

**THE 4 VERY EARLY
WARNING SIGNS
OF A POTENTIALLY
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP
THAT MOST
PEOPLE MISS**



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The Four Very Early Warning Signs of a Potentially Abusive Relationship That Most People Miss

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is on the rise, especially among young people nationwide. “Intimate partner violence” describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse.¹

It is important to realize that an abusive relationship may arise anywhere, regardless of one’s gender, sexual identity, economic status, ethnicity, or religious preference.

Let’s look at the facts below.

- ✓ One in three girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.²
 - ✓ One in ten high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend.³
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- ✓ One-quarter of high school girls have been victims of physical or sexual abuse or date rape.⁴

Why Focus on Young People?

- ✓ Girls and young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence; almost triple the national average.⁵
- ✓ Among female victims of intimate partner violence, 94% of those aged sixteen to nineteen and 70% of those aged twenty to twenty-four were victimized by a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend.⁶
- ✓ Violent behavior often begins between the ages of twelve and eighteen.⁷
- ✓ The severity of intimate partner violence is often greater in cases where the pattern of abuse was established in adolescence.⁸

Lack of Awareness

- ✓ 81% of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue, or admit they don't know if it's an issue.⁹
- ✓ Though 82% of parents feel confident they could recognize the signs if their child was experiencing dating abuse, a majority of parents (58%) could not correctly identify all the warning signs of abuse.¹⁰

According to Dr. Steven Stosny, “There are obvious red flags to avoid in a prospective lover, such as angry, controlling, possessive, jealous, or violent behavior. Unfortunately, most abusers are able to mask these tendencies in dating. By the time many people notice the obvious red flags, they're already attached to an abuser, which makes it much harder for them to leave the relationship.” Dr. Stosny further notes: “During the early stages of your relationship, your partner is not likely to do any of these things to you. But witnessing these attitudes and behaviors toward

others is a sure sign that they will turn on to you, sooner or later.”

This is why awareness and vigilance are of paramount importance. When you see how your potential lover gets along with others, you will get some good hints about what to expect from him or her. Therefore, I am encouraging you to keep the following two questions on the forefront of your mind: (1) What early warning signs should I be looking out for in a potential lover in order to date safely? (2) How does this person treat others?

Rather than discussing apparent red flags, let’s consider *very early warning signs* of a potentially abusive relationship that most people miss, or what Dr. Stosny calls the “signs that are visible before an attachment bond is formed.”

The chapters that follow present some traits to look for in a potential lover. These are the people to avoid at all costs, because loving them will invariably cause you pain.

Chapter 1:

Very Early Warning Sign #1:

Blame – The “It’s Not Me, It’s You” Syndrome



Have you ever been around someone who takes no accountability for his or her negative behaviors or actions? *“It’s your fault that I forgot, because you didn’t remind me!”* Everything is external. Blamers blame their partners, their children, their families, their parents, their friends, and their colleagues. They tend to blame those who are closest to them for their bad behaviors and misfortunes.

I like to refer to blamers as finger-pointers, because they find it easier to point the finger at another person or situation than to tackle a problem. Finger pointing makes them immune to criticism. I have come to believe that they hide behind the blame with which they bombard others in order to protect themselves from the reality of their situations. This perverted view of reality enables them to deny their own behavior.

Special caution is essential when dealing with blamers, as they can be charming and very persuasive in dating. According to Dr. Stosny, the way they speak about (and blame) others “can make you look great by comparison”:

- “You’re so smart, sensitive, caring, and loving – not like that bitch I used to go out with.”
- “Why couldn’t I have met you before I met that self-centered, greedy man I used to date?”
- “You’re so calm and together, and she was so crazy and paranoid.”

Someone on the other end of the aforementioned statements might think all this person (the blamer) really needs is the love and attention of a good woman or man to change his or her misfortune. Therein lies a dangerous belief. Remember that blamers have a habit of blaming those who are closest to them. Even with all of the flattery in the beginning of the courtship, the blame will eventually turn to you.

Let's take a closer look at some traits of a blamer:

- Blamers have an allergic reaction to personal responsibility, and they evade it at all cost. For them blame is in fact often misconstrued as accountability.
- A blamer's life seems to be a never-ending series of unfortunate events caused by other people.



- When confronted with a tough situation, blamers have a huge tendency to link the events to external factors they believe are out of their control.

- When someone challenges a blamer on something, he or she will make excuses for why it didn't happen.
- Most often you will find that blamers always blame others for failures but take full credit for successes.
- Blamers are addicted to pointing fingers, and they are always searching for someone to whom they can assign blame. In potentially abusive relationships, blamers invariably blame others for their mistakes. Blamers will minimize or justify their own aggressive behavior. They will most likely say something like, "This would not have happened if you had not _____," or even "I wouldn't have had to do this if you hadn't provoked me into it." As a result, those on the receiving end of the blame soon find themselves fearful of doing or saying anything that might offend the blamers.

- A blamer also believes that others are responsible for his/her happiness and emotional well-being. As such, he/she will blame you for feeling unhappy or angry. *Take great caution with anyone who relies on others to fix his or her life.* Relationships with blamers are toxic and will leave those on the receiving end emotionally drained.
- In the mind of a blamer, he/she is a perpetual victim, and thus suffers from victim identity. According to Dr. Stosney, “Because they see themselves as ‘victims,’ they feel justified in whatever retaliation they enact and whatever compensation they take. Blamers will certainly cause pain for you if you come to love one.”

Do you recognize any of the traits stated above in someone you are getting to know?

An even harder question: Do you recognize them in yourself?

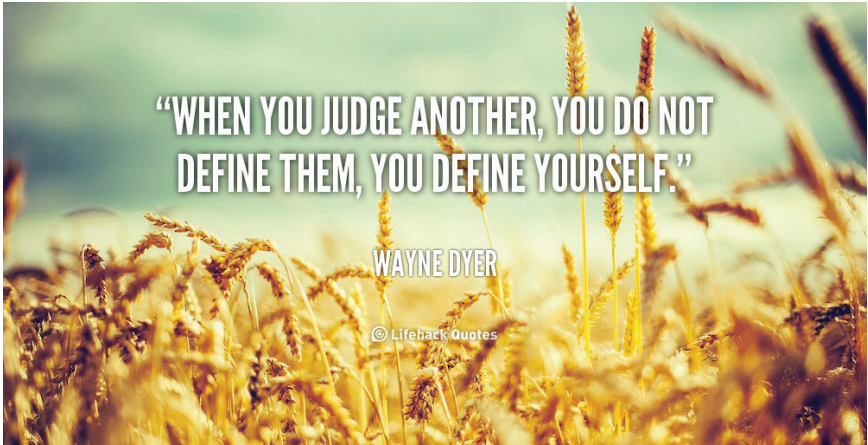
From your personal experience, what are the traits of people who never hold themselves accountable?

What other traits of a blamer have I missed?

Chapter 2:

Very Early Warning Sign #2:

Self-Righteousness – “You Practice, I’ll Preach”



Judgmental and usually hypocritical, a self-righteous person makes a point of holding the rest of us to impossible standards. Self-righteous people are highly critical of others, but not of themselves. Because of an internal need to raise their self-esteem and inflate their status, “they like to feel that they make others look up to them by taking on the role of moral authority,” says *Psychology Today* blogger and *Smart Thinking* author Art Markman.

Let's take a closer look at some traits of the self-righteous:

- Self-righteous people expect others to look up to them, because they have “something” no one else has.
- Self-righteous people often feel they have a “leg up” on others, and their focal point is to make others around them feel inferior. They always have to feel that they know what is best.
- Self-righteous people are quick to blame and condemn. They are habitually critical of others and judge them severely. “I would never do that,” they may declare. However, such an assertion infers a contemptuous view of others.
- Self-righteous people have an unhealthy view of failure or weakness. They will rarely, if ever, share their own weaknesses, since their identities are wrapped up in the false belief that they are better than everyone else.

- Self-righteous people are constantly engaged in comparing themselves to others, and they invariably see themselves as people with superior moral standards.
- Pay keen attention to a self-righteous person's daily conversations. You will find that the main theme of conversation usually revolves around him/herself. "I," "me," and "my" become the center of conversation, since those are the focal points of his or her thoughts.
- A self-righteous person shows little or no compassion. "Compassion is sympathy for the hurt or distress of another. At the heart of it is a simple appreciation of the basic human frailty we all share, which is why the experience of compassion makes you feel more humane and less isolated," explains Dr. Stosny.
- Much like blamers, self-righteous people will jus-

tify their own transgressions. Thus, when a shortcoming is pointed out to them, they rationalize and excuse it. Self-righteous people engage in a “you practice, I’ll preach” stance, because they tend to judge themselves by a more flexible standard than others might. “When people give themselves credit for intentions but judge others based on action, a double standard can exist,” notes Princeton researcher Emily Pronin.

A relationship with a self-righteous person will leave you emotionally pummeled, with internalized put-downs, criticisms, and harsh judgments.



Figure 51 *Thumbs-up position*

“Some people try to be tall by cutting off the heads of others.”

— Paramhansa Yogananda

From the traits above, can you pinpoint any self-righteous people in your life? If so, when you are in their company, how do you feel?

Do you see any of these traits in yourself?

Chapter 3:

Very Early Warning Sign #3:

Entitlement – What Have You Done for Me Lately?



The third early warning sign of a potentially abusive relationship is a sense of entitlement. Dr. Stosny explains, “People with a sense of entitlement believe that they deserve special consideration and special treatment. They may cut in front of others waiting in line, smoke wherever they want, drive any way they want, say anything they like, and do pretty much anything they choose.”

Let's take a closer look at some traits of people with a sense of entitlement:

- They have unreasonable expectations; they will take and take, and then continue to demand more and more.
- Their wants and needs take precedence, and they have a total disregard for others.
- They are not mindful of the fact that relationships should be reciprocal, and they operate from a “*What Have You Done for Me Lately?*” mindset.

- Those who feel entitled don't believe regular laws and rules apply. Instead, they expect a totally *different* standard will be devised, just for them.
- It is significant that they expect to have all of their needs and wants met without questions or complaints from the other people in their lives.
- Much like blamers and self-righteous people, when their requests or demands are challenged or go unmet, "entitled" people will become extremely insulted and will almost immediately begin to disparage and blame others.
- Dr. Stosny puts it best in expressing that "after the glow of infatuation wears off, the entitled person will regard his feelings and desire as more important than yours. If you agree, you'll get depressed. If you disagree, you'll get abused."

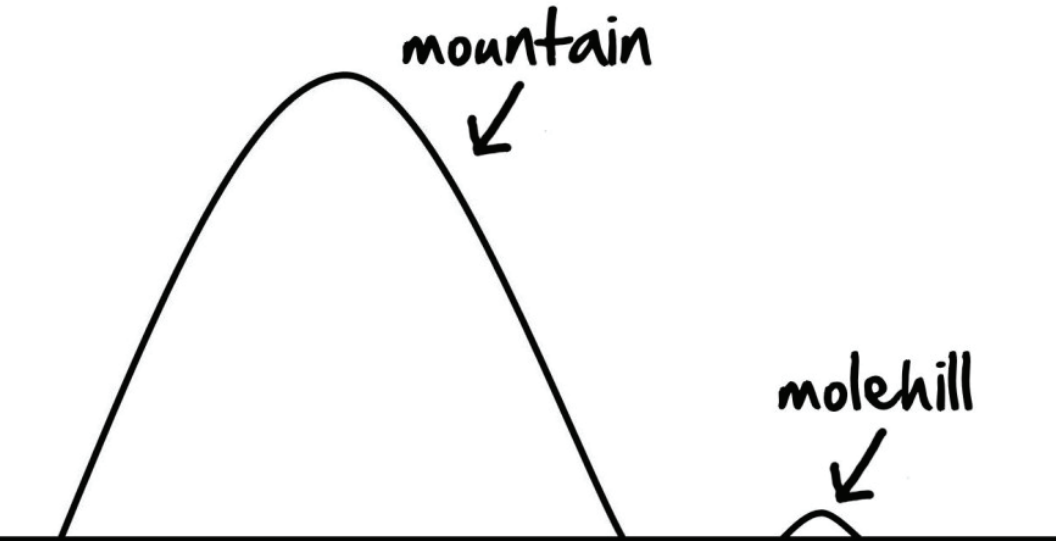
A relationship with a self-righteous person will leave you feeling devalued, taken for granted, resentful, and angry.

Take a closer look at your circle. Do you recognize certain characteristics of entitlement? Do you see a relationship that is not based on receiving and giving, but more on taking and demanding? Do you sense an inferred, habitual sentiment of “What have you done for me lately?”

Chapter 4:

Very Early Warning Sign #4:

Pettiness – “Mountains out of Molehills”



mountain or molehill
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It's the way you chew your food, the way you drive, the way you style your hair and clothes, the way you prepare

his or her favorite meal ... *nothing* you do will ever be quite right, in his or her opinion, because he or she makes a big deal out of nothing or focuses on small insignificant things.

Let's take a closer look at some traits of people who are petty:

- Similar to those with entitlement, petty people cannot move beyond their own concerns to see things from someone else's point of view, no matter how small.
- Pettiness is a way of being self-centered and having no larger perspective, thus having no empathy for others.
- Pettiness will always make mountains out of molehills.
- Pettiness suggests, "*I'm* more important. *My* stuff is more important. What *I* want to do is more important,"

After a few dates with someone who is petty, the first thing to go is your self-esteem. “In a loving relationship, his petty attitudes and behavior will make you feel reduced to some small mistake, as if nothing you have ever done right in your life matters. You will feel criticized and diminished for the smallest of infractions, real or imagined,” notes Dr. Stosny.

Is pettiness a trait you have observed in others around you?
If so, how is it manifested?

Is being petty something you've observed in yourself?

CONCLUSION

These four early warning signs provide a valuable tool with which to evaluate ourselves while we also look for these traits in others. People who exhibit such behaviors are dangerous, because they are emotion hijackers. Consequently, loving them will only cause you anguish.

We often hear the expression, “love hurts.” However, I disagree. Love *does not hurt* and leave us feeling neglected, diminished, used, or relegated to second-best.



We also often hear the expression, “tough love.” I have come to realize that we need to think instead about healthy love. Healthy love is not tough, self-righteous, or prideful. It does not live in the past, and it does not blame. On the contrary, it is present, fair, patient, and vulnerable. It sets clear boundaries, takes risks, and accepts accountability.

How is love expressed in your life?

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Vladimire Calixte is a New York psychotherapist and the owner of Life Rebuilding. She is the author of her much anticipated book, *Naked and Transparent: Six Vital Tools for Knowing Yourself and Attracting Healthy Relationships*. Part workbook and part memoir, *Naked* is an enjoyable yet informative must-read for women, men, and teens who suffer from low self-esteem, unworthiness, anxiety, shame, guilt, feelings of failure, and toxic relationships. Vladimire has appeared on *Here and Now* with Sandra Bookman, CBS radio, Fox News radio, *CentricTV.com* (BET Networks), and has been featured on *Heart & Soul Magazine*, *Ebony Magazine*, *Hot 97 FM's Street Soldiers* with *Lisa Evers*, *The Jennifer Keitt Show*, and many others.

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"My passion is to help YOU succeed by meeting you where you are and helping to take you where you NEED to be." ~Vladimire Calixte

