

SPOUSE'S CONTROLLING TENDENCIES CAN BE SUBTLE AT FIRST

ABUSE IN ANY FORM IS HARMFUL, WRITES DIANE BEAULIEU



DIANE BEAULIEU
Column

Despite the progress made in women's rights and the fact that we are equal in the eyes of the law, many women continue to experience violence at the hands of the men they love most. Women often say, "how did this happen," "why me?" "I am a strong, independent and capable woman," "Is it me, what can I do differently?" or "It wasn't the way I envisioned my life would be."

Relationships often fall apart because one partner wants to dominate and control the other. You may not

notice it at first. It can be subtle. For example, he may insist on picking out your clothes, calling several times a day to check on you, arriving where you are unexpectedly. He may insist that you see friends only in your own home when he is present. He may restrict your ability to see family and want to know where you are at all times. He may tell you it's because he loves you and needs to know where you are and who you're with. He may tell you it's his job to protect you and to do so he must be involved in every aspect of your life.

At first you may feel flattered by the attention but as you begin to resist, neglect to tell him something or negate his authority, he will feel that he is losing control over you and may become uncommunicative, unapproachable and difficult to live with.

When this type of control is no longer effective he may become angry and use words to express that anger. He may become emotionally abusive and finally resort to violence to regain control. Women tell us it is easier to comply than argue and live with the abuse and discord. Women often minimize the abuse. After all, he says he loves you ...so why does it continue to happen?

At first you may believe that it was a one-time thing and that you may have been responsible. You may say "it's not that bad, or he doesn't hit me." He may alternate between anger and kindness, leading to confusion on your part. How can someone who is so charming and kind be the same person who hurt you so badly? He may convince you that he loves you and is sorry. He will say the abuse will never

happen again. You may believe that if you do as he wants the situation will improve. Unfortunately, the demands tend to increase and the abuse escalates. You may believe that alcohol use causes the abuse. Please note that alcohol has no biological connection to abuse or violence.

Society tends to recognize physical violence because it is perceived to be life threatening. While physical violence can be serious, often painful and can lead to permanent injury including death, we must never negate the effects of any and all types of violence. Abuse in any form is harmful. Other types of abuse experienced by women can include one or all of the following:

Verbal or shouting which is often used in tandem with other forms of violence, meant to threaten, hurt or demean you.

Psychological/mental, intended to undermine your mental well-being. He may tell you that no one will believe you, often re-writing

the story and making himself the victim.

Sexual abuse - Unwanted sexual contact or conversely withholding sex as a means of control.

Cultural abuse - The use of cultural ideology to dominate you.

Children - Threatening to or abusing your children. Using the children to get his way.

Emotional - Any act which threatens or undermines your emotional well-being.

Financial abuse - Making you account for every penny spent. Using the family money for himself, gambling, drinking.

Intellectual Abuse - Any act on his part that makes you feel less than or question your intellectual ability.

Spiritual Abuse - Using your religion against you.

Abuse of Pets and Property - Using your pets and/or property to control or hurt you. Threatening to harm or kill pets if you leave.

These forms of abuse are

examples and by no means all encompassing. Each form outlined above includes many tactics. You may experience some, several or all. Each person's experience of abuse is unique to her and should never be minimized. All forms of abuse cause emotional harm.

"An abuser is a human being, not an evil monster, but he has a profoundly, complex and destructive problem that should not be underestimated," Lundy Bancroft.

Abusers rarely change unless there are consequences to the abuse. Key point to remember: You are not crazy and it is not your fault. Trust your instincts. If you perceive that you are being abused call a crisis line.

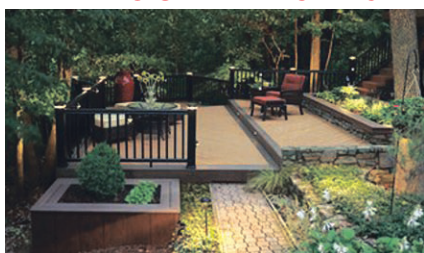
If you're in need, call Halton Women's Place at 905-878-8555 or 905-332-7892. You are not alone.

"Because a life without violence is the only life to live."

Diane Beaulieu is executive director, Halton Women's Place

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