

Why Does He Do That?

(“When Dad Hurts Mum” L. Bancroft)

Most abusive men simply don't seem like abusers. They may have good qualities including times of kindness and humor, especially in the early period of the relationship. His friends may think the world of him. He may have a successful work life and have no problems with drugs or alcohol. He won't fit anyone's image of a 'cruel' or 'intimidating' person. So when a woman feels her relationship spinning out of control, it is unlikely to occur to her that her partner is an abuser.

The symptoms of abuse can include:

- The escalating frequency of put downs.
- His early generosity turns more into selfishness.
- Verbal explosions when he is irritated or when he doesn't get his own way.
- His growing attitude that he knows what is good for you.
- The mounting sense of fear and intimidation.

You want to figure out why he gets so upset, so that you can help him break his pattern of ups and downs. You get drawn into the complexities of his inner world, trying to uncover lies, moving pieces around in an attempt to solve an elaborate puzzle.

His mood changes are perplexing. Sometime he can be a different person from day to day, or hour to hour. Sometimes he can go for weeks or months in a good mood. But sooner or later, the shadow comes back over him.

The abusive man wants to avoid you focusing in his abusive behaviours so he tries to fill your head with self-doubt and self-blame.

Victims often ask “Why does he do it?”.... here are a few reasons:

1. He needs to have control

He believes he has the right to control arguments and decision making, as well as your personal freedom and any decisions relating to parenting.

The problem is that he himself does not lose control – and the notion that domestic abuse is about ‘a loss of control’ is inaccurate. If he was ever to change his behavior, and take responsibility for his actions, the first thing he needs to let go of is control over you.

2. He feels entitled

He believes he has special status that provides him with exclusive rights and privileges that do not apply to you. His high entitlement leads him to have unfair and unreasonable expectations, so that the relationship revolves around his demands. His attitude is “you owe me”.

You may feel he is emotionally needy, and try to cater to him in every way to keep him happy. However, this is like trying to fill a bottomless pit. No matter what you give him it will never be enough for him.

He believes he is free from accountability and considers himself above criticism. If you attempt to raise your grievances, you are ‘nagging’ or ‘provoking’ him.

He takes away your right to be angry. Regardless of how he treats you, he expects that you don’t raise your voice and you should not get upset. When you do get angry, he reacts because there is power in your anger. He sees you are resisting him and challenging his sense of authority. He will continue to use your anger against you to prove what an irrational person you are.

3. He twists things into opposites

Why does he say that you are yelling and nagging all the time? Because in his mind you should be listening, not talking.

The abusive man has another reason to exaggerate and ridicule his partner’s statements - he wants to avoid having to think seriously about what she is saying. He feels it is much easier to berate and belittle you. When he dismisses you, he doesn’t have to take what you say on board.



4. He disrespects his partner and considers himself superior to her

The abuser tends to see his partner as less intelligent, less competent and less logical than he is.

Most verbally attack their partners in the most degrading and revolting ways. The words insult her humanity, reducing her to an animal, a non-living object or a degrading sexual body part. Abusers have said they use these carefully chosen words - the most degrading they can think of - to make their partners feel both debased and unsafe.

5. He confuses love and abuse

Genuine love means respecting the humanity of the other person, wanting what is best for him/her, and supporting the other person's self-esteem and independence. This kind of love is incompatible with abuse and coercion.

6. He is manipulative

He lies repeatedly, a form of psychological abuse that in itself can be destructive over time. Signs of manipulation can include:

- Changing his moods abruptly and frequently, so that you are constantly off balance. You are not sure who he is or how he feels.
- Denying the obvious about what he is doing or feeling:
 - He'll blame a difficulty he is having on you
 - Sulk for hours and then deny it to your face
 - He refuses to admit his actions
- Getting you to feel sorry for him
- Threatening suicide
- Using confusion tactics in arguments:
 - Subtly or overtly changing the subject
 - Insisting that you are thinking things that you are not (gas-lighting)
 - Twisting your words. You may leave arguments with him feeling like you are losing your mind.
 - Lying or misleading you about his actions, his desires or his reasons for doing certain things, in order to guide you into doing what he wants you to do.
- Driving a wedge between you and your friends and family. He may betray confidences, be rude to your friends, tell lies about you and use other isolating tactics.



Many victims report that psychological manipulation is worse than overt abuse, especially when the two are fixed together. After a manipulative interaction you may have little idea what went wrong. All you know is that you feel terrible or crazy and that somehow it seems to be your entire fault.

7. He strives to have a good public image

You may spend a lot of your time trying to figure out what is wrong with you. If he gets along well with other people and impresses them with his generosity, sense of humor and friendliness, you may wind up wondering “what is wrong with me? Other people seem to think he’s great”.

He is drawn to power and control, and he needs to look good in public. This makes his partner reluctant to reach out for support or assistance because she feels that people will find her revelations hard to believe or will blame her.

8. He feels justified

Abusers externalize responsibility for their actions, believing their partner makes them behave that way. They are masters of blaming other people. They blame their partners, stress, alcohol, their childhood, their children, their bosses or their insecurities. They feel entitled to make these excuses. They do not like hearing that other men under these pressures choose not to be abusive.

9. Abusers deny and minimize their abuse

He denies his actions because he does not want to have the discussion about what he did. He will turn it back onto you, and say that you are over-reacting.

10. Abusers are possessive

Their sense of ownership seems to get worse as the relationship gets more serious. The more history and commitment that develop between the couple, the more the abuser comes to think of his partner as a prized object.

Possessiveness comes in the form of sexual jealousy. Ironically the most accusatory abusers are among the ones most likely to be cheating themselves.

Extreme jealousy is also used to isolate their partner. He does this for two reasons:

- He wants her life to be focused entirely on his needs. He feels that other social contacts will allow her less time for him and he doesn’t accept that she has that right.
- He doesn’t want her to develop sources of strength that could contribute to her independence.



He sees any relationship you have with another person as a threat. You may try to manage this by giving him lots of reassurance that you still love him and are not going to cheat on him, but you will find that his efforts to isolate you don't reduce.

An abuser tries to keep everybody - his partner, professionals, friends and relatives - focused on how he feels so that they won't focus on how he thinks or how he behaves. He doesn't want anyone challenging his values and beliefs.

Support and help is available. Contacting an agency or counsellor that specializes in the dynamics of domestic abuse is extremely beneficial. They can help you unravel the complexities around the psychological impact of intimate partner abuse.

Contact us for support and information - ph: 4926 2711 or email admin@vocal.org.au

