

Warning signs of relational abuse:

- Degrading or belittling your self-image
- Extreme jealousy or possessiveness
- Inflicting control over your physical body or your location (i.e.: not letting you see friends or family members)
- Publicly humiliating you
- Controlling finances or making financial decisions without you
- Destroying your belongings
- Threatening children, pets, or other loved ones

Abuse is intentional and about control.

Several studies on domestic abuse suggest that abusers tend to be **intentional** when it comes to manipulating their partners.

This means that although an abuser may perform innocence or ignorance, abuse is **calculated** and meant to manipulate a partner into feeling weak, inferior, or powerless.

Toxicity can be understood as **disproportionately negative reactions** or interactions. Such as:

“Every time I ask my partner to do a chore it results in a fight that lasts for hours.”

“When I ask my partner to spend more quality time with me, they degrade me for being needy or attention-seeking.”

Remember: Over-reactions and negative encounters are **natural** and **common** in relationships.

We can tell when a relationship becomes toxic when these **disproportionately negative interactions outweigh any positive interactions.**

There are six types of relational abuse:

- 1. Physical abuse**
 - Causes physical harm
 - Hitting walls or throwing objects
 - Causing harm to one’s children or pets
- 2. Emotional abuse**
 - Threats to one’s physical, financial, or sexual safety
 - Verbally degrading, demeaning, or belittling
- 3. Psychological abuse**
 - Gaslighting or denying one’s reality
 - Chipping away at one’s self-esteem or confidence

Continued...

What is the difference between a **toxic** and an **abusive** relationship?

We hear about toxic and abusive relationships frequently, and often interchangeably. These two descriptors often go hand-in-hand, but the line distinguishing them is important to identify.

It comes down to control.

Toxic behaviors can be one-sided or two-sided, and tend to occur when people feel **out of control** of their relationship.

Abuse is **all about control**. Abusive behavior works to elevate one person’s power while diminishing the other person’s agency.

- 4. Financial abuse**
 - Taking control of a partner’s finances, bank information, etc.
 - Breaking or destroying possessions or property
 - Accumulating debt under a partner’s name
- 5. Sexual abuse**
 - Sexual assault, rape, coercion
 - Weaponizing sex or using sex to judge or evaluate a partner’s worth
 - Sharing or threatening to share explicit sexual images or stories without a partner’s consent
- 6. Cultural abuse**
 - Using ethnic or racial slurs
 - Threatening to “out” a partner
 - Isolating a partner who doesn’t speak the dominant language

a queer sex ed community curriculum zine

Toxicity | Abuse

A deep dive into the overlaps and distinctions between toxic and abusive relationships.

Content warning: this zine contains descriptions of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Resources for survivors are on the last page.

There is a large overlap between toxic and abusive behaviors.

Abusive relationships are often toxic, but toxic relationships are not always abusive.

Remember: it is always imperative to **believe victims/survivors** who come forward to report abuse.

Remember: it is healthy to have arguments, conflict, and even fights in relationships. It becomes unhealthy as soon as someone feels unsafe or threatened.

Remember: if you are currently weary of, surviving, trying to escape from an abusive relationship, there are established support systems and advocates for you to lean on.

Resources for victims or survivors of abuse:

Domestic Violence Support hotline: This website contains a wealth of information about how to spot abuse and how to escape abusive situations. When you click on the link, it will bring you to the hotline where you have the option to call or chat with a supporter. <https://www.thehotline.org>

Interactive Safety Plan: This interactive safety plan helps create a printable, personalized safety plan for anyone currently in an abusive situation, or someone who feels they might be at risk. It walks you through home, work, and other aspects of your life to identify key people who could be called in a crisis, code words that can be used over the phone or text, and established safe places to escape to in emergencies. <https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-a-safety-plan/>

Other sources:

- <https://cerebral-sexuality.com/2018/07/31/toxic-relationships-vs-abusive-relationships/>
- <https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/warning-signs-of-abuse/>
- <https://reachma.org/6-different-types-abuse/>