

## Red Flags in Relationships

Can a woman tell early in a relationship that a man who seems so attentive and charming may turn out to be abusive down the road? **Psychologist Lundy Bancroft** thinks you can. He has a list of red flags in his 2002 book called ***Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men.***

### He speaks disrespectfully about former partners

It's not uncommon for people to have hard feelings after a break-up but be careful if his anger toward a previous partner (or partners) is unusually bitter and you notice any of these things:

- He describes an ex-partner in degrading or insulting ways
- He starts this soon after you meet him
- He paints himself as a victim of abuse by her
- He claims she falsely accused him of abuse
- He sees all problems in their relationship as her fault and accepts no responsibility
- He admits he abused a past partner but has an excuse (like drinking) or blames it on her
- He praises you for being better than she was
- He claims you are the first woman who really understands him

### How do you think and feel in response?

- You feel sorry for him because of how badly his ex-partner treated or treats him
- You compete to be a good partner and better than she was
- You don't believe her descriptions of him, confident that she is lying
- You never get together with her to compare experiences over coffee

### He is disrespectful to you

You may be utterly perfect at first but he eventually finds fault with what you say and do.

- He insults you or puts you down
- He doesn't respect your opinions
- He is rude to you in front of other people
- He compares you to previous partners and says you are not as good as they were
- He blames you for things he himself does wrong
- He criticizes you if you protest against his disrespect

### He makes you uncomfortable by doing favours or being generous

This sounds great at first, but pay attention to your level of discomfort.

- He insists on doing something for you no matter how much you protest
- He claims you owe him favourable treatment because of his favours to you
- He brings up his past favours and makes you feel guilty if you do something he disapproves of

### He is controlling

This starts subtly and can initially be mistaken for his intense interest in you. These are some ways control can look early in a relationship:

- He has activities all planned out for your dates
- He is not interested in hearing your ideas for activities
- He has opinions on how you should dress
- He pressures you to spend all your time with him
- He gives you advice you didn't ask for

### He is possessive

This characteristic is easy to mistake for love, at first.

- He calls several times a day to check in
- He is upset when you speak to other men

- He justifies this reaction because he is crazy about you
- He wants to spend every minute with you, when it's convenient for him

**Nothing is ever his fault**

- This one explains itself. At first blame lies with other people such as co-workers or his ex-partner. Eventually, when things go wrong, it will be all your fault.

**He is self-centered**

- While dating, you notice this when he monopolizes the conversation, talks about himself but never asks about you, doesn't listen when you speak or changes the topic of conversation to be about him again.

**He abuses drugs or alcohol**

- Many men who abuse drugs or alcohol are not abusive to partners. But an enormous percentage of abusive men abuse drugs or alcohol. It does not cause them to be abusive but it is a common excuse for their bad actions. Be careful if he positions you as the force in his life to get him clean and sober and keep him that way. When he relapses, it will be your fault.

**He pressures you for sex**

- He doesn't listen or respect your feelings about when to become intimate.

**He gets serious too quickly about the relationship**

- He starts to plan out your future before you really know each other. If he won't respect your request to slow things down, what does that say about how he will respond to other issues?

**He intimidates you when he's angry**

Intimidation is a warning that physical aggression might be ahead. Watch for signs like these:

- He gets too close to you physically when he is angry, blocks your way or restrains you
- He tells you he is "just trying to make you listen"
- He drives recklessly or speeds up when driving
- He makes vaguely threatening comments, like "you don't want to see me mad"
- He punches walls, kicks door or throws things around even if he doesn't hit you

**He has double standards**

- Is there one set of rules and expectations for him and another set for you? For example, he can talk with women but you can't talk with men.

**He has negative attitudes about women**

- He sees women as inferior, as sex objects or as housekeepers. Maybe he says you are different than most women, at first. But if he believes that women are inferior, you can tell where things will end up in your relationship.

**He treats you differently around other people**

- He treats you great when people are watching.

**He appears to be attracted to vulnerability**

- Are you much younger than he is and does he like how you look up to him? Have you recently had a traumatic experience or had an abusive partner and does he position himself as your rescuer and protector?

*Adapted from: Helping Abused Women in Shelters: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do (2008)*  
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