We learn how to handle anger, be with a partner, express our frustration, and ultimately function in a relationship in our family of origin. Sometimes we pick partners to continue the abuse and issues present in our family of origin. We don’t do this consciously. We are simply accustomed to a particular type of family dynamic or way of coexisting. We usually choose a partner with the same patterns of behavior. This explains why some people continue to pick the same kind of partner again and again.

Here are twelve “signs” or ways of behaving that are indicative of a person having possible violent behavior patterns.

1. Jealousy
2. Blames others (including you) for his/her faults.
3. Blames circumstances for his/her problems. (“If only I had a job, I wouldn’t be so upset.”)
4. His/her behavior is unpredictable.
5. He/she belittles you verbally.
6. He/she cannot control his/her anger.
7. He/she always asks for a second chance.
8. He/she says they will change, that he/she won’t do it again.
9. His/her family resolves problems with violence.
10. He/she plays on your guilt. (“If you loved me, you’d…….)
11. His/her behavior often worsens when he/she uses alcohol or drugs.
12. He/she is close-minded. His/her way is the only way.

In the book *Unfinished Business*, Maggie Scarf explains how our family of origin issues affect our current relationships. If we have not closed or healed from family abuse, we will continue to seek a way to work through it with a partner. For instance, from a child’s perspective, father was abusive, and we cannot be mad at father because he will go away, and we will die. We then look for abusive mate to be MAD at. We don’t consciously look for that type of partner, but our subconscious helps us decide. If they don’t become abusive, then we instigate until he or she does become abusive or leaves.

It all sounds ridiculous, but this can be a real pattern for people who have experienced abuse in his/her family of origin. We seek partners who have the same family dynamic as we have.

We are more comfortable with familiar behaviors. Even when we know the situation is detrimental to our well-being, facing the new and the unknown may be more frightening than staying in the relationship. We know what to expect in our current relationship, even if it is abusive and harmful. People who stay in an abusive relationship may have learned a sense of helplessness in his/her family of origin. People who grow up with parents hitting learn it
is acceptable to hit. Men hitting women and women hitting men becomes the adopted mindset.

People who stay in an abusive relationship may have learned a sense of helplessness in his/her family of origin. Give WEAVE a call, they have multiply site and it is likely there is one near you. Call and become educated about available resources.

Fear keeps some partners in a bad relationship. These fears include: being perceived as a failure, having financial problems, loss of social status, the batterer finding and killing him or her, loss his or her children or home the batterer will hurt his or her family or children, not having the ability to be successful without the abusive partner. Other reasons victims stay may be;

Learned helplessness. Some people have been kept dependent by fathers and mates. They begin to feel they are unable to do things for themselves. They have learned to be passive and have been beaten into obedience. Sometimes this behavior is their mode of survival while growing up.

Some people stay for the children. They do not want to disrupt the children’s lives. Others fear they cannot provide adequately for their children if they are on their own.

If the abused partner is female, old messages may have a part of keeping her in the abuse. Messages include: good wives don’t make trouble, good wives do what they are
told, boys will be boys, the man is the boss and lord of the home, etc. Some women are brought up to believe in traditional sex roles such as, “The man is the boss of the house,” or “The man will ‘do,’ and you will ‘obey.’” Women are also taught that “good girls don’t make trouble.” And that “Good wives are suppose to be able to make the marriage work.”

Partners may also stay in a relationship because he/she has low self esteem and feels him/her feels lucky anyone live with him/her. He/she may find reasons to justify staying in the relationship. Perhaps his/her partner provides financial support, so he/she needs to stay in order to compensate for the support. Some people need to preserve the illusion of being cared about, not matter how little affection they actually receive.

Religion may also influence the couple to stay in the relationship. Divorce may not be considered moral in certain religions, so the battered partner stays in an abusive relationship as he/she is caught between pain and loyalty to church. They may hold strong religious prohibitions against divorce. To leave the marriage would mean they had broken their solemn vows to God or that they had failed. If the partner’s parents are divorced, and this partner vowed to never put his/her children through divorce.

Partners who had abusive parents, may stay in the relationship because he/she does not realize the damage inflicted upon the children. Abused partners may have a distorted thinking pattern which leaded the abused
partner to believe staying in the relationship is for the “good” of the children. “The abused partner may also rationalize his/her choice to stay in the relationship by refusing to acknowledge the damaging effects on the child. He/she sees the existence of mother and father in a household as more important.

One other reason for staying in the relationship may be because the battered partner may have been abused violently enough to respond like a captive of war. Domestic violence is realistically a war. The victim may bond with the abuser and adopt a hostage mentality. Like other hostages (concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, etc.) battered people adopt a hostage mentality. Under siege, they bond with their captors and convert to their abuser’s way of thinking in an attempt to survive. Other common responses to life-threatening abuse include feeling of powerlessness, a reduced capacity for problem solving and an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness. These symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder make it difficult for the abused person to leave.

Common responses to life-threatening behaviors include reduced ability to think for one’s self and feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness. Deep depression may set in and prevent the partner from having emotional and physical resources to leave.

Only promises of change continue the same old pattern. Changes in the batterer’s thinking must start immediately. The batterer must choose to respect his/her partner, honor boundaries and personal rights, and begin to listen with
empathy. Shame and blame are difficult emotions to eradicate. Get someone to help.

If you want to save this relationship, both partners need to make a plan to stop all abuse. The batter must agree to leave if angry or stressed. The victim must agree to allow the partner to leave if he/she feels the need. Agree on a time and a place to meet after you leave, so the one staying does not feel abandoned and knows recovery is still on track.

Accountability is the most important part of recovery. You just be accountable for your part in the dance of violence. BE CLEAR the battered person/victim is NOT responsible for the anger explosion or the battering only for staying. The batterer must be held accountable for all the abuse, voice responsibility for violent actions, and make changes in his/her behaviors, and be diligently making those behavior changes.

Both partners must work together so that patterns do not return. Remember, change does not become permanent if it is not practiced.

Resources:

MORE: IN closing I would like to remind the readers, that women are not the only battered spouses. Men can also be battered. Men are not the only ones who get violent. Battered spouses can be male or female.

*Profile of California Women, Violence, 1993 California
Commission on the Status of Women.

WEAVE local locations will be listed in your phone book or call the operator. Other shelters exist. There are more than 100 in California alone. These shelters, including WEAVE, provide crises intervention, Counseling, shelter, emergency food, clothing, and legal assistance for spouse and children.

Call the Office of Criminal Justice Planning at 916-324-0120

Violence: the Facts, a Handbook to STOP Violence,
1994 Battered Women Fighting Back and the Los Angeles County Commission for Women.

WEAVE is for people, not just women. If you are in an abusive relationship, take steps for changing that relationship or make plans for an escape.

PLAN:

1. Your own bank account, credit card, or money readily available.

2. Car keys in an accessible place to leave in an instant.

3. A bag packed to take with you. Leave this in a place you can access if leaving.

Abuse and Violence are not part of a healthy relationship. No one deserves abuse. Call 911, call
Weave (not just for women), and call a local counselor.

If there is a long history of violence, and the police have been called, Victim of Crime Funds may be available to pay for counseling for the battered spouse and the children.

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