



SEPS

the situation determines the solution

MODULE 2 - SEPS WOMEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY PROGRAM

Some people, especially if you have been the victim of violence, may find some of the subject matter contained in this article disturbing or traumatizing. If you are still in the process of recovering from violence and abuse, you may want to consult with a mental health professional before reading this content. The subject matter is also intended for an adult audience, and so if you are under 18, you should have an adult read the material first (parental guidance is advised for people under 18). This article addresses the subject matter head-on, so reader discretion is advised.

SYNOPSIS

Prevention is far better than a cure, and in this module readers are introduced to the warning signs that mark out potentially abusive partners and ex-partners who may later go on to be stalkers. It may be that students are in the early stages of a relationship and will identify these signals in their partner, or it may be that they are trying to exit a relationship and these warning signs will be something that they can relate to and reinforce their case for leaving (it is not the aim of this module to offer advice on how to leave an abusive partner or resolve an abusive relationship).

IDENTIFYING POTENTIALLY ABUSIVE PARTNERS (EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL ETC.)

Partner abuse towards women can take many forms, and is not always physical in nature. Abuse can generally be categorized as being one of five types (an abuser may engage in just one of them, some of them, or all of them):

- 1. Psychological Abuse
- 2. Emotional Abuse
- 3. Financial Abuse
- 4. Sexual Abuse
- 5. Physical Abuse

Psychological abuse includes intimidation and threats, and may not even be verbal e.g. an abuser may leave a belt he uses to assault his partner hanging in a noticeable place, just to remind them of what he is capable of. Threats may not always be made directly to the partner, but could involve children, pets or extended family members, "If you don't do everything I tell you to do, I'll kill your cat!" Emotional abuse comes in many forms. It may involve insults and belittlement, with the abuser telling his partner that they're fat, ugly, and generally lucky to have them as a partner. It can also involve guilt trips, with the abuser making their partner feel guilty for any time they spend with their friends or family. Emotional abuse can also involve humiliation and shaming, where the abuser talks negatively of their partner in front of others. Through psychological and emotional abuse, the victim may feel a mix of fear, guilt, and shame, that paralyzes them from leaving their abuser. They may believe it, when they are told that no other man would want them, that nobody else would ever date somebody who is as fat and ugly as them, etc. At the same time, they may fear for their own safety, or that of their kids, and other family members.

If someone is cohabiting with their partner, they may be suffering financial abuse. This might occur directly, with the abuser demanding that they hand over their paycheck, at the end of every week, or with their partner not allowing them to work; and thus enjoy financial independence. Their partner might indirectly abuse them, criticizing the way that they spend money e.g. wasting the household income on name-brand groceries when store brands are cheaper, or spending too much money on the kids' clothing, etc. Abuse is about control, and financial abuse is about making sure the abuser makes all the financial decisions in the relationship.

Sexual abuse can take many forms. It can include rape; forcing their partner to have sex when they don't want to, or demanding that they engage in sexual acts and behaviors that their partner is uncomfortable with or doesn't want to do. It can also involve demanding that their partner takes naked and sexual photographs of themselves, which they may then distribute amongst friends, publish on websites and in some instances, even sell. It may seem flattering in the early stages of a relationship to agree a partner's demands of you to provide naked photographs of yourself to them, however understand that if you are not happy and comfortable with this, it is a form of abuse.

Many victims of abuse don't believe they are being physically abused because the types of abuse are non-injurious. If someone locks you in a room or closet, it won't leave a scar or mark, but it is still a form of physical abuse. Physically blocking your movement, by standing in your way, is also a form of physical abuse, which isn't physically painful and that won't leave a bruise. Knocking and bumping into you won't probably cause you an injury in the same way that striking or punching you would, but it is still physical abuse, and should be acknowledged as such. If you are in a relationship where your partner spills food and drink on you, spits on you, or aggressively snatches things away from you, you are in a physically abusive relationship.

Getting out of an abusive relationship can be extremely difficult. Abusers set relationships up in such a way that they enjoy control, whether it is merely psychological and emotional (where they have convinced their partner, and burdened them with extreme guilt, that all the problems in the relationship are down to them, and they have a duty to stay and work them out), or financial, when their partner simply doesn't have any practical means that would allow them to leave. A victim of abuse may also fear what their partner would do to them, and possibly their children, if they did leave. This is why it is important to identify potentially abusive partners at the earliest possible opportunity, and this is the goal of this module.

One of the other purposes of this module is to provide you with enough information, so that you can understand and empathize with victims of partner abuse, and possibly be a supportive friend to someone you know who is involved in an abusive relationship. Many women in such relationships feel ashamed at their situation, and of allowing themselves to be treated in such a way, making it very difficult for them to talk with and confide in someone, as well as to seek support. You should not see your role as a professional counsellor, should someone you know open up to you about their abuse, but rather you should look to help them get to a stage where they are ready to seek professional help and guidance.

ABUSERS & THEIR WARNING SIGNS

Not all "emotional abusers" become physical abusers, however physical abuse is preceded by emotional abuse and so if you were to look for a pre-violence indicator for partner violence, being emotionally abused would probably be the number one indicator. Both emotional, and physical abuse, are conscious behaviors, whatever an abuser may say - they decide to abuse; they can spend all the time they want blaming a particular thing for setting them off, but at the end of the day, they choose to behave this way. It's a common trait of abusers not to accept responsibility for their behavior but to blame it on others, or circumstances. Abusers feel that they are entitled to behave however they want, and that they have a special status in the relationship that makes them more important than their partner. This status affords them special rights and allows them to control how their partner acts and behaves - not all abusers try to control the same things; some will try to control what you wear, others who you see, others what you do with your free time, etc. The partner of an abuser will be expected to not only go along with these behaviors, but also to accept his opinion and views on other matters, such as whether a particular TV show or film is good or bad, or whether a mutual acquaintance/friend is considered dumb or smart. Not only does an abused partner have to agree to behave and act in a way that their abuser dictates, they must also accept and adopt their opinions and views.

There are certain people who are looking for a particular person who can fulfill a role for them - they are not so much concerned about that person as an individual, but rather whether they can perform certain duties and responsibilities. Rather than being open to simply finding someone and seeing how a relationship might develop, they search just as an employer would for someone who can do a job of work for them. They may not consciously realize it, but they have an "ideal" candidate in mind, and whoever they choose or decide may be that candidate will have to live up to the fantasy and ideal that they have created. These individuals are the people who become abusers. Their end goal is not abuse; few abuser goes into a relationship believing they will abuse their partner - even if they have a history of it - rather, they go into the relationship believing that this will be the perfect one, and when things don't go down the way they planned or envisaged, the abuse will start. Part of the profile of such abusive individuals is that they are unable to take responsibility for their part in the relationship and will move/shift the blame on to their partner. They will see the fact that you couldn't live up to their unrealistic expectations, not as being down to them having created a fantasy life (for you both) that would be impossible for anyone to realize, but down to your lack of commitment to the relationship and your flawed character.

This is why abuse doesn't start until later on in a relationship. At the beginning, you are the ideal candidate, the one who has passed the interview and got the job. In the initial stages of the relationship, you will be finding out what your responsibilities are and what is expected of you - your partner will start to mold you to be the person they want, and this will start with small and subtle things as they begin to exert total control over you (something they believe they are entitled to do). Over time, however, it will become evident that you're unable to perform your duties as expected, and that you haven't put the effort in that was demanded of you - this is when the abuse starts. Your partner will not be able to accept that either their demands placed on you are unrealistic, or that they have "picked" the wrong person for the job, as that would imply that they were somehow at fault. Rather, they will see their failed dream as being solely down to your failings and that is why the relationship is not working out as they imagined/dreamed it.

The abusive partner derives a lot of their identity from the relationship, and in their eyes will have invested a lot into it, and so will find it difficult - if not impossible - to walk away. The only solution as they see it, is for you to start putting in more effort so that their dream can be realized; a dream they believe they are entitled to; whatever goals you may have for yourself in the relationship are secondary and unimportant - you aren't entitled to anything, not even respect. As your partner begins to see the relationship fail to deliver what they feel they are entitled to, the abuse will start. An abusive partner doesn't only abuse, he will also manipulate your feelings for him getting you to both blame yourself for his failings and those of the relationship, and feel sorry for him (he may even use this to guilt you into staying with him). In extreme situations, he may also threaten to self-harm or commit suicide should you think about leaving him.

The early days of any relationship, involves both parties, to a lesser or greater extent, attempting to present themselves as the person/people they believe the other wants them to be. Individuals will try to disguise bad habits and make the effort on things that they themselves might not deem as particularly important, but recognize that the other person does. It is also a time when expectations about the relationship start to be set. When you become initially involved with someone, you should recognize that at the start there will be a level of artificiality to a person's behaviors and actions, whilst at the same time a demonstration of certain expectations they have concerning the relationship. This is the time to assess your partner and discern whether they demonstrate any of the behaviors and actions of someone who may become emotionally, and possibly physically, abusive later. Below is a list of questions you should ask about your relationship.

DOES YOUR PARTNER TRY & CONTROL YOU & EVERY SITUATION YOU ARE INVOLVED IN?

If you are in a relationship that is founded on the premise that both parties having equal status, then any plans that are made, should be made collectively or on a 50/50 basis i.e. your partner should make plans for you both, as should you. If you find yourself in a situation where your partner never agrees to your plans, or to do the things you want to do, then you are in a controlling relationship. This type of behavior never gets better, in fact it is only destined to get worse. If your partner gets accustomed to you backing down, or constantly shelving your plans for theirs, they will soon resent any time that you try to argue your case, or want to do your own thing.

Emotionally abusive individuals appear to have an inexhaustible energy when it comes to disputes and arguments; they really are unable to let go or seek compromise. The only way is their way. This is because they believe they are entitled to certain things, and will not give up on these rights. In fact, they will argue and defend them to the hilt. If your partner is not capable of reaching compromises and will push their case until you are so exhausted that you give in, you are dealing with an emotionally abusive person. These campaigns to get you to accept something will not always be manifested as huge full blown arguments, but may take the form of persistent nagging, or bringing up the dispute, the difference of opinion, etc., at every available opportunity. You may convince yourself that if whatever it is you are disagreeing about is so important to them you should just give in, however you should be aware that once you've relented on an issue, there will be another one that takes its place.

Nobody in a relationship gives up their control immediately, nor does an abuser take it in one go, rather they do it bit by bit, and step by step. Understand when compliments turn into opinions and questions that then get translated as orders e.g. you look good in short skirts (compliment), you should wear more short skirts (opinion), why are you wearing a long skirt/trousers (question), I told you to wear that skirt (order). What starts out as a compliment that you may respond to positively by wearing more short skirts eventually turns into something you have no choice in i.e. an order. As this

type of process happens over time, you may find yourself complying with your partner's demands and handing over control to them without even realizing it i.e. it's just easier to go along with what they want than not; something which isn't that important to you isn't worth the fight, etc.

DOES YOUR PARTNER RESENT TIME THAT YOU SPEND WITH FRIENDS OR OTHER PEOPLE?

Your partner may have an alternate reality to you concerning the way that relationships work. Most emotionally abusive individuals suffer not from low self-esteem, but high self-esteem; however this is something they often internally question. These are the individuals who believe that they should be recognized as the geniuses and amazing people that they see themselves as, but end up questioning this self-belief, as their reality doesn't live up to their perceptions of what that reality should be e.g. other people don't acknowledge it - they believe that they're over-qualified for the work that they do and that their bosses and managers don't recognize their accomplishments for what they are, and/or they don't receive the compliments and praise that they feel they are deserving of, etc. As the partner to such a person, you may hear them complain regularly about this, and find yourself becoming their support network, assuring them that they really are the person they believe they are, and acknowledging that the world doesn't recognize them for who they truly are. You may end up becoming the only person in the world who reinforces the view they have of themselves - which they may also end up resenting you for, as you symbolize everybody else's failure to recognize them.

Part of their view of the world, is that the person they are in a relationship with, shouldn't need anyone else in their lives but them (this is due to the high regard in which they view themselves). They believe that when two people engage in a relationship, they shouldn't need any other people in their lives because the relationship should satisfy every need and desire - any other person, be they friend or family member, should be irrelevant once a person is in a relationship because whatever support/friendship these people offer, each partner should be able to offer to a greater degree. In their world, the relationship represents the outer limits and extent of any necessary social network; time that you spend with your family or friends is both irrelevant and a waste of time, as those needs that such social interaction satisfies should be found within the relationship you and your partner have.

Any interaction and relationship you may have or share with others will be seen as a demonstration that you are not as committed to your partner as they are to you. Often when you inform or ask them if you can spend time with your friends and family, they will challenge your commitment to them, questioning why you need other people in your life, and why they aren't enough. Often this guilt trip is enough for you to cancel your plans in favor of spending time with your partner. When you do this, you are buying in to your partner's alternate reality and reinforcing their belief that the way they see the world is the correct one.

An abusive partner will want to isolate you from others, as they will want their opinion of you to be the

only one that matters. If you listen to others' opinions, you may start to act and behave differently and that would mean that they would lose some of their control over you. Part of their "act" of control and part of the emotional abuse that such a person will put you through is to tell you that you are undeserving of them or anyone and that you are lucky to have them - they want you to want them to control you. They will not want you to have a support network that can provide or present an alternative picture to the one they present of yourself to you.

DOES YOUR PARTNER INTERPRET WORDS LIKE "MAYBE" AS "PROMISES" THAT YOU'VE MADE?

People often confuse what paranoia is, believing it to be when somebody thinks everyone else is talking about them, and whilst this is often what occurs as others respond to a person's paranoid behavior, it is not what paranoia is. Paranoid people see the world in black and white terms; there are no grey areas, everything is absolute. The paranoid person has a set beliefs about how people should behave and act and everything has to fit into their model of how the world works, you are either for the paranoid person or against them; there is no indifference. If a paranoid partner believes that it takes you 20 minutes to get home from work and one day it takes you 30 minutes, they will be immediately suspicious of the reason(s) why on this one day it took you longer. If you make the argument that it was due to bad traffic, they will question why on all the other occasions before this one there wasn't bad traffic etc. The rule is that it takes you 20 minutes, and you failed to live up to the rule; there can be no variations on the rules and every time one is "broken" it goes to prove some conspiratorial reasoning that the paranoid person has e.g. that you spent 10 minutes talking to somebody at work and you didn't mention this because you have something to hide, etc.

It may be that you did spend 10 minutes talking to someone at work and that this is the reason that you were late but you knew that the truth would be interpreted against another "rule", and so chose to give the reason as traffic. If you find yourself evaluating what you tell your partner because of the way they will interpret it against their belief system e.g. nobody spends 10 minutes talking to someone unless there is a romantic interest, you are dealing with a paranoid person. Paranoid people see things that we don't - they see conspiracies where there are simple truths, and it doesn't matter if you can prove your case or not. The truth is that it is virtually impossible to re-educate a person from holding such opinions. Paranoid people don't change.

If your partner asks you a question, such as, "Would you like to go out on Friday night?", and you reply "Maybe", your response will have been interpreted as you agreeing to go out on Friday night, if that's what your partner wants you both to do. "Maybe" is a grey word that the paranoid person finds difficult to interpret, and one that they will always read in their favor. Often, they will go as far as to argue that "you promised" something, when you'd actually said that you'd consider it or think about it, etc. If your partner is constantly saying that you promised things, that you said you'd do things, etc., referring to things that you remember very clearly saying that you'd need time to think about, then you

are dealing with someone who has painted their world in terms of black and white, and who will interpret and judge everything you do according to a set of rules and standards that you will never be able to live up to - and this is the sad fact, that whatever you do or however you behave you will always find yourself disappointing your partner; they will just have too many rules that you'll be unable to live by, however hard you try.

DOES YOUR PARTNER HAVE ANY FRIENDS OR OBVIOUS SOCIAL NETWORK THEY ARE INVOLVED IN OR BELONG TO?

If your partner has an extensive social network, or even a group of close friends, they will need to spend time with these individuals in order to maintain the relationship. If they have a history of forming romantic relationships that are all-consuming and become the entire focus of their life, then it is unlikely that they have had the time to form or maintain other relationships, even with family members, etc. If a person is only capable of interacting with others in a certain way and cannot adapt their behavior to meet with, compromise and socialize with other people, then they may well have only one way of forming relationships i.e. on an unequal basis where they can control the other person. In looser social settings where people don't feel the need or pressure to give the relationship a chance, they will soon walk away from such a person however if this person is implying that they may be your potential lifelong partner the stakes are significantly higher, and you may feel that there is an obligation on your part to try to form and work on such a relationship with them.

If they are unable to interact with others, and this may be because they see everyone else in the world as trivial and inferior to them, they will not want to be brought into your social circle and/or spend time with your friends, even though you may see this as a cure for their loneliness/isolation. You may believe that you are doing them a favor by inviting them to spend time with your friends and family, and although they may initially agree, they will soon be refusing to socialize with them, justifying their reasoning by the fact that none of your friends and family recognize them as anything special and because of this they are in fact talking down and patronizing them, etc. You should also remember that they see your relationship as being strong enough and large enough that other people aren't relevant.

This will leave you feeling isolated (just like your partner feels). They are searching for everything within you and the relationship; you will never be able to provide this or live up to their expectations of your role. You will understand that whilst your relationship with them is important, you require time and socialization with others in order to be who you are. This leads to your partner resenting you, and you feeling sad for them - especially as you find yourself moving away from your reality and into theirs.

One of the ways that this shift happens is that you will end up having to taking sides with your partner in order to maintain the relationship - this is something they will require of you, and to justify it to

yourself without resenting your partner for what has happened, you will start to agree with them, and make it out that it was your decision to turn your back on your friends and push your family away, so that you can maintain some pride and integrity. You will start to become your partner's greatest advocate, telling yourself more than anyone else (because you have been deprived a social network), that your partner is misunderstood and that the things that have happened to them and the reasons they have not fulfilled their potential etc. are down to the ignorance and failings of others.

When paranoid people believe that others are talking about them, they are absolutely right, as those around them often discuss their behaviors and actions - if your friends or family try to intervene and talk to you saying that they have been thinking about and discussing your partner together, it will seem like your partner's paranoia, "that everyone is talking about them", has been proved correct, and in a sense it has been, but only because there are people who are able to recognize, away from all the emotional stuff that you've been involved in, what has happened.

If your partner does have friends or a social network that they allow you to participate in, notice if the way that he treats you when alone is significantly different when you are in public. The way you are treated is somewhat determined by age. Adult abusers are careful individuals who know that they'll be judged badly by their peers if they are seen as an abuser of women, and so tend to treat their partner well when in public - they also do this to preemptively counter any future arguments that their partner might make regarding either the emotional and/or physical abuse. Their guard may slip if their partner says something or acts/behaves in a way that could be seen to question their view of themselves, however by and large being seen as an abuser is something they want to avoid. In teenage relationships, the abusive partner may feel a greater need to demonstrate control over their partner to their peers and so make humiliating and disparaging comments about them, only to apologize and make up with them later.

DID YOUR PARTNER INITIALLY PUT YOU UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE TO START A RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM?

Did you have a lot of resignation and doubts about getting involved with your partner? Were they definitely more into you than you were with them? If you felt pressurized to get involved with them and they were persistent in their demands and their belief that the two of you should get involved, whilst flattering, you should also consider this when coupled with the way they may have tried to control your early dates and the way you spent your time together as a potential warning sign.

DID THEY OR DO THEY MAKE LONG TERM PLANS INVOLVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF IT?

Just as an emotionally abusive partner has a blueprint of how the relationship should work and operate, they will also have a plan of how it should develop and unfold - something they will share with you and be looking for you to sign up to in the early days of the relationship. They may mention

moving in together, getting married, etc., at an unnaturally early stage in the relationship. Your silence or lack of argument with their ideas and plans, will be taken as acceptance. Remember there are no grey areas with such people, and if you don't actively reject their plans, you will be seen to be accepting them. Saying things such as "we'll see", or "let's take it slowly", etc., may seem like a non-offensive way to say "no", or to make a compromise, but in truth you aren't saying "no", you're just allowing for the possibility of their plans and ideas, without committing to them at this stage (they will have already accepted the possibility as your agreement and commitment).

Abusive partners often talk about the relationship going on "forever". They're not in the relationship for the short term, but there for the long haul. They will invest everything they have into the relationship, and whilst at first glance this may seem admirable (i.e. to meet a man who is not afraid of commitment), the fact that they will make the relationship more central than those who are engaged in it, is not. The personality of each person is less important than the role that each plays and fulfills within it. The abusive partner defines themselves in regard to the relationship, oftentimes describing or referring to themselves as the partner, husband and/or lover of their wife or girlfriend. The importance that you have to an emotionally abusive partner is not as an individual, but as someone who fulfills a role that they can use to define themselves by.

It may initially seem extremely flattering to be involved with a man who goes against type; one who is eager to talk about commitment and make future plans. However when somebody starts making plans for other people without consulting them or caring what their goals or interests are, it raises a lot of questions. This is somebody who cares little for the individual and more about recruiting somebody to fulfill a position they have in mind. Being involved with someone who seems so serious about you may go a long way towards putting your internal doubts and questions aside, as well as making you blind to the many faults that your partner has. You may even question if you'll find anyone again who shows this level of interest in you, whilst not realizing that they're not interested in you as you, but as someone who can act and behave in a certain way towards them.

DO THEY CONTINUALLY CHECK UP ON YOUR WHEREABOUTS & WHAT YOU ARE DOING?

Paranoid individuals see and imagine things that most people don't; they see lateness as a demonstration of disloyalty i.e. "if you loved and respected me you'd make the effort to get there on time", regardless of whatever problems or issues that may have legitimately prevented you from doing so. With emotionally/physically abusive partners, you are not allowed to have any unaccounted for free time, etc. They feel that everything you do should be for the relationship, and anything you don't do FOR the relationship has to be viewed as something that by its very nature is AGAINST the relationship. Spending 15 minutes in a coffee shop reading a magazine isn't for the relationship, so it therefore must be against it, and if it's not for the relationship why would you do it but for reasons of disloyalty.

Most abusive partners will want to know where you are and what you are doing at any given moment of time. This is a form of control. At first it may start as phone calls and emails that seem a pleasant enquiry about what you are doing and from your part seem to demonstrate an interest in you, however it will soon be that they will be asking you what your plans are in advance and then checking up on you to make sure that what you said you'd be doing you actually are. What seems to start as a general interest in what you are up to will start to become a demand to know what you are up to, which if you complain about will be taken as you having something to hide - why else wouldn't you tell them what you planned to do unless there was something you didn't want them to know. When somebody starts checking up on you, they'll soon be making plans for you as well, telling you what you can and can't do and who you can and can't see. They may justify that they need to do this, as when they were in the "checking up" phase what you said you were doing didn't match your plans etc. and that you can't really be trusted.

If you do refuse to play this game, your partner's act may change, from aggression, to one of having his feelings hurt; in order for you to feel guilty for not providing this information. Abusers will often try and portray themselves as being sensitive souls who are offended and hurt by your lack of willingness to show commitment to the relationship e.g. not tell them where you are every minute of the day, etc.

DO THEY GIVE LAVISH GIFTS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE?

It is not uncommon for emotionally abusive individuals to create a feeling of indebtedness. When somebody buys or gives us something we feel a natural desire to give something back. The bigger the gift or present, the more we feel indebted to that person. In the early days of a relationship, any gift is somewhat inappropriate, however large, expensive gifts are definitely out of place - especially if it seems out of proportion with what the person giving the gift can afford e.g. if it is early days (and your partner is out of work or on a low income) and they buy you something expensive that seems way out of their budget, flattering as it may be, you must recognize it for what it is - someone making an investment, that at some point has to be paid back.

You must remember that the emotional profile of an abusive person has them suffering from a high level of self-esteem, and perceived self-worth that in certain moments they end up questioning and feel insecure about. Whilst most of the time, they may believe that you are lucky to be with them, they will also have moments when they question if they are the person that you want to be with. This will lead them to feel the need and the pressure to do something that will convince you to be with them - getting you a gift that you will put you in their debt is one way of doing this.

If you receive a gift - in the early stages of your relationship - that makes you uncomfortable because of its value, it is an out of place gift and you should question the motive of the giver.

DO THEY REGULARLY TALK ABOUT EX-PARTNERS THEY BELIEVE TREATED THEM BADLY?

Abusers will always portray themselves as the victims. They are never to blame and they never take responsibility for their actions and behaviors. They will readily share stories of their own abuse and mistreatment that will tug at your heart strings. They want you to feel sorry for them, they want you to join their team and become an advocate for them. We often excuse or explain people's negative behaviors away by blaming their past experiences for leading them to behave in a particular way. This is a very common but weak argument, even if the abuse they claim were true (there are many people who have been abused and mistreated and yet don't develop negative behaviors e.g. most victims of child abuse don't go on to become abusers, etc.).

There are many people who bear grudges against their ex-partners, however most won't claim to be victims of abuse. Emotionally abusive people don't see it this way. In their minds, they are always the victim of abuse; they have more than just anger towards their ex-partner, they have complete contempt for them, seeing them and describing them as being less than human. It is one thing to be bitter towards another person, another thing to entirely degrade them. If your partner can only talk badly about their ex-partners and is unable to imagine how their own behaviors and actions may have contributed to the situation, be very wary.

Their language may also contain a hint as to how they view women in general. Many emotionally and physically abusive men have a problem with women as a group. They don't just disrespect individuals, they disrespect every female. When somebody tells you that you are not like their other partners or like women in general, they are not paying you a compliment - they are making a comment regarding every member of your gender, including you.

CONCLUSION - IDENTIFYING POTENTIALLY ABUSIVE PARTNERS

You may think that self-defense training is all about how to physically defend yourself, however comprehensive self-defense training should concern itself with your complete safety; both emotional and physical. Abusive partners are a very real threat to your emotional and physical well-being.

This component on the course has tried to explain some of the warning signs of physical abuse through describing the emotional abuse that leads up to it. If you are in an emotionally abusive relationship and you feel that it will become physical, in all probability it will - your intuition is certainly your best predictor, even more than your partner's past/previous behavior and actions.

If your answers to the questions asked in this section can be explained or made clear by the information that has been provided in each section, or the overall picture/profile of your partner largely matches that described in this component, it would be safe to say that your partner is at the least emotionally abusive and may well become physically abusive.

SEPS (Situation Effective Protection System) is a framework, for understanding how violent situations occur and evolve, along with the motivations behind them, so that it is possible to predict, identify and avoid them. The system was created and developed by Gershon Ben Keren and Andy Rallings. This handout is part of the SEPS free women's personal safety program developed by Gershon Ben Keren. For more information and other course modules, please go to www.womensselfdefense-seps.com.

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