

PATTERNS OF THINKING AND BEHAVIOR OFTEN DISPLAYED BY ABUSIVE PEOPLE

Domestic abuse is caused by the abuser's desire to gain power and control in the relationship. The abuser feels entitled to have control and often displays the following patterns of thinking as a way to justify their behavior to themselves and others.

EXCUSE MAKING: The person gives excuses instead of accepting responsibility for the behavior, especially when confronted by others.

BLAMING: The abuser will shift the responsibility for the abusive behavior onto someone or something else, often the victim. This often has the effect of making the victim feel like the abuse is their fault.

JUSTIFYING: The person explains and justifies the behavior as necessary, unavoidable, or caused by factors outside the person's control.

REDEFINING: Changing the definition of "what's really going on" so that the focus is not on what the person did.

LYING: Lying is a power play used to maintain control of information, confuse or make fools of other people, and gain advantage in the situation. In addition to being untruthful, abusers may also lie by intentionally leaving out certain information.

IMPULSIVITY: Many abusers act on impulse rather than on thought, and tend not to think about the consequences of their actions. Having this characteristic makes them more dangerous to the victim, because they don't consider the effects of their abusive behavior.

MAKING FOOLS OF OTHERS: This behavior may include agreeing to things the person has no intention of doing, setting up other people to fight, and getting other people upset to watch their reaction and take advantage of them.

BUILD-UP: Abusive people often think that they are better than other people. They often build themselves up by putting other people down. Frequently they feel "one down" in a situation where they don't believe they are "one up."

ASSUMING: Abusive people often believe they know what other people are thinking, feeling, and doing without real information. This allows them to justify their behavior based on what they assume somebody's motives are.

I'M UNIQUE: Abusive people often believe they are different from other people, that nobody else is like them, and that they are not bound by the same rules as other people.

INGRATIATION: Some abusive people show phony niceness to other people, or display excessive or phony interest in the other person's opinion. This may be done to manipulate the other person or control the situation by refusing to give information about one's self.

FRAGMENTATION: This is a pattern where various parts of the person's life don't seem to match.

MINIMIZATION: Minimization is making the behavior, or the impact of the behavior, seem less important than it is. The abuser may also minimize to the point of denying that behavior ever occurred.

VAGUENESS: Abusive people have a tendency to be unclear and non-specific to avoid being found out or being held responsible for their behavior.

ANGER: Abusive people aren't necessarily any angrier than anyone else. Abusive people use anger and angry behavior as a way to intimidate and control other people. They often express their anger in threatening ways to gain control of a situation.

POWER PLAYS: Abusive people sometimes use dramatic tactics to regain control of a situation when a person isn't getting his/her way. This may include walking out, out shouting the other person, threatening, etc.

PLAYING VICTIM: Abusive people play victim by appearing helpless, pretending to be unable to cope with the situation, and complaining of persecution.

DRAMA & EXCITEMENT: Abusive people have trouble experiencing really satisfying close and intimate connections with other people. They often substitute action, excitement, uproar or constant stimulation for closeness or other meaningful activity. Any of the tactics described in this list may be used to create uproar.

OWNERSHIP: "If I want it, it's mine; I can do whatever I want with it." This attitude applies both to possessions and to people. It justifies taking other people's possessions, controlling the behavior of others and physically abusing others.

IMAGE: Many chronically abusive people think of themselves as strong, superior, independent, and self-sufficient. Statements or actions that don't support this image are often considered attacks or put-downs.

