Working out whether you’re in a toxic (otherwise known as an abusive) relationship isn’t always easy. Learning the signs of an abusive relationship can give you some perspective. Thinking that abusive behaviour is your fault is a common feeling, but it’s important to know that you’re never to blame for another person’s behaviour.

What is an abusive relationship? Abuse is experienced in heaps of different ways and isn’t just limited to physical violence. An abusive relationship can include sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and can also involve control of finances.
Key signs of an abusive relationship:

- Possessiveness. Checking on you all the time to see where you are, what you’re doing and who you’re with.
- Trying to control where you go and who you can see and getting angry if you don’t do what they say.
- Jealousy. Accusing you without good reason of being unfaithful or flirting.
- Isolating you from family and friends, often by rude behaviour.
- Put downs. Putting you down, either publicly or privately, by attacking your intelligence, looks, mental health or capabilities.
- Constantly comparing you unfavourably with others. Blaming you for all the problems in the relationship, and for the times they are out of control or violent.
- Threats. Yelling, sulking and deliberately breaking things that you value.
- Threatening to use violence against you, your family, friends or even a pet. Saying things like ‘no one else will want you’.
- Physical and sexual violence. Pushing, shoving, hitting, grabbing, making you have sex or do things you don’t want to do.
- Harming you, your pets or your family members.

Things you might feel in an abusive relationship

- ‘My partner isn’t violent all the time - they love me.’ A violent relationship may not be violent all the time and the person who is violent may seem very loving at other times and sorry for their behaviour. This can make it hard to stay angry and upset with them. However, the chance of their violent behaviour continuing is quite high. Abusers are often very charming and sweet with other people, especially if they are trying to manipulate other people’s view of them.
- ‘Things will get better - they don’t mean it.’ After a violent event, it’s common for both of you to try and make it OK by making excuses, apologising, or promising to change. Sometimes the violent person may even blame you – saying things like ‘it wouldn’t have happened if you didn’t…’. Things might settle down for a little while but it’s often only a matter of time before the build-up to violence starts again.
- ‘It’s so confusing - I’m sure it’s a one-off.’ If you are experiencing violence in a relationship, things can feel very confusing, especially if it’s your first relationship. You might not be sure what behaviour to expect. Abusers often work on your sense of what is real to make you feel confused or even that you are going crazy. Statistically though, if someone is violent once they are far more likely to be violent a second time.
- ‘Maybe it’s my fault.’ You might begin to think that the violence is your fault. The abuser will probably tell you that it is. The truth is that no matter what you do, another person’s behaviour is never your fault.
- ‘I’m scared of what will happen if I leave them.’ In an abusive relationship, it’s not unusual to be afraid of leaving the person you are with. This can be for a number of reasons, such as fearing for your own safety, or being fearful of what the person might do to themselves. You might also be afraid of not being able to make it on your own. But it’s important to remember that you’re not on your own and there are people who can help you every step of the way.

What to do if this sounds like you. No one deserves to be in a relationship where they don’t feel safe. If you are in a relationship that you think might be abusive tell someone. National services like 1800 RESPECT can support you no matter what state or territory you are in. They can also direct you to local services in your area such as ‘Enough is Enough’.


Extract from Reach Out; http://au.reachout.com/signs-of-an-abusive-relationship