



PENNY HOLBURN COACHING

It's about You and Results

Seven Signs of Abuse

1 June 2018

Whether in the workplace or in your personal life, abuse is perpetrated more than we would like to believe. The first step towards dealing with abuse is recognising it. Sometimes it is easier to recognise than at other times. If you get hit or assaulted most people recognise that clearly as abuse. Below are seven signs that may be less obvious, especially to the one being abused. But they are nevertheless signs you don't want to ignore.



1. An abuser likes to feel they are in charge. They like to dominate and control. It is about what they want and about them looking good at the expense of you. Abusers will shame you and make fun of you in front of others
2. An abuser doesn't care about your feelings. You are not someone who matters except to the extent that you make them feel and look good. Their feelings matter. They matter a lot. Don't you dare do anything to upset them. But they are perfectly entitled to disregard what you think and feel. And you had better never do anything to slight their feelings.
3. Do you know someone who is often telling you that you are too sensitive. Beware. That is often the sign of an abuser. Abusers complain that you are too sensitive and cannot take a criticism or a joke. Belittling and demeaning someone however is not criticism or a joke. The irony is that if you said or did the same to them they would become enraged. Very often it is the abuser who is very sensitive to what is said and done to them. It doesn't take much to set them off, which is why so many people report it feels like they are having to walk on eggshells around abusers.

4. All people are entitled to their opinions. You are allowed to think and feel whatever it is that you think and feel. You however are not allowed to act how you want. Actions need to be such that they respect and do not harm others or yourself. Abusers will tell you that your opinions are wrong. They will want you to, indeed they will often insist, that you share the same opinions as them. Sometimes they can be quite aggressive if you don't think the same way as them. It is threatening for you to have your own opinions. It means you are your own person. Abusers don't like that.
5. It is normal and good to be able to express yourself. Making suggestions, even if others don't agree is self-assertion. An abuser will ridicule and dismiss your suggestions as they have an absolute need to be right and therefore you must be wrong. It is always about their way and yours doesn't matter.
6. An abuser doesn't respect boundaries. They don't respect your right to your time and space, your right to say no or I don't know, and expect you to do what they want you to do. You need to respect the abuser's boundaries, but they have the right to invade yours.
7. An abuser will try and isolate you. The abuser works to break down your sense of self as an independent and valuable person. They work on breaking down your self-esteem. Which is why I believe anyone who has worked in an environment with abusive bosses or colleagues, or had personal relationships with an abusive person needs to work on their self-esteem to ensure they restore their sense of self and worth, and don't end up again in abusive situations. By isolating you, an abuser will prevent you from getting the views and opinions and advice of others. Views and opinions and advice that could help you see the abuse for what it is. When you are shut off from others, then the only opinions you hear are those of the abuser. And so you come to think those opinions, because they are the only ones you hear, must be the truth. And you come to believe a distorted view of yourself - one the abuser wants you to have. Eventually you are so convinced of the abuser's views that you cannot believe in yourself any more and don't feel able to exit an abusive situation.

If you are in an abusive situation, it is not as easy as many think to just leave. Fortunately there are some other options. Try and talk to other people about what is going on. Contact support groups like POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse) and/or LvA (Lawyers Against Abuse), who will understand your situation and help you get the resources you need to get out of the situation.