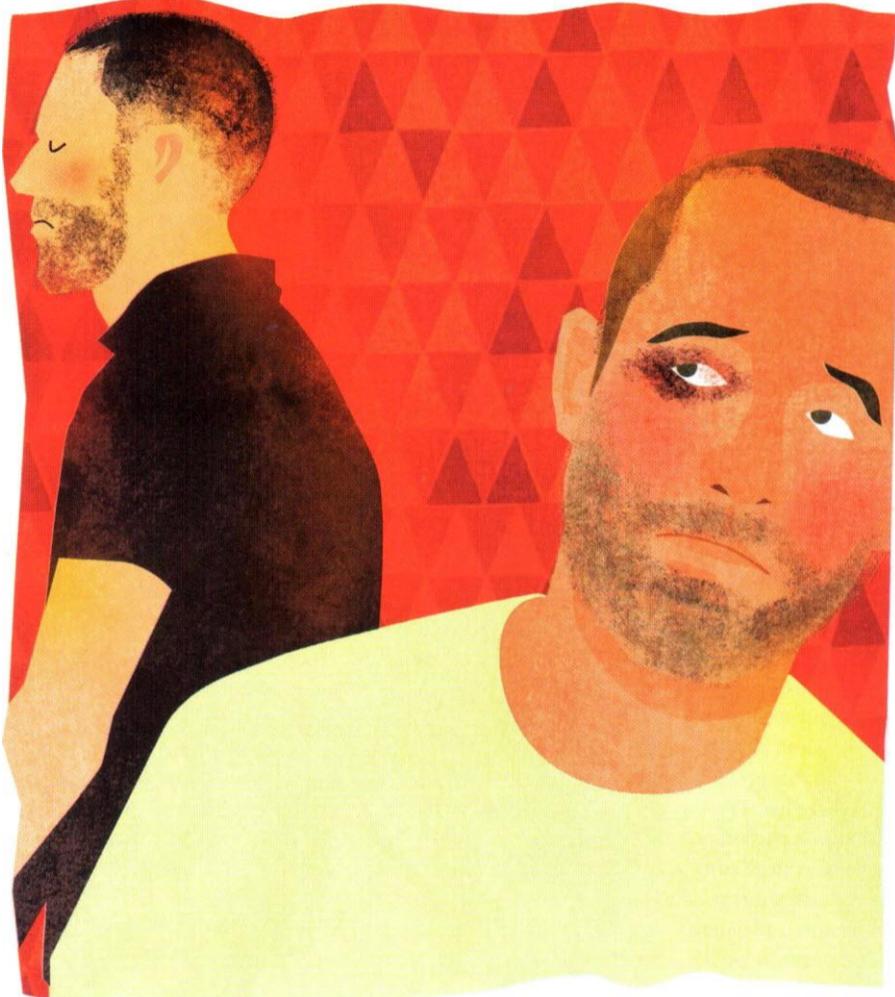


MY BOYFRIEND KEEPS HITTING ME. I STILL LOVE HIM. HOW CAN I GET HIM TO CHANGE?



~DEAR JOE

----- I have been in a loving and long-term relationship with my partner for the last five years. We signed a civil partnership last year. Before we got married I was having a few worries about the state of our relationship but I thought that by taking this step they might go away. My partner has always been quite controlling, he goes through my phone, even though I've never been unfaithful and he gets cross when I socialise with people he doesn't like - which seems to be most of my friends. One of my friends wrote me an email telling me he didn't like it when my partner yells at me - and it made

me realise that it was not healthy. At Christmas I told him I didn't want him to shout at me anymore and he hit me in the face. The next day he was really sorry and begged me not to leave. I really do love him so I stayed. Since then he has hit me three more times. I've stopped seeing my friends because I just feel so embarrassed and don't know what to say to them. I really love him and don't want us to break up but I can't go on like this. Is there some way that I can get him to stop doing this to me? Underneath it all, I know he is a good man. PETE, CAMBRIDGE

**DEAR PETE**

My immediate advice to you is to first seek help for yourself. You are in a very dangerous and potentially harmful relationship. There is no therapy that you can get to help him. He has to get the help himself. Do not even seek couple's therapy. You are in a domestic abusive relationship in which couple's therapy is ineffective and can actually make things worse and be destructive, causing him to be even more harmful to you than he already is. Things are not going to get better. They are only going to get worse, especially without intervention.

There is never any reason for hitting a partner, ever! You say he is a good person however I am not so sure. Did he get help for himself for hitting you? Is he sorry enough to investigate what made him hit you not just once, but several times? Does he feel embarrassed for his own behaviour? If he is embarrassed and sorry, how long does it last? A person who exhibits these behaviours is normally so horrified they will do anything to never let something like this happen again. I am guessing he blamed you each time he hit you, as that is the typical pattern of domestic violence perpetrators. Even though he says he is sorry, that is not enough and you should expect much more than this. An apology is not enough.

- Your letter sounds like a classic example of domestic violence. The classic traits of domestic violence are:

CONTROL

You state your partner has been controlling from the beginning. It sounds like it has only gotten worse, which is expected. Going through your phone without reason is a form of control and is violating.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE IS THE MOST COMMONFORM OF ABUSE

You may be telling yourself that in five years he has only physically struck you a few more times than once (although once is enough) but the psychological abuse of controlling you and treating you as if you are hiding something is psychological abuse. I actually think psychological abuse can be worse than physical abuse in that psychological consequences are mostly invisible. He yells at you which is verbal abuse and your friends are noticing. Your shame is psychological abuse. You have nothing to be ashamed of - he does!

MISTREATMENT, LEAVING THE VICTIM WITH FEELINGSOF ISOLATION, FEAR, AND GUILT

You are becoming isolated by not seeing your friends. This is what the perpetrator of domestic violence wants so that he can have power and control over you. By becoming cross about the people with whom you socialise he demonstrates jealousy and this is an attempt to get you away from your friends so that he can have more control and power over you.

THE PATTERN OF ABUSE INCLUDES A VICIOUS CYCLEOF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

You said he has hit you more than once. You have asked him to stop and he doesn't. The pattern is the perpetrator hits, apologises and begs for forgiveness and engages in controlling behaviour all over again. These are all signs that you are in trouble! If you don't seek help immediately you will find yourself with worse consequences than you are already in.

- Abused spouses say things such as you have said like:

HE IS A GOOD PERSON

A good person doesn't hit another and not suffer great pain about it and get some help. A good person has a conscience and feels integrity and remorse as well as empathy for the person they have harmed.

HE DOESN'T MEAN IT

Yes he does. He means every word and every hit. Perpetrators have a belief system that they have a right to what they want and from the person from whom they want it - at any cost.

I MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING TO DESERVE IT

Never! Even if you were very provocative and said or did something which caused him to be very angry and upset, it never deserves abuse.

As someone tolerating this abuse, you need to find out why you are not only putting up with this, but why you are minimising and denying the truth that is right in front of you, that even your friends can see easily. After spending many years with someone who is abusive it can whittle away at your self-esteem. The abused starts to believe what the abuser is saying and doing to them. Sometimes this is related to the abused partner's childhood and how they were treated by their primary caretakers. Whatever the reasons are that you believe you deserve this abuse, you don't! A part of you knew that already, or you wouldn't have reached out to me and asked for help.

Go to a therapist or a domestic violence shelter for some counselling on how to best move forward. Ideally you start your own therapy and your own healing and your partner sees this and decides to get help. You can urge him to seek an evaluation from a therapist and you can even go with him to his first appointment, understanding that this is for him, not the two of you. You are there only to report the issues and your side of how you experience him so the therapist can have a full picture.

Once he gets the help he needs he should be able to have remorse and empathy towards you for what he has done. If this is not forthcoming from his therapy, it means his going is a courtesy and a ploy to stop you from complaining and just get past the latest abuse. If he really is motivated for therapy he will go for at least a year and will be able to share all the factors that went in to becoming an abuser. He will be able to identify how to stop it and avoid it in the future. If this doesn't occur, I strongly recommend that you leave him. Never stay anywhere where you're abused.

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0808 2000 247



DR JOE KORT IS A LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER AND BOARD-CERTIFIED SEXOLOGIST. HE IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF 10 SMART THINGS GAY MEN CAN DO TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES JOEKOR.COM