



Isolation, control and fear: **a guide to self-evaluate the risk in toxic relationships**

Violence is not only physical, sexual or economic – it can also be psychological and digital. It manifests in many ways, often escalating through threats and controlling behaviors that create fear. Your choices are no longer free, but conditioned. «Many cases of femicide have occurred without previous physical or sexual violence, but rather through escalating verbal threats and controlling demands, often reinforced online and via social media», explains **Marina Calloni**, professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Milano-Bicocca, and director of the research centre **ADV (Against Domestic Violence)** and of the national academic network **UN.I.RE (Universities United Against Gender-Based Violence)**.

How can you self-assess your level of risk? And when should you ask for help (since the end of a relationship, unfortunately, does not always mean the end of the danger – quite the opposite, at times)?

Here's when a relationship is toxic:

1. When the relationship is seen as exclusive possession and jealousy becomes obsessive and constantly justified.
2. When your presence is demanded continuously and exclusively.
3. When you are constantly suspected.
4. When you are repeatedly blamed or criticized.
5. When your friendships are controlled or restricted, and you are prevented from seeing others.
6. When you are increasingly isolated, heightening your dependence on your partner.
7. When your words are twisted to make you feel guilty or at fault.
8. When your partner begins to monitor your messages, phone, and social media activity.
9. When they demand that you dress a certain way, according to their preferences.
10. When he remains indifferent to your needs and desires.
11. When they make unpleasant comments about your body or behavior, even in front of others.

12. When they prevent you from studying or pursuing a career.
13. When they give you false information to make you doubt yourself, your memory, your perception – leaving you disoriented and questioning your identity.
14. When they begin to intimidate or threaten you.
15. When you are humiliated with degrading criticism, sarcasm, unpleasant remarks, or offensive language.
16. When you begin experiencing anxiety attacks, PTSD symptoms, depression or suicidal thoughts, putting your physical and mental health at risk.

«A man who behaves this way is a pathological narcissist», explains Calloni. «He feels superior with a constant need for admiration, and lacks empathy. He treats others as objects to control and manipulate. But don't be fooled! This is not love».

Gender-based violence often follows a **cyclical pattern**, beginning with a gradual build-up of tension, followed by aggression, and then a phase of regret or reconciliation, with promises of change or by blaming the woman for what happened. However, after the love bombing, new threats and abuse often follow.

If you begin to feel fear, it's a sign that the risk of more serious harm is increasing — and the danger is real. Professor Calloni's plea, based on years of working with gender-based violence, is clear: ask for help. Contact anti-violence centres, specialized social services, or call **1522**, the anti-violence and anti-stalking helpline, available 24/7 and always free. Or contact law enforcement to file a report and request protection».

The **Signal for Help** is an international gesture to silently ask for help in situations of violence – it can save a life.

1. Raise your hand with your palm facing out and tuck your thumb into your palm.
2. Fold your four fingers down over your thumb.



Ending the relationship does not necessarily mean the danger is over, especially when the ex-partner cannot accept the separation and harbors frustration, anger, and resentment.

Here are the dangers that persist even after the relationship has ended:

1. When your ex continues to feel jealousy and a sense of ownership over you, preventing other people from getting close to you.
2. When they follow you or show up unexpectedly at your workplace or place of study.
3. When they contact your friends to get information about you.
4. When they begin monitoring your activity on social media.
5. When they continue to intimidate or threaten you, either in person or online, via phone or social media.
6. When they spread false information about you or share images, including intimate ones.
7. When you start suffering from anxiety, depression, or guilt for having left them, to the point that your physical and mental health are at risk.
8. When he insistently asks to see you again for "closure" or to get back together.

If any of this happens and your sense of fear increases, it means you are truly in danger.

If you need help, please contact the
Anti-Violence Support Service



