

Recognizing a potential victim is not always easy. They are victimized, creating trauma and stress. Sometimes it is unnoticeable, sometimes there are obvious physical signs. Let's take a moment to talk about signs of victimization, trauma, stress, and what to do if you recognize them.

Everyone processes trauma, stress, and victimization differently. What we talk about in this vlog, does not apply to everyone. Not every sign mentioned will exist with the person. Be mindful that sometimes the signs can mean something else too.

Abuse happens when one person in a relationship needs to have power and control. They try to dominate the other person with verbal or emotional abuse, and then escalate to physical abuse.

Let's start with the physical signs of abuse, if someone is being physically abused, they will show signs of bruises, injuries that are consistent with being punched, choked, or knocked down. When asked about them, they may provide weak explanation for the injuries. They may try to cover them up, wearing inappropriate clothing, regardless of the weather. For example, a scarf or turtleneck in the summer time when it's too hot. They may also physically cover the bruises, like using a hand to hold that spot to cover up the bruise. Physical signs can be:

- Black eye(s)
- Busted lips
- Bruises on the neck
- Bruises on the arms
- Sprained wrists
- Headaches
- Inability to sleep
- Cuts or broken skin
- Fractures or broken bones
- Loose or missing teeth
- Burns from cigarettes, ropes, etc
- Welts with obvious outline of the object. (example, candlestick, can see the shape of it on the body.)
- Heart beating too fast
- Numbness and/or tingling
- Complaints of pain in various parts of the body
- Strangulation – If you experience that, see a medical person now. It could cause problems in the future.

There are emotional signs of abuse, and those can be harder to detect. Those are also easier for the victim to deny that they exist. With emotional signs, they can come out as a physical sign, behavior changes, or develop mental health needs in the future. These can be shown physically and worth watching for. Emotional signs can be:

- Avoiding social interactions/stop participating in usual activities
- Extremely apologetic
- Low self-esteem
- Fearful
- Anxiety
- Developing a drug or alcohol problem. More difficult because they use alcohol or drugs to forget about the abuse and then get addicted.
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping too much or not sleeping enough)
- Signs of depression
- Lack of interest in daily activities
- Cancels plans at the last minute
- Often late to work, meetings, or events. I know in Deaf Culture, that is normal, but this is more than normal
- More private than usual. Maybe before we would just talk about everything, but then stopped sharing things
- Isolation. They stop going to family and friends events, pulling themselves away from social situations and stops communicating.
- Lack of focus, ignores what you say, or day dream without paying attention to the conversation.
- Even if you have confided in each other before.
- Anger
- Irritability
- Unable to make a decision. Saying they have to check with someone first.
- Suicidal. Thoughts of no one loves them anymore. Feeling that it is better to end their lives. Watch their social media for posts or conversations that seem suicidal. Check in on them, maybe they are thinking or planning suicide. Let them talk it out.

Some develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Signs of PTSD are similar to emotional signs of abuse. Signs of PTSD can be:

- They talk about flashbacks, dreams, or they obsessively think about the abuse
- Shows signs of distress, panic, and anxiety attacks
- Change in sleep patterns
- Shows more than normal anger, more than usual emotional range. Develops apprehension and resistance., indecision, difficulty focusing, easily startled, over aware of surroundings, and sensitivity
- Detachment, as if they are a different person now
- Avoiding people, places, things that are associated with the assault

- Lack of care or uncertain about their futures
- Reliving the assault as if it was still happening.

What can we do when we recognize the signs? Be prepared for the victim to deny anything. There are ways you can approach the conversation about abuse that can be helpful. First and foremost, believe the victim when they say they experienced trauma. Biggest help we can offer is start by believing. Have resources ready to give them if they decide to tell you they are victimized. Deaf Unity brochures, local shelter resources, offer your time (by listening, by believing, by providing transportation, etc), and resources for medical exams if needed. Don't flat out tell them they are experiencing trauma and ask them to get out. That will cause an immediate defensive reaction. Maintain the I statement. "I saw this happen, and I am concerned for your safety." "I've heard other people experience the same things and there are free hotlines you can contact." Respect their answers and their decisions, even if you don't agree with the decision. Don't react strongly if they choose to tell you the story. Stay calm and listen to them. Let them talk out what happened and what they feel their options are. Sometimes leaving the house is not the best option. After they talk to you, refer them to an organization that can help empower them to work through their trauma.

As always, you can reach out to Deaf Unity to get tips and resources to help your victim. If you are not sure, talk to us. We can help you with services, resources, and options. We are here to help and support.