How to Recognize Abuse--and Deal

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Identifying the Problem: The hardest part of getting out of an abusive relationship isn't getting out—it's knowing you're in one. So how can you know? Your partner may be abusive if he or she:

>> Makes you feel like damaged goods for having HIV—and that you'll never find anyone else.

>> Isolates you by revealing or threatening to reveal your HIV status.

>> Keeps you from following HIV basics: getting health care, eating right or accessing ASO services.

>> Blames you for infecting him or her, even if you're not the source of infection.

>> Is HIV positive and demands excessive care-giving or exploits your guilt.

>> Is positive and tries to get a clinician or caseworker to see his violent behavior as a cry for help.

Disclosing: Dázon Dixon Diallo at SisterLove Inc. says if you fear for your safety, disclose to a confidant or counselor instead of your partner. If you do disclose to a potentially violent partner, she advises:

>> Never disclose in the heat of an argument. "You'll sound like you're hurling a weapon," Diallo says.

>> Disclose when the relationship is stable. "Don't gamble that it will fix your other problems," she says.

>> Have a counselor or family member(s) present. "The more witnesses you have, the less likely the partner is to try something," Diallo says.

>> Opt for a public space whenever possible. "It's like ending a relationship—you want to do it where they'll think twice about making a scene."

Getting Help: Resources and shelters are only a phone call away—via the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800.799.SAFE (ext. 7233), or, for LGBT people, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs: 212.714.1141. If you want to get out of an abusive situation, either group can help you leave, but according to Diallo, "You simply must escape—go to a friend's, go to your work, go wherever. Just someplace you can get yourself together."

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