

"DON'T YOU TRUST ME?"

20 SIGNS OF FIANCÉ ABUSE

Who doesn't love a big fat Punjabi engagement party?

Those who reflect back may realize they overlooked many signs that the wedding and marriage to follow would be scary, difficult, and even dangerous.

My jeeja-to-be stopped talking to my sister after the sangeet, **two days before the lavaan**. The elders didn't notice, but I did. **He was cold**, and she said that he was **punishing her** because she had **disagreed with him**. What could I say? I was just her younger brother.

"While his friends were drunk dancing outside, his sister came inside during the mehendi to tell me the **family was toxic and he was worse than anything I had seen yet**. She said she was warning me as a woman. But I told myself she was just a bitter, single lady... Within a month, **I knew better**."

"We were so relieved and happy that our parents had agreed to the wedding, after first being furious to learn we were dating! But soon after the ardaas, **his entire behavior changed**. He said he knew things about me no one knew, **so I dare not leave him**; otherwise, he would make it impossible for me or my siblings to get married."

"His parents called from Punjab and asked us to prepone the arrangements, to come sooner. His calls to me had **become like begging**, like he was in trouble if he didn't marry me. **My gut was against going**. But our tickets were booked, and my parents loved his parents. I didn't want to cancel anything then."

Over the past 16 years, **Sikh Family Center** has had the privilege of serving thousands of individuals and gaining deep insight into the cultural nuances and practices surrounding dating, weddings, and marriage within our community. In response to these experiences, we have developed this resource as part of our ongoing commitment to early intervention and violence prevention.

By naming **“fiancé abuse,”** Sikh Family Center brings necessary attention to the various problematic behaviors that appear after a rokaa/ardaas/engagement and before a wedding—often during a “courtship”—and may signal greater risk of violence after a wedding. In creating the following list, **victims and survivors of domestic violence from within our Sikh Punjabi community have identified signs and red flags** that they now believe were present prior to the wedding but were overlooked or missed when they had first appeared.

Consider the below **(non-exhaustive)** list if you or someone you know is planning to get married soon. These questions are **not intended to create fear**, but rather to assist reflection, provide an opportunity to recognize potential signs of abuse, and to foster awareness of what healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships look like. Good, safe planning does not take the fun out of exciting new beginnings—**unless someone is hiding their true self.**

Trust your gut.

If something feels wrong, don’t hesitate to reach out to discuss your concerns. **You are not alone.** Confidential, non-judgmental support for yourself or a friend, is available; you may **call our Helpline** and speak with a trained peer counselor in Punjabi or English.

Everyone has a right to safety.



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1 Isolation

Does your fiancé **express discomfort** with, or try to **limit your contact** with, your closest friends and family by claiming your family/friends don't value you, understand you, or care for you, as well as your fiancé does? ("**They don't want what's best for you,**" or "**They don't like me,**" or "**They are just jealous of our love,**" or "**I just can't share you.**")

2 Gaslighting-Blaming-Guilt

Does your fiancé **blame you** or others **for their anger, irritation, or overwhelming emotions**, and **avoid taking responsibility** for their own actions? Does your fiancé often make you feel like you are overreacting, "**too sensitive,**" or "**crazy**" when you raise concerns? Do they frequently rewrite past events or deny things they previously said or did? ("**I wouldn't have done this if you hadn't...**" or "**This happened because of you.**")

3 Warnings

Do your fiancé's own family/friends **drop hints** suggesting all may not be well, such as "**You will fix them**" or "**He just needs a partner to sort him out**"?

4 Evasion

Does your fiancé consistently **avoid your questions and/or difficult conversations** about life post-marriage, where you will live, when you will move in with them, and who will live in the same house as you? Do they **refuse to discuss** shared financial responsibilities post-marriage?



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Sexual Coercion

Does your fiancé **pressure** you for **premarital sexual activity against your wishes**, and/or justify their actions? (“**We are getting married anyway...**” or “**Don’t you trust me?**”)

6

Rushing

Does your fiancé/their family seem **overly interested in a quick wedding?** Are they **avoiding** a court marriage or insisting on a quick court marriage only? (“**We can always have a court marriage later; the four lavaan matter more,**” or “**We can do the lavaan later—e.g., with the due fanfare.**”)

7

Surveillance-Monitoring

Does your fiancé **monitor how you spend your time**, insist you constantly **check in, interrupt your plans** by constantly calling or messaging you when they know you are out or busy, **track your daily activities** (via phone, social media, tracking apps), and/or expect you to **share all your personal passwords?**

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Entrapment

Do you **feel trapped** in your current life situation and see **marriage as your only escape?** Does your fiancé tell you this is **your best/only option?**



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Interrogation

Does your fiancé **ask many intrusive questions** about your past relationships—perhaps while **being secretive about his/her own?** (“**I have to make sure you are pure, it’s different for men,**”; “**My ex was crazy, don’t ask about her, don’t talk to her!**”)

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Violence

Does your fiancé **exhibit physically aggressive behavior**, such as using their **strength to harm or control you** (e.g., **pinning you against a wall, squeezing your wrist too tightly, throwing objects, threatening you with a weapon, forcibly restraining you**), or **destroying** items of personal or emotional significance? Have there been patterns or instances of aggressive behavior directed toward others as well?

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Escalation

Does your fiancé **escalate feelings**—sadness after a fight, **jealousy** about you talking to a friend—with the use of substances such as **drugs or alcohol?** (e.g., **justifying being drunk and misbehaving because he/she is “so happy to have you”** or because “**you drive me to it!**”)

12

Deception & Non-Disclosure of Documents

Does your fiancé, their family, or the vicholai (matchmaker) **misrepresent information about your fiancé’s identity, career, education, or financial situation?**

Note: if you haven’t seen **official documents**, such as a passport or driver’s license, it is time for a conversation!

Note: Vicholai are not verification! In their eagerness to secure a promising future for their children, parents may overlook crucial due diligence when arranging marriages to people living abroad—failure to conduct background checks or investigate whether there were any previous marriages, divorces, criminal records, or legal cases, etc., creates a vulnerable situation with people who are essentially strangers.



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Reproductive Pressure

Does your fiancé or their family talk about **how you must have children** soon after you are married, without considering your **voice, choice, and opinions** on this matter?

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Control

Do you feel pressured to **always 'agree'** with your fiancé or their family, including by laughing off their insults toward you or your family? Does your fiancé or their family impose **strict rules** on your behavior, your sense of dress, your friendships, your diet, and routine, or pressure you to adhere to their expectations? Do they make **comments about your appearance, clothes, accent, education, or other features**—and perhaps brush it off as **"we're just joking"**?

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Dependency

Does your fiancé insist you **don't need to work**, especially after you are married, dismissing how this will **limit your financial independence**? (**"You'll take care of our kids," "I make enough," "Women in my family never have to work."**)

16

Silencing Others or Self

Have your friends or family ever **shared concerns** about your partner or relationship—maybe things you've dismissed too quickly? Do you ever feel like **you need to hide** certain problems or incidents to **avoid shame, judgment, or gossip** from your family/support system?



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Financial Exploitation

Has your fiancé/fiancé's family **requested dowry**? Have they asked you to take **loans, give money to their family, or open joint accounts before marriage**? Or have they said they don't believe in 'dowry' but just **"tokens of love/tradition"**? Do they have specific demands about what these "tokens" should be, without giving any specifics about how they will be used post-marriage (e.g., **asking for a particular car, but not in your name; asking for certain jewelry, but not to be kept in your personal locker**)? Sometimes demands can occur at the last minute to **put immense pressure** on the girl's family.

18

Immigration Threats

Has your fiancé or their family implied you should move abroad **immediately after marriage**, without clarity on legal status, support system, or future plans? Do they threaten to **cancel visa paperwork or immigration sponsorship** if you don't comply with their demands?

19

Manipulating Your Current Situation

Does your fiancé present marriage as **your only escape** from your current challenges? e.g., they **know you feel trapped** in your living situation currently and **want to be free**?

20

Ignoring Your Gut

Do you find yourself **ignoring your gut** about something being wrong and find yourself **justifying** it as **"romantic"** and **"passionate"**?

For example:

- Does your fiancé shower you with **extreme attention** and praise (**love-bombing**) or gifts, to make up for other behavior?
- Does your fiancé claim to depend on you for **all happiness**?
- Does your fiancé immediately **switch behavior** when other people are around witnessing how you are treated (**e.g., switch from annoyed to super-friendly**)?
- Has your fiancé **threatened to self-harm** if you ever leave?



Remember...

It is okay to **pause or step away**—even after an engagement. **Trust is a two-way street**, and there should be **no shame** in choosing your own safety.

It's never too late.

For more information or support, contact the

Sikh Family Center National U.S. Helpline

 **866-SFC-SEWA (866-732-7392)**

Free | Private | Punjabi + English | Non-Emergency

