

Understanding Domestic Violence

Abuse definition: Domestic abuse, also commonly referred to as spousal abuse, occurs when one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is referred to as domestic violence.

- **Domestic violence and abuse occurs for one reason; to gain and maintain complete control over a victim.**
- Domestic violence and abuse do not discriminate. It happens among heterosexual couples and in same sex relationships. It occurs in every age range, ethnic background and financial levels.

Types of Abuse - 10 Tools that are used for power and control over others:

Physical Abuse: Any unwanted physical contact or threat of physical harm. It is used to punish, harm, dominate, threaten, terrorize and control.

- Invading a person's personal space, restricting a person's movement (blocking an exit).
- Physical contact such as pushing, shoving, slapping, kicking, punching, hitting, spitting, pinching, pulling hair, choking, throwing things, hitting victims with an object and using or threatening to use a weapon, (gun, knife etc.)
- Damaging a person's property or abusing pets
- Kicking the victim out of the house or car and driving recklessly.

Sexual Abuse: Forced or unwanted sexual contact. Using someone's sexuality to control them.

- Making a person do a sexual act they do not want to do, including but not limited to: sexual intercourse, touching, watching pornography, watching sexual acts, performing sexual acts, having sex acts with others.
- Using a person's gender against him/her by: making demeaning or humiliating remarks about a person's gender, restricting a person's activities/freedom based on gender or discriminating in any way based on a person's gender.
- Leering
- Intentional exposure of partner to STD's

Using Children: Any behavior that involves or uses the children as a way to gain power and control.

- Bad-mouthing partner in front of children, threatening to take custody, limiting visitation rights, using children to relay messages, or threatening to harm the children.

Financial Abuse: Using financial power to control others.

- Restricting a person's (or one's children) financial security by not allowing access to money, giving an allowance, requiring unreasonable accountability for spending, taking money away, not allowing the person to be involved in decision making regarding spending.

Spiritual Abuse: Destroying someone's sense of who they are.

- Not allowing the person to practice their faith or to connect with a "higher power", demeaning a person's deeply held values and beliefs.
- Restricting contact with loved ones considered important to the victim

Isolation and/or Abandonment: Any attempt to cut off a person from sources of support and care by controlling another person's social interactions.

- Threatening to leave or leaving and not saying where they are going or when they will return.
- Telling the victim that no one wants them now or in the future and that they will be alone.
- Monitoring what another person does, dictating where they go, who they spend time with, embarrassing them in front of others, criticizing activities and/or people important to them.

Positional / Entitlement: Any action or tactic used to support the belief that one partner is more superior, more central and more deserving of privilege than the other in a relationship.

- Demanding that one's desires and/or needs are met, treating partner like a servant, acting like the "master" of the home, or being the one to define gender roles.

Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming: Any behavior that makes light of the abuse, denies its reality and/or shifts responsibility for the abuse on to the partner.

- Making a person feel they were the cause of the abuse, making jokes about the abuse, and ignoring the abusive behavior.

Emotional Abuse: Undermining a person's emotional well-being with controlling how another person thinks and feels. Playing on someone's emotions. It is about feelings.

- This is done by forcing a person to have the same feelings or moods as the abuser does by dismissing or denying feelings. (If I am having a bad day, then I'll make sure you will too!)
- Intimidation and excessive criticism.

Psychological Abuse: Shifting responsibility by destroying a person's thought patterns, making a person think they are the cause of the abuse, ("If you had not done that/ said that/ looked at me that way, I would not have lost my temper/ hit you/ thrown that etc.)

- Controlling how a person thinks, coercing a person into thinking a certain way (brain washing), demanding perfection.

- Playing mind games, making a person think he/she is crazy, making a person think he/she is worthless through verbal putdowns, creating a “no-win” situation.

Some Results of domestic abuse are:

The effects of abuse can include psychological characteristics that greatly resemble those of hostages. The characteristics are the result of being in a life-threatening relationship, not the reason for being in an abusive relationship.

Lowered Self-esteem

- Maintaining a positive sense of self is a daily effort for the abused victim
- The victim starts to believe they deserve nothing better because the abuser has told them exactly that
- Abused victims will eventually begin to internalize the abusers criticisms and start to believe them

Accepting Blame for the Abuse

- The abused victim will accept responsibility for the abusive partner’s actions
- Abuser will try to convince the victim that it is their fault. “If the dishes were done, the laundry clean but not folded, the grass been cut...this would not have happened!”
- Victims of abuse will try to do everything to please the abuser. They will never be able to please the abuser and only receive a sense of failure from the abuser. No matter what the victim does to please the abuser, they will never get it right!

Guilt

- Feelings of failure contribute to and enhance the feelings of guilt
- Victims are not allowed to express their feelings and frustrations
- The discounted feelings begin to internalize and turn to feelings of anger
- Guilt will start to erode self-esteem

Feeling of Helplessness & Passivity

- Someone who is being abused may develop strategies for keeping the abuser happy and staying alive
- Survival strategies may include denial, attentiveness to the abuser’s wants, fear of interference by police, and adoption of the abuser’s perspective “I should have supper ready when they get home, or I should have the house clean at all times!”

Denial & Minimization of Abuse

- The abused may deny the seriousness of the abuse or minimize the abuse they face
- Some feelings of denial that the abused will express may include:
- Assumption that the abuser is a good person who’s actions stem from problems that they can help them solve

- Abused victims will start to believe that the abuser is not responsible for the abuse, which instead they attribute to some outside cause (bad day at work, only physically abusive when he drinks, if the kids didn't make so much noise!)
- The abused feels they instigated the abuse and thus deserves the punishment
- The victim is lead to believe that they would not be able to survive without the abuser's support (emotional and financial)
- Cultural or religious beliefs that may tell them to obey the abuser, are more important than their personal welfare
- The abused victim claims the abuse was not bad enough to require a trip to the hospital.
- "He/she didn't beat me up bad enough to break any bones"

Recognizing abuse is the first step to getting help

Domestic abuse must be taken seriously as the abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to physical abuse and even murder.

Physical injury is often the most obvious danger but it is important to remember that emotional and psychological abuse has devastating consequences. **The first step for a victim to break free of the abuse is to recognize the signs of abuse and understand what constitutes abuse.**

Signs That You're In An Abusive Relationship	
Your Inner Thoughts and Feelings	Your Partner's Belittling Behavior
<p>Do You:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Feel afraid of your partner much of the time? * Avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner? * Feel that you can't do anything right for your partner? * Believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated? * Wonder if you're the one who is crazy? * Feel emotionally numb or helpless? 	<p>Does Your Partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Humiliate or yell at you? * Criticize you and put you down? * Treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see? * Ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments? * Blame you for his abuse behavior? * See you as property or a sex object rather than as a person?
Your Partner's Violent Behavior or Threats	Your Partner's Belittling Behavior
<p>Does your Partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Have a bad and unpredictable temper? * Hurt you, threaten to hurt or kill you? * Threaten to commit suicide if you leave? * Threaten to take away your children or harm them? * Force you to have sex? * Destroy your belongings? 	<p>Does your Partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Act excessively jealous and possessive? * Control where you go or what you do? * Keep you from seeing your friends or family? * Limit your access to money, phone, or the car * Constantly check up on you?

Speaking up if you suspect domestic violence or abuse:

Expressing your concern for a victim of domestic violence will let the victim know you care and might even save her life. Speak with the person in private and let them know you are concerned about their safety. Let the victim know what your concerns are and that you will be there for her when she is ready to talk about it. Let the victim know that you will help in anyway you can.

It is important to remember that abused and battered women are often depressed, drained, scared, isolated, shamed and confused. They need help to get out of their relationships, but have often been isolated from their family and friends. Being aware of warning signs and offering support to these women is critical if they plan to leave their relationship.

Do:

Ask
Express concern.
Listen and validate
Offer to help

Don't:

Wait for her to come to you
Judge or blame
Pressure her
Give advice

Examples of questions you can ask:

1. How are You?
2. Were you injured?
3. Have you seen your doctor?
4. Do you have children
5. How are you keeping yourself safe right now?
6. Who is your main support system?
7. Are you planning to stay in the relationship
8. Have you thought about leaving the relationship
9. Where would you go?
10. Have you considered a shelter?
11. Do you work? (victims are often financially dependent on their abusers).
12. Have you spoken to your supervisor at work to let him/her know what's going on at home?
13. Do you think your partner's violence has been escalating over time? If yes, how?
14. What is your greatest concern at the moment?
15. Do you have a safety plan in place?
16. Has your partner ever been arrested for assaulting you in the past?
17. If so, did he obey condition that were put on him?
18. Does you partner have any substance abuse problems?
19. Do you understand the cycle of violence? If not, may I explain it to you?
20. Does your partner work?

Remember! Despite what many people believe, domestic violence and abuse is not due to an abuser's loss of control over his behavior, rather, abusive behavior is a deliberate choice made by the abuser in order to control a victim.