

Domestic Abuse

The Safer Vale Partnership is committed to providing a professional and consistent approach to victims of Domestic Abuse. Some people think domestic abuse is only about physical violence. However, many people suffer years of domestic abuse where violence is minimal or absent but experience persistent verbal and emotional abuse. Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off event but it tends to get worse over time and can lead to serious injury or death.

What is domestic abuse between intimate partners?

Domestic abuse between spouses or intimate partners is when one person in a marital or intimate relationship tries to control the other person. The perpetrator uses fear and intimidation and may threaten to use or may actually use physical violence. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is called domestic violence.

The victim of domestic abuse or domestic violence may be a man or a woman. Domestic abuse occurs in traditional heterosexual marriages, as well as in same-sex partnerships. The abuse may occur during a relationship, or continue while the couple is breaking up, or after the relationship has ended.

Domestic abuse is not a result of losing control; domestic abuse is intentionally trying to control another person. The abuser is purposefully using verbal, nonverbal, or physical means to gain control over the other person.

What are the types of domestic abuse?

The types of domestic abuse are:

- physical abuse (domestic violence)
- verbal or nonverbal abuse (psychological abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse)
- sexual abuse
- stalking or cyberstalking
- economic abuse or financial abuse
- spiritual abuse

What is physical abuse of a spouse or intimate partner?

Physical abuse includes:

- pushing, throwing, kicking
- slapping, grabbing, hitting, punching, beating, tripping, battering, bruising, choking, shaking
- pinching, biting
- holding, restraining, confinement
- breaking bones

- assault with a weapon such as a knife or gun
- burning
- murder

What is emotional abuse or verbal abuse of a spouse or intimate partner?

- Mental, psychological, or emotional abuse can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal or nonverbal abuse of a spouse or intimate partner consists of more subtle actions or behaviours than physical abuse. While physical abuse might seem worse, the scars of verbal and emotional abuse are deep. Studies show that verbal or nonverbal abuse can be much more emotionally damaging than physical abuse.

What is sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a spouse or intimate partner?

Sexual abuse includes:

- sexual assault: forcing someone to participate in unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity
- sexual harassment: ridiculing another person to try to limit their sexuality or reproductive choices
- sexual exploitation (such as forcing someone to look at pornography, or forcing someone to participate in pornographic film-making)

What is stalking?

Stalkers employ a number of threatening tactics:

- repeated phone calls, sometimes with hang-ups
- following, tracking (possibly even with a global positioning device)
- finding the person through public records, online searching, or paid investigators
- watching with hidden cameras
- suddenly showing up where the victim is, at home, school, or work
- sending emails; communicating in chat rooms or with instant messaging (cyberstalking: see below)
- sending unwanted packages, cards, gifts, or letters
- monitoring the victim's phone calls or computer-use
- contacting the victim's friends, family, co-workers, or neighbors to find out about the victim
- going through the victim's rubbish.
- threatening to hurt the victim or their family, friends, or pets
- damaging the victim's home, car, or other property

Stalking is unpredictable and should always be considered dangerous. If someone is tracking you, contacting you when you do not wish to have contact, attempting to control you, or frightening you, then seek help immediately.

What is cyberstalking?

Cyberstalking is the use of telecommunication technologies such as the Internet or email to stalk another person. Cyberstalking may be an additional form of stalking, or it may be the only method the abuser employs. Cyberstalking is deliberate, persistent, and personal.

A cyberstalker's message may be disturbing and inappropriate. The more you protest or respond, the more rewarded the cyberstalker feels. The best response to cyberstalking is not to respond to the contact and report it to the Police.

What is economic or financial abuse of a spouse or domestic partner?

Economic or financial abuse includes:

- withholding economic resources such as money or credit cards
- stealing from or defrauding a partner of money or assets
- exploiting the intimate partner's resources for personal gain
- withholding physical resources such as food, clothes, necessary medications, or shelter from a partner
- preventing the spouse or intimate partner from working or choosing an occupation

What is spiritual abuse of a spouse or intimate partner?

Spiritual abuse includes:

- using the spouse's or intimate partner's religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate them
- preventing the partner from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs
- ridiculing the other person's religious or spiritual beliefs
- forcing the children to be reared in a faith that the partner has not agreed to

How do victims feel when they experience domestic abuse?

Inner feelings and dialogue: Fear, self-loathing, numbness, desperation

- Fearful of their partner a large percentage of the time?
- They avoid certain topics or spend a lot of time figuring out how to talk about certain topics they do not arouse your partner's negative reaction or anger?
- They feel that they can't do anything right for their partner?
- They can feel so badly about themselves they think they deserve to be physically hurt?
- They think they are the one who is crazy as they are made to believe they are overreacting to their partner's behaviours?
- They are afraid that their partner may try to kill them?
- They are afraid that their partner will try to take their children away

- They feel that there is nowhere to turn for help?
- They can feel feeling emotionally numb?
- They may start to normalise Domestic Abuse

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Who is the Abuser?

After the more dramatic and publicised Domestic Abuse stories hit the headlines, one often hears comments such as "*what sort of Monster would do that*" or "*Nobody I know would do that sort of thing!*". The assumption seems to be that all abuser walk around with a big A for 'abuser' on their forehead, are easily discernable by anyone 'normal' and always comply with the stereotypical image.

In actual fact one of the main problems encountered by victims, friends, family and various agencies dealing with the consequences of an abusive relationship, is how 'normal' the abuser seemed, how unlike the image so frequently portrayed by the media. We may expect an abuser to be male, big, working-class, prone to being drunk, un-shaven, heterosexual, (fill in the blanks!). However, an abuser is just as likely to be gay, have a good job, a religious leader or clean-shaven. Sometimes the abuser is also a woman.

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Why don't victims just leave?

Some people fear seeking help in case the abuser (the person carrying out domestic violence) finds out and becomes even more violent. Sometimes victims can be almost "paralysed by fear"

Many people rely on their abuser for financial support. The victim may believe that they would never be able to cope on their own and are simply not aware of the help that is available to them.

An abuser will isolate a victim from their family and friends by causing arguments etc. The victim may not have anywhere to go.

Some victims are reluctant to split up the family by taking the children when they leave. The decision to leave may be especially hard when children are involved.

And there are many people who have strong feelings towards their abuser - despite the violence - and cannot imagine life without them. This is hard to believe, however the abuser will blow hot and cold and the victim will always cling onto the "good person" inside the abuser.

Warning Signs of an Abusive Personality It is sometimes possible to predict the likelihood of the person you are currently or are about to become involved with being abusive. Below are a list of behaviours and traits which are common in abusive personalities. These are commonly known as **Warning Signs**.

Jealousy

He/she may question you about whom you have spoken to or seen during the day, may accuse you of flirting, or be jealous of time you spend with family, friends, calling you frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. Also checking the car mileage or ask friends to keep an eye on you. Jealousy is not proof of love; it is a sign of insecurity and possessiveness.

Quick Involvement

Many victims of abuse dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. The abuser will often claim 'love at first sight', that you are 'made for each other'. He/she will pressure you to commit to him/her or make love before you feel the relationship has reached 'that stage'

Isolation

He/she may prevent you from spending time with your friends or family and demand that you only go places 'together'. He/she may accuse you not being committed to the relationship, or view your friends as 'causing trouble'. He/she may want to live in the country without a phone, not let you use the car, stop you from working or gaining further education or qualifications.

Cruelty to Animals

The abuser may punish animals brutally, be insensitive to their pain or suffering, or neglect to care for the animals to the point of cruelty, e.g. not feeding them all day, leaving them in areas he/she knows will cause them suffering or distress. There is a strong correlation between cruelty to animals and domestic violence.

Cruelty to Children

The abusers unrealistic expectations of their partner are often mirrored in their attitude toward children. He/she may expect children to be capable far beyond their ability (e.g. is angry with a two-year old for wetting their pants or being sick on the carpet, waking at night or being upset by nightmares) and will often meet out punishments for 'naughtiness' the child could not be aware of. Abusers may tease children until they cry, or punish children way beyond what could be deemed appropriate. Since abusers want all your attention themselves, they resent your spending time with the children or any normal demands and needs the children may have.

'Playful' use of Force in Sex

He/she may show little concern about whether you want to have intercourse and uses sulking or anger to manipulate you into compliance. Starting sex while you are sleeping, demanding sex when you are ill or tired, or refusing

any form of intimacy unless you are willing to go 'all the way' can all be signs that he/she could be sexually abusive or sexually violent.

Rigid Gender Roles

Abusers usually believe in stereotypical gender roles. A man may expect a woman to serve him; stay at home, obey him in all things - even things that are criminal in nature. A male abuser will often see women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship. Female abusers may expect the man to provide for them entirely, shift the responsibility for her well-being onto him or heckle him as being 'not a real man' if he shows any weakness or emotion.

Verbal Abuse

In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, either in public or in private, this can include degrading remarks or running down any accomplishments. Often the abuser will tell you that you are 'stupid', could not manage without him/her. He/she may keep you up all night to 'sort this out once and for all' or even wake you at night to continue to verbally abuse you. The abuser may even say kindly things to your face, but speak badly about you to friends and family.

Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde

Very rarely do abusers conform to the stereotypical image of a constantly harsh, nasty or violent person. More frequently the abuser portrays a perfectly normal and pleasant picture to the outside world and reserves the abuse for you in the privacy of your own home. This Jeckyll and Hyde tendency of the abuser serves to further confuse the victim, while protecting themselves from any form of suspicion from outsiders. Many victims describe "sudden" changes in mood - one minute nice and the next explosive or hysterical. This does not indicate some special "mental problem" but are typical of abusive personalities.

Drink or Substance Abuse

While neither drinking or the use of drugs are signs of an abusive personality, heavy drinking or drug abuse may be a warning sign and do increase the risks of abuse, especially violence, taking place. Often an abusive person will blame the drink for his/her abuse. However, a person who, knowing there is a risk he/she could be violent when drinking or on drugs, chooses to get drunk or high, is in effect choosing to abuse.

Threatening Violence

This would include any threat of physical force such as "If any wife of mine acted like John's did, I'd give her a right seeing to". Threats are designed to manipulate and control you. An abuser will excuse this behaviour by saying "everybody talks like that" and maintaining he/she is only saying this because

the relationship or you are so important to him/her or tell you you're "over-sensitive" for being upset by such threats.

Breaking or Striking Objects

The abusive person may break your things, beat his/her fists on the table or chair or throw something at or past you. Breaking your possessions also has the effect of de-personalising you, denying you your individuality or literally trying to break links to your past. Beating items of furniture or throwing objects is used to terrorise you into submission.

Any Force during an Argument

An abuser may physically restrain you from leaving the room, lash out at you with his/her hand or another object, pin you against a wall or shout 'right in your face'. Basically any form of force used during an argument can be a sign that actual violence is a strong possibility.