

Understanding domestic violence and abuse

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.

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
<u>Do You:</u> * 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?	<u>Does Your Partner:</u> * 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 Controlling Behavior
<u>Does your Partner:</u> * Have a bad and unpredictable temper? * Hurt you, threaten to hurt or kill you? * Threaten to take away your children away or harm them? * Threaten to commit suicide if you leave? * Force you to have sex? * Destroy your belongings?	<u>Does your Partner:</u> * 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, the 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 woman 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.**