

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is the wilful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.

Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. It is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior that is only a fraction of a systematic pattern of dominance and control. Domestic violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and in severe cases, even death. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and last a lifetime.

It is not always easy to determine in the early stages of a relationship if one person will become abusive. Domestic violence intensifies over time. Abusers may often seem wonderful and perfect initially, but gradually become more aggressive and controlling as the relationship continues. Abuse may begin with behaviors that may easily be dismissed or downplayed such as name-calling, threats, possessiveness, or distrust. Abusers may apologize profusely for their actions or try to convince the person they are abusing that they do these things out of love or care. However, violence and control always intensifies over time with an abuser, despite the apologies. What may start out as something that was first believed to be harmless (e.g., wanting the victim to spend all their time only with them because they love them so much) escalates into extreme control and abuse (e.g., threatening to kill or hurt the victim or others if they speak to family, friends, etc.). Some examples of abusive tendencies include but are not limited to:

- Telling you that you can never do anything right
- Showing jealousy of your family and friends and time spent away
- Accusing you of cheating
- Keeping or discouraging you from seeing friends or family members

- Embarrassing or shaming you with put-downs
- Controlling every penny spent in the household
- Controlling access to transportation
- Taking your money or refusing to give you money for expenses
- Looking at or acting in ways that scare you
- Controlling who you see, where you go, or what you do
- Dictating how you dress, wear your hair, etc.
- Stalking you or monitoring your every move (in person or also via the internet and/or other devices such as GPS tracking or your phone)
- Preventing you from making your own decisions
- Telling you that you are a bad parent or threatening to hurt, kill, or take away your children
- Threatening to hurt or kill your friends, loved ones, or pets
- Threatening to deport you or not submit immigration papers for you
- Intimidating you with guns, knives, or other weapons
- Pressuring you to have sex when you don't want to or to do things sexually you are not comfortable with
- Forcing sex with others
- Threatening to "out" you or criticize your sexuality
- Refusing to use protection when having sex or sabotaging birth control
- Pressuring or forcing you to use drugs or alcohol
- Preventing you from working or attending school, harassing you at either, keeping you up all night so they perform badly at your job or in school
- Destroying your property
- Denying you food, clothing, sleep or medications

It is important to note that domestic violence does not always manifest as physical abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse can often be just as extreme as physical violence. Lack of physical violence does not mean the abuser is any less dangerous to you, nor does it mean you are any less trapped by the abuse.

Additionally, domestic violence does not always end when you escape the abuser, or try to terminate the relationship, and/or seek help. Often, it intensifies because the abuser feels a loss of control over

you. Abusers frequently continue to stalk, harass, threaten, and try to control you after you escape. In fact, you are often in the most danger directly following the escape of the relationship or when you seek help: 1/5 of homicide victims with restraining orders are murdered within two days of obtaining the order; 1/3 are murdered within the first month.

Unfair blame is frequently put upon the victim of abuse because of assumptions that victims choose to stay in abusive relationships. The truth is, bringing an end to abuse is not a matter of the victim choosing to leave; it is a matter of the victim being able to safely *escape* their abuser, the abuser choosing to stop the abuse, or others (e.g., law enforcement, courts) holding the abuser accountable for the abuse they inflict.

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