

## Domestic violence

### **What Is Domestic Abuse?**

**Domestic abuse**, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.

**Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or class**

Victims of domestic abuse may also include a child or other relative, or any other household member.

Domestic abuse is typically manifested as a pattern of abusive behavior toward an intimate partner in a dating or family relationship, where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim.

Domestic abuse can be mental, physical, economic or sexual in nature. Incidents are rarely isolated, and usually escalate in frequency and severity. Domestic abuse may culminate in serious physical injury or death.

### **Recognizing the signs of domestic abuse**

#### **Does the partner...**

- Embarrass or make fun of the victim in front of their friends or family?
- Put down the victim's accomplishments?
- Make the victim feel like they are unable to make decisions?
- Use intimidation or threats to gain compliance?
- Tell the victim that they are nothing without them?
- Treat the victim roughly—grab, push, pinch, shove or hit them?
- Call the victim several times a night or show up to make sure they are where they said they would be?
- Use drugs or alcohol as an excuse for saying hurtful things or abusing the victim?
- Blame the victim for how they feel or act?
- Pressure the victim sexually for things they aren't ready for?

- Make the victim feel like there is “no way out” of the relationship?
- Prevent the victim from doing things they want – like spending time with friends or family?
- Try to keep the victim from leaving after a fight or leave them somewhere after a fight to “teach them a lesson”?

### **Does the victim...**

- Sometimes feel scared of how their partner may behave?
- Constantly make excuses to other people for their partner’s behaviour?
- Try not to do anything that would cause conflict or make their partner angry?
- Always do what their partner wants them to do instead of what they want?
- Stay with their partner because they are afraid of what their partner would do if they broke up?

### **Power and Control**

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic abuse and violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the abuser, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill the fear of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the victim's life and circumstances.

**Emotional abuse** includes undermining a person's sense of self-worth through constant criticism; belittling one's abilities; name-calling or other verbal abuse; damaging a partner's relationship with the children; or not letting a partner see friends and family. Someone may be in an emotionally abusive relationship if their partner:

- Calls them names, insults them or continually criticizes them.
- Does not trust them and acts in a jealous or possessive manner.
- Tries to isolate them from family or friends.
- Monitors where they go, whom they call and with whom they spend their time.
- Does not want them to work.
- Controls finances or refuses to share money.
- Punishes them by withholding affection.
- Expects them to ask permission.

- Threatens to hurt them, the children, their family or their pets.
- Humiliates them in any way.

**Psychological abuse:** involves causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner or children; destruction of pets and property; “mind games”; or forcing isolation from friends, family, school and/or work.

**Financial or economic abuse:** involves making or attempting to make a person financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money, and/or forbidding attendance at school or employment.

**Physical abuse:** involves hurting or trying to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force. Someone may be in a physically abusive relationship if their partner:

- Damages property when angry (throws objects, punches walls, kicks doors, etc.).
- Pushes, slaps, bites, kicks or chokes them.
- Abandons them in a dangerous or unfamiliar place.
- Scares them by driving recklessly.
- Uses a weapon to threaten or hurt them.
- Forces them to leave their home.
- Traps them in their home or keeps them from leaving.
- Prevents them from calling police or seeking medical attention.
- Hurts their children.
- Uses physical force in sexual situations.

**Sexual abuse:** involves forcing a partner to take part in a sex act when the partner does not consent. Someone may be in a sexually abusive relationship if their partner:

- Accuses them of cheating or is often jealous of their outside relationships.
- Wants them to dress in a sexual way.
- Insults them in sexual ways or calls them sexual names.
- Has ever forced or manipulated them into having sex or performing sexual acts.
- Holds them down during sex.
- Demands sex when they are sick, tired or after beating them.

- Hurts them with weapons or objects during sex.
- Involves other people in sexual activities with them.
- Ignores their feelings regarding sex.

**Stalking** involves any pattern of behavior that serves no legitimate purpose and is intended to harass, annoy, or terrorize the victim. Typical stalking activities include repeated telephone calls, unwelcome letters or gifts by mail, surveillance at work, home and other places that the victim is known to frequent. Stalking usually escalates.

### **For Concerned Staff - How Can You Help?**

How you can help victims of domestic abuse?

- Listen and believe the abused person to let them know they are not alone.
- Encourage her/him seek support through a confidential hotline to connect with a professional in the field.
- Express concern for him/her, show support, and offer referrals to available resources.
- If you have not been directly approached but have reason to believe that a colleague may be in an abusive relationship, consult with your Organization's Counselling.

**Note:** Keep in mind that a survivor often makes several attempts to leave the abusive relationship before succeeding.