



Montgomery County Women's Center

24-HOUR HOTLINE (936) 441-7273



*What Is
Domestic Violence?*

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence can take many different forms, but one thing remains the same: it's never the victim's fault. It's not always easy to tell at the beginning of a relationship if it will become abusive. In fact, many abusive partners may seem absolutely perfect in the early stages of a relationship. Possessive and controlling behaviors don't always appear overnight, but rather emerge and intensify as the relationship grows. Domestic violence doesn't look the same in every relationship because every relationship is different. But one thing most abusive relationships have in common is that the abusive partner does many different kinds of things to have more power and control over their partners. If you're beginning to feel as if your partner or a loved one's partner is becoming abusive, there are a few behaviors that you can look out for. Watch out for these red flags, and if you're experiencing one or more of them in your relationship, call or chat online with an advocate to talk about what's going on.

Types of Abuse

Physical abuse is any intentional and unwanted contact with you or something close to your body. Sometimes abusive behavior does not cause pain or even leave a bruise, but it's still unhealthy. ***Examples of physical abuse are:***

- Scratching, punching, biting, strangling or kicking
- Throwing something at you such as a phone, book, shoe or plate
- Pulling your hair
- Pushing or pulling you
- Grabbing your clothing
- Using a gun, knife, box cutter, bat, mace or other weapon
- Smacking your bottom
- Forcing you to have sex or perform a sexual act
- Grabbing your face to make you look at them
- Grabbing you to prevent you from leaving or to force you to go somewhere

Emotional abuse includes non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring or "checking in," excessive texting, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking.

Examples of emotional or verbal abuse are:

- Calling you names and putting you down
- Yelling and screaming at you
- Intentionally embarrassing you in public
- Preventing you from seeing or talking with friends and family
- Telling you what to do and wear
- Damaging your property when they're angry (throwing objects, punching walls, kicking doors, etc.)

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- Using online communities or cell phones to control, intimidate or humiliate you
- Blaming your actions for their abusive or unhealthy behavior
- Accusing you of cheating and often being jealous of your outside relationships
- Stalking you
- Threatening to commit suicide to keep you from breaking up with them
- Threatening to harm you, your pet or people you care about
- Making you feel guilty or immature when you don't consent to sexual activity
- Threatening to expose your secrets such as your sexual orientation or immigration status
- Starting rumors about you
- Threatening to have your children taken away

Sexual abuse refers to any action that pressures or coerces someone to do something sexually they don't want to do. It can also refer to behavior that impacts a person's ability to control their sexual activity or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs, including oral sex, rape, or restricting access to birth control and condoms. It is important to know that just because the victim didn't say "no," doesn't mean that they meant "yes." When someone does not resist an unwanted sexual advance, it doesn't mean that they consented. Sometimes physically resisting can put a victim at a bigger risk for further physical or sexual abuse. Some think that if the victim didn't resist, it doesn't count as abuse. That's not true. It still is. This myth is hurtful because it makes it more difficult for the victim to speak out and more likely that they will blame themselves. Whether they were intoxicated or felt pressured, intimidated or obligated to act a certain way, it's never the victim's fault.

Examples of sexual assault and abuse are:

- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
- Rape or attempted rape
- Refusing to use condoms or restricting someone's access to birth control
- Keeping someone from protecting themselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Sexual contact with someone who is very drunk, drugged, unconscious or otherwise unable to give a clear and informed "yes" or "no."
- Threatening someone into unwanted sexual activity
- Pressuring or forcing someone to have sex or perform sexual acts
- Using sexual insults toward someone

Financial abuse can be very subtle — telling you what you can and cannot buy or requiring you to share control of your bank accounts. At no point does someone you are dating have the right to use money or how you spend it to control you.

Here are some examples of financially abusive behavior:

- Giving you an allowance and closely watching what you buy
- Placing your paycheck in their account and denying you access to it

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- Keeping you from seeing shared bank accounts or records
- Forbidding you to work or limiting the hours you do
- Preventing you from going to work by taking your car or keys
- Getting you fired by harassing you, your employer or coworkers on the job
- Hiding or stealing your student financial aid check or outside financial support
- Using your social security number to obtain credit without your permission
- Using your child's social security number to claim an income tax refund without your permission
- Maxing out your credit cards without your permission
- Refusing to give you money, food, rent, medicine or clothing
- Using funds from your children's tuition or a joint savings account without your knowledge
- Spending money on themselves but not allowing you to do the same
- Giving you presents and/or paying for things like dinner and expecting you to somehow return the favor
- Using their money to hold power over you because they know you are not in the same financial situation as they are

Why Don't They Just Leave?

People who have never been abused often wonder why a person wouldn't just leave an abusive relationship. They don't understand that leaving can be more complicated than it seems. Leaving is often the most dangerous time for a victim of abuse because abuse is about power and control. When a victim leaves, they are taking control and threatening the abusive partner's power, which could cause the abusive partner to retaliate in very destructive ways. Aside from this danger, there are many reasons why people stay in abusive relationships. Here are just a few of the common ones:

- **Fear:** A person may be afraid of what will happen if they decide to leave the relationship.
- **Believing Abuse is Normal:** A person may not know what a healthy relationship looks like, perhaps from growing up in an environment where abuse was common, and they may not recognize that their relationship is unhealthy.
- **Fear of Being Outed:** If someone is in an LGBTQ relationship and has not yet come out to everyone, their partner may threaten to reveal this secret.
- **Embarrassment or Shame:** It's often difficult for someone to admit that they've been abused. They may feel they've done something wrong by becoming involved with an abusive partner. They may also worry that their friends and family will judge them.
- **Low Self-Esteem:** When an abusive partner constantly puts someone down and blames them for the abuse, it can be easy for the victim to believe those statements and think that the abuse is their fault.

- Keeping you from seeing shared bank accounts or records
- Forbidding you to work or limiting the hours you do
- Love: So often, the victim feels love for their abusive partner. They may have children with them and want to maintain their family. Abusive people can often be charming, especially at the beginning of a relationship, and the victim may hope that their partner will go back to being that person. They may only want the violence to stop, not for the relationship to end entirely.
- Cultural/Religious Reasons: Traditional gender roles supported by someone's culture or religion may influence them to stay rather than end the relationship for fear of bringing shame upon their family.
- Language Barriers/Immigration Status: If a person is undocumented, they may fear that reporting the abuse will affect their immigration status. Also, if their first language isn't English, it can be difficult to express the depth of their situation to others.
- Lack of Money/Resources: Financial abuse is common, and a victim may be financially dependent on their abusive partner. Without money, access to resources, or even a place to go, it can seem impossible for them to leave the relationship. This feeling of helplessness can be especially strong if the person lives with their abusive partner.
- Disability: When someone is physically dependent on their abusive partner, they can feel that their well-being is connected to the relationship. This dependency could heavily influence their decision to stay in an abusive relationship.

How does domestic violence affect victims?

Domestic violence affects all aspects of a victim's life. When abuse victims are able to safely escape and remain free from their abuser, they often survive with long-lasting and sometimes permanent effects to their mental and physical health; relationships with friends, family, and children; their career; and their economic well-being.

Victims of domestic violence experience an array of emotions and feelings from the abuse inflicted upon them by their abuser, both within and following the relationship. They may also resort to extremes in an effort to cope with the abuse. Victims of domestic violence may want the abuse to end, but not the relationship.

- Feel isolated
- Feel depressed
- Feel helpless
- Be unaware of what services are available to help them
- Be embarrassed of their situation
- Fear judgement or stigmatization if they reveal the abuse
- Deny or minimize the abuse or make excuses for the abuser
- Still love their abuser
- Withdraw emotionally

- Distance themselves from family or friends
- Be impulsive or aggressive
- Feel financially dependent on their abuser
- Feel guilt related to the relationship
- Feel shame
- Have anxiety
- Have suicidal thoughts
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Be hopeful that their abuser will change and/or stop the abuse
- Have religious, cultural, or other beliefs that reinforce staying in the relationship
- Have no support from friends or family
- Fear cultural, community, or societal backlash that may hinder escape or support
- Feel like they have nowhere to go or no ability to get away
- Fear they will not be able to support themselves after they escape the abuser
- Have children in common with their abuser and fear for their safety if the victim leaves
- Have pets or other animals they don't want to leave
- Be distrustful of local law enforcement, courts, or other systems if the abuse is revealed
- Have had unsupportive experiences with friends, family members, employers, law enforcement, courts, child protective services, etc. and believe they won't get help if they leave or fear retribution if they do (e.g. they fear losing custody of their children to the abuser)