



What Is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is more than just hitting, shoving, and other physical attacks. It's a pattern of controlling behaviors. The goal always is to get and keep power over an intimate partner.

You may not realize you're in an abusive relationship. Not even if you're the abuser. Abuse can happen to anyone, anywhere. It happens to married, unmarried, and same-sex couples. Abusers and their partners can be rich or poor, and come from any race and ethnicity. Men can abuse women. Women can abuse men.

You may think the troubles in your relationship are no big deal. Your partner slaps you only during huge fights. Or insults you only after a bad day at work.

It all counts as domestic abuse. And chances are it will only get worse as time passes.

Types

Domestic abuse is any behavior that scares, intimidates, humiliates, isolates, and controls another person.

Physical violence. The abuser may:

- Hit
- Grab hair
- Shove
- Bite
- Force drugs or alcohol
- Deny medical care

Sexual abuse. It's a type of physical abuse. Anytime you feel forced into any sexual act you don't want, because you're not in the mood or for any other reason, that's sexual abuse.

Emotional or psychological abuse. This can be verbal or nonverbal. The aim is to lower your sense of self-worth and chip away your independence. Your partner may:

- Call you names or yell at you
- Shame you
- Blame you
- Constantly criticize
- Damage your relationship with others and isolate you
- Threaten to hurt you, themselves, or others
- Hurt your pets or destroy property

Economic abuse. This isn't about one person managing the household finances. It's when the abuser keeps their partner financially dependent by controlling the money. They also may not allow you to have a job or attend school.

Abuse in Certain Groups

Many abusers act alike. But sometimes, the abuse can take specific forms.

LGBTQ people: Abusers may go after their partners' sexual identity. They may threaten to "out" their partners or accuse them of not really being gay, bi, or trans -- which can not only demean the abused person but also isolate them from the community.

Immigrants: People who are here legally or illegally can have a hard time getting help. Their abusers may:

- Keep them from learning English
- Block them from staying in touch with family and friends in their native countries
- Use the threat of deportation as a tool of control

Disabled people: They are especially vulnerable to domestic violence, including sexual assault. Their abusers may:

- Steal their Social Security disability payments

- Damage wheelchairs or other assistive equipment
- Harm or threaten to harm a service dog or other animal
- Refuse to help them use the bathroom or do other needed tasks

Pregnant women: The abuse can start or get worse as the woman shifts some of her focus away from her partner to her unborn baby. Physical violence also can raise the woman's chances of miscarriage or complications during labor.

If You're Abused

The abused person is never at fault. Fights and arguments happen in every relationship. But a pattern of abusive words and behavior is not normal and it's not OK.

If you feel that you're abused, call the National Domestic Violence hotline at 800-799-7233 for 24/7 help. Or visit www.thehotline.org anytime for a live chat.