

Abusive Relationships

But the truth is that abuse is always something someone chooses to do. It's never the choice of the person being abused.

Abusive relationships

Anyone of any age, ethnicity, sexuality or social background can be affected by an abusive relationship, whether as a victim of abuse or as an abuser. Domestic abuse – which is also called domestic violence – happens not just in couples but also between family members. And according to the charity [LWA](#) (Living Without Abuse), it will affect one in four women and one in six men during their lifetime (currently, an estimated two million adults under the age of 60 experience some form of domestic abuse every year in England and Wales).

Abuse – which comes in many different forms – is never the fault of the person it's directed at. It's never healthy or acceptable, even if you think the person abusing you is doing it because they love you. Indeed physical and emotional violence, anger and possessiveness are never behaviours associated with loving relationships. Yet many who are affected try to change how they themselves behave to try and stop their partner or family member abusing them. Some also find excuses for their abuser's behaviour, such as they drink too much alcohol or use drugs, or they say their abuser didn't really mean it.

You may find abuse within your relationship difficult to talk about – you may even struggle to admit you have a problem in the first place. But if you're in a situation where someone is abusing you in any way, remember it's not your fault. It is, however, important to find out what help and support is available to you, as abusive relationships can lead to poor physical and emotional health and even serious injuries and death.

This helpsheet aims to explain what domestic abuse is, how to recognise if you're having a problem and how to remove yourself from an abusive situation.

Did you know? The most recent figures suggest an estimated 7.9 per cent of women (1.3 million) and 4.2 per cent of men (695,000) experienced domestic abuse in the last year (*Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018*)

Types of abuse

When you hear the word abuse, the first thing that probably springs to mind is physical violence. But domestic abuse means so much more than that.

The UK government defines abuse as:

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Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial or emotional.

It then defines controlling behaviour as:

A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Finally its definition of coercive behaviour is:

An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Though not a legal definition, the government's definition of abuse also includes so-called 'honour'-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Here's a quick rundown of some of the behaviours associated with the main types of abuse, as included in the government's definition:

Psychological and emotional abuse If someone behaves in a way that damages your confidence and sense of wellbeing, they are abusing you psychologically or emotionally. This may include things like criticising you constantly, telling you you're ugly, stupid, useless or using other negative

comments to take away your self-esteem and confidence. It could also mean behaving possessively, including not letting you go out without them, screening your calls or taking away your phone, not allowing friends and relatives to visit you or putting you down in front of other people.

Someone who abuses you psychologically or emotionally may also engage in emotional blackmail, where they threaten suicide if you leave them. Your abuser may accuse you of things you haven't done or tell you their actions are your fault. They may also promise they'll change, but continue to treat you abusively.

Physical abuse This includes behaviours that cause physical harm, including punching, pushing, kicking, slapping, biting, scratching, burning or hitting with an object.

Sexual abuse Sexual abuse can take many forms besides demanding sex and forcing you to have sex against your will. Someone who abuses you sexually may humiliate you sexually and take inappropriate photographs of you without your consent, they may force you to watch porn or behave aggressively towards you in a sexual manner. In extreme cases people who are sexually abused may be forced into prostitution or denied the use of contraception.

Financial abuse A powerful form of abuse, this can include someone taking complete control of their partner's finances, preventing them from working, putting them in debt and controlling their spending.

The charity [Family Lives](#) also says children can be used in abuse, such as when one partner threatens to take children away from the other partner or when they

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try to turn the children against them, forcing them to choose one partner over the other. They may even threaten to harm their partner's children or lie to social services, saying their partner is unable to cope with their children or that they are harming them.

How to tell if you're affected

With all these different kinds of abuse, the bottom line is always that the abuser wants power and control over the abused, often making their victim increasingly reliant on them. But it may not always be obvious to the person being abused or even their abuser that any sort of mistreatment is taking place.

[Women's Aid](#), the charity that co-runs the National Domestic Violence Helpline, has put together a series of questions you can ask yourself if you're not sure you're experiencing abuse, including the following:

- Has your partner tried to keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- Does your partner constantly check up on you or follow you?
- Does your partner unjustly accuse you of flirting or of having affairs with others?
- Does your partner constantly belittle or humiliate you, or regularly criticise or insult you?
- Are you ever afraid of your partner?
- Have you ever changed your behaviour because you are afraid of what your partner might do or say to you?

- Has your partner ever kept you short of money?
- Has your partner ever forced you to do something that you really did not want to do?
- Has your partner ever threatened to take your children away?
- Has your partner ever made you participate in sexual activities that you were uncomfortable with?
- Has your partner ever tried to prevent your leaving the house?
- Does your partner blame his use of alcohol or drugs, mental health condition or family history for his behaviour?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions, you may be in an abusive relationship. If that's the case it's important to remember that you're not alone, and that whatever you decide to do, there are people and organisations that can advise and help you.

First steps: making yourself safe

There are several things you may want to do if you're in an abusive relationship. If you can't stay in your own home, the first thing you should do is find somewhere to stay where you will be safe. One option would be to stay with friends or relatives, but if this isn't possible there are other possibilities:

Local refuge Staying in a refuge could give you a bit of breathing space to think about what you want to do next. People who work in refuges can also help you

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by providing support and giving you advice on things like benefits and housing. Most refuges also have children's support workers who can help if you're taking children with you. To find a refuge near where you are, contact one of the following:

- National Domestic Violence Helpline 0800 2000 247 (for women needing a refuge)
- Men's Advice Line 0808 801 0327 (for men needing a refuge)

You can also contact refuge organisations through the police, the [Samaritans](#), local authority social services or [Citizens Advice](#).

Emergency accommodation If you had to leave your home because there was a risk or fear you might experience domestic violence, you may be considered legally homeless. This means you could go to your local authority and ask to be housed in emergency accommodation – usually a bed and breakfast hostel.

To find details of your local authority, visit gov.uk/find-local-council. If you need help with emergency housing outside normal office hours, call your local authority's emergency out-of-hours service.

What you should do next

Most types of domestic abuse are criminal offences, so you may decide to report what has happened to you to the police (or someone else could report it on your behalf). If it's an emergency and you're in immediate danger, call 999. Otherwise contact your local neighbourhood policing team by telephoning 101 or visit your local police station in person. Most police stations these days have domestic violence

units or community safety units that deal with domestic violence and abuse.

Your local policing team can also advise you about crime prevention as well as having a police marker put on your address – this means a police officer will come to your home as quickly as possible if you need urgent help.

Once you're out of danger you may want to consider what you want to do in the longer term, such as separating from your partner or taking legal action to protect yourself in other ways, including getting a non-molestation order or an occupation order – find out more about these options and how they may help you by visiting the [Rights of Women website](#).

Other things you may need legal advice about include housing (including if you have any legal rights to the family home), your children and your finances. You can consult a solicitor or law centre, or see an advisor at your nearest [Citizens Advice](#).

Meanwhile if you're on a UK partner visa and your relationship with a British citizen or someone settled in the UK has broken down because of domestic abuse, the government may grant you settlement as a victim of domestic violence. You can apply online by visiting gov.uk. You may also want to apply for benefits while applying to settle in the UK – this is called the destitution domestic violence (DDV) concession (apply at gov.uk).

How to help someone you know

If you suspect someone you know may be a victim of domestic abuse, it can be difficult to decide whether or not you should get involved. But even if you don't

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know exactly what's going on, it's important not to simply ignore your suspicions and to offer help and support.

Try to find the right time and place to let the person you think may be affected know you've noticed something isn't quite right. Even if they don't feel ready to talk, at least they'll know they can come to you when they do need some support. If and when that happens, it's important to give them your full attention and listen without judgement. Try to remember that it takes a lot of courage for someone to admit they're experiencing any kind of abuse, and try not to push them into talking if they don't want to.

The best thing you can do for someone who is experiencing domestic abuse is to support them as a friend, and let them make their own decisions – try not to push them into doing anything they're not ready to do. If they've been physically abused you could offer to go with them to their GP or a hospital, and if they want to report an incident to the police you could help them with that too. It may also be a good idea to check what support is available to them so that you can give them plenty of advice if they ask for it – see the useful links section for organisations that provide information and practical support.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: support@ltcharity.org.uk. Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk. It's full of useful

information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information:

National Domestic Violence Helpline

0800 2000 247

nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/

Manned by trained female support workers and volunteers, this helpline is for women who want help and advice about violence or abuse

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

mensadviceline.org.uk/

This is a confidential helpline for heterosexual, gay and bisexual men experiencing domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner, or from other family members.

Disrespect Nobody

disrespectnobody.co.uk/

A UK government online campaign aimed at young people that challenges attitudes and behaviours that suggest abuse in relationships is acceptable.

Citizens Advice

citizensadvice.org.uk

Whether online, over the phone or in person, the Citizens Advice service helps millions of people every year, including those needing help with relationship or domestic abuse problems.

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

familylives.org.uk

This charity provides help and advice on a variety of aspects of family life in the UK.

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Living Without Abuse

0808 80 200 28

lwa.org.uk

Providing support to anyone experiencing or fearing violence or abuse from a partner, ex-partner or family member, LWA is a charity based in Loughborough, North Leicestershire.

Women's Aid

womensaid.org.uk

A federation of 180 UK organisations that provides almost 300 local services to women and children across the country. Its online services include the [Survivors' Forum](#) and [The Hideout](#). Women's Aid also publishes [The Survivor's Handbook](#), which provides information for women on many issues including housing, money and legal rights.

Refuge

refuge.org.uk/

This charity provides specialist support to women, children and some men escaping domestic violence and other forms of violence. It runs the National Domestic Violence Helpline in partnership with Women's Aid.

Relate

Respect

0845 122 8606

respect.uk.net/

If you think you may be abusing your partner or a family member – or if you're concerned about someone you think is behaving abusively towards their partner or a family member – the Respect helpline offers support.

Galop

0800 999 5428

www.galop.org.uk

Galop provides help, support and advice to LGBT+ people who have experienced hate crime, sexual violence or domestic abuse.

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

0800 027 1234

sdfmh.org.uk

Support for anyone with experience of domestic abuse or forced marriage.

Live Fear Free (Wales)

0808 80 10 800

gov.wales/live-fear-free

For help and advice about violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Women's Aid Federation (Northern Ireland)

0808 802 1414

www.womensaidni.org

Specialised support services throughout Northern Ireland to women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to provide you with an overview of the issue in question. If you're experiencing problems with this issue, our Advisors are available to you.