Domestic Violence & Abuse

Signs of Abuse and Abusive Relationships

Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone, yet the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. This is especially true when the abuse is psychological, rather than physical. Emotional abuse is often minimized, yet it can leave deep and lasting scars.

Noticing and acknowledging the warning signs and symptoms of domestic violence and abuse is the first step to ending it. No one should live in fear of the person they love. If you recognize yourself or someone you know in the following warning signs and descriptions of abuse, don't hesitate to reach out. There is help available.

Understanding domestic violence and abuse

Men can be victims, too

Women are not the only victims of domestic violence and abuse. Men also suffer from domestic abuse—especially verbal and emotional abuse—and may be even more ashamed to seek help.

Domestic abuse, also known as *spousal abuse,* occurs when one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is called *domestic violence*.

Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control over you. An abuser doesn't "play fair." Abusers use fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear you down and keep you under their thumb. Your abuser may also threaten you, hurt you, or hurt those around you.

Domestic violence and abuse do not discriminate. It happens among heterosexual couples and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds, and financial levels. And while women are more commonly victimized, men are also abused—especially verbally and emotionally.

Recognizing abuse is the first step to getting help

Domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to physical violence and even murder. And while physical injury may be the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also severe. No one deserves this kind of pain—and your first step to breaking free is recognizing that your situation is abusive. Once you acknowledge the reality of the abusive situation, then you can get the help you need.

You don't have to live in fear

If you are afraid for your safety or have been beaten by your partner:

- Dial 911 or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-787-3224
- ASAP: 916-734-2727

Signs of an abusive relationship

There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is fear of your partner. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner—constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive. Other signs that you may be in an abusive relationship include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

To determine whether your relationship is abusive, answer the questions below. The more "yes" answers, the more likely it is that you're in an abusive relationship.

SIGNS THAT YOU'RE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Your Inner Thoughts and Feelings

Do you:

- feel afraid of your partner much of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
- feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?
- believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
- wonder if you're the one who is crazy?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?

Your Partner's Belittling Behavior

Does your partner:

- humiliate or yell at you?
- criticize you and put you down?
- treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see?
- ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?
- blame you for his own abusive behavior?
- see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?

Your Partner's Violent Behavior or Threats

Does your partner:

- have a bad and unpredictable temper?
- hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you?
- threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- threaten to commit suicide if you leave?
- force you to have sex?
- destroy your belongings?

Your Partner's Controlling Behavior

Does your partner:

- act excessively jealous and possessive?
- control where you go or what you do?
- keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?
- constantly check up on you?

Physical violence is just one form of domestic abuse

When people think of domestic abuse, they often picture battered women who have been physically assaulted. But not all domestic abuse involves violence. Just because you're not battered and bruised doesn't mean you're not being abused.

Domestic abuse takes many forms, including psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse. These types of abuse are less obvious than physical abuse, but that doesn't mean they're not damaging. In fact, these types of domestic abuse can be even more harmful because they are so often overlooked—even by the person being abused.

Emotional or psychological abuse

The aim of emotional or psychological abuse is to chip away at your feelings of self-worth and independence. If you're the victim of emotional abuse, you may feel that there is no way out of the relationship, or that without your abusive partner you have nothing.

Emotional abuse includes *verbal abuse* such as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior also fall under emotional abuse. Additionally, abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in threats of physical violence.

You may think that physical abuse is far worse than emotional abuse, since physical violence can send you to the hospital and leave you with scars. But, the scars of emotional abuse are very real, and they run deep. In fact, emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse—sometimes even more so. Furthermore, emotional abuse usually worsens over time, often escalating to physical battery.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is common in abusive relationships. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, between one-third and one-half of all battered women are raped by their partners at least once during their relationship. Any situation in which you are forced to participate in unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity is sexual abuse.

Forced sex, even by a spouse or intimate partner with whom you also have consensual sex, is an act of aggression and violence. Furthermore, women whose partners abuse them physically *and* sexually are at a higher risk of being seriously injured or killed.

Economic or financial abuse

Remember, an abuser's goal is to control you, and he will frequently use money to do so. Economic or financial abuse includes:

- Rigidly controlling your finances.
- Withholding money or credit cards.
- Making you account for every penny you spend.
- Withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter).

- Restricting you to an allowance.
- Preventing you from working or choosing your own career.
- Sabotaging your job (making you miss work, calling constantly)
- Stealing from you or taking your money.

It Is Still Abuse If . . .

- The incidents of physical abuse seem minor when compared to those you have read about, seen on television or heard other women talk about. There isn't a "better" or "worse" form of physical abuse; you can be severely injured as a result of being pushed, for example.
- The incidents of physical abuse have only occurred one or two times in the relationship. Studies indicate that if your spouse/partner has injured you once, it is likely he will continue to physically assault you.
- The physical assaults stopped when you became passive and gave up your right to express yourself as you desire, to move about freely and see others, and to make decisions. It is not a victory if you have to give up your rights as a person and a partner in exchange for not being assaulted!
- There has not been any physical violence. Many women are emotionally and verbally assaulted. This can be as equally frightening and is often more confusing to try to understand.

Violent and abusive behavior is the abuser's choice

Despite what many people believe, domestic violence and abuse is not due to the abuser's loss of control over his behavior. In fact, abusive behavior and violence is a deliberate choice made by the abuser in order to control you.

Abusers use a variety of tactics to manipulate you and exert their power:

- Dominance – Abusive individuals need to feel in charge of the relationship. They will make decisions for you and the family, tell you what to do, and expect you to obey without question. Your abuser may treat you like a servant, child, or even as his possession.
- Humiliation – An abuser will do everything he can to make you feel bad about yourself or defective in some way. After all, if you believe you're worthless and that no one else will want you, you're less likely to leave. Insults, name-calling, shaming, and public put-downs are all weapons of abuse designed to erode your self-esteem and make you feel powerless.
- Isolation – In order to increase your dependence on him, an abusive partner will cut you off from the outside world. He may keep you from seeing family or friends, or even prevent you from going to work or school. You may have to ask permission to do anything, go anywhere, or see anyone.
- Threats – Abusers commonly use threats to keep their partners from leaving or to scare them into dropping charges. Your abuser may threaten to hurt or kill you, your children, other family members, or even pets. He may also threaten to commit suicide, file false charges against you, or report you to child services.

- Intimidation – Your abuser may use a variety of intimidation tactics designed to scare you into submission. Such tactics include making threatening looks or gestures, smashing things in front of you, destroying property, hurting your pets, or putting weapons on display. The clear message is that if you don't obey, there will be violent consequences.
- Denial and blame – Abusers are very good at making excuses for the inexcusable. They will blame their abusive and violent behavior on a bad childhood, a bad day, and even on the victims of their abuse. Your abusive partner may minimize the abuse or deny that it occurred. He will commonly shift the responsibility on to you: Somehow, his violent and abusive behavior is your fault.

Reasons we know an abuser's behaviors are not about anger and rage:

- He does not batter other individuals - the boss who does not give him time off or the gas station attendant that spills gas down the side of his car. He waits until there are no witnesses and abuses the person he says he loves.
- If you ask an abused woman, "can he stop when the phone rings or the police come to the door?" She will say "yes". Most often when the police show up, he is looking calm, cool and collected and she is the one who may look hysterical. If he were truly "out of control" he would not be able to stop himself when it is to his advantage to do so.
- The abuser very often escalates from pushing and shoving to hitting in places where the bruises and marks will not show. If he were "out of control" or "in a rage" he would not be able to direct or limit where his kicks or punches land.

The cycle of violence in domestic abuse

Domestic abuse falls into a common pattern, or cycle of violence:

- Abuse – Your abusive partner lashes out with aggressive, belittling, or violent behavior. The abuse is a power play designed to show you "who is boss."
- Guilt – After abusing you, your partner feels guilt, but not over what he's done. He's more worried about the possibility of being caught and facing consequences for his abusive behavior.
- "Normal" behavior – Your abuser does everything he can to regain control and keep you in the relationship. He may act as if nothing has happened, or he may turn on the charm. This peaceful honeymoon phase may give you hope that your abusive partner has really changed this time.
- Fantasy and planning – Your abuser begins to fantasize about abusing you again. He spends a lot of time thinking about what you've done wrong and how he'll make you pay. Then he makes a plan for turning the fantasy of abuse into reality.
- Set-up – Your abuser sets you up and puts his plan in motion, creating a situation where he can justify abusing you.

Your abuser's apologies and loving gestures in between the episodes of abuse can make it difficult to leave. He may make you believe that you are the only person who can help him, that things will be different this time, and that he truly loves you. However, the dangers of staying are very real.

The Full Cycle of Domestic Violence

A man abuses his partner. After he hits her, he experiences self-directed guilt. He says, "I'm sorry for hurting you." What he does not say is, "Because I might get caught." He then rationalizes his behavior by saying that his partner is having an affair with someone. He tells her "If you weren't such a worthless whore I wouldn't have to hit you." He then acts contrite, reassuring her that he will not hurt her again. He then fantasizes and reflects on past abuse and how he will hurt her again. He plans on telling her to go to the store to get some groceries. What he withholds from her is that she has a certain amount of time to do the shopping. When she is held up in traffic and is a few minutes late, he feels completely justified in assaulting her because "you're having an affair with the store clerk." He has just set her up.

Recognizing the warning signs of domestic violence and abuse

It's impossible to know with certainty what goes on behind closed doors, but there are some telltale signs and symptoms of domestic violence and abuse. If you witness any warning signs of abuse in a friend, family member, or co-worker, take them very seriously.

General warning signs of domestic abuse

People who are being abused may:

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner.
- Go along with everything their partner says and does.
- Check in often with their partner to report where they are and what they're doing.
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner.
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness.

Warning signs of physical violence

People who are being physically abused may:

- Have frequent injuries, with the excuse of “accidents.”
- Frequently miss work, school, or social occasions, without explanation.
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises or scars (e.g. wearing long sleeves in the summer or sunglasses indoors).

Warning signs of isolation

People who are being isolated by their abuser may:

- Be restricted from seeing family and friends.
- Rarely go out in public without their partner.
- Have limited access to money, credit cards, or the car.

The psychological warning signs of abuse

People who are being abused may:

- Have very low self-esteem, even if they used to be confident.
- Show major personality changes (e.g. an outgoing woman becomes withdrawn).
- Be depressed, anxious, or suicidal.

Speak up if you suspect domestic violence or abuse

Do's and Don't's

Do:	Don’t:
Ask.	Wait for her to come to you.
Express concern.	Judge or blame.
Listen and validate.	Pressure her.
Offer help.	Give advice.
Support her decisions.	Place conditions on your support.

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, speak up! If you’re hesitating—telling yourself that it’s none of your business, you might be wrong, or the woman might not want to talk about it—keep in mind that expressing your concern will let the person know that you care and may even save her life.

Talk to the person in private and let her know that you're concerned about her safety. Point out the things you've noticed that make you worried. Tell her that when and if she wants to talk about it, you're there for her. Reassure her that you'll keep whatever she tells you between the two of you, and let her know that you'll help in any way you can.

Remember, abusers are very good at controlling and manipulating their victims. Abused and battered women are depressed, drained, scared, ashamed, and confused. They need help to get out, yet they have often been isolated from their family and friends. By picking up on the warning signs and offering support, you can help them escape an abusive situation and begin healing.

Site: http://helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_types_signs_causes_effects.htm#

Resources:

- Weave: 916-448-2321
- Dial 911 or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-787-3224

ASAP offers confidential, cost-free assessment, counseling, consultation and referral services to all UCDHS faculty, staff, and their family members. Whether the problem is work-related, personal, career or relationship focused, ASAP can assist you in evaluating and resolving the problem.

You can call ASAP at 916-734-2727 for an appointment.