

Family and Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence in Australia is widespread but often hidden. It occurs across society, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, age, cultural and ethnic background, or religious belief. Domestic Violence often presents devastating short-term and long-term effects across psychological, social, developmental and economic factors, impacting on families, children, and the community as a whole.

The term 'domestic violence' refers to interpersonal violence which takes place in domestic settings, family relationships, and intimate relationships. This includes violence perpetrated by a man to a woman, woman to a man, between same sex domestic partners, and amongst family members (including siblings and parent-child violence either way).

Domestic or family violence may involve a wide range of behaviours, including:

Physical abuse - including direct assaults on the body, use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation.

Sexual abuse - any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent, causing pain during sex, assaulting the genitals, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly, criticising, or using sexually degrading insults.

Verbal abuse - continual 'put downs' and humiliation, privately or publicly, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and spouse.

Emotional abuse - blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement (eg weeks of silence).

Social abuse - systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim knows nobody, and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people — in effect, imprisonment.

Spiritual abuse - denying access to ceremonies, land or family, preventing religious observance, forcing victims to do things against their beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence.

Economic abuse - complete control of all monies, no access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate 'allowance', using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses.

Power and Control Cycle



©Pence and Paymar (1986). Reference: Pence, E. & Paymar, M. (1986). Power and Control Tactics of Men who Batter. Duluth, MN: Minnesotagram Development, Inc



Converge International is your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. To make an appointment or speak to a consultant:

call:
1300 687 327

Family and Domestic Violence

The Effects of Abuse

A victim of an abusive relationship may feel:

- Afraid to tell anyone
- Worried that they are to blame
- Depressed and alone
- Confused
- Scared of coping on their own
- Scared it will get worse if they leave
- Worried about what others will think
- Afraid that no-one will believe you
- Frustrated and sad because they've tried everything

Responding to Domestic Violence - Offering Support and Taking Action

You may recognise the signs of violence in a family member, friend, neighbour or work colleague and wonder what to do.

Many of those experiencing domestic violence cope with it alone. While they may develop a range of active strategies to protect themselves and limit the impact of the violence, many do not seek any outside help — they tell nobody at all. When they do disclose the situation to a family member or friend, the first response is often critical in determining how, and whether, they will proceed further.

Family and Domestic Violence is under-reported, and statistics show that a victim of violence is more likely to discuss and disclose their experience to a friend or family member than to the police or another public authority.

It is important to know where to refer people and how to support people telling you about their experience.

If someone discloses an abusive situation to you, some simple advice includes:

- Find a safe/quiet space to talk
- Listen – this may be the first time they have spoken about the experience
- Have a non-judgmental attitude
- Believe the person's story
- Reassure them that it is not their fault
- Hold the perpetrator responsible for the violence and abuse
- Provide emotional and practical support
- Support the person's choices

Intervening in Violent Situations

Many people mistakenly believe that they have only two options in instances of actual or potential violence – intervene physically and possibly expose themselves to personal harm, or do nothing. They often choose to do nothing as a result. But this is a limited set of choices.

Intervening in violent situations can make them less dangerous or more dangerous. Not stepping in keeps it dangerous and says to the violent person that it's okay to hurt someone. And it tells the person being hurt that no one cares, that she isn't important. When violence isn't challenged, it leaves all of us feeling unsafe.

Things to do:

1. Call the police
2. If safe to do so, tell the violent person clearly that their actions are not okay
3. Talk to the victim to help them feel safe
4. Call on help from other people nearby
5. Create a distraction to stop the violence
6. Stand where the violent person can see that their actions are being witnessed

Things to Remember

- If someone discloses violence to you, they are showing enormous trust and it is important to maintain this trust where possible.
- If you are concerned for someone's current safety then it is important to consider helping them to act; however in some instances it may be enough to simply acknowledge that they have shared their experience with you.
- It is important that someone making a disclosure is not forced into acting. You can talk about their options but they must feel in control of the situation and what happens next.
- You are not expected to be a counsellor. The most important things you can do are: listen to the person, show you believe them and take the disclosure seriously. Make sure you care for yourself as well after hearing their story.

Support Services

National Services

For emergency situations that require immediate and urgent assistance call 000

**National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence
Counselling Service** (24 hours)
www.1800respect.org.au
1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Lifeline (24 hours)
www.lifeline.org.au
13 11 14

MensLine (24 hours)
www.mensline.org.au
1300 78 99 78

Kids Help Line (24 hours)
www.kidshelp.com.au
1800 55 1800

References:

White Ribbon Foundation <<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au>>