

What is domestic abuse?⁶

Domestic abuse is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other partner. It may or may not be illegal behavior. Domestic abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, stalking, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person or used to gain/maintain power and control. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Below are some examples, these are used in service of power and control.

Physical Abuse: Hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair pulling, etc. are types of physical abuse. This type of abuse also includes denying a partner medical care (chronic issues, injuries from abuse, reproductive care, hormones or surgery for a transgender partner), or forcing alcohol and/or drug use upon them.

Sexual Abuse: Coercing or attempting to coerce any sexual contact or behavior without consent. Sexual abuse includes, but is certainly not limited to, marital rape, attacks on sexual parts of the body, forcing sex after physical violence has occurred, or treating someone in a sexually demeaning manner. Sexual abuse can also include consequences for not having sexual contact, such as not allowing a partner to sleep or not allowing access to family money for food and hygiene items. These may be times victims/survivors say “yes” but only because they did not feel as if they could say “no” without consequence.

Emotional Abuse: Undermining an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem is abusive. This may include, but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing the other person's abilities, name-calling, or damaging the other parent's relationship with their children.

Economic Abuse: Preventing an individual from acquiring, using, or maintaining financial resources by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding someone's access to money, forbidding one's attendance at school or employment, ruining the family's credit/rental history, or not spending family money responsibly.

Psychological Abuse: Elements of psychological abuse include - but are not limited to - causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner, children, or partner's family or friends; destruction of pets and property; causing the individual to feel “crazy” and confused; and forcing isolation from family, friends, school or work.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating.

⁶ Sources: National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Center for Victims of Crime, WomensLaw.org., and Futures Without Violence. Copied from: <http://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence> with modifications.

Remember:

- Violence, coupled with a pattern of control and coercion, may be predictive of escalating physical and potentially lethal violence.
- Research shows that victims' perceptions of high danger are often accurate; their perceptions of low danger are not. In fact, victims frequently minimize the occurrence or severity of abuse.
- The most dangerous time for a victim is when the abuser becomes aware that the victim has decided to leave the relationship.
- Children exposed to DV are at increased risk of neglect, physical and sexual abuse.
- Many abusive or coercive behaviors that are highly relevant to the children's well-being and to a well-designed parenting plan would not rise to the level that warrants criminal charges or qualify for a Family Abuse Protection Act Restraining Order. The absence of protection orders or criminal charges does not indicate an absence of domestic abuse.