



# Domestic Violence

Dealing with physical, sexual or emotional  
abuse from those close to you

A self help guide



Adult services  
Patient information leaflet

**Birmingham Healthy Minds**  
[www.birminghamhealthyminds.org](http://www.birminghamhealthyminds.org)

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## **These are the stories of two people who have experienced domestic violence/abuse from their partner:**

“I’ve had a knife to my throat, he threw all of my stuff out of the house, he has kicked my car door off. I was isolated, I lost a lot of friends. It was torrents of verbal abuse. I wasn’t allowed out, I couldn’t speak to people. I didn’t feel capable of doing anything at the time, it just chips away at your self-esteem”.

“The worst abuse was more emotional. It was very subtle, little put-downs. He started controlling the money. I wouldn’t have any money to buy things for myself. He was timing me when I did go out and asking me “Who’ve you been talking to?” If I spoke, I was talking rubbish and I wasn’t to speak. He used to keep the car away from me and he wouldn’t let me have contact with my family. He said I was thick and stupid and I would never get a job, nobody would want me. I honestly thought I was going mad”.

## **What is domestic abuse?**

Domestic abuse is also known as domestic violence, and is much wider than physical violence alone.

Domestic abuse is the term used to describe the physical, sexual or emotional (mental) abuse of one person by another who is, or has been, close to them. Most often this is a partner, ex-partner or family member. Some examples of domestic abuse are:

- Being bullied, threatened, called names, put down and made to feel stupid.
- Being sent abusive texts or receiving abusive phone calls.
- Being controlled through:
  - Not being allowed to see family and friends
  - Being harassed and questioned when leaving the house
  - Having money or benefits taken away
  - Not being allowed to use the telephone
  - Not being allowed to make decisions.
- Having property destroyed.
- Being threatened and having children, family, friends and pets threatened too.
- Being physically assaulted or harmed.
- Being forced into unwanted sex.
- Being intimidated, emotionally blackmailed or threatened with suicide if leaving is attempted.
- Being blamed, saying you caused the abusive behaviour.

## **Who is this booklet for?**

This booklet is for anyone who is affected by domestic abuse, whether they are male or female, gay or straight, young or old. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, occupation or social class.

## **How might this booklet help me?**

This booklet describes what domestic abuse is, how to recognise it and how you might seek help if it is happening to you.

There is a lot of information in this booklet and it may be helpful to read it several times, or to read it a bit at a time, to get the most from it.

**You have the right to live free from violence or fear. But the most important thing is for you to be as safe as possible. If you are worried that someone could find this booklet, you might want to put it in a safe place or leave it with another person that you trust.**

## **How common is domestic abuse?**

Domestic abuse is more common than a lot of people think.

- One woman in four will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.
- One woman in 10 will experience domestic abuse in any given year.
- The police receive one telephone call every minute from a member of the public requesting help for an incident involving domestic violence.

## **Who is likely to be a victim of domestic abuse?**

The simple answer is domestic abuse can happen to anyone. However, we know that:

- Most domestic abuse happens to women; 90 - 97% of victims are female.
- Some men experience domestic abuse.
- Younger women, women who are pregnant and women who have young children are more at risk.
- Domestic abuse happens in some lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) relationships.

## **Why might I find it difficult to believe that what I am experiencing is domestic abuse?**

Perhaps you are beginning to think that you are a victim of domestic abuse, and it has been going on for some time, but you haven't realised it.

There are lots of reasons why this might be the case:

- You may not want to believe that these things are happening to you.
- Your relationship may be affectionate at times.
- You may love the person who is abusing you.
- You may have been persuaded that this isn't abuse.
- You may have been abused before and think it is "normal".

## **Why don't people always seek help or support?**

Even if you do recognise that you are being abused, you may find it difficult to do anything about it.

There are lots of reasons why you might not have done anything about the abuse:

- Perhaps you think that people might not believe you.
- There may not seem to be an alternative.
- You may feel that nothing can be done to help you.
- You may have had bad experiences of others not wanting to get involved.
- You may feel too afraid to seek help or support.
- Perhaps you hope that the relationship will improve.
- You may fear being judged by other people.
- You may think that you will lose your friends.
- You may feel ashamed or guilty.

- You may love the person who is abusing you and not want to get them into trouble.
- You may be afraid that your children could be taken into care or that they could lose their home.
- Perhaps you don't know what help is available (this leaflet can help you to find out).

On average, a woman who experiences domestic abuse is assaulted up to 35 times before seeking help. She may try to leave the relationship up to eight times before leaving for good. This is why it is important to take action to prevent this happening as soon as possible.

### **What sort of thoughts may stop someone seeking help or leaving?**

People who are being abused may try to make excuses for their partner, or they may think of other reasons why they should put up with the abuse. You may have had thoughts like this yourself:

#### **"It's my fault".**

It never is, no-one deserves to be abused in a relationship that is meant to be based on love and respect.

#### **"It will stop soon".**

Abuse tends to continue, and if anything, gets worse.

#### **"He's only abusive when he drinks".**

Alcohol is not an excuse for unacceptable behaviour.

#### **"I wouldn't be able to leave or cope on my own".**

People often lose their confidence as a result of abuse. But many people do leave, and with the right help and support feel much better in the long run.

**"I can't deprive my children of their parent and home".**

Children are always affected by domestic abuse. They need to feel safe.

**"I love my partner and he loves me".**

Abuse has no place in a loving relationship.

**What do people think about domestic abuse?**

Most people nowadays know that domestic abuse is never acceptable, and can happen to anyone, but there may be a few people in the community who believe in some old myths. You might have come across these. They are very unhelpful and completely untrue:

**Myth**

Domestic abuse only happens in working class, unemployed or problem families.

**Fact**

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone.

**Myth**

It can't be that bad or she would leave. She must really enjoy being treated in an abusive way.

**Fact**

Women may stay with an abusive partner for a number of reasons; they may love their partner or be afraid to leave their partner. Victims may not have told anyone about the abuse because they think no one would believe them. They may have nowhere to go or no money to leave. They may be concerned for their children's welfare, even if they take their children away from the abuser. They may not leave because they think they may become isolated and are frightened to live on their own.



### **Myth**

She must ask for it/deserve it/provoke it.

### **Fact**

No-one deserves to be beaten, harmed, humiliated or treated without dignity or respect. Someone may blame themselves for being abused but there is no justification for violence and abuse.

### **Myth**

It isn't really domestic abuse because it doesn't happen all the time.

### **Fact**

It doesn't matter whether you experience abuse daily, weekly, monthly or infrequently – it is still abuse.

## **Has my own behaviour changed to try and cope with the abuse?**

You might find that you are:

- Staying at home and not wanting to leave the house.
- Not socialising with friends or family because your partner doesn't like it.
- Relying on your partner for money/having little control over finances.

## **What other problems might I have?**

You might find that you experience:

- Low mood, sadness, tearfulness.
- Irritability, poor concentration.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Appetite loss or weight gain.
- Despair or a sense of hopelessness.
- Have flashbacks to the abuse.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or suicide.
- Feeling anxious, a strong sense of dread, or having panic attacks.

There are further booklets in this series on dealing with the above specific difficulties. Titles include: Depression and Low Mood, Shyness and Social Anxiety, Sleep Problems, Panic, Stress, Anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But it is important that you think about whether these problems may be happening because of abuse. For example, you may feel depressed, anxious and have low self-esteem because of someone being psychologically abusive towards you.

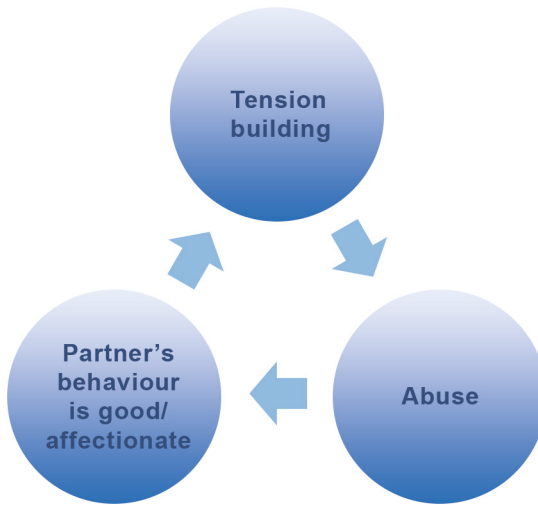
**If you have thoughts of harming yourself or of suicide you should seek help from your GP or other health professional immediately.**

### **If my partner only does these things occasionally, am I still being abused?**

Domestic abuse can vary in how often it happens and what actually happens. You may not think you are a victim of domestic abuse because there is no obvious pattern to the abuse. It might not happen every day or every week or even every month. Most people who experience domestic abuse don't suffer physical harm very often, but they may be emotionally or psychologically abused daily. You may have been forced into unwanted sex frequently or over a long period of time. You may have not had control over money for a long time. Your partner may tell you that he is sorry after incidents and that he will not behave in an abusive way again.

Domestic abuse can start at any point in a relationship. However, research shows that marriage, pregnancy and childbirth often mark the beginning of abuse, which usually continues once it has started.

**The diagram below shows that sometimes abuse shows a cycle. Does this happen to you?**



Tension Building refers to times when your partner is critical of you – your relationship is difficult, and it may feel that a big argument is brewing. Following this time, abusive behaviour becomes worse and may be followed by a violent incident. After such an incident, your partner may become very sorry and they may promise that the abuse and violence will never happen again. This better behaviour may lead you to forget about the seriousness of the abuse but will not stop the cycle from beginning again.

### **If domestic abuse is affecting me, who can I tell?**

If you think that you are experiencing domestic abuse, it can be helpful to tell someone about it so that you can receive support or help.

There are people who will listen to you, believe you and help you. You can use confidential phone lines (such as the National Domestic Violence Helpline) and local services (which are detailed later in this booklet) to talk about your difficulties or you

can talk to your GP, Health Visitor, Midwife, District or Practice Nurse, Community Psychiatric Nurse, Social Worker or Psychological Therapist if you are seeing any of these people.

Telling other people that you are being abused does not automatically mean that your children will be taken into the care of the local authority. This would only occur if your children were being neglected or were at risk of physical or sexual abuse.

Remember that violence and rape are crimes, and you can report them to the police.

### **What do people who have experienced abuse say they find helpful?**

People who have been affected by domestic abuse say that the following things have been helpful to them when they have tried to deal with an abusive partner:

- Having a safe place to go.
- Support from friends, family, and professionals.
- Practical help with transport to appointments, money advice and advocacy, childcare provision (e.g. Crèche facilities).
- Early helpful responses from professionals.
- Time and privacy with friends and professionals.
- Someone to understand your point of view, taking your side, offering sympathy and empathy.
- Clear information about sources of support.
- Accurate legal, housing, financial and other advice.
- Someone to be supportive even if you cannot act quickly or consistently.
- Knowing you are not alone and talking to people who have been through similar experiences.

## **What do people who have experienced abuse say they found unhelpful?**

People who have experienced abuse say that unhelpful actions and attitudes include:

- Others blaming the victim or not taking the situation seriously.
- Others blaming the victim for not protecting their children.
- Tolerance of domestic abuse and violence by society.
- Not having a safe place to go.
- Having no one to confide in.
- Professionals not asking about domestic abuse.
- Professionals, friends and family not recognising that domestic abuse is unacceptable.
- Being isolated.

## **What can I do to deal with the abuse?**

To make a change you need to:

1. See that there is a problem.
2. Think of doing something about the situation.
3. Talk to someone.
4. Prepare to do something about the situation.
5. Make things happen.
6. Keep on with the changes you have made and try and stay safe.

Making changes often needs you to tell a trusted friend, family member or colleague. Or, you may confide in your GP, Health visitor, a solicitor or an agency like Victim Support.

Victim Support may be able to help in a practical way, with childcare or money. You may need to spend time discussing the pros and cons of different options before making decisions.

To deal effectively with domestic abuse may not necessarily mean that you have to end the relationship with the person who is abusive towards you. The problem of abuse may be stopped by support and mediation if both parties are willing to try this. Details are included in the Useful Organisations section of this booklet. No agency expects you to leave your partner in order to receive help and support from them.

However, you may decide yourself that you do need to leave your home to stop an abusive relationship. This may be very difficult for you and your family but may be the only safe option. Some of the agencies listed later in this booklet can help you to find somewhere to live, and provide financial and practical help and emotional support for you and your children, if you have them.

### **How can I keep myself safe?**

If you do decide to leave your home, you will need to consider your own and your children's safety during this time. It is extremely important to stay safe and make sure you have the support and legal measures you may need to do so.

Remember:

- Their abusive partners or ex-partners murder two women per week in the UK.
- Being separated from an abusive partner doesn't always reduce risk of harm, and can in fact increase it.
- 35% of households where there is domestic violence have a second incident within five weeks of the first.

### **How can I plan to be safer during a violent incident?**

You might want to think about some or all of these strategies:

- Plan which stairs, doors, windows you would use if you needed to leave your home in a hurry.
- Where could you keep your purse, bag, car keys, medication etc, so you could pick them up quickly if you needed to?

- Leave an extra set of house keys with a trusted friend or family member, so that you can come back later to collect belongings.
- You could warn or tell a neighbour that if they hear suspicious noises or shouting coming from the house that they have your permission to phone the police.
- Think about whose home you would go to, or take the phone number of the local Women's Aid Refuge or local housing department, so that you can arrange emergency accommodation.
- Contact the police – telephone 999, if you are able to do so.
- Teach your children to call the 999 number in a crisis and tell them to give their name and address and telephone number.

## **How can I plan to be safer when preparing to leave home?**

If you have decided that you need to leave your home or your partner, you will need to plan some things in advance. Even if you are only intending to leave home for a short while, you may need to take the following with you. Tick them off on the list to be sure you have everything you need ready.

- Money – including change for phone calls and transport to a safe place.
- Emergency phone numbers of friends and family.
- Emergency phone numbers of services – such as those listed at the back of this booklet.
- Benefit books.
- NHS number.
- Bank books.
- Rent book.

- Marriage and birth certificates.
- Driving licence.
- Court injunctions or court orders.
- Spare house keys.
- Any medication you need for yourself or for your children.
- Your children's favourite possessions or toys, your own sentimental items.
- You may want to leave an 'emergency bag' with a trusted friend or family member in case you do leave, containing toiletries and a change of clothes.
- Your mobile phone, charger and top-up card.

## **Do people manage to stop domestic abuse?**

**Yes – these are the stories of how some women dealt with domestic abuse:**

“I would bury my head in the sand. I didn't know how to cope, what to do. I started off going to see a doctor. I needed help, I knew I was in trouble. I went to the doctor, said I'm in trouble, I had never told a professional before. Then I found out about women's domestic violence groups and went there. I got a lot of help from them, a lot of courage. The worker talked me through it. Listening to other people's stories, you did not feel totally and wholly alone”.

“The first people I called were the police. Then I rang the council, told them what happened, went to the solicitor and Victim Support. I knew I needed money, so I rang the benefits agency. I started going to the women's group, and go and have a chat, like counselling. The counsellor told me “it was his fault, it wasn't mine”. I was able to tell her how I was feeling”



## **Here are some examples of how women left their abusive partners and how they felt after leaving:**

“I wouldn’t put up with stuff like that now. I feel strong because I have had two children; I have to be the provider for them. I’ve got to look after them, make sure they’re loved and nurtured. I want to get my own business going, I want them to go on holidays and have nice things. I want to do some living now”.

“I’m just so happy, happier that I’ve left him. I’ve never been happier. I love being single, I love living here. I’m going to start my GCSE’s, I’ll do my Access course, then after that I’ll do my degree. I’ll do it because I want to, I really do. I’m taking driving lessons. It’s the best thing I’ve ever done, leaving him. I don’t have any regrets at all. I’m really happy and things are looking up”.

The process of dealing with an abusive relationship is not easy but there are people who can help you. Although it may be difficult to ask for help, there are organisations and professionals who can help and support you at your own pace whether you choose to leave your abusive partner or not.

## **Who can I contact if I need help?**

**In an emergency you should always dial 999**

### **Useful organisations**

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Tel: 01455 883 316

[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth,  
Leicestershire, LE17 4HB

Offers an information service providing contacts for counselling in  
England and Wales.

- Broken Rainbow UK

Helpline: 0300 999 5428

[www.brokenrainbow.org.uk](http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk)

Provides support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender  
people experiencing domestic violence.

- Everyman Project

Helpline: 0207 263 8884

[www.everymanproject.co.uk](http://www.everymanproject.co.uk)

Everyman Project, 1A Waterlow Road, London, N19 5NJ

Information and support for men who have anger management issues.

- Healthwatch

[www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk)

Healthwatch England is the independent consumer champion  
for health and social care in England. Working with a network  
of 152 local Healthwatch, we ensure that the voices of  
consumers and those who use services reach the ears of the  
decision makers.

- Mens Advice Line

Tel: 0808 801 0327 (freephone)

[www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)

Email: [info@mensadvice.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadvice.org.uk)

A confidential helpline for all men experiencing domestic violence. Freephone available Monday to Friday, 10am - 1pm and 2pm - 5pm.

- Mental Health Matters

Tel: 0191 516 3500

[www.mentalhealthmatters.com](http://www.mentalhealthmatters.com)

Avalon House, St Catherines Court, Sunderland Enterprise Park, Sunderland, SR5 3XJ

A national organisation which provides support and information on employment, housing, community support and psychological services.

- Mind Infoline

Tel: 0121 608 8001

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London, E15 4BQ

Provides information on a range of topics including types of mental distress, where to get help, drug and alternative treatments and advocacy. Also provides details of help and support for people in their own area

Helpline available Mon - Fri, 9am - 6pm.

- National Domestic Violence Helpline

Tel: 0808 200 0247

[www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk)

The helpline can give support, help and information over the telephone. The helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female helpline support workers and volunteers. All calls are confidential and there are translation facilities and a service for callers who are hearing impaired.

- NHS Choices – Your health – your choices

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Information about conditions, treatments, local services and healthy lives.

- NHS Direct

Tel: 111

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Health information and advice

- NSPCC Helpline

Tel: 0808 800 5000

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Helpline which enables anyone who is concerned about the welfare of a child or young person to have someone to turn to. Helpline offers advice, guidance and support or takes action on caller's behalf if they have concerns about a child who is either being abused or at risk of abuse.

- Customer Relations - PALS

Tel: 0800 953 0045

Text: 0798 588 3509

Email: [pals@bsmhft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@bsmhft.nhs.uk)

[www.bsmhft.nhs.uk](http://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk)

Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust offers support and advice from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday

- Relate

Tel: 0121 643 1638, [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

Premier House, Carolina Court, Lakeside, Doncaster, DN4 5RA

Help with marital or relationship problems.

- Respect Phonenumber

Helpline: 0808 802 4040

[www.respectphonenumber.org.uk](http://www.respectphonenumber.org.uk),

Email: [info@respectphonenumber.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphonenumber.org.uk)

Helpline offering information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners and want help to stop

- Rethink

Helpline: 0300 500 0927

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP

Provides information and a helpline for anyone affected by mental health problems.

- Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org); Email: [Jo@samaritans.org](mailto:Jo@samaritans.org)

Freepost: RSRB-KKBY-CYJK, Chris, PO. Box 90, Stirling, FK8 2SA

Confidential support for anyone in a crisis.

- Victim Support

0845 30 30 900

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Victim Supportline, Hallam House, 56-60 Hallam Street, London, W1W 6JL

Provides confidential help to victims of crime, their family, friends and anyone else affected. Service offers information, emotional support and practical help.

- Women's Aid

Helpline: 0808 2000 247

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

PO BOX 391, Bristol, BS99 7WS, England

Provides free 24 hour helpline and resources to women affected by abuse.

**Don't forget, domestic violence is a crime. If you are in immediate danger contact the police - dial 999.**

**You can contact your local social services department, Citizens' Advice, Victim Support or Mediation Services (look in the phone book for local numbers).**

**You can also speak to your GP, Health Visitor, District Nurse, CPN, Psychologist or Psychiatrist if you have one.**

## **Useful books**

- **Healing the trauma of domestic violence: a workbook for women**

Edward Kubany, Mark F. McCarthy, Janet R. Laconsay  
New Harbinger 2004

Domestic violence experts offer the first-ever post-traumatic stress disorder treatment approach to help abused women overcome the trauma they have endured and regain control of their lives.

- **Talking about domestic violence**

Nicola Edwards  
Anova Books 2005

A sensitive introduction to difficult personal and social issues. Offers support with reassurance and strategies for dealing with problems and special fact boxes for making difficult decisions. Contains a listing of organisations, helplines and websites that can help.

- **Talking about domestic abuse**

Catherine Humphreys, Ravi K. Thiara, Audrey Mullender,  
Agnes Skamballis  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2006

Based on the authors' work with families who have experienced domestic abuse, this activity pack is suitable for children of 9 years and above, helping them to open up to their mothers about their distressing experiences.

- **The Survivor's Handbook**

Women's Aid Federation of England 2009

The Survivor's Handbook provides practical support and information for women experiencing domestic violence, with simple guidance on every aspect of seeking support.

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[www.bsmhft.nhs.uk](http://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk)

Main switchboard: 0121 301 0000

**Improving mental health wellbeing**