

Overview of Domestic Violence

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is any use of physical or sexual force, actual or threatened, between people in an intimate relationship. Domestic violence may also include abuse that is emotional/psychological or behaviour that is intimidating. Although both men and women can be victims of domestic violence, the overwhelming majority of this violence involves men abusing women.

Intimate relationships include those between the opposite sex and same sex partners. These relationships can include current and former partners, people living in de-facto relationships and married couples.

The violence itself can take many forms, including a physical attack, unwanted sexual force, financial control, emotional and psychological abuse. It may happen only once in a while or it may happen all of the time.

Although each situation is different, there are common warning signs which may include:

- Calling you names or putting you down
- Keeping you away from family or friends
- Withholding money from you
- Denying you access to medical treatment or other services
- Threats and psychological abuse directed towards you, the children or your pets
- Anger and intimidation directed at you
- Actual or threatened physical harm
- Emotionally blackmailing and/or guilt tripping you
- Sexual assault/or sexual force that is unwanted

Knowing these signs is an important part of preventing the violence and stopping it from continuing.

Abusive relationships include:

Inequality
Competition
Manipulation
Hostility
Control
Put Downs

Healthy relationships include:

Equality
Partnership/Co-operation
Honesty
Good Will/Peaceful Communication
Intimacy/Closeness
Support (emotional, physical, financial)

Impact on women

Women in domestic violence relationships are often afraid to take a stand about the violence or the ongoing abuse, as it can be unsafe for them to do so. They are impacted emotionally, physically, financially and sometimes spiritually. As a consequence of these relationships many women suffer from self-doubt, loss of confidence and have feelings of regret when they think about what's going on. They



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do not want to break up their family and they are torn because a person they once loved (or love) is now behaving very differently.

Making a decision to end the abuse is tough however many women do it and move forward into lives that are safer, happier and more satisfying for themselves and their children.

Impact on children

Children are impacted by abuse in a variety of ways.

Sometimes the stress of the abuse causes:

- A delay in the ability to learn
- Acting out behaviours sometimes called "bad" behaviour
- Issues such as ADD, ADHD
- Health problems such as chronic colds or rashes
- Depression, anxiety, nightmares, bedwetting and other states of distress
- Desire to be perfect
- Drug or alcohol use
- Not wanting to go to school

Your child may be trying to keep you or their brothers and sisters safe or they may be trying to stop the abuse from happening again. Research has shown that in these situations the greatest protective resource your child can have is the positive relationship they have with you. When they know they can rely on you they are better able to manage difficult situations.

There are many ways you are already supporting your children to feel safe. It is important for you to keep yourself safe so that you can continue to look after them. It is also important to remember that your children have a legal right to live in a home which is free of violence and abuse. The best way for you to support your children is to get support for yourself.

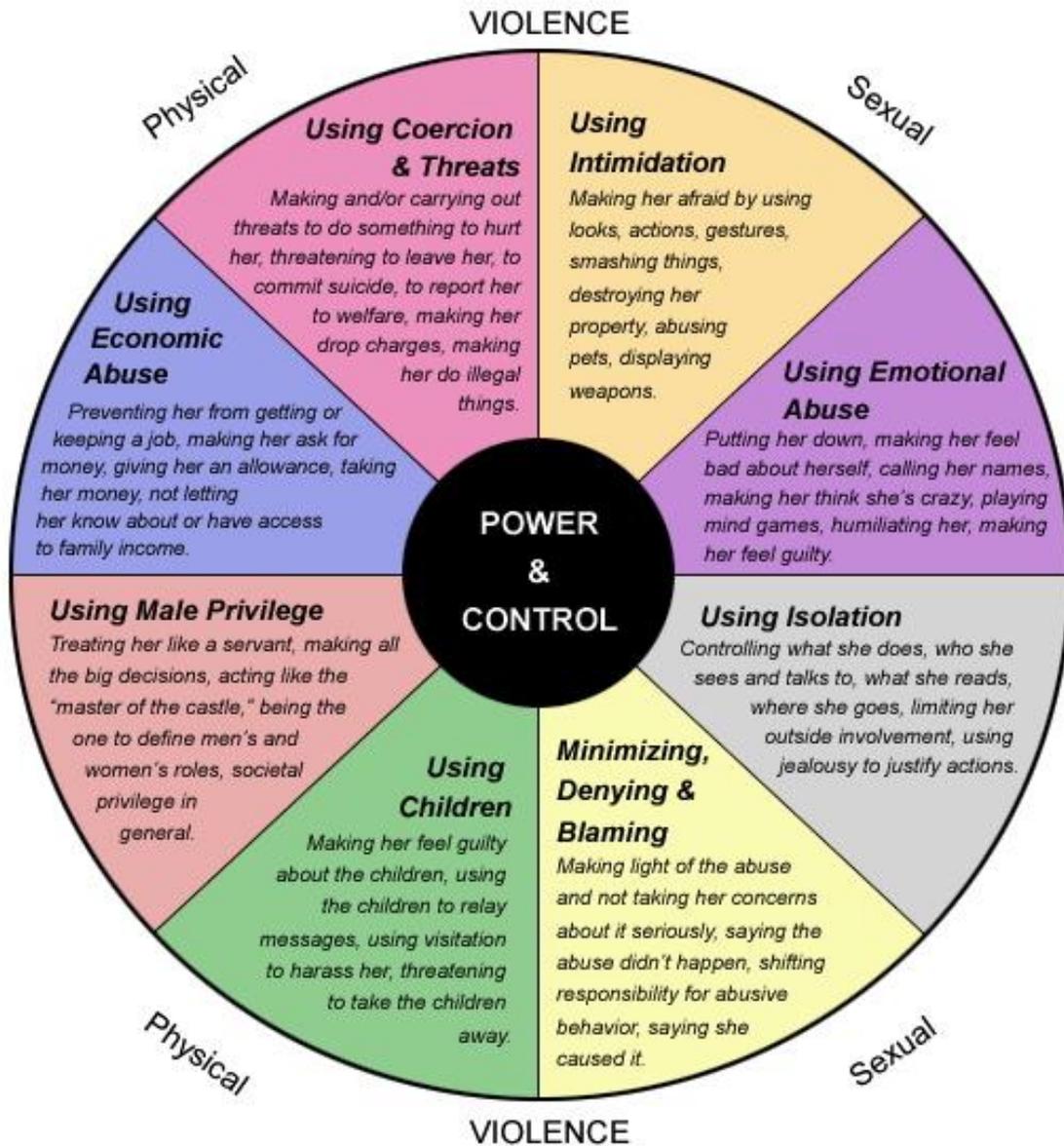
Making a decision to end the abuse

Making a decision to end an abusive relationship can be one of the hardest things you will ever do. It's a very difficult thing to finally decide that enough is enough, that you and the children deserve a better life and where you have the courage and determination to make the changes necessary to put a stop to the abuse.

This decision requires great honesty and courage and this can be very difficult when your life has been full of chaos, distress and emotional pain from an abusive relationship. When you make this decision, there are support systems available to you, from people who are trained and skilled in this area. This support is free and confidential. It can involve just you or you and your partner - if he is willing to take responsibility for his behaviour.

How an abusive person uses power and control to dominate

If you recognise any of the situations below in your current relationship then you are in an unhealthy, unbalanced relationship that has the potential to become dangerous and unsafe for you and your children.



Abuse in Relationships

All intimate relationships are different as each person in a relationship is an individual. However in relationships where a partner is abusive and controlling, there are some typical patterns of behaviour that are easy to recognise once you know them.

Studies have shown there is a cycle of abuse found in many abusive relationships which contain many of the stages illustrated below. If you recognise this pattern in your relationship, you should first understand that you are not to blame. This is a pattern of behaviour which is common in people who are trying to gain control of others.



What is the 'Cycle of Violence'?

The 'Cycle of Violence' consists of a set of behaviours and abusive tactics used to control an intimate partner, ex-partner, family member and their children. The various phases, outlined below, can be used in various combinations and to varying levels of intensity, with some phases overlapping.

Blow up

When the time and circumstances are right, the explosive attack begins. This is a display of control over the partner and may include extreme abuse, aggression, damage to property and violence.

False Guilt

After the explosion, false guilt is displayed. These are not normal feelings displayed after hurting someone but guilt over the possibility of being found out. The abusive person may feel ashamed of what happened or fear the consequences. The abuser will often promise that it will not happen again and may blame other factors or substance abuse e.g. alcohol for the behaviour.

Rationalisation

Here the abuser attempts to justify and minimise their actions. They may blame the victim for provoking the behaviour, saying she made him do it due to something she did or said. The abuser may demonstrate false remorse and may use threats of self-harm to get sympathy.

Honeymoon/Normal Behaviour

Things have calmed down and returned to the courting phase. The abusive partner may show increased caring, attention and romantic feeling (previous manipulative practices) or acts as if nothing happened at all. This gives the victim hope it will never happen again and at this point many women, because of their forgiving nature and goodwill, give the violent partner another chance to prove that he really is a good guy.

Fantasy

Here the abuser fantasises about past and future abuse of the victim. These fantasies fuel the abusers anger to help them move onto the next stage. They may start an argument to prove to themselves they are right about their fantasies. He may have jealous fantasies or falsely accuse the victim of something she has not done.

Set-up

It is now that increasing level of control and threats begin, tension builds up as well as harassment and arguments. This is how the abuser creates a situation of control, in which the he feels there is no choice but to act in an abusive way and he feels this can be justified. This is where the inevitable violent explosion occurs again and the cycle repeats itself.

The "Cycle of Violence" theory was developed following research by Dr Lenore Walker in 1979.

Knowing these facts about relationship abuse and the cycle of violence can help you make informed decisions about what is best for you in these circumstances. When you realise you are not going crazy and the abuser is the one responsible for the violent behaviour a lot of the confusion around making a decision to leave is removed.

Where to get help

WASH House

9677 1962

You can arrange an appointment to talk to our counsellor about your situation. This is a confidential and free service. Here you can get resources, information and support as you work through the process of making the positive changes you want for your life.

Domestic Violence Crisis Line

1800 65 64 63

A 24 hour service line which can provide advice on vacancies in refuges, as well as referrals, counselling and information.

Mt Druitt Family Violence Service

9677 9628

Crisis support and medium term case management for anyone affected by domestic and family violence. Aboriginal and Pacific communities, caseworkers are available.

Mt Druitt Community Health Centre

9881 1200

Counselling service available to children, families and individuals

Blacktown Community Health Centre

9881 8700

Counselling service available to children, families and individuals