



Freephone 24-Hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: **0808 2000 247**

or visit [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk) (access live chat Mon-Fri 3-10pm)

## What is domestic violence?

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Domestic violence is the systematic pattern of behaviour on the part of the abuser designed to control his partner.

The abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, financial or sexual. Anyone forced to alter their behaviour because they are frightened of their partner's reaction is being abused. It can begin at any stage of the relationship. Domestic violence is rarely a one-off. Incidents generally become more frequent and severe over time.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone, regardless of age, social background, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. Whilst domestic violence happens in all relationships (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), statistics show the vast majority of domestic violence incidents are carried out by men and experienced by women.

**Domestic violence is a crime. We all have a role to play in bringing domestic violence to an end.**

## Recognising abuse

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Violence against women and girls (also called 'gender-based violence') is rooted in inequality between the sexes; it is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. It takes **many different forms** including domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking and modern slavery, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour' violence. No matter what your experience of gender-based violence, Refuge is here to **support you**.

Domestic violence describes any violence or abuse that is used by someone to control or obtain power over their partner. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, emotional and financial abuse. If you alter your behaviour because you are frightened of how your partner will react, you are being abused.

Many women experience domestic violence and other forms of abuse without ever being physically abused. Remember: non-physical forms of abuse can be as destructive and as undermining as physical violence.

Whilst the vast majority of those who experience domestic violence – and all forms of gender-based violence – are women, it can affect anyone.

**All forms of gender-based violence are against the law.**

## Are you being abused?

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- Is your partner excessively jealous and possessive?
- Is he charming one minute and abusive the next? Does he have sudden changes of mood – like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?
- Is he stopping you from seeing your family and friends? Do you feel isolated?
- Is he constantly criticizing you and putting you down in public?
- Does he embarrass you, often in front of family and friends, so that you are seen in a bad light?
- Does your partner play mind games and make you unsure of your own judgment?
- Does he tell you you're useless and couldn't cope without him?
- Does he control your money?
- Does he tell you what to wear, who to see, where to go, what to think?
- Does he pressure you to have sex when you don't want to?
- Are you starting to walk on eggshells to avoid making him angry?
- Does he monitor your movements? Or check up on you via your email, Facebook, Twitter or by looking at your text messages?
- Does he use anger and intimidation to frighten you and make you comply with his demands?
- Has your partner ever threatened you, or intimidated you by using violent language or smashing up the furniture?
- Are you forced to alter your behaviour because you are frightened of your partner's reaction?
- Are you blamed for their behaviour e.g. they say you were "asking for it" or deserved the abuse?

**If you answered yes to any of the above questions, then you may be experiencing domestic violence. Abuse is a crime and it is never your fault. You don't have to deal with this alone. Refuge is here to support you.**

## Forms of domestic abuse

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Domestic violence is the abuse of one partner within an intimate or family relationship. It is the repeated, random and habitual use of intimidation to control a partner. The abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, financial or sexual. Anyone forced to alter their behaviour because they are frightened of their partner's reaction is being abused.

Most people can identify physical abuse – it is the most 'obvious' form of domestic violence. But what about the more subtle forms? This page gives information on the other techniques perpetrators may use to abuse and control. For more information on recognising abuse, [click here](#).

### Emotional abuse

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Sometimes called 'psychological abuse', emotional abuse is an attack on a woman's personality rather than her body, and it can be just as harmful as physical abuse. Examples include calling her names, putting her down, making her feel like she is going mad and blaming her for the abuse, or controlling her every move through threats and intimidation. The grinding impact of emotional abuse can chip away at a woman's sense of self. She may gradually begin to believe her abuser when he tells her, day in, day out, that she is worthless, that no-one will believe her, that no-one cares about her but him. For more on recognising emotional abuse, [read about Refuge's 'Care or Control?' campaign](#).

## Sexual abuse

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Approximately 90% of those who are raped know the perpetrator prior to the offence. Sexual abuse – including rape, sexual assault and sexual exploitation – is commonly used by domestic violence perpetrators as a way to control and abuse their partners. Sexual abuse is any form of sexual activity (involving physical contact, words, or photographs) that takes place without the other person's full and informed consent. It makes no difference whether a man's wife or girlfriend has consented in the past. Sexual abuse also includes an abuser withholding his partner's access to contraception, or forcing her into sexual practices she finds degrading. You can find out more about sexual violence, consent and how to get support [here](#).

## Economic abuse

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Economic abuse – which includes financial abuse – is a way of controlling a person's ability to acquire, use and maintain their own money and resources. Economic abuse can take many forms. Abusers may prevent a woman from earning or accessing her own money (for example, by banning her from going out to work, or sabotaging job interviews, or by taking the welfare benefits she is entitled to); spend or take her money without consent; build up debts in her name; or damage her possessions or property. If a woman is separated from the abuser, he might withhold child maintenance payments. Find out more about economic abuse [here](#), and learn about Refuge's latest research in our [2020 report Know Economic Abuse](#).

## The facts

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### [The extent of domestic violence](#)

**Almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime**

*[Office for National Statistics](#) (2019) [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019](#)*

**Two women a week are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales alone**

*[Office for National Statistics](#) (2019) [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018 \(average taken over 10 years\)](#)*

**In the year ending March 2019, 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse**

*[Office for National Statistics](#) (2019) [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)*