

Safety & Wellness in Conflictual Relationships

Recognizing Domestic Violence

Often when we think about domestic violence we think about physical abuse. This is in part because of what we may have seen in the media and in part because when we hear the word violence we think of physical assault.

The truth is that domestic violence and abuse can take many forms. Physical violence is just one form of domestic violence. There are many other forms of abuse that can be just as harmful, sometimes even more harmful than physical violence, and they tend to be easier to hide.

Most people would recognize that physical assault is a form of domestic violence since bruises, cuts, burns, and broken bones are easier for professionals, friends, and family to see. Verbal, psychological, social, financial, sexual, emotional, and legal abuse can be much harder to recognize, both for the victim and for people around them.

When my counsellor told me, many years ago, that I was in a domestic violence relationship, I found it very hard to believe. My partner had never hit me, there were no bruises, no obvious signs of harm. I was educated, a professional, I worked as a teacher at the time, and I thought if I was in a domestic violence relationship, I would have known it. My counsellor pulled out some sheets of paper, they were checklists for different types of domestic violence. As we went through the checklists, I was shocked to see how many of the boxes my relationship at the time ticked. It was the start of me opening my eyes to the toxic relationship that I was in.

The checklists below will provide you with information about the different types of abuse and how to recognise them.

These checklists are provided for information only. They do not include all forms of abuse but rather give you an idea of what these types of abuse look and feel like.

All abuse, whatever form it takes, is about control – getting control of you and keeping control of you.

It would be beneficial for you to work through these with a counsellor so that you can form a clearer picture about the patterns of behaviour in your relationship.

Isolation/Social Abuse

- Jealous about who you see
- Tells you that you cannot see certain people
- Monitors your time, makes you explain where you were/who you saw
- Does not allow you to leave the house
- Makes it difficult for you to get a job
- Restricts your use of the car/doesn't allow you to have your own car
- Tries to prevent you from contacting family
- Restricts times or ways that you can contact family
- Moves you away from family
- Keeps you moving so that you cannot get close to others
- Tries to turn you against your family, or your family against you
- Alienates you from family and friends
- Turns your children against you
- Keeps you from getting medical care
- Withholds affection to punish you
- Tries to turn people against you
- Tells you that you have no friends
- Ridicules and insults you in front of friends and family
- Humiliates you in front of others
- Threatens to humiliate you in front of others
- Tells you that you are boring/weird/someone that no one would want to be around
- Tells you that people only pretend to like you to get something from you
- Tells you that you look ridiculous before you go out
- Tells you that no one would want to be around you

Financial Abuse

- Makes you explain any money that you have spent
- Prevents you from spending money on yourself
- Mocks you for any money that you spend on yourself
- Keeps you short of money
- Makes you ask for necessities
- Undermines or prevents your attempts to improve your education

- Undermines or prevents your attempts to get or keep a job (this could include forcing you to have more children)
- Controls the money
- Refuses to give you money
- Makes all major decisions about money
- Spends money only on things they want
- Restricts the money that you can spend on your children

Sexual Abuse

- Withholds sex to punish you
- Pressures you to have sex
- Forces you to have sex against your will
- Pressures you to have sex after being abused
- Pressures or forces you into unwanted sex acts
- Treats you like a sex object
- Inflicts pain on you during sex
- Lies about their use of contraception to create an unwanted/unplanned pregnancy.
- Lies about STIs or STDs and infects you
- Lies about contraception to prevent a much-wanted pregnancy

Anger and Intimidation

- Changing their mood suddenly
- Giving you the silent treatment
- Demonstrating anger
- Shouting or yelling
- Pounding fist on table
- Hitting the wall
- Throwing or kicking something
- Stomping out of the room/house

Threats and Psychological Abuse

Threatens to:

- Turn people against you
- Leave the relationship
- See someone else
- Take children away from you
- Leave you short of money
- Come after you if you leave
- Have you committed to an institution
- Hurt or kill you and/or the children
- Hurt or kill himself/herself
- Blames you for his/her problem
- Drives your car in a frightening way
- Have someone else kill you, your family, your friends etc.

Physical Abuse

- Throws something at you
- Pushes, grabs, or shoves you
- Pulls your hair
- Twists your arm
- Pins you to the wall, floor, bed
- Chokes you
- Kicks, hits, or punches you
- Hits, or tries to hit you with something
- Threatens you with a knife, gun, or other weapon
- Tries to run you down with the car
- Physically and/or sexually abuses the children
- Kills pets
- Deprives you of sleep

Emotional Abuse

- Says things to spite or insult you in front of others
- Puts down your physical appearance
- Makes out that you are stupid
- Criticizes your care of your children/home
- Calls you names and swears at you
- Calls you crazy/irrational
- Accuses you of having an affair
- Ridicules family or friends
- Does not show concern for children's needs or concerns
- Gets angry when children cry or make demands
- Goes through personal things i.e.: purse, drawers, pockets
- Frightens children's friends so they stop coming over
- Demands obedience like you are a servant
- Makes decisions without your input
- Treats you like you are inferior
- Tells you can't cope without them
- Tells you no one else would want you
- Treats you like a child

Legal Abuse

Threatens that if you separate, they will:

- Tie you up in court for years
- Get full custody of the children
- Get time alone with the children
- Leave you with nothing
- Report you to the Ministry of Child and Family Development and Child Protective Services
- Show the courts how crazy you are and get you locked up
- Report you to the police and have you charged with crimes that you didn't commit
- Force you to sign documents that you don't agree to
- Leave you in debt
- Hire an expensive lawyer who will beat you in court
- Get the legal right to move away (to another province or country) with the children



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Where to go next

If you think that your relationship might be abusive, but you're not sure check out the *"What is Domestic Violence"* information. Also speak to a family counsellor or other trusted professional.

If you think that your relationship might be abusive but sometimes things are ok. Or, if you find that you're covering up for the person who's abusing you, and trying rescue them, check out the *"Cycle of Domestic Violence"* information. Also speak to a family counsellor or other trusted professional.

If you feel that you need to get out quickly because your situation is unsafe check out the *"Safety Plan"*, *"Red Flags"* and the *"Leaving Safely"* information. Also speak to a family counsellor, a trusted professional and if possible, a lawyer. If you need immediate protection, contact the RCMP.