

Domestic violence, or domestic abuse,

Domestic violence, or domestic abuse is a pattern of abusive behaviour by one or both people in a relationship. It can be any form of close relationship, such as marriage, family, friends or cohabitants. There are many different forms the abuse can take, including physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, emotional, threatening, intimidating or involve deprivation.

The government defines domestic violence as 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners, or family members, regardless of gender of sexuality'.

The abuse may stem from the abuser's need to be in control, asserting excessive and unnecessary authority in the relationship.

The most common victims of domestic violence are women and children, and the most common abusers are men.

Types of domestic violence

- Domestic violence can take many forms, from physical to emotional:
- Criticism/verbal abuse – shouting, name calling, verbal threats, criticising, mocking
- Pressure – removing communication devices, taking the children without informing, lying to others, making threats
- Harassment – constant checking where the victim is and who they are with, following/stalking
- Threats – violent threats, intimidating, brandishing a weapon, carrying out violence on inanimate objects
- Physical – punching, kicking, pushing, burning, slapping etc
- Sexual – using force, rape, degrading marks about sexuality
- Breaking trust – lying, withholding information, breaking promises, lying to others

When is the right time to seek help?

Domestic violence is a very difficult situation to escape from. The victim may try and explain away the problem instead of dealing with it, making excuses for the abuser. The victim may blame themselves or feel they deserve the abuse. Practically, the victim may not have enough money or anywhere to go to get out of the situation. It can also be particularly difficult if there are children involved. Refuges are available for women and their children who are being abused, providing safe accommodation at a confidential address where men are not permitted.

There are several questions to ask which may help ascertain if a relationship has turned into domestic abuse, such as:

- Does the person suspected of abuse over criticise, or get angry very quickly
- Does the person exert excessive control, e.g. over clothes, money, other relationships
- Do you feel the need to be over cautious or constantly on eggshells around the person so as not to upset them?
- Does the person suffer from mood swings or extreme emotions?
- Do you have to make changes to your life to keep your partner happy?
- There are changes in behaviour that may suggest a person could potentially become abusive:
 - They have been in an abusive relationship before
 - They insult the victim's friends/family
 - They lose their temper of small issues
 - They make all the decisions, whilst the victim's needs are ignored

Discovered early enough, it may be possible to salvage the relationship and prevent the situation spiralling out of control, through counselling and mediation.

The first practical step to take to get out of an abusive relationship is to tell someone. In an emergency, call 999. Domestic violence is not a private matter – it is not an issue that should be kept between the two people in the relationship. It is important that if friends or family suspect domestic violence, they should try and seek advice as how best to help them.

Causes

There are many theories as to what causes domestic violence. They include:

A continuation of a generation cycle of abuse

Being brought up in an environment where violence is acceptable

Drug or alcohol abuse – which can lead to out of control behaviour

Circumstances – poor health, job loss

Psychological – abusers are more likely to have particular personality traits such as sudden bursts of anger, poor self-esteem, poor impulse control

Mental illness – some psychiatric disorders are associated with domestic violence including borderline personality disorder, bipolar and schizophrenia.

Treatment

Domestic violence is very difficult to recover from. The victim may have issues learning to trust again, be dealing with post-traumatic stress, flashbacks, nightmares, or feel they are constantly living in fear. It is very common that the victim may experience long-term stress or anxiety issues. Depending on the nature and severity of the abuse, the victim may also need to recover from physical injuries.

Counselling is an important tool for the victim to help overcome the trauma, recover and rebuild their life. It provides a safe environment where the victim

can work through their issues, helping to get their life back on track and be able to move on.

Counselling can also be helpful for abusers. If someone is able to recognise that their behaviour is becoming unacceptable, counselling can help them to find where the emotion is coming from, and help change their behaviour.

Statistics

- Domestic violence accounts for between 16-25% of all recorded violent crime
- One incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute
- 45% of women and 26% of men have experienced at least one incident of domestic violence in their lifetime.
- There are on average 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from their partners in one year
- on average, 2 women a week are killed by a male partner or former partner
- just under a quarter of women have experienced stalking
- 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence children who live with domestic violence are at increased risk of behavioural problems or mental health difficulties in adult life 75% of domestic violence cases result in physical injury or mental health consequences to women the total cost of domestic violence to services (criminal justice, health, social services, housing and civil legal) amounts to £3.1 billion per year
- it is estimated around only two thirds of domestic violence cases in the UK are actually reported

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