

Tip Sheet

Are you experiencing violence or abuse in your relationship?

Men also experience family and domestic violence.

Violence and abuse can take many forms but the most common include physical violence and threats, emotional abuse, social and financial control, and persistent demeaning comments.

Violence and abuse in intimate relationships includes:

- **Physical assault** – slapping, hitting, scratching
- **Emotional and psychological abuse** – belittling remarks, yelling, screaming, put-downs, being ignored, constant criticism
- **Limited decision making** – having all decisions relating to finances, purchases, lifestyle and living arrangements made for you
- **Social isolation** – being unreasonably restricted from your family or friends
- **Dominating behaviour** – behaviour designed to deliberately frighten, harm or control you (i.e. threatening to harm you, themselves or someone else).

No one person's experience is typical. Violence and abuse in intimate relationships have many different combinations of controlling behaviour and can also change over time.

Questions to ask yourself

- Do you feel safe in your current relationship?
- Are you insulted, demeaned or criticised in public by your partner?
- Is living with your partner like 'walking on eggshells'?

- Does your partner prevent you from doing things that are important to you? E.g. seeing family or friends
- Does your partner threaten you?
- Do you feel like you are in an abusive relationship?
- Are your partner's needs the only ones allowed to be met in the relationship?

Impact of violence and abuse

Experiencing violence and abuse, even over a short time, can lead to long-standing changes in a person, including:

- Feelings of helplessness, depression, worthlessness, powerlessness and isolation
- Feelings of shame, guilt and despair
- Chronic health problems (including psychological problems), physical injury and shortened lifespan
- Difficulty in functioning in other parts of your life – in particular at work, but also among your social group.

Will I be believed?

There is now far greater understanding of the frequency of men as victims of violence and abuse in their intimate relationships. It is important to remember:

- Men, like everyone, are entitled to the full protection of the law
- If you are at risk of injury, it is better to report it to the police than do nothing or act out physically
- You are entitled to be treated with respect. If you are not satisfied appropriate action is being taken to protect you, report it again until your situation is understood and your safety is being addressed.

What can I do?

Report it

Let someone else know what is going on. Talk with a person in a position of authority (police, lawyer, doctor) who will know your rights and responsibilities or who can put you in contact with a professional for expert advice. When contacting police, in some circumstances they will be required to take action if your safety is at risk.

Get support

It is important that you find someone you can confide in about your situation. Talking about what is happening is very important and can undo some of the feelings of isolation and helplessness that are common in men who are the victims of violence and abuse. This person can have specialist skills such as counselling, but that is not essential; it needs to be someone who will listen to you carefully and be available as you move through the process of working out how to manage the situation.

Call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 for support and to discuss your options.

Develop a safety plan

Develop a safety plan if you believe your safety, or the safety of others, could be at risk. The safety plan is a predetermined course of action to use when you decide there is an imminent risk of violence or psychological harm (children can be harmed psychologically when witnessing repeated abuse).

The safety plan is designed to create distance and remove the likelihood of an incident happening, and may include things such as:

- Under what circumstances will you leave the family home? Where will you go that is safe? What is your long-term plan?
- Will you take the children with you? Do you have the right to take the children with you?
- Who needs to know that you have activated your safety plan?

Keep a journal of incidents

This could be useful if you need legal protection or police intervention.

Will your partner change?

A change in your partner's behaviour is unlikely to occur without them obtaining professional assistance. Your partner may feel remorse after an abusive incident, but the abuse is unlikely to stop unless they seek help or you remove yourself from the situation.

The decision to stay or leave a relationship is yours alone. However, talk through your decision with trusted others beforehand. Understand what you lose or gain from staying in a relationship, or from leaving.

MensLine Australia is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with professional counsellors providing information and support for all relationship issues. Call us on **1300 78 99 78** or visit mensline.org.au.