

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is an escalating pattern of coercive behavior in which one person gains and maintains control over another person in an intimate relationship. This includes dating, romantic, and sexual relationships as well as family relationships between closely related adult relatives.

Abusive behavior does not have to be physical or sexual to be considered domestic violence. It also includes any kind of behavior from a partner or close relative that undermines your ability to live without fear or being punished in some way. Examples include but are not limited to:

- **Emotional** – ‘mind games,’ gas lighting, manipulation, guilt-tripping, blackmail
- **Verbal** – name-calling, threats, insults
- **Financial/resource-oriented** – controlling, limiting, or denying you access to money, employment, shelter, food, healthcare, or other resources
- **Technological** – controlling, limiting, or denying you access to a device, tracking your movements, demanding your passwords, constantly texting or calling you
- **Spiritual** – attacking or insulting your spiritual beliefs or lack thereof; using religion or spirituality to make you feel bad, guilty, or punished
- **Privilege-based** – using your culture, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, cognitive processing style, immigration status, or other identity or quality against you
- **Physical** – kicking, grabbing, punching, shoving, throwing things at you
- **Sexual** – coercing you into sexual acts by force, guilt-tripping, manipulation, blackmail, asking over and over until you ‘give in’

Domestic violence (DV) is common. Current research shows that in the US, 1 in 3 women, 1 in 4 men, 1 in 3 people under 18 years old of any gender, and over half of people who are LGBTQ experience some form of DV at least once in their lifetimes.

You should know that:

- Your partner or relative’s abusive behavior is a choice *they* made.
- The abuse is not, and never was, your fault.
- You do not, and never did, deserve to be abused.
- You are neither weak nor stupid for having experienced abuse, regardless of your age, gender, and other identity.
- Understanding why someone may be abusive does not mean you have to forgive them or put up with any more of their abusive behavior.
- It’s okay to be angry. It’s also okay *not* to be angry. You have the right to your emotions around your own experiences, regardless of what other people say.
- You are not “crazy.”
- You are not alone.

