



You're not alone

Domestic violence guidebook

Resources *for* Living®



Almost 20 people experience physical abuse by an intimate partner each minute.¹ But domestic violence is so much more than physical abuse. This guidebook offers information so you can recognize the signs of domestic violence and get help.

You are not alone.

¹[National statistics](#), National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Accessed September 2019.

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Abusive relationships — recognize the signs

Partners who abuse tend to have certain traits. Often, there are signs before abuse begins. Seeing abuse patterns before they happen can help victims get out of the relationship early.

Recognize the warning signs

Early on, an abusive partner often:

- Tries to keep the victim from friends and family
- Gets easily offended
- Is quick to blame others
- Acts controlling
- Wants to be with the victim all the time
- Has unrealistic expectations
- Sweeps the victim off his or her feet with a quick, whirlwind romance

And abusive actions are often disguised as ways to “love” or “protect” the victim. How do you know your relationship is abusive? The biggest red flag is if you feel afraid of your partner in any way. Do you feel like you have to walk on egg shells? Are you always trying to keep your partner calm and happy?

And here are some other signs¹:

Your experience:	Your partner's actions:
Do you feel afraid of your partner?	Does your partner humiliate or yell at you?
Do you avoid certain topics because you don't want to upset your partner?	Does your partner criticize you or put you down?
Do you feel like you can't do anything right in your relationship?	Would you be embarrassed for your friends or family to see the way your partner treats you?
Do you believe you deserve to be hurt or treated poorly?	Does your partner blame you for any abusive behavior or outbursts?
Do you feel like you have to shut down your feelings to cope?	Does your partner treat you like an object or like property?
Do you feel like maybe you're the one who is messed up?	Does your partner ignore or belittle your opinions or the things you accomplish?

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is about more than hitting or punching. It includes behavior that puts a person in danger. Even if it seems minor or happens one or two times, these actions are part of physical abuse:

- Hitting
- Damaging property
- Kicking
- Withholding resources
- Pinching

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can be just as, if not more, hurtful and damaging as physical abuse.¹ It chips away at a person's sense of self. And while you may not see visible cuts, the scars it leaves are very real. Here are some examples:

- Constant criticism
- Stalking
- Name-calling
- Making and breaking promises
- Isolating a person
- Using children to control a person
- Threats to harm themselves or others
- Blackmail
- Silent treatment
- Keeping weapons around

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a kind of physical and emotional abuse. Partners who abuse physically and sexually tend to be more violent.¹ Sexual abuse can include:

- Forced sex acts
- Manipulating a person into sex acts
- Accusations of cheating
- Threats to “out” a gay or transgendered partner

Economic abuse

One way for a person to control another is through money. This can make it very hard for a victim to leave. Here are some examples:

- Controlling household money
- Forbidding or sabotaging school or employment
- Running up bills the victim has to pay
- Threats of deportation

¹[Domestic Violence and Abuse](#). HelpGuide.Org. Accessed February 2018.



Why do abusers abuse?

There's no clear answer for why abuse happens. Many abusers have emotional issues. These may come from their own abusive pasts or other factors. But that's not an excuse. Many people go through abuse and don't go on to hurt others. Abuse is a choice someone makes. The person doesn't "lose control." He or she abuses in order to control another person.

This attempt to control others may be due to a number of factors. These include:

- Having a poor self-image
- Seeing abuse as a child
- Being the victim of abuse as a child
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Having trouble with feelings

Getting out of an abusive relationship

As soon as you see your partner is abusive, end the relationship. Abusers often promise the abuse will stop or improve. Know that these promises are part of the abuse cycle and it will most likely continue or worsen.

Even if you love your partner very much, he or she will not get better alone. The person needs professional help and this work is best done while you are not together. Couples counseling is not recommended.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone. It doesn't discriminate by age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, education, culture or financial status.





Talk to others about your plans to leave

If you are planning to leave the abuser, talk with someone who can help you assess the safety of your plan. Consider who can help you leave. The time of leaving can be the most dangerous time of your relationship.

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** for help. Tell people around you — family, friends, employers, neighbors — when you are going to leave. Ask them to be alert for the presence of the abuser. Ask if they would be willing to call for help if you need it.

Feeling worried about a loved one?

Maybe you've noticed your friend's relationship doesn't seem healthy. Is it abuse? What can you do? People in abusive relationships might:

- Be afraid or anxious to please their partners
- Check in often with their partner about where they are and what they're doing
- Make very few decisions for themselves
- Withdraw from others
- Show major personality changes

If you're worried, you may not know what to do. You might feel like you're being nosy. But by speaking up, you let the person know you care. Here are some tips¹:

- Ask if something is wrong
- Offer help
- Listen without judgment
- Support the person's decisions
- Show concern
- Avoid blaming or giving advice

If you want to learn more, you can visit the **Violence prevention section** on the Center for Disease Control website.

There is hope for survivors of abusive relationships. By seeing the warning signs, recognizing abuse and getting support, help can be found.



¹[Domestic Violence and Abuse](#). HelpGuide.Org. Accessed February 2018.



The cycle of violent abuse

A lot of times we think of domestic violence as a situation that comes out of nowhere. We imagine the abuser flies into a rage and physically abuses his or her partner. But physical violence doesn't tend to show up out of the blue. Abuse often follows a similar pattern that repeats over time.¹ Let's explore these phases more closely.

Tension-building phase¹

This period might look like peace and calm in the couple's relationship. But stress and tension are building. Stress may come from anywhere — conflict over children, marital issues, misunderstandings, financial problems or other daily life issues. Over time, the abuser gets more upset, feeling ignored, threatened or annoyed. Eventually, the abuser releases the tension by hurting his or her partner.

As tension builds, the victim may try to prevent violence by acting meek and passive. He or she may live in fear, wondering when the violence is coming. On the other hand, victims might unconsciously provoke their abusers into violence as a way of coping. This serves several purposes. It relieves the tension of waiting, provides the victim a sense of control and lessens the intensity of violence because the abuser is less angry. It also means the victim can return to the honeymoon phase more quickly.

Acting out phase¹

When the tension finally reaches a peak, the abuser lashes out at his or her victim. This breaks the tension that's been building. Abuse looks different for each couple. It may include hitting, kicking, sexual abuse or other harmful actions.

Before the violence, abusers might be verbally and emotionally abusive. They may justify the abuse by telling themselves the victim "had it coming."

Honeymoon phase¹

The acting out phase is sometimes followed by a honeymoon phase. The abuser may apologize or try to "make up" for the abuse with gifts or affection. Many abusers promise to change during this phase. The abuser might use self-harm or suicide threats to try to manipulate the victim. These actions are often an effort to keep the victim from leaving or win the victim back.

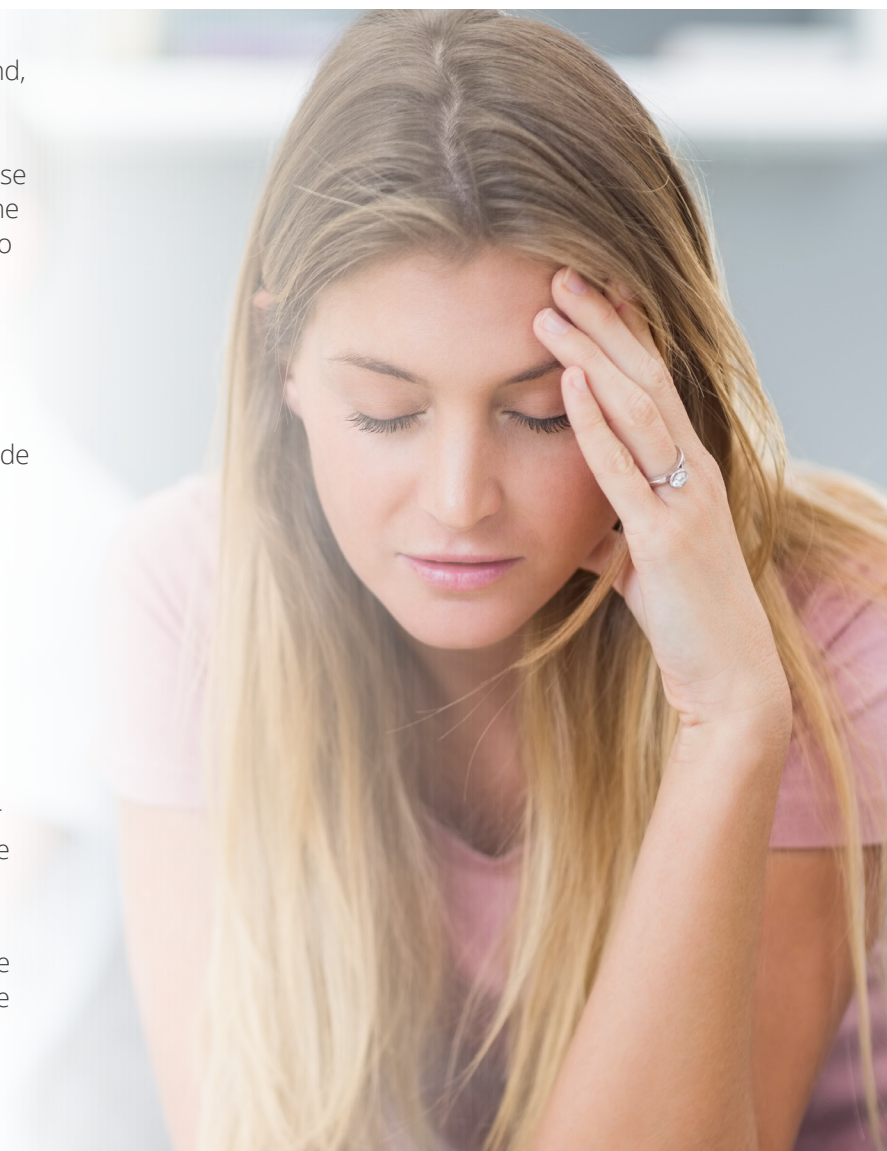
Abusers can be very convincing. And survivors may love the abuser and want the relationship to improve. So the honeymoon phase can convince them to stay with the abuser. It's easy to see how the acting-out phase is abuse. But this phase keeps the cycle going because victims see their partners aren't all bad.

When the honeymoon phase ends, tension begins to build again. And the abuser breaks his or her promises. But some abusive relationships don't have a honeymoon phase. For some, the acting out phase is immediately followed by the tension-building phase.

The cycle of violence¹

For many relationships, the cycle continues to repeat until the relationship ends. And it's common for the abuse to become more violent as time goes on.

But everyone is different. For some, the cycle repeats very quickly. For others, it can take weeks, months or more than a year. No matter how fast or slow the cycle may be, it's important for victims to seek help.



¹[The cycle of domestic violence](#). Domestic Violence Roundtable. Accessed September 2019.



Leaving your abuser

“Why don’t they just leave?” This is a common question when it comes to domestic violence.

But this question is flawed. Asking why the victim stays in the relationship puts the responsibility on the wrong person.

Shouldn’t we ask “Why do abusers abuse?”

Abused partners can and do leave. Here is some information that might help you understand what it means to leave and how that process can be made safer.

Leaving can be hard

Domestic violence is a complex issue. There are many reasons why leaving is so hard. Often, victims don’t leave because of:

- **Fear of more violence:** Trying to leave can lead to more attacks and more danger. Abusers may threaten to hurt themselves, pets or children. The time victims leave tends to be the most dangerous period in their relationships.¹
- **Financial dependence:** Many abusers gain power by controlling all the money in the relationship. This often leaves victims with no means of providing for themselves and their children. Survivors often state lack of money as a top reason for staying in an abusive relationship.²
- **Children:** An abuser may threaten to take or harm the victim’s children.
- **Low sense of self-worth:** Repeated abuse can chip away at a person’s self-worth. This can make it hard to even think about leaving.
- **False hope:** Abusers often show remorse for abuse and promise it will stop. And while victims want the abuse to end, they may not want the relationship to end. The victim cares about the abuser and wants to believe he or she will change.

- **Religious or cultural beliefs:** Some religions and cultures don’t support divorce or may endorse outdated or unrealistic gender roles. These beliefs may lead a victim to stay and try to keep the family together no matter what happens.
- **Isolation:** An abuser might keep the victim from talking to or seeing friends and family. After losing these supports, the victim may feel even more alone. And this can make leaving harder.
- **Self-blame:** Many victims are made to feel like the abuse is their fault. Abusers might convince them that ending the abuse is up to them. But abuse is never the victim’s fault. No one deserves to be abused.

Preparing to leave

It’s not easy to end an abusive relationship. And since it can be a risky time, it helps to have a plan in place. Here are some steps that can help:

- Open a bank account in your name only. Add money to it as you are able.
- Get a new cell phone. Abusers can track your location, text messages, calls and more on your current phone.
- Have a list of friends, hotlines and shelters that might help.
- Know where you can go to be safe.
- Talk to an expert. You can call a shelter or the National Domestic Violence Hotline **(1-800-799-7233)**.
- Practice ways to get out of your home and keep a bag packed. You may want to leave the bag with a trusted friend.
- Get rid of any weapons in your home. Make sure they’re locked away or put in a safe place.
- Teach children how to dial 911 and make up a code word if you need them to call.
- Tell friends and loved ones about your situation.



¹[50 Obstacles to Leaving](#). The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Accessed February 2018.

²Renzulli, Kerri Anne. [Money Fears Keep Women in Abusive Relationships](#). Here’s How to Change That. Money. Accessed February 2018.



Keep these items together in a place that's easy to access. If you need to leave quickly, you'll be ready.

- _____ Personal identification (driver's license, passport, military ID card, birth certificate, INS green card, VISA, welfare identification, etc.)
- _____ Children's identification (birth certificates, military ID cards, INS green cards, etc.)
- _____ Social Security cards for you and your children
- _____ Medical insurance card
- _____ Wedding certificate
- _____ Divorce papers
- _____ Protective order
- _____ Insurance papers (for health, life, auto, etc.)
- _____ Car registration
- _____ School records
- _____ Bankbooks and checkbook
- _____ Money
- _____ ATM or debit card
- _____ Credit cards
- _____ Keys to car, house, office
- _____ Medications you and your children need
- _____ Medical records for all family members, including children's immunization records
- _____ Lease or rental agreements
- _____ Mortgage payment book and deed to house
- _____ Address book
- _____ Photos of you, your children, your abuser
- _____ Jewelry
- _____ Children's favorite toy or blanket
- _____ Personal care items and diapers, if needed
- _____ Small items you can sell

Finding a shelter

Domestic violence shelters can provide victims with a safe place to go and get help. Many shelters provide both short- and long-term housing options. This gives victims time to recover and rebuild their lives. And some shelters offer legal services, childcare, employment help and counseling.

Learn about your local shelters. Find out where shelters are and what they offer before you leave. Find out:

- Will you feel safe there?
- What services do they offer? Do they help with housing?
- Does someone there speak your language? If not, can they still help you?
- Can you get emergency transportation?

Leaving

When it comes to leaving an abusive relationship, safety needs to come first. Here are some things to think about:

- Take out a restraining order. Be sure to include your workplace.
- Tell friends and neighbors to call the police if they see your abuser in the area.
- At work, inform your supervisor, Human Resources and security so they can be alert.
- Change your daily routine. You may want to leave for work earlier or change office or store locations.
- Attend a support program through a local shelter.

Resources

Computer use is never completely private. Consider using a computer at work or the library where abusers can't track your activity. If you're worried someone may be looking at your search history, you may want to call a hotline instead. Here are some resources:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline **1-800-799-7233**
- Domestic abuse hotline for men and women **1-888-7HELPLINE**
- **National Coalition Against Domestic Violence**
- **No More**
- **Love Is Respect**
- **Battered Men**

Leaving an abusive situation is hard. But you can do it. Just be sure to put your safety first.



Strategies for staying safe at home

Domestic abuse puts victims, children and pets in danger. Putting together a safety plan can help keep you and your loved ones safe. Here are some tips¹:

If you're living with your partner

- Identify your partner's abuse patterns (triggers, levels of force, etc.) to help you measure your risk.
- Find safe areas in your house where there are no weapons and ways to escape. Try to move to these areas during fights.
- Make yourself a small target during violence. Go into a corner and curl into a ball with your face protected and your head covered by your hands.
- Try to keep a phone nearby. Know the number to your local shelter.
- Tell trusted friends and neighbors about your situation. Come up with codes to use if you need help.
- When researching shelters and services, use computers at your library or workplace. Search histories, emails and texts can be tracked by your partner. So avoid using home computers or cell phones when possible.
- Keep weapons locked away and hard to access.
- Avoid wearing long necklaces or scarves as they can be used to strangle you.
- Come up with reasons you may need to leave the house at different times. This will help when it comes time to leave.
- Teach children how to call for help. Tell them to avoid getting involved in fights and plan codes and signals letting them know to seek help or leave the home.
- Make a habit of backing your car into the driveway, keeping doors unlocked and the gas tank full. This can help you make a quick escape.

Preparing to leave

- Take pictures of injuries or damage as a result of abuse. Keep these in a safe place.
- Keep a record of violent outbursts. Include dates, events and threats. Keep this in a safe place.
- Know where you can go and be safe.
- Tell others what is happening to you.
- If you're hurt, go the doctor and report what happened.

- Set money aside. You may want to ask a trusted friend or family member to keep money safe for you.
- Plan with your children and find safe places for them to go for help.
- Get a new cell phone and discard your old one. Your abuser may try to use the old one to track your location or actions.
- Contact your local shelter to learn about laws and resources for your situation.
- Ask friends to care for pets or go to the [Animal Welfare Institute website](#) to search for safe havens.



¹Types of Safety Planning. The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Accessed February 2018.



When you leave

- Make a plan for how and where you can escape.
- Request a police escort when you leave.
- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline **(1-800-799-SAFE)** or go to **Women's Law online** to find out about restraining orders and child custody.
- If you're not a US Citizen, you may qualify for self-petition legal status under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Learn more about your rights at **Casa de Esperanza website**. Or reach out to **Women's Law online**. They can connect you with a specialized immigration attorney.

If you share custody of children

- Teach children how and when to call 911.
- Talk about where they should go if things become unsafe.
- If it's safe to do so, send a cell phone with children so they can call for help if needed.
- Help children come up with a list of people they can talk to about their feelings.
- Meet in safe, crowded places with lots of cameras for custody exchanges. Avoid your home or your partner's home for these drop-offs and pick-ups.
- Bring a trusted person with you during custody exchanges.

Make sure you have the necessary identification, financial information and means, legal papers and other important items. For a list of things to take, see the checklist on page 9.

After you leave

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Make sure your phone has caller ID. Ask the phone company to block your number so that no one will have your new number.
- Create a new email address and be sure your partner doesn't know about it.
- Change your work hours, if possible.
- Take different routes to work, school or other places you visit.
- Change the stores you frequent.
- Let school authorities know about the situation.
- Keep a copy of your restraining order with you at all times.
- Let friends, neighbors and others know to be on the alert for your abuser's presence. You may want to give them a picture of the abuser.
- Get a post office box for mail.
- Alert your workplace about the situation.
- Install motion-active lighting and security systems at your new home.
- Replace wooden doors with ones made of steel or metal.
- Make sure you have working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
- Post only the things you want the public to know online. This information could be used against you.





Strategies for staying safe at work

You may think that domestic violence only occurs at home. But it also affects victims at work. In fact, 70% of abuse victims are harassed while at work.¹ Abusers may call the workplace over and over or show up at work to harass the victim.

If you are a victim of an abusive relationship, it may be hard to tell others about what's going on. But your safety is more important than your privacy.

Staying safe

Here are some things you can do:

- **Talk to your employer.** Let your manager or human resources know what's happening.
- **Get a protection order.** Include your workplace in the order and give them a copy of it.
- **Talk to security staff.** If your workplace has security, talk to those in charge about what's going on and give them a picture of your partner and a description of his or her car.
- **Keep a record.** Write down issues that occur while you're at work. Include dates and times. Keep voicemails and emails from the abuser.
- **Get an escort.** Have someone walk you to and from your car or bus stop when you come and go at work.

Asking for help

Others can only help you if they know what's going on. Talk to your supervisor or human resources manager. If this sounds too hard, ask a trusted coworker to go with you for these conversations.

Your employer may not know what kind of help you want. Depending on your situation, here are some things you may want to ask for:

- A new work phone number
- Someone to screen your phone calls
- A flex-time schedule
- Flexibility with work arrangements
- A parking spot in a well-lit area
- A work space that's far from visitor access or windows

Keeping people informed

Leaving an abusive relationship can be risky. Let others know about your situation. Ask for help. And arrange to call someone when you're leaving and arriving in different places. You may want to come up with code words or signals to let others know if you need help.



¹[Recognizing domestic violence at work](#). Make It Our Business. Accessed September 2019.



Respecting your partner — Are you abusive?

Relationships are an important part of life. But not all relationships are healthy. When one partner tries to control the other, you may be dealing with domestic abuse.

Anyone can abuse or be abused. Men, women, teens, adults, rich, poor, straight or gay — domestic violence and intimate partner rape are issues that can affect us all. Abusive relationships hurt you, your partner, children, friends and family. Without help, abuse may lead to serious injury or even death.

Why do people abuse?

Schools don't teach us how to have healthy relationships. Instead, we learn from our parents, our friends, movies and other media.

If you grew up in a home with abuse or were exposed to popular culture, you likely received messages that support domestic abuse. These ideas are wrong but they're everywhere. For example:

- Jealousy is a sign of love
- Violence is manly
- Rape can't happen in relationships
- Fighting shows passion
- People sometimes deserve to get hurt

Some people blame anger problems, mental illness or substance use for domestic abuse. But these are separate issues. They can make domestic abuse worse, but they aren't the cause.

No matter what, abuse is a choice. And it's never okay. If you're ready, now is the time to undo those unhealthy lessons of the past. It's time to learn how to love and respect your partner.

The relationship spectrum

Relationships aren't black and white. They fall on a spectrum that may include healthy, unhealthy and abusive actions. But how do you know which is which?

- **Healthy relationships are based on respect and equality.** Both partners are safe to be themselves, say what they think and have personal privacy.
 - **Unhealthy relationships lack equality and respect.** There's often low trust, poor communication and attempts to control the other person. This can lead to jealousy and tension.
 - **Abusive relationships are based on a pattern of hurtful behavior.** One partner mistreats the other in an effort to feel in control. Abuse can include threats, hurtful words, physical assaults, control over money, forced sexual contact or stalking. The other person often feels scared to say or do anything that may upset the abuser.
- If your relationship includes behaviors that are unhealthy or abusive, you should seek help. Are you still not sure where you fall? Take a closer look at your actions to learn more.



¹[The relationship spectrum](#). Love Is Respect. Accessed September 2019.



Are your actions abusive?

Domestic abuse can look different in every relationship. And it can be hard to see your actions as hurtful when you're the one doing them. But being honest about your choices is an important first step in improving your relationship.

Find out if you're hurting your partner by looking at your actions. Do you¹:

- Get angry or jealous when your partner talks about other people (friends, family, coworkers)?
- Check up on your partner all day long with calls, texts or visits?
- Check your partner's phone, computer, social media accounts, or belongings?
- Think your partner should ask you about who to spend time with, where to work or how to dress?
- Get angry when your partner doesn't act the way you want?
- Blame your partner for your anger, drinking, drug use or other problems?
- Express your anger by yelling, name-calling or putting down your partner?
- Let your upset feelings out by threatening to hurt your partner, yourself or someone else?
- Release your anger by hitting, pushing, throwing things or damaging property?
- Try to control all the money in your relationship or put your partner on an allowance?
- Expect your partner to be physically intimate with you when you want it?
- Feel like your emotions (happy, angry, etc.) depend on your partner's actions?

And how does your partner respond to you? Does he or she²:

- Seem scared or nervous around you?
- Cringe or move away when you're upset?
- Cry because of a decision you made about what he or she should or should not do?
- Avoid disagreeing with you?
- Limit time with friends or family to keep you happy?

If any of these seem familiar, you may be harming your partner and your relationship.

Getting help

It might seem easier to blame your partner for your behavior. But only you can control your actions. At the end of the day, you need to take ownership for your choices.

Help is available for people who abuse. Look for a Batterer's Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP) in your area. Believe it or not, therapy for anger management, substance misuse or mental health issues won't help you deal with abusive patterns.² Neither will couples counseling. Abuse isn't a couple's problem. The abusive person needs to change for the relationship to have a chance to heal.

If you want to address your behavior, consider calling The National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**. Or **chat online**. They will¹:

- Treat you with respect
- Listen to your concerns
- Brainstorm solutions with you
- Offer to connect you with a local BIPP



¹[Help for abusive partners](#). The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Accessed September 2019.



Domestic violence resources

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

Find information and support for your relationship. You can reach highly-trained support people 24/7/365. They can talk to you about your relationship and help you find resources and information.

Call: **1-800-799-7233/1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**

Online support and chat: thehotline.org

Love is Respect

Learn about healthy dating, relationships and teen dating violence. Find information or talk to a trained advocate.

Call: **1-866-331-9474/1-866-331-8453 (TTY)**

Text **loveis** to **1-866-331-9474**

Online support and chat: loveisrespect.org

Womens Law

This site provides legal information and resources for survivors of domestic violence. You can get referrals, restraining order information and more for each state.

Womenslaw.org

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)

The NCADV has been around since 1978 and works to raise awareness about domestic violence.

Ncadv.org

LGBT National Help Center

People who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ+) can find free and confidential support and local resources.

Glbthotline.org

Safe Havens Mapping Project for Pets

Search for a domestic violence shelter that allows you to bring pets. If you're not able to find a listing in your area, call a local animal shelter to ask about temporary help for pets in domestic violence situations.

Awionline.org/safe-havens

Menweb

Male victims can find information and resources to help them recover from domestic abuse.

Batteredmen.com

Crisis Text Line

Find free, confidential support 24/7 with trained crisis counselors.

Text **HOME** to **741741**





Strong Hearts Native Helpline

Strong Hearts Native Helpline is a safe domestic, dating, and sexual violence helpline for American Indians and Alaska Natives, offering culturally- appropriate support and advocacy daily from 7:00 a.m. — 10:00 p.m. CST. Calls are anonymous and confidential. All advocates identify as Native.

Call **844-762-8483**

strongheartshelpline.org

If you're experiencing domestic abuse, you're not alone. Help is available.

1-800-825-3555 / rfl.com

Username: Walmart

Password: Associate

Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence

Workplaces Respond provides online resources, training, and technical assistance to employers, survivors, co-workers, and advocates to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence, and stalking impacting the workplace.

workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/



The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC.

All EAP calls are confidential, except as required by law. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional and is not meant to replace the advice of a professional. Please note that there may be many other explanations for any or all of the above delineated behaviors. This information is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all signs concerning warning sign of depression, anxiety or suicide and should not be used as a stand-alone instrument. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs. This material is for informational purposes only. It contains only a partial, general description of programs and services and does not constitute a contract. Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date; however, it is subject to change.

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