

# Understanding Domestic Abuse and How to Break Free

## Abuse is never acceptable

Domestic abuse occurs when one person in an intimate relationship tries to dominate and/or control the other person. Domestic abuse can happen among heterosexual couples and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds and economic levels. Although it is more common for women to be victimized, men are also abused too. Domestic abuse affects everyone in the family. Children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to develop behavioural problems and may grow up to think that violence in an intimate relationship is acceptable.

Abuse can be verbal, emotional, sexual or physical. Domestic abuse often escalates from verbal and emotional abuse to violence. While physical injury is dangerous and scary, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also very serious. Emotionally abusive relationships can destroy one's feelings of self-worth and self-confidence and possibly lead to anxiety and depression. Physical health problems may also develop from living with severe stress and anxiety.

## You are not alone

Most of the time, abuse does not occur continuously. The abuser's actions in between episodes of abuse may make it difficult to seek help. The abuser may make you believe that things will be different or that you are the only person who can help him/her. The first step in breaking free is recognizing that your situation is abusive and getting the help that you need.

### Signs that you are in an abusive relationship

#### Your Inner Thoughts and Feelings

##### Do you:

- feel afraid of your partner much of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
- feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?
- believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
- wonder if you are the one who is crazy?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?
- feel like you are walking on egg shells?
- hide injuries?

#### Your Partner's Belittling Behaviour

##### Does your partner:

- humiliate or yell at you?
- criticize you and put you down?
- treat you so badly that you are embarrassed for your friends or family to see?
- ignore your feelings, or put down your opinions, accomplishments, values or beliefs?
- blame you for their own abusive behaviour?
- see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?

#### Your Partner's Violent Behaviour or Threats

##### Does your partner:

- have a bad and unpredictable temper?
- hurt you or threaten to hurt or kill you?
- threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- threaten to commit suicide if you leave?
- force you to have sex?
- destroy your belongings?

#### Your Partner's Controlling Behaviour

##### Does your partner:

- act excessively jealous and possessive?
- control where you go or what you do?
- keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- limit your access to money, the phone or the car?
- constantly check up on you?
- have rigid ideas of the roles of men and women?
- minimize the seriousness of the abuse?

**Abuse is never acceptable. You deserve to feel valued, respected and safe.**

**Violence and abusive behaviour is a deliberate choice made by an abuser to control a victim. Abusers may use the following to exert their power:**

**Dominance:** abusers need to feel in charge of the relationship and expect compliance.

**Humiliation:** abusers may degrade or belittle you causing you to feel worthless, powerless and alone. An abuser may also make you feel that you are crazy or unstable.

**Isolation:** abusers will increase dependence by cutting you off from the outside world and limiting or cutting off your contact with others.

**Threats:** abusers commonly use threats to scare you and to keep you from leaving.

**Intimidation:** abusers may use threatening looks or gestures or smash things to show that they are capable of violently acting out.

**Denial and Blame:** abusers are good at making excuses and blaming others for their abusive behaviour.

**Understanding the cycle of violence can help to break it.**

The cycle of violence is made up of four phases:

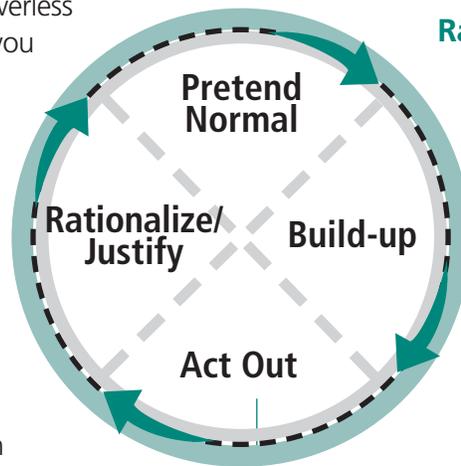
**Build-Up:**

- Some stress (ex: job, money or bills) begins this part of the cycle. The stress causes the abuser to feel powerless. The abuser chooses to act out toward a spouse or partner through name calling, insults and accusations.
- As tensions builds, the victim tries to calm the abuser and anticipate his/her every need.
- The tension becomes unbearable... like "walking on eggshells".

**Act Out:**

- The tension that builds up leads to severe verbal abuse, violent physical or sexual attacks.
- It may happen once or again and again.
- Abuse is always intentional and never an accident. The motivation for any type of abuse is to hurt, humiliate or have power and control over an individual.

**CYCLE OF ABUSE**



**Rationalize/Justify:**

- In this phase the abuser uses defense mechanisms such as blaming others or minimizing violence.
- Defence mechanisms are used to turn blame away from the abuser and make him/her feel better. The abuser defines the abuse and interprets how things "really are." The abused partner begins to believe this interpretation.

**Pretend Normal:**

- In this phase both partners may try to make the relationship continue in a normal way by pretending that everything is all right. However, the cycle of abuse will continue, if the problems in the relationship are not addressed.

**Sometimes these behaviours present themselves gradually, over time and sometimes are hard to recognize as abuse. If you recognize yourself or someone you know in this situation, reach out. There is help available.**

**For more information contact:**

**Manitoba Justice**

**Victim Services Branch**

In Winnipeg: 204-945-6851

Toll free: 1-866-484-2846

Toll free province-wide Domestic Abuse Crisis Line

(24 hours): 1-877-977-0007