# What is an Abuse?

Abuse is defined as an act of violence and/or maltreatment towards a person or things to gain benefit. There have been many notable cases of domestic abuses and local household violence such as physical violence, sexual assaults, psychological violence and even economical abuse.

Physical Abuse  
When physical force is used against you in a way that injures or endangers you, this is known as physical abuse. Whether it occurs within or outside of a family, physical violence or beating is a felony.

Warning Signs of Physical Abuse

* Bruises, burn, abrasions, laceration, or swelling caused by other than accidental means
* Belt buckle marks, hand prints, bite marks, and pinches
* Child states injury was caused by abuse
* Child excessively passive, compliant or fearful

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when you are compelled to engage in undesired, dangerous, or demeaning sexual activities. Forced sex, even from a spouse or intimate partner with whom you have consensual sex, is a kind of domestic violence.

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse

* Pain, bleeding, redness, or swelling in anal or genital area
* Age-inappropriate sexual play with toys, self, or others
* Age-inappropriate knowledge of sex

# Psychological Abuse

# Psychological abuse or Emotional Abuse, such as yelling, name-calling, accusing, and shaming, is an example of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse can also take the shape of isolation, intimidation, or domineering conduct.

Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse

* Turning the tables. They say you cause their rage and control issues by being such a pain.
* Shutting down communication. They’ll ignore your attempts at conversation in person, by text, or by phone.
* Accusing you of abuse. They say you’re the one who has anger and control issues and they’re the helpless victim.
* Public embarrassment. They pick fights, expose your secrets, or make fun of your shortcomings in public.
* Name-calling. They’ll blatantly call you “stupid,” “a loser,” or words too awful to repeat here.
* Abusers who utilize emotional or psychological abuse may threaten physical harm or other consequences if you do not comply with their demands.

Economic Abuse

Economic abuse is described as behavior that takes away a person's economic or financial independence. It is forceful, dishonest, or unreasonable control of another person's financial independence (or the financial independence of that person's child) without that person's agreement.

Warning Signs:

* Rigidly controlling your finances.
* Withholding money or credit cards.
* Making you account for every penny you spend.
* Withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter).
* Restricting you to an allowance.
* Preventing you from working or choosing your own career.
* Sabotaging your job (making you miss work, calling constantly).
* Stealing from you or taking your money.

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# How do I recognize abuse?

Child abuse cuts across all social classes and ethnicity and can occur in many different ways. There are four major types of child abuse: physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. The first step in helping a neglected or abused child is to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse.

Warning Signs of Physical Abuse

* Bruises, burn, abrasions, laceration, or swelling caused by other than accidental means
* Belt buckle marks, hand prints, bite marks, and pinches
* Child states injury was caused by abuse
* Injury unusual for a specific age group
* A history of previous or recurrent injuries
* Unexplained injuries; conflicting explanations or reasons for the injury
* Child excessively passive, compliant or fearful
* Caretaker attempts to hide injuries

Warning Signs of Neglect

* Child is lacking adequate medical or dental care
* Child is always sleepy and/or hungry
* Child is always dirty or inadequately dressed for weather conditions
* There is evidence of poor supervision
* Conditions in the home are extremely or persistently unsafe or unsanitary

Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse

* Child exhibits extremes in behavior from overly aggressive to overly passive
* Child displays delayed physical, emotional, or intellectual development
* Caretaker constantly criticizes, threatens, belittles or rejects child with no evidence of love or support

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse

* Pain, bleeding, redness, or swelling in anal or genital area
* Age-inappropriate sexual play with toys, self, or others
* Age-inappropriate knowledge of sex

## Signs of an abusive relationship

There are many signs of an abusive relationship, and a fear of your partner is the most telling. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around them—constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive.

Other signs include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and having feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

To determine whether your relationship is abusive, answer the questions below. The more “yes” answers, the more likely it is that you’re in an abusive relationship.

| **Are you 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’re the one who is crazy? * feel emotionally numb or helpless? |
| Your partner’s belittling behavior |
| **Does your partner:**   * humiliate or yell at you? * criticize you and put you down? * treat you so badly that you’re embarrassed for your friends or family to see? * ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments? * blame you for their own abusive behavior? * see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person? |
| Your partner’s violent behavior 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 behavior |
| **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 Internet, phone, or car? * constantly check up on you? |

## Physical and sexual abuse

Physical abuse occurs when physical force is used against you in a way that injures or endangers you. Physical assault or battering is a crime, whether it occurs inside or outside of a family. The police have the power and authority to protect you from a physical attack.

Any situation in which you are forced to participate in unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity is [sexual abuse](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/recovering-from-rape-and-sexual-trauma.htm). Forced sex, even by a spouse or intimate partner with whom you also have consensual sex, is an act of aggression and domestic violence. Furthermore, people whose partners abuse them physically *and* sexually are at a higher risk of being seriously injured or killed.

[[Read: Recovering from Rape and Sexual Trauma]](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/recovering-from-rape-and-sexual-trauma.htm)

#### It is still domestic abuse if…

**The incidents of physical abuse seem minor** when compared to those you have read about, seen on television, or heard other people talk about. There isn’t a “better” or “worse” form of physical abuse; severe injuries can result from being pushed, for example.

**The incidents of physical abuse have only occurred one or two times in the relationship.** Studies indicate that if your partner has injured you once, it is likely that they’ll continue to assault you.

**The physical assaults stopped when you became passive** and gave up your right to express yourself as you desire, to move about freely and see others, or to make decisions. It is not a victory if you have to give up your rights as a person and a partner in exchange for ending the assault!

**Physical violence has not occurred.** Many people are emotionally and verbally assaulted. This can be just as frightening and is often more confusing to try to understand.

## Emotional abuse: It’s a bigger problem than you think

Not all abusive relationships involve physical violence. Just because you’re not battered and bruised doesn’t mean you’re not being abused. Many men and women suffer from emotional abuse, which is no less destructive. Unfortunately, emotional abuse is often minimized or overlooked—even by the person experiencing it.

The aim of emotional abuse is to chip away at your feelings of self-worth and independence—leaving you feeling that there’s no way out of the relationship, or that without your abusive partner, you have nothing.

**Emotional abuse includes *verbal abuse*** such as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior are also forms of emotional abuse.

**Abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse** often throw in threats of physical violence or other repercussions if you don’t do as they want.

**The scars of emotional abuse are very real** and they run deep. You may think that physical abuse is far worse than emotional abuse, since physical violence can send you to the hospital and leave you with physical wounds. But emotional abuse can be just as damaging—sometimes even more so.

[[Read: Emotional and Psychological Trauma]](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/coping-with-emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm)

#### Economic or financial abuse: A subtle form of emotional abuse

Remember, an abuser’s goal is to control you, and they will frequently use money to do so. Economic or financial abuse includes:

* Rigidly controlling your finances.
* Withholding money or credit cards.
* Making you account for every penny you spend.
* Withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter).
* Restricting you to an allowance.
* Preventing you from working or choosing your own career.
* Sabotaging your job (making you miss work, calling constantly).
* Stealing from you or taking your money.

## Speak up if you suspect domestic violence or abuse

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, speak up! If you’re hesitating—telling yourself that it’s none of your business, you might be wrong, or that the person might not want to talk about it—keep in mind that expressing your concern will let the person know that you care and may even save their life.

Talk to the person in private and let them know that you’re concerned. Point out the signs you’ve noticed that worry you. Tell the person that you’re there for them, whenever they feel ready to talk. Reassure them that you’ll keep whatever is said between the two of you, and let them know that you’ll help in any way you can.