

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

## **Break the Chain**

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

If you are being physically or sexually assaulted by someone you live with, or are being threatened by them, that is domestic violence. Domestic violence is controlling behaviour and includes all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within all kinds of intimate relationships. It harms women and men. It wrecks thousands of lives.

Domestic violence is rarely a one-off event. Physical and sexual abuse tends to increase in frequency and severity over time, sometimes only ending when one person actually kills the other. Other forms of abusive or controlling behaviour may be ongoing. This chain of events needs to be broken.

A lot of people can help to break the chain. Some of the organisations working to do this are mentioned in this leaflet. But individuals also have an important part to play. For people experiencing violence, the support of a trusted friend can be invaluable. Breaking the chain is a job for everyone.

Domestic violence is much more common than most people realise. Even if you are not experiencing it yourself, you may well know someone who is. This leaflet may help you to help them.

We must not let domestic violence beat us. Together we can break the chain.

### **WHAT CAN I DO?**

If you are in a violent relationship there are three steps you can take.

- Recognise that it is happening to you
- Accept that you are not to blame
- Seek help and support

### **RECOGNISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic violence includes all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within all kinds of intimate relationships. The most harmful abuse is carried out by men against female partners, but abuse can also occur by women against men and within same-sex relationships.

People experience domestic violence regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality and lifestyle. The abuse can begin at any time - in new relationships or after many years spent together.

Domestic violence can take a number of forms such as physical assault, sexual abuse, rape, and threats. In addition, it may include destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation and harassment. Some abusers offer 'rewards' on certain conditions, or in an attempt to persuade their partners that the abuse won't happen again. However persuasive they seem, the violence usually gets worse over time.

### **ACCEPTING THAT YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME**

It is not easy to accept that a loved one can behave so aggressively. Because they can't explain their partner's behaviour, many people assume that they themselves are to blame. They are not. No-one deserves to be assaulted, abused or humiliated, least of all by a partner in a supposedly caring relationship. It is the abuser's behaviour which needs to change: there is no excuse.

## SEEKING HELP

The most important thing you can do is to tell someone. For some the decision to seek help is quickly and easily made. For many, the process will be long and painful as they try to make the relationship work and stop the violence. The prospect of leaving an abusive relationship can be as frightening as the prospect of staying. Most people try to find help a number of times before get what they need, and even after leaving there may still be a risk. Never be afraid to ask for help again.

**In an emergency, always call the police by dialing 999 (minicom 0800 112 999).**

## WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you or someone you know are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence, there are a range of organisations that can help. Some useful addresses and telephone numbers are provided here, but there are many others: libraries, local authorities and Citizens Advice Bureau are good sources of further information.

Organisation Helpline URL Resource  Wales	<i>Women's Aid National Domestic Violence Helpline</i> 0345 023 468 <a href="http://www.womensaid.org.uk">www.womensaid.org.uk</a> The helpline is open from 10am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and from 10am to 3pm on Fridays. Outside these hours you can contact your local Women's Aid service through the local phone book, or access the Women's Aid website. This service can give you support, help and information. They will discuss the practical and legal options available, and if you wish refer you to a local Women's Aid refuge and advice service, or other sources of help. All calls are taken in strictest confidence. Welsh Women's Aid on 029 20 390874.
Organisation Resource	<i>Local Women's Aid refuge services</i> There are nearly 300 local refuge projects in England and Wales. Many local Women's Aid groups also run advice centers, drop-in centers or outreach services to more isolated areas, as well as local helplines. You can call in to see someone, or telephone for advice and support, without having to stay in a refuge.
Organisation Helpline Resource	<i>Refuge 24-Hour National Crisis Line</i> 0990 995 443 This service provides information, support and practical help, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to women experiencing domestic violence. It can refer women and their children to refuges throughout the UK.
Organisation Tel Resource	<i>Men's Advice Line</i> 0808 801 0327 <a href="http://www.mensadvice.org.uk">www.mensadvice.org.uk</a> Monday - Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm Information, support and advice to men experiencing domestic violence. Local projects for men are available in some areas.
Organisation Tel Resource	<i>Victim Support</i> 0845 30 30 900 Victim Support offers information and support to victims of crime, whether or not they have reported the crime to the police. All help given is free and confidential. You can contact Victim Support direct, or ask the police to put you in touch with your local group. The national helpline is open from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to 7pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.
Organisation Helpline Resource	<i>Shelterline</i> 0808 800 4444 Emergency access to refuge services

Organisation Resource	<i>The Police</i> Many kinds of domestic abuse are criminal offences, and the police take all domestic violence very seriously. Most forces have specially trained, experienced officers who will listen and speak to you separately from your partner. Women can ask to be seen by a woman officer. The police can, if you wish, arrange medical aid, transport and a safe place for you to go. Their first priorities are your safety and well-being and, if applicable the safety and well-being of your children.
Contact	To contact the police in an emergency, dial 999. At other times, you can contact your local police station. You can find the number in your telephone directory.
Organisation Resource	<i>National Health Service</i> Many people do not realise how direct an impact their partner's behaviour can have on their health and that of their children. They may experience depression and anxiety which are often just as damaging as physical injuries - or more so. This can happen during the relationship, or after it has finished. Talk to your GP or health visitor and tell them the real cause of your worries and injuries. If you have to go to casualty, try to be open about the reasons. This is vital if you are to get the proper medical help and support you need. Remember: you can always talk to NHS staff in confidence.
Organisation Helpline Resource	<i>The Samaritans</i> 0345 909090 24-hour confidential emotional support for anyone in crisis. The number given above links up all their branches; or you can use the number of your local branch, which you will find in your phone book.
Organisation Tel Minicom Resource	<i>National Child Protection Helpline (NSPCC)</i> 0800 800 500 0800 056 0566 This free, confidential service for anyone concerned about children at risk offers counseling, information and advice.
Organisation Helpline Resource	<i>Carelina</i> 0208 514 1177 A national confidential counseling line for children, young people and adults on any issue including family, marital and relationship problems, child abuse, rape and sexual assault, depression and anxiety.
Organisation Resource Contact	<i>Relate</i> Relationship counseling, for non-emergency situations. There will be a local number in your phone book.

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM THE VIOLENCE?

### *Legal protection*

Whether or not the police use the criminal law against a violent person, you can still use the civil law to get protection to allow you to live in safety. Under the Family Law Act 1996, many people experiencing domestic violence can apply for court orders against their abusers. For example, you can apply for an order against someone you live with or have lived with (whether or not you have been married), someone you have agreed to marry, or someone with whom you share parental responsibility for a child.

These orders can stop the abusive behaviour itself, or in some cases prevent the abusive person from entering the home. Courts can attach a power of arrest so that if the order is not obeyed, the abuser can be taken to court by the police.

If you are on income support or have a very low income you may be able to get legal aid to pay for a solicitor's advice and legal proceedings.

You can find out more from the police, a solicitor, your local magistrates' court or county court, Citizens Advice Bureau or Women's Aid group.

### *Moving away*

If you are abused by the person you live with, or someone connected with you such as an ex-partner, you may decide it is best to leave your home. If you have nowhere else to go, you may wish to consider contacting the helplines given in this leaflet or the housing department of your local council. The council should provide a 24-hour emergency homelessness service. If they consider that you are vulnerable because you are at risk of domestic violence, and that it would not be reasonable for you to continue living at your home, they must help you to find somewhere else to live. If so, they may provide you with temporary accommodation such as a place in a hostel, bed-and-breakfast hotel or women's refuge.

A refuge is a safe house where women and children can live free from violence. It offers a temporary breathing space where decisions can be made free from pressure and fear. There are refuges specifically for women and children from particular ethnic or cultural backgrounds - for example black, Asian, Latin American or Jewish women - and some refuges have disabled access and staff trained in special needs.

One of the reasons that many people stay on in abusive relationships is because they wonder how they will manage financially if they leave. There are various benefits which you may be able to claim and some can be paid even if you are working. Your local Social Security Benefits Office will be able to advise you.

### *What about the children?*

There are established links between domestic violence and child abuse. Children may themselves be injured or abused or may be at risk of accidental injury, and they may also suffer indirectly even when not directly abused themselves: they are often more aware of the abuse than their parents realise.

Some abusers threaten that if their partner leaves or tells anyone about the violence, their children will be taken away from them. Social services will not take children away for this reason. If you fear your partner will abduct the children, you should seek advice. Your local Women's Aid group, Law Center, Citizens Advice Bureau, or a solicitor can advise on issues such as parental responsibility, where children should live, who they should have contact with, changes of school and related problems.

## **HOW CAN I HELP A FRIEND WHO IS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

Unless the person you are trying to help has been very open about their experiences it may be difficult for you to acknowledge the problem directly. However, if someone does confide in you that they are experiencing domestic violence, there are some basic steps that you can take.

- **Be understanding.** Explain that there are many people in this situation. Acknowledge that it takes strength to trust someone enough to talk about the abuse. Allow them time to talk, and don't push them to give too much detail if they don't want to.
- **Be supportive.** Say that no-one deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what the abuser may have said. Be a good listener, and encourage them to express their hurt and anger.
- **Let them make their own decisions,** even if this means they aren't ready to leave the relationship. This is their decision.

- **Ask if they have suffered physical harm.** Offer to go along with them to hospital if they need to go. Help them to report the assault to the police if they choose to do so.
- **Provide information,** as far as you can, on the help which is available. Explore the options together. Go together to visit a solicitor if the person is ready to take this step.
- **Plan safe strategies for leaving the abusive relationship,** letting them decide what is safe and what is not. Don't encourage them to follow any strategies that they are expressing doubt about.
- **Offer the use of your address and/or telephone number** for information and messages.
- **Above all, look after yourself while you are supporting someone else.** Do not put yourself in a dangerous position: for example, do not offer to talk to the abuser about your friend, or let yourself be seen by the abuser as a threat to their relationship.

For copies of this leaflet please write or fax:

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