



# Domestic violence awareness: Recognizing abuse

**Don't talk yourself out of it. Talk to someone who can help.**

When you hear the word “abuse,” what picture pops up in your mind? Is it of a physical incident, like a man hitting a woman?

Although [statistically](#), the majority of abuse instances involve a female victim, that's not always the case—men can also be victims of abuse. And while abuse often includes a physical component, it can also take many other forms, some of which are hard to recognize as abuse.

That's especially the case if you are on the receiving end of the troubling behavior. It's common to downplay—both to yourself and to others—certain kinds of abuse, particularly when it's the kind that doesn't leave bruises. You may mentally talk yourself out of thinking of it as abuse, telling yourself things like “I'm making a big deal about nothing—it wasn't really that bad,” or “well, he didn't hit me, so this can't be abuse.”

## **What forms can abuse take?**

While abuse can be physical, like hitting, kicking, or shoving, [abuse can also be](#):

- Preventing you from spending time with friends or family; showing extreme jealousy
- Demeaning, insulting, and/or shaming you, especially in front of others
- Preventing you from making your own decisions, particularly about attending school or work
- Strictly controlling finances in ways that prevent you from getting the things you need, and/or taking your money
- Intimidating you through threatening looks, words, actions, or with the presence of weapons
- Threatening to harm or take away your children or pets
- Pressuring you to do things you're not comfortable with, like using drugs or alcohol or performing sexual acts when you don't want to

- Destroying your belongings and/or your home

A common theme in abusive situations is [power and control](#). The abuser will likely try to gain power and control in different ways, like denying the victim's experience (sometimes even blaming the victim), isolating the victim, preventing them from getting a job or interfering with that job so they aren't able to keep it, and playing mind games or trying to make the victim think they're crazy.

## Go with your gut

If you saw yourself and your relationship reflected somewhere in the section above, or if you just have a feeling of "something isn't quite right" in your relationship...

- The first step is accepting those feelings and not minimizing or denying them. You know yourself best, and if you're feeling unsettled, there's a reason you're feeling that way.
- At a time when you are somewhere safe, [keep these important tips in mind](#) and reach out for support. If you're not sure who in your life you can safely talk to, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is available 24/7 by calling 1.800.799.SAFE (7233), by texting START to 88788, or by [chatting with an advocate online](#).
- Start working on [your personal safety plan](#), and be sure to keep these [internet safety tips](#) in mind. Also begin [documenting the abuse](#).

## If you think someone you know may be in an abusive situation

First, [talk to them](#). Ask them how things are going and let them know you're there for them no matter what, whether that's now or sometime in the future. If they open up to you about an abusive situation:

- [Ask how you can help them](#). Don't spring into action without their permission—although you mean well, [this may put the person in more danger](#).
  - Be [emotionally supportive](#). Truly listen to them and acknowledge that their situation is scary and difficult.
  - Point them in the direction of, or offer to help them create, [a safety plan](#).
  - Encourage them to seek help from organizations that can provide guidance, like the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#).
  - Offer to attend legal and other appointments with them for moral support
  - Help them identify support resources for needs like housing, food, and healthcare
- And avoid doing these things:

- Judging, criticizing, or guiltning them over choices they've made or the situation they're in
- Thinking in stereotypes and invalidating their experiences. For example, if a male loved one comes to you seeking support, saying something like "You're a man—you couldn't possibly be a victim!" invalidates his experience and could discourage him from reaching out to get the help he needs.
- Posting information online/on social media that could be used to identify them or where they spend time

- Trying to “rescue” them. They are the one with the right to make a decision about what they do, even if it’s a decision you don’t agree with. Be there for them whether they leave the relationship or not, and whether they go back.

If you are a friend or relative helping someone you love get through a difficult situation like this, understand that it can take a toll on you. Take time to care for yourself as well and do things to reduce your stress—consider journaling to process your feelings, talking to a counselor, or making appointments with yourself to do things that help you relax or bring you happiness. And remember that supporting them doesn’t mean you need to have all the answers, so go easy on yourself and know that you’re doing the best you can.