
Coping With Violence

A LIFE EFFECTIVENESS GUIDE

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All Case Histories in this text are presented as examples only
and any comparison which might be made with persons either
living or dead is purely coincidental

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Definition

Domestic or family violence occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically harm the other partner. It is important to note that violence happens in many different forms within relationships. It can be perpetrated by a male or female partner however the vast majority of domestic violence is reported to be committed by men against women. Abuse happens to people from every age group, income and educational level and religious and cultural background.

Living in a domestically violent household is not easy. Some believe that *leaving* a domestically violent household is even more difficult. We all have a right to feel safe. For this reason, this resource has been written to help victims and friends of victims to identify and understand domestic violence. A safety plan template has been included in the case of an emergency.

You do not have to be physically hurt to be abused, nor is it ever too late to seek assistance. This means that domestic violence can be categorised into several forms. Let's take a look at the different types of domestic violence.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes direct harm against a person, their child, pet or property and includes hitting, slapping, punching, choking, pushing, being thrown against a wall, being hit with objects or injured by weapons.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any type of forced or unwanted sexual behaviour between adults.

Emotional/Psychological abuse

Similar to verbal abuse, emotional or psychological abuse can leave a person feeling that the relationship problems are their fault.

Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse is the use of critical or insulting language or continual put-downs, threats or criticisms.

Financial abuse

Financial abuse involves the unequal control of money in a relationship, by making a person dependent upon the perpetrator for money, taking a person's money or threatening a person for money.

Social abuse

Social abuse is when the victim is denied contact with friends or family who may be able to offer support. Some victims are also made to account for everything they do and everywhere they go.

Prevalence

Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, abused or coerced into sex in her lifetime. Most often the abuser is a member of her own family. The prevalence of domestic violence is difficult to determine for several reasons: it often goes unreported, and there is some ambiguity about what should be included in the definition of domestic violence. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that only 31% of victims of domestic violence and 20% of female victims of sexual assault report the incident to the police.

A survey of Australian women (1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics) asked women about their experiences of violence, and found that:

- 5.9% of women had experienced physical violence in the 12 month period preceding the survey
- 2.6% of women either married or in a defacto relationship had experienced violence by their current partner in the 12 months prior to the survey
- 23% of women who had ever been married or in a defacto relationship had experienced violence in that relationship
- 1.1 million women experienced violence by a previous partner during and after the relationship
- women were nearly four times more likely to experience violence by a man than by a woman
- 9% of women who were currently in a relationship reported some form of emotional abuse (manipulation, isolation or intimidation)

A study conducted by the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force estimates the following :-

- Over 90% of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women
- 88% of victims suffer from physical abuse with 36% of these suffering abuse daily or weekly
- 20% of all incidents involve threats with either a knife or gun and of these, 6% are actually wounded with the weapon (sometimes fatally)
- 29% of reported victims endure forced sexual contact, 50% on a weekly basis
- Sexual abuse is rarely isolated from other forms of abuse. It is often the final form of abuse if the abuser is unable to gain the power and control they desire from physical or emotional abuse
- Emotional abuse is often the best hidden of all domestic violence. By undermining the confidence of the victim, no visible scars or need for medical intervention is required.
- Of 23 women murdered in Queensland in 1991, 11 were murdered by a spouse or partner, a rate of almost one domestic homicide per month.

Myths about Domestic Violence

Myth: Domestic violence is rare

Although statistics on domestic violence is not exact, it's clear that millions of women, children and even men are abused physically by family members and other people close to them

Myth: Domestic violence is only seen in lower socioeconomic families and areas

Police records, domestic violence services and studies have shown that domestic violence occurs in every socioeconomic group regardless of age, race, culture, or academic level

Myth: Alcohol and drug abuse are the causes of domestic violence

Domestic violence and substance abuse are two different problems that should be treated separately. Alcohol and drugs have been linked to domestic violence because many perpetrators use these substances; however to name them as the cause for domestic violence is almost excusing the batterer for his behaviour.

Myth: Victims like being hit, otherwise they would leave

Most people respond to domestic violence with statements like "why doesn't she just leave" without thinking of the economic and social realities facing the victim. Shelters are often full and sometimes family and friends are less than supportive. Making the decision to leave may even increase the chance of physical harm to the victim or the children.

Impact of Domestic Violence

Many people fear admitting the impact of abuse. If you have accessed this reading to gain knowledge about domestic violence and you suspect that the behaviour of your partner is unsatisfactory, it might be worthwhile assessing the level of abuse in your relationship. For each question below, indicate the number from the scale that describes your relationship with your partner.

3 – frequently

2 – sometimes

1- rarely

0 – never

- Does your partner monitor your time and make you account for every minute?
- Does he discourage you from starting friendships with other people?
- Is he / she ever critical of things such as your cooking, your clothes or your appearance?
- Does he / she demand an account of how you spend money?
- Do his / her moods change radically, from calm to very angry?
- Is he / she disturbed by your working?
- Does he / she become angry more easily when he / she drinks?
- Does he / she pressure you for sex?
- Does your partner ever strike you? (e.g. slap, punch, kick etc)
- Does he / she ever strike you with an object?

- Does he ever threaten to hurt you?
- Has he ever threatened to kill you?
- Does he / she ever give you visible injuries such as bruises or cuts?
- Have you ever had to treat any injuries from his / her violence with first aid?
- Have you ever had to seek professional assistance for any injuries?
- Does he / she ever hurt you sexually or make you have intercourse against your will?
- Is he / she ever violent towards the children?
- Does he / she ever throw objects or break things when he / she is angry?
- Have you ever called the police because you felt that you were in danger?
- TOTAL SCORE**

If you have a score over 12, you are in a moderately abusive relationship. The higher your score, the more serious the level of abuse and potential for danger.

Impact on Children

Estimates are that more than 3.3 million children are exposed to physical or verbal abuse each year. Children may directly observe domestic violence or they may be aware of it indirectly. They may be in another room when it takes place, be woken during the night and hear the violence, or see bruising or damaged property after the violence occurs.

The impact of domestic violence on children varies from child to child. When compared with other children, children who have witnessed or been victims of domestic violence host a list of behavioural and emotional problems. These problems include both external and internal behaviours which range from aggression and antisocial behaviours, through to depression, anxiety and low self esteem. Some children react by becoming overly introverted and shy while others act out and become extroverts. Children in families where domestic violence is present, generally grow up prematurely, by taking on additional roles such as nurturer (when mum is recuperating), protector (of other children when violence is occurring) or referee between mum and dad. Quite often, children in this situation isolate themselves from other children in order to hide their situation.

Younger children can show excessive irritability and emotional distress and sometimes their toileting and language regresses. Preschool children may develop aches and pains for no apparent reason and eating and sleeping patterns may be disturbed.

Looking at the long term effects on children, depression and low self esteem generally transfer into adulthood. Substance abuse, sexual problems and criminal behaviour are behaviours which are at risk of being taken up in later life, as a result of witnessing domestic violence.

Children of victims are also at risk of continuing the violence in their own adult relationships because their parents failed to teach conflict resolution skills, and instead modeled violent behaviour and abuse. Some people believe that violence can result in

gender based differences such as boys going on to become perpetrators of domestic violence and girls going on to become victims. It is important to note that children may also learn to be assertive and non violent by mothers who model this behaviour.

The impact of domestic violence can also extend to people not directly involved. For example, the effects can flow onto other children not experiencing domestic violence through bullying or aggression. Those children who survive the ordeal unscathed are those with average or above average intellectual development and high feelings of self esteem.

Who Is At Risk?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) Women's Safety Survey found that younger women were more at risk of violence than older women. In the 12 months prior to the survey, 19% of women aged 18-24 had experienced an incidence of violence compared to 6.8% of women aged 35-44 and 1.2% of women aged 55 and over.

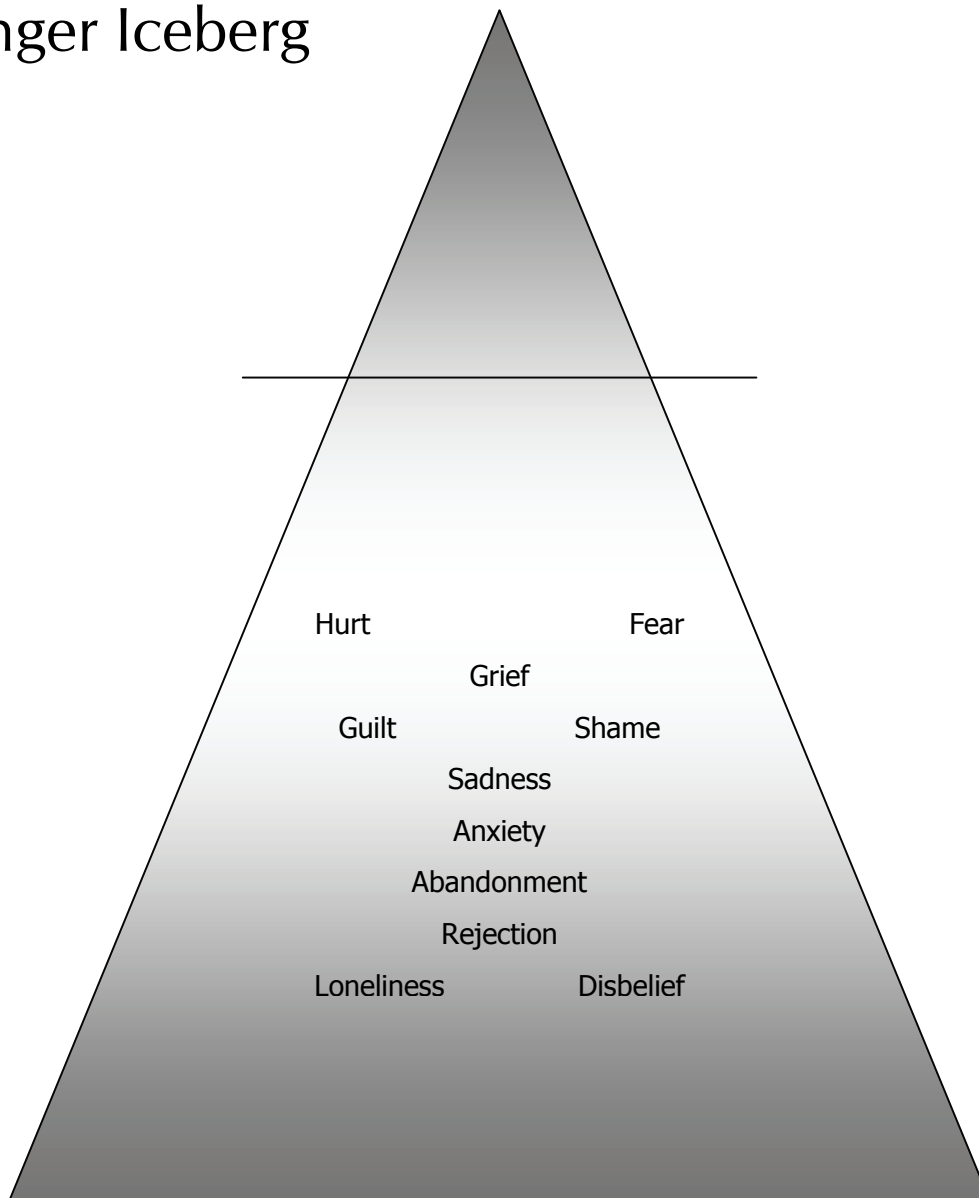
Pregnancy is a time when women appear to be vulnerable to abuse. Of the women who reported experiencing violence by a previous partner, over 700,000 had been pregnant at some time during their relationship. While 42% of these women experienced violence during pregnancy, 20% experienced domestic violence for the first time while they were pregnant.

Some research suggests that domestic violence is more problematic in remote and regional Australia. By contrast, major cities had lower rates of domestic violence. Indigenous Australians are over represented as both victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. The rate of death from violence in Indigenous communities is 10 times higher than for non-Indigenous people.

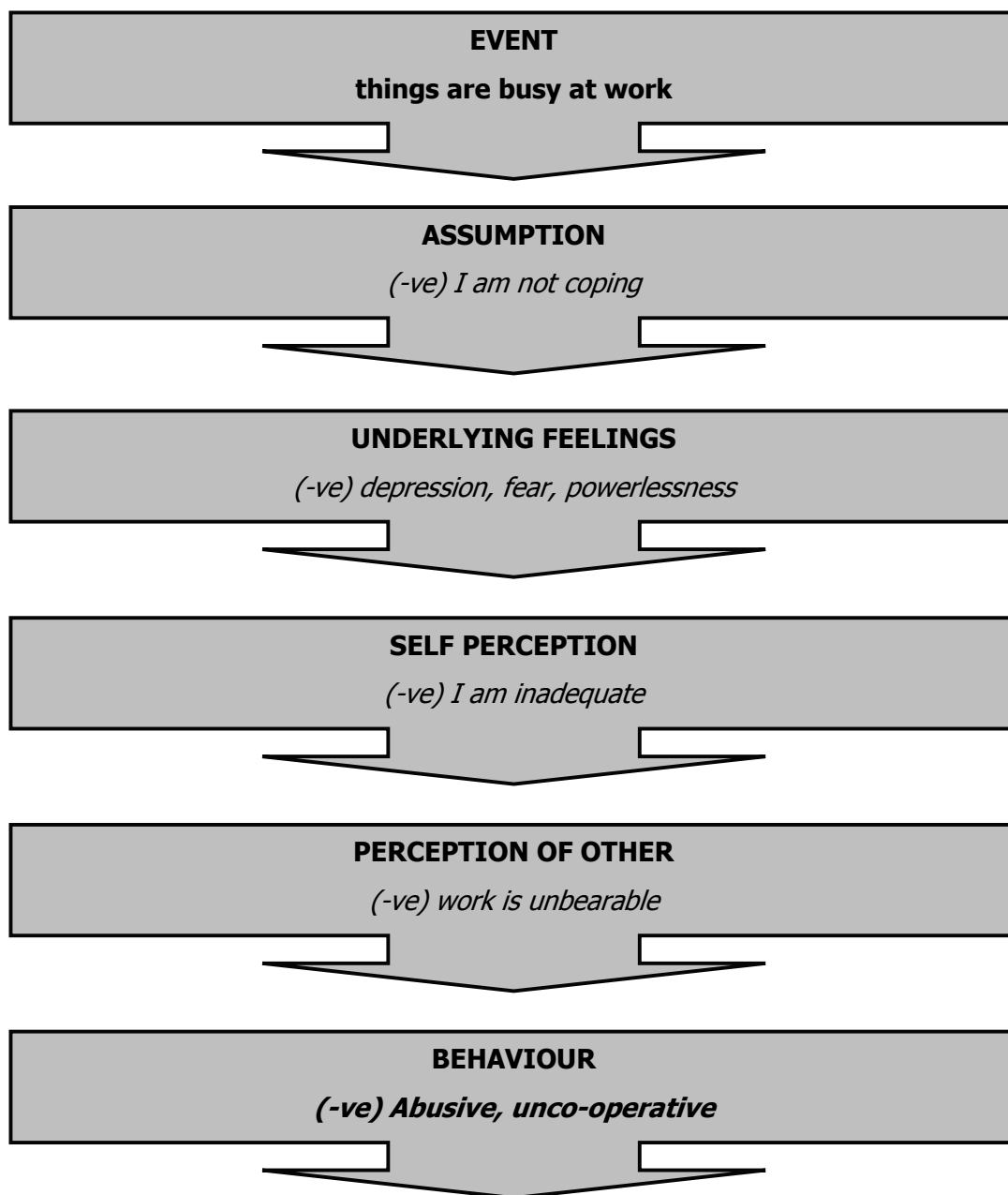
Understanding Domestic Violence

While there is no excuse for domestic violence, it is useful to have an understanding of why it occurs. Hurting someone usually results from being angry, but anger is a secondary emotion. This means that the anger is usually just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what the real feelings are underneath. Often people react angrily when they feel embarrassed, ashamed, frustrated, guilty, stupid, sad, fearful or incompetent. These feelings are primary emotions hidden under the surface which need to be identified, as in the anger iceberg below. Above water level is the only part of the iceberg that is seen which represents anger. Most of the iceberg is beneath the water and this part represents other emotions linked to anger.

Anger Iceberg



Despite the expression of anger occurring quickly and aggressively with seemingly little time to think, there are many thoughts and beliefs that come into play when a person becomes angry. There is usually a rapid cycle which occurs after the event through to the expression of anger. By looking at the cycle on the following page, we can see various points at which the perpetrator of violence may be able to think differently about an event and therefore be able to respond differently to it.



As you can see from the above, angry outbursts are the conscious response to events which occur in our day to day lives. However we all have the power to control our thinking and behaviour and to make decisions about other options or ways to respond to the event. It is for this reason that domestic violence is not tolerated. If you suspect that you are in a domestically violent relationship, take some time to review this cycle,

noticing if there are patterns or events which cause your partner to behave in an abusive or violent way.

Why Do Men Abuse?

Women are the victims of domestic and family violence in the majority of cases, and in fact, 90% of domestic violence is committed by men against women. While it is accepted that women as well as men can commit violence, this section will primarily focus on the male being the perpetrator.

There are many reasons or excuses for a man to commit an act of domestic violence or act in an abusive way. Women are renowned for being the more comfortable gender when speaking about or sharing their feelings. This means that men are less likely to speak about their frustrations with work, home life, and the disappointments in life. For this reason, men seem to bottle up their feelings which can allow these feelings to escalate and get more intense. Men who notice their feelings sooner rather than later are more able to find alternative routes to violence or abuse.

Men are also likely to have angry responses if they don't feel good about themselves. Quite often one's self esteem is developed in early childhood where the person is often reminded that they are no good or worthless. When self esteem is not repaired by adulthood, people can take on a 'victim mentality'. In order to feel good about themselves, they search for partners who will alleviate them from this role by becoming the victim, which restores the perpetrator's self worth and superiority.

The majority of violence occurs to women with dependent children, many of whom will be directly abused in addition to witnessing their mother being abused. The effects on these children include depression, anxiety, withdrawal and low self esteem in the short term. Unfortunately, many studies have noted that in the long term, boys who witness domestic violence may go on to become perpetrators in future relationships.

Why Do Victims Stay?

Probably the only person who can answer this question accurately is the person who is being abused in the relationship. Generally there are two types of factors which influence the decision. These are emotional and situational factors. It is useful to gain this understanding before making big decisions for your future.

Complete the checklist below which will give you an indication of your reasons for having stayed in the relationship until this time.

Emotional factors:

- I have a low self esteem
- I fear being alone
- I have a lack of emotional support if I leave the relationship
- I would feel guilty if the relationship fails
- I fear that my partner would not be able to survive without me
- I fear that my partner may commit suicide if I left
- I believe my partner will change
- I feel too embarrassed and humiliated to seek help
- I love him too much to leave

Situational factors:

- I am staying because of the children
- If I leave, I may lose custody of the children
- I don't have anywhere else to go
- I can't support myself financially
- I have no job skills to get a job
- Wherever I go, he will find me

Fear is the main reason women do not seek help or tell anyone about the violence or abuse in their relationship. Sometimes this fear is about coping alone if and when they leave and is heightened in cases where the woman is either physically or financially dependent on their partner. People with disabilities therefore face additional challenges when trying to leave a violent relationship. Fear can also be about what the partner might do if they found out that help was sought. For some women, the thought of being physically hurt or even killed, or the thought of their children being physically hurt or killed is enough to stay in a relationship. Studies show that the highest risk of serious injury or death from violence occurs at the point of separation or at the time when the decision is made to separate. By leaving, the perpetrator's power is threatened and his need to control the woman and children is intensified.

As a result of domestic violence and abuse, many women's self esteem is so low that they are unable to see themselves as worthy of seeking help. The victim tries to rationalize the abuse, believing that they were the cause of it or they somehow deserved it. Police called out to the scene of domestic violence by neighbours, often complain that when the abuser is arrested, the victim wants them to drop the charges.

Many battered women try various tactics to alleviate the abuse. These include fighting back, trying to talk out the problem, or changing their own behaviour to meet the needs of the abuser. When this doesn't work, women may become passive, which reduces the immediate danger. Repeated violence has pushed many women to suicide or homicide.

The sad truth about domestic violence is that many suffer in silence. The main reason for this is fear of retaliation both toward themselves and to their children. Being abused means you are NOT in a good relationship.

The Cycle of Violence

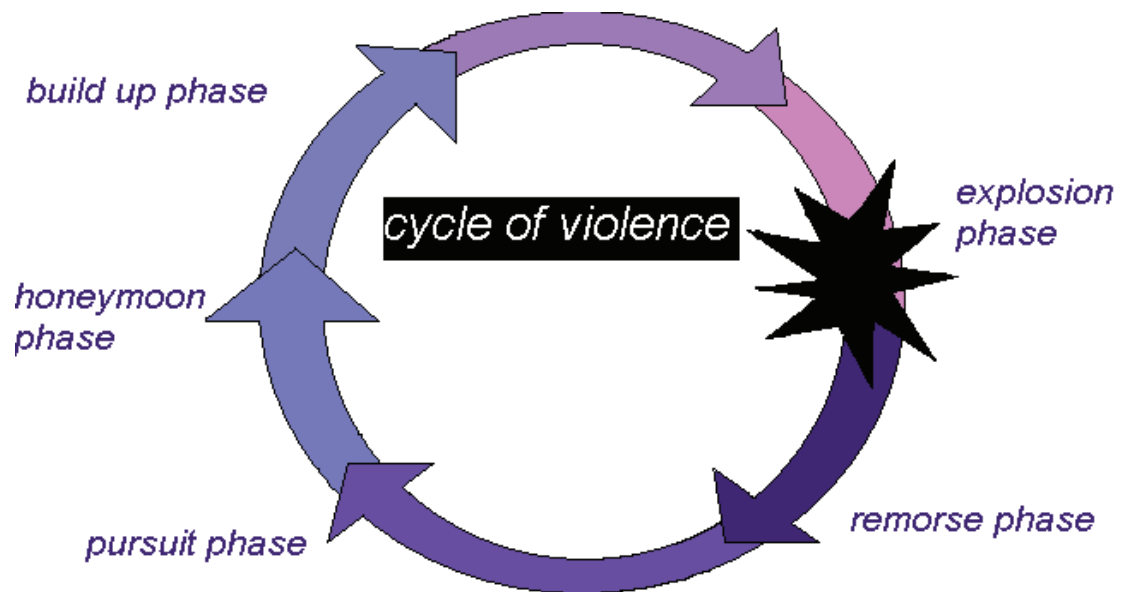
There has been a great deal of research which indicates that there are patterns to violence in abusive relationships and is often referred to as "the cycle of violence". It has been useful for many women in violent relationships to notice these patterns in order to predict attacks, however it is important to note that there are many situations where violence is not predictable.

The cycle has five phases and begins with what is known as the ***build up** phase*. This phase can run over any length of time and usually is a period of high tension caused by anything from work stressors, family or financial pressures or destructive thought patterns. The build up phase generally includes stand over tactics such as verbal threats. These threats raise the level of fear of the partner and enable the male partner to gain greater control of the situation. Ultimately the perpetrator explodes in a rage of violence which is called the *explosion phase*.

The *remorse phase* follows the explosion, where the perpetrator feels ashamed and guilty because of his actions. He may fear that his partner will leave, so he makes a greater effort in the relationship. Some women choose to believe that the violence will not be repeated. During this phase the perpetrator may deny or minimise what occurred during the explosion or even look for reasons outside him for what happened.

Next is the *pursuit phase* where the perpetrator attempts to win back the love and affection of his partner. This usually involves gifts and promises of changed behaviour.

Lastly is the *honeymoon phase* which is a time of intense intimacy and denial of the previous abuse. Women, while confused, are less inclined to exit the relationship at this time. She sees the batterer as sincere and loving and chooses to believe this is what he is really like, and if she supports him things will change. The perpetrator becomes increasingly more confident in the relationship until the cycle is repeated. Calm loving behaviour gives way to smaller incidents until the tension reoccurs and a new cycle of violence and battering begins again.



Safety Plan

You may be far from making decisions about staying or leaving the relationship. However you may have completed the questions listed at the beginning of this document and identified that you are in an abusive relationship. You may also recognise that your relationship is showing patterns similar to the cycle of violence. If this is the case, you need to be honest with yourself that you may also be in danger.

Every woman has the right to feel safe and for this reason, it is essential that you develop a safety plan which you can implement if you need to leave quickly. This plan should be flexible enough that allows for changes to circumstances but it is important that your partner does not see the plan.

Safety plans should be individualised, for example it should take into account your age, marital status, whether children are involved, geographic location and resources available.

Your safety plan should include where you can go in order to feel safe, who to call if your safety is threatened and any emergency telephone numbers. It can operate as a checklist of things you need to do and things you need to have ready, in case of an emergency.

Below is a template of a safety plan for you to complete. It has three parts. The first is a safety plan in case of a violent situation occurring. The second is an exit safety plan, one which will operate in the event of you needing to get out, fast. The third is a day to day safety plan in order for you to feel safe after you leave.

Please take the time to complete the plans, and store them in an easy to locate, safe place.

Safety Plan Template

During a violent incident

- when my partner becomes abusive, I can

.....
.....
.....

- when we have an argument, I will move to a space where there is lower risk such as

.....
.....
.....

- If the situation becomes very serious, I can

.....
.....
.....

- I can ask the following people to call the police if they hear arguments coming from my home

1.
2.
3.

- I will use a code word when calling for help with my children / family / friends

.....

SAFETY PLAN

When preparing to leave

- If I leave my home, I will go to
.....
.....
.....
- I can store extra clothes, money, extra sets of keys and important documents with
.....
.....
.....
- If I am unable to locate my mobile phone, the closest phone to my home is located
.....
.....
.....
- In the case of an emergency, I am able to stay with
 1.
 2.
 3.
- The Domestic Violence Hotline number is
.....
- 1. When I leave I will take with me the following items
 - Driver’s licence & concession card
 - Birth certificate (for all family members)
 - School & vaccination records for the children
 - Medication for all family members & medical records
 - Passports
 - Money/cheque book/ATM credit cards/bank books
 - Children’s favourite toys/blankets
 - House and car keys

SAFETY PLAN

Day to day safety plan

- I can trust the following people at work to screen my telephone calls during work time

1.
2.
3.

- When driving home, if problems occur, I can

.....
.....
.....

- If problems occur while using public transport, I can

.....
.....
.....

- I can also do the following to ensure my safety

.....
.....
.....

To assist you complete your safety plan, it might be helpful to identify your support people and also to highlight in what areas of your life, support is missing. Here is a short exercise to help you identify your support network.

Social Support Network Exercise

<p>NETWORK SUPPORT Belonging to a group, recreation, social activities, church group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••	<p>INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT Offering advice or guidance e.g. Child Health Nurse, Doctor, Counsellor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<p>EMOTIONAL SUPPORT Can ring or visit for a talk when stressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••
<p>NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS People who can trigger anger and frustration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••	<p>SOCIAL SUPPORT</p>	<p>PHYSICAL SUPPORT When you need to move house or get to the doctor quickly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••
<p>ESTEEM SUPPORT Those people who boost your confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••		<p>EMERGENCY SUPPORT Can use 24 hours a day without fear of inconvenience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••

Protection Orders

Under the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act (1989), domestic and family violence is abusive behaviour used by one person to control and dominate another person within a relationship, and is defined as:

1. wilful injury to the other person
2. wilful damage to the other person's property
3. intimidation or harassment of the other person
4. indecent behaviour toward the other person without consent
5. a threat to commit one of the acts mentioned in 1 to 4.

A spouse need not personally commit the act or threaten to commit it for it to be considered domestic violence. This means it also includes one person in the relationship asking or getting someone else to injure, intimate, harass or threaten the other person or damage the other person's property.

The Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act (1989) aims to provide protection to those people experiencing domestic and family violence by allowing a Court to issue a domestic violence order. This order can prevent violence occurring by restricting the behaviour of the person committing the abuse. It does not give your partner a criminal record unless he breaks the order.

A domestic violence protection order can be applied for at local police stations, any domestic violence service or women's refuge, or local magistrate's court. A date for a hearing will be made when both parties will give evidence. A judge will make a decision whether to grant the order or not.

If you have reason to believe that you are in immediate danger, you can apply to court for a temporary protection order which will provide you with protection until the hearing date.

A domestic violence protection order may include orders for your partner to stop committing domestic violence to yourself or your children, not to come within a certain distance of your home your place of work, not to have firearms or weapons, or not to damage property. Once granted, a copy of the order is supplied to your partner and the local police. If your partner breaches the order, it is important to contact your local police station as soon as possible.

Stalking

Stalking can take place *after* a partner or spouse has left the relationship. The victim of stalking usually fears for their safety because the stalker is either trying to resume the relationship or punish the victim for departing.

Some tactics that stalkers use include the following :-

4. following the victim to work
5. watching the home of the victim
6. making repeated phone calls, sometimes hanging up
7. watching with hidden cameras
8. finding the victim through paid investigations
9. sending repeated sms messages or emails
10. sending unwanted gifts
11. making contact with victim's friends, family, co-workers
12. threats to hurt the victim or their family or friends

Stalking can sometimes end in violence whether or not violence is threatened. If you are suspicious that you are being stalked or your partner is watching your movements, contact your local police.

Looking After Yourself

Victims of domestic violence describe the experience as exhausting and emotionally draining. Many victims continue to blame themselves for the abuse long after they have left the relationship. For this reason, constructing a new life can take time and energy. The victim needs to gain confidence and get on top of things.

Here are some exercises to assist in this area.

- Whenever I feel abused or controlled by others, I can tell myself

.....
.....
.....

- Whenever I feel low in confidence and self esteem, I can speak to

.....
.....
.....

- If I feel inclined to return to an abusive situation, I should

.....
.....
.....

- Other things I can do to help me feel stronger are

.....
.....
.....

There are a number of things that you can do to help you recover a sense of safety, control and self worth including:-

- If you have moved house, make sure you have good locks on the doors
- If you are in the same house, change the locks on the doors
- Apply for a DVO (domestic violence order) if you are being stalked or threatened
- Talk to a Domestic Violence Counsellor. (you can talk anonymously to Domestic Violence Line on 1800 656463)
- Renew friendships with old friends, and make new ones
- Spoil yourself. Set aside time (and money) if possible to do things you enjoy
- Accept that your recovery will take time.
- Grieve the loss of the relationship before entering into a new one.

New Relationships

On leaving a domestic violent relationship, many victims find themselves in new relationships which are also abusive. This may be due to not giving themselves enough time to fully recover their self esteem and work through the various stages of grieving. Be cautious about new relationships, but remember not to let the experience of abuse get in the way of forming positive and trusting relationships.

Here are some tips to help you feel comfortable in a new relationship:

- Take the relationship slowly – let it develop in a way you feel comfortable
- Be clear with your partner about what behaviour you will and will not accept
- Talk with your new partner about what you have experienced so they have an understanding of domestic violence and what you have been through
- Talk to your counsellor about the relationship, especially if you have any concerns
- Keep your financial affairs separate initially.

Further Reading

Bancroft, L. (2002). *Why does he do that?: Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

Berry, D.B. (2000). *Domestic violence sourcebook: everything you need to know*. Inninois USA: Contemporary Publishing Group.

Cook, P.W. (1997). *Abused men: the hidden side of domestic violence*. Connecticut USA: Praeger Publishers.

Useful Websites

Women's Safety Survey:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0d21d0868273a2c3ca25697b00207e97/46ea7c5b824d2940ca256bd0002840df!OpenDocument>

Anger: Managing angry feelings:

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=240&np=298&id=2130>

National Child Protection Clearinghouse:

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/issues2.html>

Support Agencies

Lifeline (24 hours)

☎ 13 11 14

<http://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Centacare

☎ 3252 4371

<http://www.centacare.org.au/>

Relationships Australia

☎ 1300 364 277

<http://www.relationships.com.au/>