



Abusive Relationships: Recognizing the Signs

Abuse is **more than physical violence**. Most people don't knowingly enter an abusive relationship — abuse often develops **gradually** over time, like the “boiling frog” effect: the danger increases so slowly that victims don't realize how bad it has become until they are deeply trapped. Abuse can include:

- **Verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse**
- **Severe manipulation and control**
- **Isolation from friends or loved ones**
- **Physical and sexual violence**

Verbal, Psychological & Emotional Abuse

Abusers use words and behaviors to degrade, control, and damage a victim's mental and emotional health. Examples:

- Humiliating or constantly criticizing
- Threatening, shouting, or name-calling
- Sarcasm or jokes intended to hurt
- Blaming and scapegoating
- Forcing degrading acts
- Withholding affection (“silent treatment”)
- Unpredictable rules and “moving the goalpost”
- Making the victim feel worthless or unbelievable

Toxic Relationship Dynamics

- **Humiliation, Negating & Criticizing:** Name-calling, public embarrassment, insulting appearance or accomplishments, belittling interests
- **Control & Shame:** Threats, tracking movements, controlling finances, lecturing, ordering, unpredictable outbursts, using others to shame
- **Accusing, Blaming & Denial:** Jealousy, gaslighting, guilt-tripping, blaming victim for reactions, destroying property, trivializing harm
- **Emotional Neglect & Isolation:** Withholding affection, cutting off social ties, turning others against victim, dismissing feelings
- **Codependence:** Neglecting own needs, seeking constant approval, sacrificing without reciprocity, defending the abuser, fear of leaving

Narcissistic Abuse

Abuse perpetrated by individuals high on the narcissism spectrum, often manipulative, controlling, and emotionally damaging. Narcissists seek constant attention, often disregarding all needs but their own, and are linked to physical and sexual abuse.



Community Tool Kits

Domestic & Interpersonal Violence

Any **threat or act of physical violence** against a relative, partner, or roommate. Often includes isolation, financial control, verbal/emotional abuse, threats to children or pets.

- Victims may develop **trauma bonds**, making it harder to leave
- Offenders may appear calm and rational afterward, portraying the victim as “unstable”
- Many domestic abusers are also sexual abusers of partners or children

Stalking & Harassment

Pattern of unwanted contact intended to harass, threaten, or cause fear.

- Threatening messages
- Unwanted gifts
- Following the victim
- Showing up at home/work/school
- Property damage
- GPS tracking
- Spreading humiliating content

⚠ Victims facing both physical abuse and stalking face a **much higher homicide risk** — 89% of women killed by an ex-partner were stalked by them first.

Domestic Sexual Violence

- Intimate partner sexual assault is **more common** than stranger assault
- Often causes greater physical injury
- 25% of women are sexually assaulted by partners
- 75% of physically abused women have also been sexually assaulted by the same person
- Strongly linked to **increased homicide risk** and long-term health problems

Common control tactics include: Using/abusing children as leverage; parental alienation; threatening or harming pets; threatening suicide; and/or using religion or culture as control.

Impact on Children

Domestic violence in a child’s presence **is child abuse**.

- 1 in 3 children who witness DV are also abused
- Children exposed to DV may develop anxiety, aggression, nightmares, trouble in school, and relationship problems later in life
- Children in DV homes are **3× more likely** to become abusers as adults
- Risks include obesity, cancer, heart disease, depression, substance abuse, alcoholism, and unintended pregnancies