

What is Domestic Abuse?

The following list of behaviors may help you identify any current or past physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. You may have been abused by a stranger, but more often it is by an intimate partner, family member, or acquaintance. Violence is usually not an isolated incident but a pattern of behaviors intended to harm and control. You are NOT responsible for/or deserve any abuse you receive no matter what the circumstance. If you are experiencing current incidents of abuse, you deserve to receive support from people who understand the reality of physical and sexual violence. This list is intended to be used for your personal information only and describes only some abusive behaviors.

What is physical abuse?

You have been physically abused if another person has:

- pushed and shoved you
- held you down and kept you from getting up or leaving
- bitten you
- kicked you
- choked you
- hit or punched you once, twice, or repeatedly, which may or may not have resulted in visible physical injury
- tied or otherwise physically restrained you
- thrown objects at you that may or may not have hit you
- locked you out of your house, a room, or a closet
- abandoned you in dangerous places
- refused to help you (for example—to get medical help) when you were sick, injured, pregnant, or if you are physically disabled
- deprived you of sleep, food, or water
- forced you or the children to ride in a car while that person was driving dangerously
- forced you off the road or kept you from driving
- pulled your hair
- dragged you
- pulled your arms, legs, or other body parts
- thrown you down or against a wall
- ripped your clothing
- threatened you with a weapon
- hit or beat you with other objects
- stabbed you
- burned you
- forced you to participate in violent rituals
- physically abused you as a child

Sometimes these forms of physical abuse do not result in physical injury. However, the atmosphere of fear and violence these acts create is abusive and results in the emotional pain that accompanies physical abuse.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual Abuse may be included in a pattern of behavior to gain power and control and cause harm in a domestic violent relationship

You have been sexually abused or harassed if a person has:

- told anti-woman jokes or said bad things of a sexual nature about women
- treated women as sex objects
- acted like he or she owns you
- accused you of being sexual with others
- insisted that you dress more sexually than you wanted or criticized how you dress
- said bad things about your body
- put down your feelings about sex
- criticized your sexual past; blamed you if you had been sexually abused in the past or as a child
- criticized you sexually (for example, called you frigid)
- insisted on touching you sexually when you did not want to be touched—either when you two were alone or with other people
- forced you to mimic or watch pornography when you did not choose to do so
- called you a whore or a slut or another sexually derogative term
- withheld or made you beg for sexual affection
- made you strip when you did not want to—when you two were alone or with others
- openly showed sexual interest in other people when you were in public or at home (for example, when watching TV)
- had affairs (often bragging about them) after agreeing not to have sex with anyone else
- forced you to have sex
- forced you to have sex with other people
- forced you into prostitution
- forced you to make pornographic films
- made you watch other people having sex
- made you perform sexual acts you did not want to do
- forced sex after physically or emotionally abusing you
- forced sex when you were sick or when bad for your health
- hurt you with objects or weapons during sex
- made you pose for sexual photographs
- made you have sex with animals
- sexually abused you as a child
- raped you

Sexual abuse is NOT just forced intercourse. All forms of coerced sexual contact or exploitation constitute sexual abuse.

What is emotional abuse?

You have been emotionally abused if another person has:

- ignored your feelings or made fun of them
- put down women as a group (for example—called them crazy, emotional, stupid)
- withheld approval, appreciation, or affection to punish you
- constantly criticized you and called you names
- told you that nothing you do is ever good enough no matter what you do or how hard you try
- yelled and screamed at you
- insulted your friends and family, driving them away
- put you down in front of others
- avoided socializing with you (for example—going out with you but then ignoring you)
- kept you from working or going to school, controlled your money, made all the decisions, demanded that you ask permission to do or have anything
- didn't let you use the telephone, and/or censored your mail and email
- refused to work or share money
- destroyed, sold, or given away things you (or the both of you) own
- kept you from talking to or seeing your friends and family
- threatened to hurt your friends or family
- punished or kept things from the children when angry at you
- treated the children more nicely than usual when angry at you
- threatened to kidnap or hurt the children if you left
- blamed you for any problems, real or imaginary, with the children
- abused pets to hurt you
- accused you of having affairs
- tried to control you with lies or contradictions
- tried to control you with emotions (for example—threatened to commit suicide if you left)
- told you it was your fault when a person physically or sexually abused you—that you asked for it, deserved it, or liked it
- denied that the behavior is abusive or minimized it by calling you crazy or stupid or telling you that you made it up
- threatened to tell or told your employer or family that you are a lesbian in order to get you fired or have your children removed
- threatened to use weapons, to harm you, or to kill you

Adapted from *What is Domestic Abuse?*, St. Paul Intervention Project, St. Paul, MN