

# Am I Being Abused?

## What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of coercive tactics that are used to gain and maintain power and control in an ongoing, familiar relationship. Generally, several forms of abuse, such as psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and/or economic, are used in combination. Abusers believe they are entitled to control how their victims think, feel and behave. This control extends to the entire household, and children in the home are harmed by the behavior and parenting tactics of the abuser. Physical and sexual violence may be a component of the abuse but some victims are controlled through intimidation, threats, emotional and psychological abuse and isolation – no physical abuse is necessary. In an abusive relationship, one party fears the other and attempts to comply with the other's wishes to avoid harm.

Anyone can become a victim of domestic violence. Abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, economic, religious age groups and across the lifespan. Victims are primarily female, although men can also be harmed. Abusers who use power and control to get gain and maintain power and control include spouses, partners, adult children or other family members and some caregivers. Intimate partners may be of the same sex or opposite sex.

## What can I do if I think I might be a victim of abuse?

Keep in mind that you are not alone. Many other individuals are harmed by spouses, partners, family or caregivers; many experience sexual assault and/or abuse by someone they know or a stranger.

Help is available. Talk with someone you trust and/or an advocate at a domestic abuse or sexual abuse program. You can usually call your local domestic/sexual abuse hotline and talk with someone without having to give your name or location. Talk to them about what is going on in your relationship and they will help you identify abusive behaviors that may be present. For the nearest domestic abuse hotline in your area, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1- 800-799-SAFE or 1-800-799-7233; for the nearest sexual assault hotline in your area, call the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) at 800-656-HOPE or 800-656-4673.

You can also ask for support and information from other professionals such as law enforcement, health care providers or faith community members. Be aware, that certain professionals may be mandatory reporters, meaning they would have to report to an investigative/enforcement agency any kind of physical or sexual abuse that you might share. Counseling: Is it Helpful? 13. Is counseling helpful for victims? Most victims of abuse are not mentally ill. However, some victims experience depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other mental health issues because of the abuse. In addition, persons with mental illness are often targeted as easy victims who will not be believed. Many victims find counseling, peer support, and support groups helpful. Many domestic abuse or rape crisis centers have support groups and counseling available for victims at no charge. These programs can also provide referral information for mental health counselors who are skilled in working with victims of abuse. 14. Is counseling helpful for abusers? Abusers are responsible for their own actions. Educational programs done in a group setting have been shown to be the most effective way to help abusers change their behavior. The most effective programs usually have at least a 26-week program, and many of the participants are court mandated into the program. Please note, one on one counseling and/or counseling the victim and abuser together is not recommended and has proven to be harmful to victims. For information about educational programs for abusers, contact your local domestic violence program.

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**Source URL (retrieved on 07/03/2015 - 8:40pm):** <http://wcadv.org/gethelp/am-i-being-abused>