

What to Do if You Are in an Abusive Relationship

How do I know if I'm in an abusive relationship?

You may feel afraid or unsafe around your intimate partner. You could be in an abusive relationship even if your partner has never hit you. There are many types of partner abuse:

- Physical abuse (hitting, punching, kicking)
- Sexual abuse (rape, forced sexual activity)
- Emotional or verbal abuse (repeated name-calling, insults, or threats)
- Controlling behaviors (little or no access to money, limited ability to leave or enter the house or use the car)

What should I know about it?

Partner violence is a crime. It's not your fault if you are being abused, so don't blame yourself. No one deserves to be abused. One in four women and one in nine men in the United States are victims of partner violence at some time. Partner violence can happen in any type of couple—married, dating, heterosexual, or same-sex. People of any age, ethnicity, or income or education level can be in an abusive relationship. If your partner uses alcohol or drugs, this can make the abuse worse.

What can I do if I'm abused?

Talk about it with someone you trust (family members, friends, clergy, nurse, or doctor). Know where your and your children's important papers are in case you need to leave your situation in a hurry. Important papers include bank records, birth certificates, Social Security cards, and other important documents. Put these papers in a safe place. You will need them to access your money and to apply for services for you and your children. Make a plan to go to a safe place, such as a shelter or a family member's house.

Call the police at any time you feel you are in immediate danger. You may want to get a legal order that forbids the person abusing you to be near you. This may be called an "order of protection" or "injunction," depending on the laws in your state. The police can enforce this.

Where can I get help?

Your doctor or nurse, a social worker, or the police

The National Domestic Violence Hotline can give you the name of a local shelter

Telephone: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Web site: <http://www.thehotline.org/get-help/help-in-your-area/>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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