

Intimate Partner Violence Information

Intimate partner violence, also called domestic abuse or relationship abuse, is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other partner. Intimate partner violence can happen to women and men and can happen between people who are or were:

- Married.
- Dating.
- Living together.

What are the types of intimate partner violence?

Intimate partner violence can involve physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse, or stalking by a current or former partner. Different types of abuse can occur at the same time within the same relationship.

- Physical abuse. This includes rough handling, threats with a weapon, throwing objects, pushing, or hitting.
- Emotional and psychological abuse. This includes verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation, intimidation, social isolation, or threats. Abuse may also include limiting contact with family and friends.
- Sexual assault. Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual activity that occurs without clear permission (*consent*) from both people. This includes unwanted touching and sexual harassment.
- Economic abuse. This includes controlling money, food, transportation, or other belongings.
- Stalking. This involves such things as repeated, unwanted phone calls, e-mails, or text messages, or watching the victim from a distance.

What are some warning signs of intimate partner violence?

Physical signs

- Bruises.
- Broken bones.
- Burns or cuts.
- Physical pain.
- Head injury.

Emotional and psychological signs

- Crying.
- Depression.
- Hopelessness.
- Desperation.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Fear of the partner.
- Anxiety.
- Suicidal thoughts or behavior.
- Antisocial behavior.
- Low self-esteem.
- Fear of intimacy.
- Flashbacks.

Sexual signs

- Bruising, swelling, or bleeding of the genital or rectal area.
- Signs of an STI, such as genital sores, warts, or discharge coming from the genital area.
- Pain in the genital area.
- Unintended pregnancy.
- Problems with pregnancy.

What are common behaviors of those affected by intimate partner violence?

Those affected by intimate partner violence may:

- Be late to work or other events.
- Not show up to places as promised.
- Have to let their partner know where they are and who they are with.
- Be isolated or kept from seeing friends or family.
- Make comments about their partner's temper or behavior.
- Make excuses for their partner.
- Engage in high-risk sexual behaviors.
- Use drugs or alcohol.
- Have unhealthy eating behaviors.

What are common feelings of those affected by intimate partner violence?

Victims of intimate partner violence may feel that they:

- Must be careful not to say or do things that trigger their partner's anger.
- Cannot do anything right.
- Deserve to be treated badly.
- Overreact to their partner's behavior or temper.
- Cannot trust their own feelings.
- Cannot trust other people.
- Are trapped.
- May have their children taken away by their partner.
- Are emotionally drained or numb.
- Are in danger.
- Might have to kill their partner to survive.

Where can you get help?

If you do not feel safe searching for help online at home, use a computer at a public library to access the Internet. Call 911 if you are in immediate danger or need medical help.

Intimate partner violence hotlines and websites

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline.
 - 24-hour phone hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).
 - Videophone: available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 1-855-812-1001.
 - thehotline.org
- The National Sexual Assault Hotline.
 - 24-hour phone hotline: 1-800-656-4673.
 - safehelpline.org

Shelters for victims of intimate partner violence

If you are a victim of intimate partner violence, there are resources to help you find a temporary place for you and your children to live (*shelter*). The specific address of these shelters is often not known to the public.

Police

Report assaults, threats, and stalking to the police.

Counselors and counseling centers

Counseling can help you cope with difficult emotions and empower you to plan for your future safety. The topics you discuss with a counselor are private and confidential. Children of intimate partner violence victims also might need counseling to manage stress and anxiety.



The court system

You can work with a lawyer or an advocate to get legal protection against an abuser. Protection includes restraining orders and private addresses. Crimes against you, such as assault, can also be prosecuted through the courts. Laws vary by state.

Follow these instructions at home:

- Create a safety plan that includes ways to remain safe while you are in an abusive relationship, while you are planning to leave, or after you leave. This plan may be created by the victim alone or with assistance from the domestic violence hotline staff or local shelter staff. Your safety plan may include:
 - How to cope with emotions.
 - How to tell friends and family about the abuse.
 - How to take legal action.
 - How to create a safe home environment.
 - How to keep your children safe.
 - Emergency plans for life-threatening situations.

Get help right away if you:

- Feel like you are in immediate danger.
- Feel like you may hurt yourself or others.

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

Summary

- If you are a victim of intimate partner violence, there are resources to help you find a temporary place for you and your children to live (*shelter*).
- Create a safety plan that includes ways to remain safe while you are in an abusive relationship, while you are planning to leave, or after you leave.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

Document Released: 03/09/2005 Document Revised: 02/01/2019 Document Reviewed: 02/01/2019
Elsevier Interactive Patient Education © 2020 Elsevier Inc.