

Domestic abuse:  
getting the facts  
and challenging  
the myths

**women's aid**  
until women & children are safe



# What is domestic abuse?

**Domestic abuse, also known as domestic violence, is abuse within an intimate or family relationship using a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading or violent behaviour.**

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, social background, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity.

Sadly, domestic abuse is very common and in the majority of cases is experienced by women and perpetrated by men. Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off event and tends to escalate in frequency and severity over time.

Domestic abuse can involve physical or sexual violence including rape, punching, hitting, slapping and threatening to kill or harm. But abuse isn't always physical and perpetrators often use emotional abuse, bullying and humiliation to intimidate and isolate, making it very hard for women to leave.

# Challenging the myths

Myths about domestic abuse are often widespread and deep-rooted. These prejudices lead many women to blame themselves for the abuse and often prevent them from seeking help.

We want to challenge some of the most commonly held myths so that women feel empowered to come forward and are believed and understood when they do.

## Myth #1

**If it was that bad, she'd leave.**

Women stay in abusive relationships for many different reasons and there are a range of psychological, emotional, financial and physical barriers that can make it difficult to leave, even if she wants to. **A woman may be frightened for her life or for the safety of her children;** she may have nowhere to go; she may have no financial independence; she may be reliant on the perpetrator for care due to a disability.

Abusers often isolate their partners from family and friends in order to control them, making it very difficult for an abused woman to leave. Violence can also significantly escalate after separation.

## Myth #2

**He has never hit her, so it isn't really abuse.**

Domestic abuse isn't always physical, but it does almost always include controlling, manipulative behaviour that erodes someone's sense of self and independence.

**Coercive control is a criminal offence** and includes ongoing humiliation and frightening threats. This behaviour creates a prison that is invisible to the outside world, and instils a sense of fear that permeates all elements of a woman's life.

### Myth #3

**She provoked him.**

No one deserves to be assaulted, raped or emotionally abused. This myth is especially dangerous because any reference to 'provocation' means that we are blaming the woman and relieving the abuser of responsibility for his actions. **Abuse or violence of any kind is never the woman's fault.** Responsibility always lies with the perpetrator, and with him alone.

### Myth #4

**Alcohol and drugs make men more violent.**

Alcohol and drugs can make existing abuse worse, or be a catalyst for an attack, but they do not cause domestic abuse. **Men can be violent when they are sober and similarly many people use alcohol or drugs and do not abuse their partner.** Alcohol and drugs should never be used to excuse violent or controlling behaviour, the perpetrator alone is responsible for his actions.

### Myth #5

**Women are attracted to abusive men.**

To suggest that some women are particularly attracted to abusive men unfairly blames the victim. **A perpetrator of domestic abuse can be charming and charismatic** when he first meets a new partner, and often no one, let alone the woman he has just met, would suspect he would ever be abusive in a relationship.

### Myth #6

**Domestic abuse is a private matter.**

Domestic abuse is a largely hidden crime, occurring primarily at home behind closed doors. Because of this, people think that what goes on in the home is private, and not their problem. But domestic abuse is a crime. It is against the law. **We are all affected by domestic abuse and we all have a responsibility to speak out against it.**

# Am I experiencing domestic abuse?

Everyone has arguments with the people they love from time to time. But if you feel scared of your partner, and feel like you have to alter your behaviour because you are frightened of their reaction, then it is a sign of domestic abuse.

- Has your partner tried to **keep you from seeing your friends or family?**
- Has your partner **prevented you from studying or going to work?**
- Does your partner **constantly check up on you or follow you?**
- Are you ever **afraid** of your partner?
- Does your partner **constantly belittle or humiliate you, or regularly criticise or insult you?**
- Do you feel like you're constantly **'walking on eggshells'?**
- Has your partner ever **forced you to have sex with him, or perform sexual acts you haven't wanted to?**

**If you answered yes to one or more of the above questions, then you may be experiencing domestic abuse.**

# Getting help

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children across England. We give women and children the support they need to escape abuse and we campaign tirelessly to address the root causes of violence against women.



If you or a friend need help we are here to listen.

Speaking out about domestic abuse can be really hard. Please don't suffer in silence. We can offer confidential, non-judgemental support.

**If you are ever in immediate danger, always call the police on 999.**



Call the 24hr freephone National Domestic Violence Helpline (run by Refuge) on **0808 2000 247**.



Visit our website at [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) to find out more about domestic abuse and to use the Survivors' Forum – a safe, anonymous space for women who have been affected by domestic abuse to share their experiences and support one another.

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“Being lucky enough to access refuge meant the difference between life and death. I know that sounds dramatic but he would have tried to kill me and I was feeling so trapped, I would have let him. I got away with my tiny baby and was able to become the confident kind of mother I never even knew I could be. Women’s Aid made both our lives what it is today.”

**Sarah, survivor\***

\*Photo posed by model

**This is why we’re here.  
We want to help more women  
like Sarah, but we need your  
help to do it.**

**Please donate if you can  
[www.womensaid.org.uk/donate](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/donate)**



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