

Guide for Prevention of Family Abuse in Australia

**RECOGNISE THE SIGNS
RAISE YOUR CONCERNS
REFER SUPPORT**



Stopping
Abuse in
Families
Everywhere

Rotary
Hawthorn



Rotary SAFE Families Inclusive Communities Initiative

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Stopping Abuse in Families Everywhere

How You Can Prevent Abuse to Others

Understand and Be Informed of the “3RRR’s” of Prevention

1. **R**ecognise signs of abuse
 2. **R**aise your concerns safely with victim
 3. **R**efers victim (000 if Emergency) to support agency OR Make the call yourself!
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Please note that the pronoun “she” can be replaced with “he” at all times!

What is abuse?

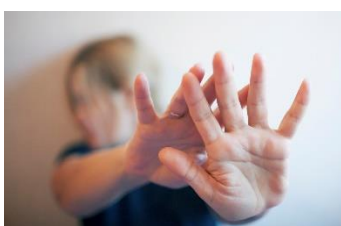
In an abusive relationship, one partner tries to dominate the other through physical harm, criticisms, demands, threats, reproductive coercion, or sexual pressure.

Every couple has arguments or disagreements. In a respectful and equal relationship, both partners feel free to state their opinions, to make their own decisions, to be themselves, and to say no to sex.

For the victim and her children, this behaviour can be very dangerous, frightening, confusing and damaging.

Psychological, financial, or emotional abuse can be just as harmful as physical abuse. Abuse in a relationship is never acceptable in Australia, regardless of the circumstances, and is never the fault of the victim.

Abuse is **not** caused by alcohol, or stress, or by the victim’s behaviour. Abuse happens because the abuser wants to control and manipulate the other person. Physical and sexual assault, coercive control, threats and stalking are crimes in Australia and need to be reported to the police.



“My family and friends didn’t think it was ‘that bad’ because he only physically hit me once. But the put-downs and manipulation were so much worse, the way he controlled my life. I really wish my family could have understood how horrible it was.” –Katia

How can I recognise abuse?

You might be unsure if what your friend or relative is experiencing is 'abuse'. Maybe you just have some sense that something is 'wrong' in the relationship. Sometimes there may be signs that indicate that there is abuse.

Signs that someone is being abused:

- Afraid of her partner or is always very anxious to please him.
- Stopped seeing friends or family, or cuts phone conversations short when her partner is in the room.
- Partner often criticises or humiliates her in front of other people.
- Partner pressures or forces her to have sex.
- Partner often orders her about or makes all the decisions (for example, her partner controls all the money, tells her who she can see and what she can do).
- She often talks about her partner's 'jealousy', 'bad temper' or 'possessiveness'.
- She has become anxious or depressed, lost her confidence, or is unusually quiet.
- Physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc). She may give unlikely explanations for physical injuries.
- Her children seem afraid of her partner, have behaviour problems, or are very withdrawn or anxious.
- She is reluctant to leave her children with her partner.
- After she has left the relationship, her partner is constantly calling her, harassing her, following her, coming to her house, or waiting outside.

Why doesn't she just leave?

It can be hard to understand why someone would stay in a relationship if being treated so badly. Leaving may appear to be a simple solution.

It is hard to imagine what it is like to be abused when you are not in the situation yourself. From the outside, it may seem easier to leave than it actually is. It can be very difficult to leave an abusive partner. It is important for friends and family to understand.

Reasons why it may be so hard to leave:

- Fear of what the abuser will do if she leaves. The abusive person may have threatened her, her relatives, or the children, pets, or property. They may threaten to commit suicide if she talks about leaving.
- She still loves her partner because he is not abusive all the time.
- She has a commitment to the relationship or belief that marriage is forever, for 'better or worse'.
- She hopes her partner will change. Sometimes the abusive person promises to change.
- She thinks the abuse is her fault.
- She feels she should stay 'for the sake of the children', and it is best that children live with both parents.
- A lack of confidence. The abusive person will have deliberately tried to break down their partner's confidence, and make her feel stupid, hopeless, and responsible for the abuse. She may feel powerless and unable to make decisions.
- Isolation and loneliness. The abusive person may have tried to cut her off from contact with family or friends. She might be afraid of coping on her own. If English is not her first language she might feel particularly isolated.
- Pressure to stay from family, her community or church. She might fear rejection from her community or family if she leaves.
- She may feel that she can't get away from her partner because they live in a rural area, or because they have the same friends, or are part of the same ethnic, Aboriginal, or religious community.
- She doesn't have the means to survive if the relationship ends. Nowhere to live, access to money, or transport, particularly if she lives in an isolated area. She may be dependent upon her partner's income. If she has a disability, she may depend upon the abuser for assistance.



It is very important that you do not make her feel that there is something wrong with her because she hasn't left. This will only reinforce her low confidence and feelings of guilt and self-blame.

Leaving an abusive partner may sometimes be quite dangerous. The abuse may continue or increase after she leaves. Help her to understand, to decide what she can do, and to consider her safety whether she decides to stay or to leave.

Encourage her to contact a community health service to talk about how to protect herself. This can be anonymous and confidential.

You can make the call yourself to get professional advice for the victim.

"When I told her how he abused me, my friend said 'but you let him do it' like it was my fault. That made me feel worse. She didn't know how much pressure he put on me to go back, how he said he loved me and would kill himself rather than live without me and the children.

He made me feel so guilty. I thought how important it was for the children to have a father. It was all a way of manipulating me to come back. My friend stopped talking to me after I went back to him, she said I was stupid.

I was really upset because she was my only close friend in Australia and I really needed someone to talk to and help me to see that the way he treated me was wrong." –Ashari

Should I get involved?

Many people worry that they will be 'interfering' if they get involved, or that it is a 'private matter'. But it is equally worrying if someone is being abused and you say nothing. Your support can make a difference. You might risk some embarrassment if you approach her and she rejects your support or tells you your suspicions are wrong.

But if you approach her sensitively, without being critical, most people will appreciate an expression of concern for their well-being, even if they are not ready to talk about their situation. It is unlikely you will make things 'worse' by expressing concern.



If there are children witnessing abuse or being abused, you have a responsibility to become involved!

How should I approach?

Approach your friend or relative in a sensitive way, letting her know your own concerns. Tell her you're worried about her, then explain why. For example: *I'm worried about you because I've noticed you seem really unhappy lately.*

Don't be surprised if she seems defensive or rejects your support. She might fear worrying you if she tells you about the abuse.



She may not be ready to admit to being abused or may feel ashamed and afraid of talking about it. She might have difficulty trusting anyone after being abused.

Don't push the person into talking if they are uncomfortable but let them know that you're there if they need to talk. Be patient and keep an ear out for anything that indicates they are ready to talk about the abuse.

What can I do to help?



The most important thing you can do is to listen without judging, respect her decisions, and help her to find ways to become stronger and safer.

"You don't have to fully understand to be of assistance. All you have to do is give your time and love without being judgemental." –Janic

- **Listen to what she has to say.**
- **Believe what she tells you.** It will have taken a lot for her to talk to you. People are much more likely to cover up or downplay the abuse. You might find it hard to imagine someone you know could behave abusively. But the abusive person will probably show you a very different side to the side the victim sees.
- **Take the abuse seriously.** Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally. Don't underestimate the danger she may be in.
- **Help her to recognise the abuse** and understand how it may be affecting her or her children.
- **Tell her you think she has been brave** in being able to talk about the abuse, and in being able to keep going despite the abuse.
- **Help to build her confidence in herself.**
- **Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault** and that no-one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do. Let her know you think that the way her partner is treating her is wrong. For example: *'No-one, not even your husband, has the right to mistreat you'*

- **Help her to protect herself.** You could say *'I'm afraid of what he could do to you or the children'* or *'I'm worried that it will get worse'*. Talk to her about how she thinks she could protect herself better.
- **Help her to think about what she can do** and see how you can help her to achieve it.
- **Offer practical assistance** like minding the children for a while, cooking a meal for her, offering a safe place to stay, transport.
- **Respect her right to make her own decisions**, even if you don't agree with them. Respect her cultural or religious values and beliefs.
- **Maintain some level of regular contact with her.** Having an opportunity to talk regularly to a supportive friend or relative can be very important.
- **Tell her about the services available.** Remind her that if she calls a service, she can remain anonymous and get support and information, they won't pressure her to leave if she doesn't want to.
- **Keep supporting her after she has left the relationship.** She may need practical support and encouragement to help establish a new life and recover from the abuse. She could also seek counselling or join a support group. (Via one of the support agencies listed)

"What would really have helped is to have a relative or friend to mind the kids for a while. I just needed the time to think and work out my feelings without the kids being around all the time." –Soraya

Questions you could ask and things you could say

These are just some ideas. It is important that you only say what you believe and use your own words.

- *The way he treats you is wrong.*
- *What can I do to help you?*
- *How do you think his behaviour has affected you?*
- *How do you think his behaviour is affecting your children?*
- *I'm worried about what he could do to you or the children.*
- *What do you think you should do?*
- *What are you afraid of if you leave?*
- *What are you afraid of if you stay?*

What not to do ...

When talking to someone who is being abused, some things may not help, or may stop her from wanting to confide in you fully.

*Here are some of the things victims of abuse say that do **not** help:*

- **Don't blame her for the abuse** or ask questions like 'What did you do for him to treat you like that?' or 'Why do you put up with it?', or 'How can you still be in love with him?' These questions suggest that it is somehow her fault.
- **Don't keep trying to work out the 'reasons' for the abuse.** Concentrate on supporting the person who is being abused.
- **Don't be critical** if she says she still loves her partner, or if she leaves but then returns to the relationship. Leaving an abusive partner takes time, and your support is really important.
- **Don't criticise her partner.** Criticise the abusive behaviour and let her know that no-one has the right to abuse her (for example, say 'Your partner shouldn't treat you like that'). Criticism of her partner is only likely to make her want to defend him or her.
- **Don't give advice** or tell her what you would do. This will only reduce her confidence to make her own decisions. Listen to her and give her information, not advice.
- **Don't pressure her to leave** or try to make decisions on her behalf. Focus on listening and supporting her to make her own decisions. She knows her own situation best.

Where to Find Professional support

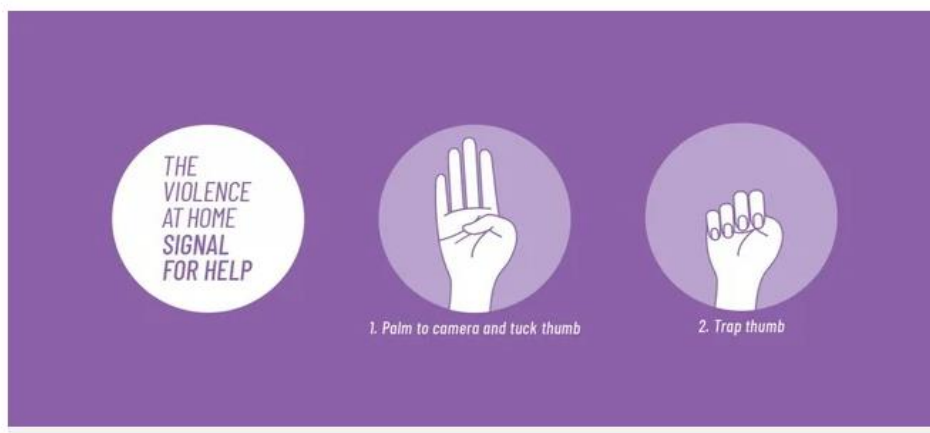
Helping to increase her safety

Whether she is staying in the relationship or has separated, it is important to think about how she can be protected from further abuse.

For information about her rights and safety, it is important to provide details of support agencies for her protection and her children's protection,. These are listed at end of this materials. If she is unable to make the call, YOU call that support organisation yourself!

Agree on a code word or signal that she can use to let you know she needs help. (See the item on "Hand Signals" in Rotary SAFE Families website/Latest News www.rotarysafefamilies.org.au)

It involves a simple two-step movement of placing their palm forward with their thumb tucked in before 'trapping' their thumb under their four fingers.



What can I do if I witness or overhear physical violence or threats?

*If you believe there is immediate physical danger and that she and her children are about to be harmed, call the police on **000** immediately.*

Encourage her to telephone one of the professional organisations listed, to get their support and thoughts. If she does not make this telephone call, YOU make the call yourself to ask for advice and support for her.

Note: Many people are afraid of involving the police, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds or indigenous communities who may have had bad past experiences. You can simply call a domestic violence service (As Listed) to find out about how you could help in this situation.

But remember, if you think there is immediate physical danger, call the police on 000.



Looking after yourself Supporting a friend or relative who is being abused can be frustrating and stressful. You need to look after yourself and to get support too.

Feeling frustrated or angry that she hasn't left the relationship Remember that letting her know you're frustrated or disappointed will not help her and may only make things worse.

Feeling afraid or 'out of your depth' Get some support for yourself. Talk to other friends or contact a service for information on what you can do.

Feeling pressured to help more than you are able Be honest about the amount and type of support you can offer. Remember that you are not responsible for the abuse, and you cannot 'rescue her'.



You are not the professional so you must not try to "fix" the problem.

Be careful. Don't place yourself in a position where the person who is being abusive could harm or manipulate you. Don't try to intervene directly if you witness a person being assaulted - call the police instead.

If the person who is being abusive is your friend or relative, you may feel caught in the middle.

Services that can help

In Victoria, and in other states, there are 24 hour crisis hotlines, as well as local Domestic Violence Services which can provide information and practical support in finding safe accommodation, housing, or obtaining legal or financial assistance.

You can call these for information or pass the number on to your friend or family member.

Note: From 1 February 2023, employees of non-small business employers (employers with 15 or more employees) can access 10 days of paid family domestic violence leave. This includes part-time and casual employees. (see website: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/family-and-domestic-violence-leave>)



000 always if emergency!

InTouch: Multicultural Centre against Family Violence This is a state-wide organisation specialising in services, programs and responses to family violence in migrant and refugee communities. Call InTouch on 1800 755 988

Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS) The IWSS provides support services either face-to-face or over the telephone. A caseworker will discuss your options and can arrange a time to talk with you. For crisis and need immediate assistance, IWSS is available from 9:00 am to 4:00pm, Monday to Friday. Ph: (07) 3846 3490

Safe Steps (Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service) 24 hour telephone crisis counselling, information, referral and support for women experiencing domestic violence. Phone 1800 015 188 www.safesteps.org.au

Lifeline Australia 24-hour counselling to anyone within Australia. You can talk to them about any problem, big or small. Phone: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

1800 RESPECT 24 hour counselling and support service for people impacted by sexual assault, family violence. Phone: 1800 737 732 www.1800respect.org.au

Women's Support Line Run by Women's Information and Referral Exchange Inc. you can call this free, confidential and state-wide phone service on 1800 811 811 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday). Email inforequests@wire.org.au

Kids Helpline Kids Helpline provides private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling for children, teens, young adults and also for parents and carers on 1800 55 1800 (toll-free). Email: counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au Counselling and WebChat is also available.

Australian Childhood Foundation Counselling for children and young people affected by abuse. Phone: 1300 381 581 Email: info@childhood.org. Website: www.childhood.org.au

Men's Referral Service Men's Referral Service provides an anonymous and confidential phone counselling, information and referrals service on 1300 766 491 for:

- men who might be using violent and controlling behaviour towards a partner or family member
- men who have been victimised by a partner or family member
- women wishing to find information about male family violence
- friends, family or colleagues of people who are using or experiencing family violence

MensLine National phone and online support service for men with family and relationship concerns includes video counselling on 1300 78 99 78

Victims Support Agency - Men

The Victims Support Agency provides support and information to help adult male victims of family violence and victims of violent crime, guides victims through legal process, helps manage effects of crime with practical assistance and counselling. Call the Victims of Crime helpline 1800 819 817. Text service via 0427 767 891 (8.00 am to 11.00 pm, 7 days a week).

Centres Against Sexual Assault Confidential, non-profit, government-funded organisations providing support and intervention for women, children and men - victim survivors of sexual assault. The Sexual Assault Crisis Line is 1800 806 292 (24/7). You can also email: ahcasa@thewomens.org.au

Relationships Australia Support groups and counselling on relationships, and for abusive and abused partners. Phone: 1300 364 277 Website: www.relationships.com.au

Aboriginal Family Domestic Violence Hotline

1800 019 123 (24 hours) Victims Services has a dedicated contact line for Aboriginal victims of crime who would like information on victims' rights, how to access counselling and financial assistance.

National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Visit website: hotline@workfocus.com An Australia-wide telephone hotline for reporting abuse and neglect of people with disability. Call the free hotline on: 1800 880 052

Translating & Interpreting Service

Call the hotline for help 131 450 Gain free access to a telephone or on-site interpreter in your own language. Immediate phone interpreting is available 24 hours every day of the year on: 131 450