



Frequently asked questions: The signs of relationship abuse and how to help



Violence against women is a human rights violation that takes place every single day around the world. Globally, one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. While domestic violence and abuse are sometimes hidden, if we know the signs of an abusive relationship, we may be able to recognize it better and seek or offer help.

What are some common signs of abuse?

- Your partner keeps track of everything you do. They monitor where you are and whom you are with at all times. They prevent

or discourage you from seeing friends, family, or going to work or school.

- You partner insists that you reply right away to their texts, emails, and calls, and demands to know your passwords to social media sites, email, and other accounts.
- An abusive partner may act jealous, including constantly accusing you of cheating. They may attempt to control how you spend money and your use of medications or birth control. They may make everyday decisions for you, such as what you wear or eat.
- They may be demeaning. They may put you down by insulting your appearance, intelligence, or interests. They may try to humiliate you in front of others and attempt to destroy your property or things that you care about.
- An abusive partner may act angry or have a quick or unpredictable temper, so you never know what might cause a problem. They may blame you for their violent outbursts and physically harm or threaten harm to you, themselves, and members of your household, including children or pets.
- They may hurt you physically, such as hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, punching, slapping, kicking, or biting. They may use, or threaten to use, a weapon against you.
- They may be sexually abusive, including rape or other forced sexual activity. They may incorrectly assume that consent for a sex act in the past means that you must participate in the same acts in the future. They may also incorrectly assume that consent for one activity means consent for increased levels of intimacy. For example, an abuser may assume that a kiss should lead to sex every time.
- An abusive partner may threaten to turn you in to authorities for illegal activity if you report the abuse, or if you resist.

You can talk with someone who has been trained to help by calling a [local helpline](#).

What are some safety tips if I am experiencing abuse?

If you think you are being abused, seek help. These tips provide guidance on how to find safety and support.

- **Consider sharing your concerns with a trusted friend, family member, or neighbor.** Work with them to develop a plan for when you need help. This plan may include, for instance, creating a secret code or multiple code words, sentences, or emojis that would help you communicate more safely with them.
- **Develop an escape strategy,** such as saying you need to go to the pharmacy or grocery store and, once there, asking to use the phone to call for help. Think through several plausible reasons for leaving home at different times of the day or night in case you need to escape.
- If possible, **keep a telephone always charged** and accessible and know which numbers to call for help: a friend, a family member, or the police. If your life is in danger, call the police if you believe it is safe to do so.
- Try to **identify patterns** in your partner's use and level of violence. This can help you to predict when abuse may escalate.

You can **talk with someone who has been trained to help** by calling a [local helpline](#).

What can I do to help someone I know who is experiencing abuse?

If you are concerned about a friend who may be experiencing domestic violence or abuse or feels unsafe around someone, review these tips on how to help them find safety and support.

- **If you are worried about a friend's safety, stay in touch and be creative.** Avoid making the abuser suspicious so that communication lines can stay open. If you both have children, for example, you can suggest joint calls between both yourselves and the kids. You can create secret code words to use in conversations that can help you communicate more safely.
- **Ask your friend how they prefer to connect.** It is important to establish a safe communication channel since they will be, in many instances, physically close to the abuser who might be monitoring conversations. Ask them if they prefer an instant message or text over a call, and if there is a specific platform or app they prefer to use.
- **Be supportive and believe them.** Reassure them that they are not alone and that help and support are available. Recognize

that it may be difficult for them to talk about the abuse. If they want to talk, listen carefully and be empathetic.

- **Help them think through how to stay safe during COVID-19.** Help your friend create a plan for lockdown situations. Are there other friends or family they could stay with during this time? Consider helping them to reach out to these people to make a plan.
- **Respect their right to consent.** Unless you strongly believe that your friend's life is in danger, avoid taking actions without their consent. They know the safety risks best, and, therefore, they should be driving any decisions related to the abuse they are experiencing.
- **Respect their privacy.** Because of safety issues, stigma, feelings of shame, and victim-blaming that survivors often face, it is critical that their experiences and identity remain confidential, unless they give explicit consent to reveal them.
- **Offer practical assistance and share resources.** Let your friend know that you want to help. If you are able, offer them a safe place to stay, transportation, or other forms of support that may increase their safety.

Let your friend know they can talk with someone who has been trained to help. Provide them with information about [local services](#) and [helplines](#).