



## What would you do?

Brief for December 2016 theme for the localisation of the National Awareness Campaign 'What Would You Do?'

# Information on how to look for signs of Domestic Abuse

Information for relations, friends and neighbours.



## Recognising Domestic Abuse

The signs of domestic abuse/violence are not always obvious. It is more common than most people realise and is often unreported and misunderstood. 213,000 women and 88,000 men in Ireland have been severely abused by a partner at some point in their lives. It occurs in all social classes, all ethnic groups and cultures and among people of every educational background. It can be described as the use of physical or emotional force or the threat of physical force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships, in order to control the victim.

Domestic abuse is a major issue that profoundly affects the physical, emotional, social and financial wellbeing of individuals and families. It is perpetrated against a person by that person's spouse, intimate partner, ex-partner, other family members and/or another person at home. Domestic violence is not an isolated, individual event, but rather a pattern of repeated abusive and controlling behaviours that take place within an intimate or family-type relationship and may even continue after the relationship has ended.

The term 'domestic abuse' goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to others including children; stalking; and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone.

Domestic and sexual violence have recently emerged as an increasingly important topic in the public debate both in Ireland and in the international community. While, in the past, discussion has been framed principally with respect to violence against women, men can also be victims of violence in the home and in relationships. Men and women have exactly the same rights to be safe in their own homes. All statutory services (such as the Gardaí, Courts, and social services) have a duty to provide services to all, whatever their gender.



## Types of Domestic Abuse

### Physical

Physical violence/abuse is any intentional and unwanted contact with you or something close to your body. Examples of physical abuse are: direct assault on the body; hitting; slapping; biting; choking; shoving; punching; mutilation; burns; throwing of objects; use of weapons, roughly grabbing a phone, etc.

### Emotional

Examples of emotional or psychological abuse are humiliation; bullying; threatening to hurt children; exploitation; intimidation; psychological degradation; verbal aggression; undermining of self-esteem; name calling; continual "put downs" etc.

### Sexual

Sexual violence, as a form of domestic abuse, is any form of sexual coercion (physical or emotional) or sexual degradation against an individual in the family or domestic unit. Examples are incest; rape between spouses, cohabitants, partners or ex-partners; sexual activity without consent; unwanted touching; causing pain during sex without consent etc.

### Financial

Examples of financial or economic abuse include: economic blackmail; complete control of all monies and bank accounts; denial of access to necessary funds; preventing the victim from working etc.

### Social

Examples of social abuse include systematic isolation from family and friends; forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people etc.

### Digital

Digital or online abuse is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. In most cases, this type of abuse is emotional and/or verbal and is perpetuated online. Examples include: sending negative, insulting or even threatening emails, Facebook messages, tweets; online "put downs" on status updates; sending unwanted and/or explicit pictures; stealing or insisting on being given online passwords; constantly checking of victim's mobile phones for pictures, texts and calls; unkind comments/tags on Instagram or Tumblr etc.



## Signs of Domestic Abuse

Before you get involved, ask yourself if it's safe and legal to intervene. If the situation is already violent or looks like its escalating quickly, don't directly intervene. Call the Gardaí on 999. The only effective bystander intervention is a nonviolent one. If you try to "rescue" a victim or fight off an abuser, you'll not only be endangering yourself, but the abuser might take out their anger on the victim later. The victim could end up more isolated and less likely to seek help later on.

### When you are concerned about someone you know

These are some warning signs that people who are concerned about someone they care about can look out for:

Someone experiencing abuse may seem:

- Anxious to please their partner
- Afraid of their partner, talking about their temper, possessiveness, or jealousy
- Restricted from seeing family and friends
- Limited in access to money or a car
- Depressed, anxious, or suicidal

Follow your instincts. If you've noticed these warning signs and expect that someone you know is being abused, then it is likely that they are.

### When you are concerned about a stranger

Unfortunately, bystanders to abuse between strangers have a limited amount of time to assess the situation and decide how to best intervene.

There are some warning signs that a situation might be abusive:

If the person suspected of being an abuser is:

- Acting excessively jealous of their partner
- Insulting or embarrassing their partner in public
- Yelling at or trying to intimidate their partner

Or, if the person suspected of being a victim is:

- Acting afraid of their partner
- Acting submissive
- Showing physical injuries, or wearing unusual clothing as if to hide an injury (ie, sunglasses indoors or long sleeves in summer).

If these signs are apparent, then the behaviour being witnessed could well be abuse.



## Advice for bystanders/witnesses concerned about someone they know

Don't wait for them to approach you. Look for a private moment where you can express concern and let them know you're there to support them. A simple question like "are you ok?" could give you both an opportunity to talk.

### Express concern

Tell your friend that you've been concerned for them or that you're worried. This is a non-judgmental approach that might make them feel comfortable in opening up. If they deny that anything is wrong, don't push, but communicate that you'll be there for them if they ever want to talk.

### Assure them that the violence is not their fault.

This can be such an important thing for a victim of violence to hear. Some useful things to say might be, "No one deserves to be treated this way," "You are not to blame," or simply, "What's happening is not your fault."

### Support, but don't give advice

This can be so hard to do, especially if the victim is someone close to you. But remember that you cannot make someone leave a relationship if they are not ready to do so. **Be aware that leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim. The victim is best placed to assess the danger to themselves.** Give them options and offer to help and support them along the way, but pressuring a victim to leave a relationship who does not want to may only isolate them further by making them feel like they can't confide in you. Remember that abusive behaviour is a pattern of getting power and control over someone else. Validating a victim's choices and encouraging them to make their own decisions about their life can help to break the cycle of power and control.

### Give resources

There are plenty of services in Ireland who can offer help and support to the person you are concerned about. Check out [www.whatwouldyoudo.ie](http://www.whatwouldyoudo.ie) for a list of services and advice on how to find the one most appropriate.



## Advice for people witnessing abuse between strangers

If you've decided that a situation requires an intervention and you are happy that it is safe to do so, try following one or more of the three D's.

### **Distract**

Creating a distraction is an indirect and non-confrontational way to intervene, and it can help keep a dangerous situation from escalating. You can try distracting either the person about to commit violence, or the potential victim. Either way, your goal is to prevent a situation from getting worse, or better yet, buy enough time to check in with the potential victim.

Examples: Ask for directions, the time, help looking for a lost item, or anything else that you think might keep them from leaving quickly. Better yet, if you can use a distraction that will get you a moment alone with the victim, to ask is there a problem.

### **Delegate**

Even if you don't know the victim and the abuser, someone else in the room might. Friends of the people involved might be in a better position to get involved, and they might have a better opportunity for a sustained intervention than you. You could say to them, "Look, I'm concerned about that person. Their partner seems really angry. Would you be able to check in on the situation now or later?"

Or, if you don't feel comfortable intervening but it doesn't seem like the situation calls for Garda involvement, look for someone else who might be in a better position to get involved. If you're at a bar, look for the bouncer or someone in a similar role and point out what's happening.

### **Direct**

In a direct approach you either approach the potential victim or potential abuser and intervene. The problem with directly approaching an abuser is that they may attack you and they might end up taking it out on their partner later. If you're going to have any direct contact with a possible abuser it's probably best to be subtler, like using body language to communicate disapproval and make your presence and concern known. You could do this just by watching what is happening and making it obvious that you're keeping an eye on the situation.

If you're going to try a direct approach, your best bet will probably be to approach the victim. You can simply say, "I'm concerned about what just happened. Is anything wrong?" Or, if you only have an instant and there's no opportunity for even a brief conversation, you could say, "No one deserves to be treated like that," or, "That wasn't your fault." Don't try to give advice or judge or blame the victim for what's just happened. Use the opportunity to say that you're concerned, that you want to help, and that it's not their fault.