

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SUNFLOWER CENTRE

The Really Useful Handbook

For

People Affected by Domestic Abuse

CONTENTS

Domestic Abuse – Myths and Facts

Types of Abuse

Power and Control Wheel

Children and Domestic Abuse

Warning Signs of an Abusive Personality

What About Alcohol and Domestic Abuse?

The Stockholm Syndrome

Domestic Violence – Safety Advice

Harassment & Stalking – Victim Advice and Evidence

Useful Numbers

DOMESTIC ABUSE – MYTHS AND FACTS

Society tends to have a stereotypical picture of what domestic abuse is and what sort of person both the abused and the abuser are.

It is often thought that the abused will have originated from a family where abuse took place, may have been abused themselves during childhood, may be poor, unkempt or uneducated. Some may believe the victim actually enjoys being abused in some masochistic way or is encouraging it because they enjoy the attention of feeling victimised. However, our perceptions tend to be biased by myths, perpetuated both by the media and by society in general, and are unrelated to the reality or the extent of Domestic Abuse. ANYONE can become a victim of Domestic Abuse. Some of the myths include:

MYTH – *Abuse only happens in certain families, ethnic minorities, and uneducated or poorer areas*

FACT – Abuse crosses every walk of life - regardless of social standing, education, profession or wealth. Abuse is about the need for power and the belief of the right to control someone else.

MYTH – *Domestic abuse is a family matter*

FACT – Abusing, assaulting or raping another person is a criminal offence. People will often think that what happens behind closed doors should remain behind closed doors. Domestic abuse is not just a family matter but affects many aspects of life; including the effect on children, the impact on the economy such as days lost from work, education providers and also the impact on the emergency services including paramedics, Accident & Emergency and police. It also has a massive impact on the National Health Service, including mental health services. In fact, we are all affected by Domestic Abuse!

MYTH – *Some victims ask for it, provoke it, want it or even deserve it*

FACT – Victims do not like to be abused, want to be abused or deserve to be abused. Abusers abuse because it gives them a feeling of control over another individual. There is no excuse or justification for abuse. Violence or intimidation is not the way to resolve relationship conflicts. This myth encourages the blame shifting from the abuser to the abused and avoids the stark reality that only the abuser is responsible for their own actions.

MYTH – *Domestic Abuse is caused by excessive alcohol or the use of drugs*

FACT – Alcohol or drugs do not cause someone to be abusive. They are separate issues from the domestic abuse, though they may overlap. Blaming chemical dependency for domestic abuse is missing the point; the abuser is responsible for their own actions.

MYTH – *Domestic Abuse is a one-off incident*

FACT – Very rarely is abuse a one-off. Most often it is part of an ongoing means of establishing and maintaining control over another person. Abuse tends to increase in terms of frequency and seriousness over a period of time.

MYTH – *It can't be that bad or he/she would leave*

FACT – There are many reasons why victims do not leave an abusive relationship. There may be emotional, social, spiritual, cultural and financial reasons why victims stay. Constant undermining of the victim's self-esteem can leave the victim with very little self-worth or confidence or they may have feelings of worthlessness or shame. Victims may be socially isolated, cannot speak English or feel unable to make decisions.

MYTH – *Abusers are always coarse, nasty, violent men and easily identified*

FACT – Abusers can be women, as well as men. Abusers are often apparently charming, generous and well presented people who can hold positions of social standing. Abuse is kept for those nearest to them, in the privacy of their own homes. This Jekyll and Hyde tendency of the abuser can further confuse and frighten the person being abused, as the person in private is so very different to the person everyone else sees. It can also mean that when the person being abused finally does try to tell friends, family or acquaintances of the abuse they may not be believed because the person they are describing simply does not fit the image portrayed in public.

MYTH – *Lesbians and gay men do not get abused*

FACT – Sexual orientation does not make any difference. Abuse is about control within a relationship and can occur within any relationship where one partner believes they have the right to control the other. Whether they are married or living together, of the same or opposite gender, have been together for a few weeks or many years really does not make much difference – abuse can and does occur.

MYTH – *Abusers just have a problem expressing anger; they need counselling or Anger Management courses to learn to resolve disputes without violence*

FACT – Most abusers have no problem resolving disputes with their boss, colleagues or friends without resorting to violence. Abusers choose to use violence and other forms of abuse against their partner as a means of maintaining their power over them.

TYPES OF ABUSE

We tend to think of Domestic Abuse as physical violence or assault on a partner/wife/husband. In reality however **domestic abuse is the summary of physically, sexually and psychologically abusive behaviours directed by one partner against another** regardless of their marital status or gender. Generally when one form of abuse exists it is coupled with other forms as well.

Domestic Abuse does not just affect people of a certain race, age, gender or background. Abuse knows no ethnic, cultural or social boundaries.

Domestic Abuse may also be defined by the domination, punishment or control of one's partner. Abusers use physical and/or sexual violence, threats, money, and emotional and psychological abuse to control their partners. Sometimes Domestic Abuse is better understood by its effect on the victim than by the specific actions of the abuser.

Abuse in the home is not a rare problem; just one that is rarely admitted.

Physical Abuse

Physical assault is the most obvious form of Domestic Abuse, the most visible and also the most lethal. Assaults often start small; maybe a shove during an argument or forcefully grabbing your wrist; but over time physical abuse usually becomes more severe and more frequent and can result in the death of the victim.

Physical abuse is any act of violence and can include the following:

- pulling hair
- pinching
- shoving
- slapping
- kicking
- choking
- burning
- beating
- physical restraint – pinning against wall/floor/bed etc
- forced feeding
- withholding food or drink
- use of weapons (guns, knives or any object)
- depriving sleep

Basically any behaviour that hurts or physically harms or is intended to do so.

Threats

Threats made within a violent relationship are just as debilitating as the violence itself. A victim who has already suffered being physically assaulted can imagine the result of displeasing the abuser or even doubt the abuser's ability to carry out the threats. Even where the victim has not been physically assaulted, the abuser will often demonstrate their ability to harm by punching walls or furniture, kicking the cat/dog or using aggressive behaviour.

However, many threats are not physical but part of the on-going emotional abuse. The abuser may threaten to take the children or remove them from the country, report them to social services as an unfit parent, harm the children/family members/friends, refuse money or commit suicide. Whether the threats are of a physical, sexual or emotional nature they are all designed to further control the victim by instilling fear and ensuring compliance.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can be defined as any sexual encounter without consent and includes any unwanted touching, forced sexual activity be it oral, anal or vaginal, forcing the victim to perform sexual acts, painful or degrading acts during intercourse and/or exploitation through photos or prostitution. The abuser may use violence to rape their partner or may use only enough force to control the partner's movements such as restraining. Coercion or manipulation in the form of threats, emotional or psychological abuse may also be used, leaving the victim to submit to unwanted sexual acts out of fear or guilt. The abuser may,

for instance, imply that should the victim not submit, they will hit the victim, leave the victim, and 'find someone else' or punish in some other way. The abuser may insist on sex following a physical attack so that the victim 'proves' they have forgiven the abuser. Whatever form of coercion is used, be it physical, financial or emotional, any sexual act that is not based on mutual consent, constitutes sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can involve any of the following:-

- Excessive jealousy; checking underwear for signs of sexual activity with others when you have been out or they have been away
- Calling you sexually derogatory names
- Criticising you sexually
- Forcing unwanted sexual acts
- Forcing you to strip or forcefully stripping you
- Withholding sex and/or affection
- Making sex conditional on your behaviour or agreement to include practices you are not happy to do
- Minimising or denying your feelings about sex or sexual preferences
- Forcing sex after physical assault
- Using coercion to force sex
- Taking unwanted sexual photos, sharing these with other people/internet without your consent
- Forcing you into prostitution

Rape within a marriage may leave the victim feeling confused and unsure whether they have been 'raped'. It may seem that when a stranger rapes a woman or man out on the street, that rape has occurred and is wrong. When rape occurs within the marriage neither the abuser nor victim may consider it legal rape. This is partially due to the general acceptance of the Christian tradition within our culture, which tells us that it is the wife's duty to fulfil her husband's sexual demands. Many women (both religious and non-religious) do not believe they have the right to refuse sex, that 'sex on demand' is an unwritten part of the marriage contract. Many abusers will deny that rape has actually occurred and treat the abuse as though it was normal and by joint consent. This has the effect of further confusing the victim as to the reality of the experience. Marriage, however, is a contract based on mutual love, respect and consideration. Each party has a right to their own body, and while consideration for each person's sexual needs is normal, forced sexual acts are not an expression of love, but a purposeful betrayal of the respect and trust which form a solid marriage.

Of course, the above is also true within any intimate relationships.

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Many forms of abuse are obviously cruel; emotional abuse is more subtle. Quite often such abuse goes unseen, as even the victim does not recognise that they are being abused. Although emotional abuse does not leave black eyes or visible bruises, it is often more seriously damaging to your self-esteem. Emotional abuse is cruel and psychologically damaging. Physical or sexual abuse often follows emotional abuse, ie emotional assault is used to wear the victim down generally over a long period of time, to undermine their self-concept until they are willing to take responsibility for the abuser's actions and behaviour towards them or simply accept it.

"I

thought domestic abuse always meant someone had to be beating someone else up. I never realised the daily belittling, shouting, demands and isolating were part of the same problem."

"He would move things around, switch the heating on when I thought I'd turned it off. I thought I was going crazy!"

There are many categories of emotional/psychological abuse. They encompass a variety of behaviours that will be easily recognisable by those experiencing them, and often remain completely unnoticed by others. They include:

Isolation

The abuser can control who the victim sees, where they go, who they speak to and what they do. This can take the form of simply not allowing them to use the phone, have friends round or visit family, or ensuring it simply isn't worth it by being in a bad mood because they left some housework or job undone, making them feel guilty that they were out enjoying themselves while the abuser worked, or even encouraged the victim – theoretically – to make friends and then discounting them or complaining that they cares more for friends/family/hobby than the abuser, or is neglecting them. Some abusers may move home frequently to prevent their victim from building a social support network. Many abusers justify their control over their victim by stating that it is proof of their love, or that they worry about their safety when out etc. In reality, however, the abuser needs to isolate the victim to exert their control without being observed or questioned. They may feel as though any relationship; be it family, friend or colleague; will undermine their authority and take their partner away from them, ie poses a threat. The effect of this isolation is that the victim feels very alone in their struggle, doesn't have anyone to confide in and then becomes more dependant on the abuser.

Forms of isolation include:-

- Checking up on you
- Accusing you of unfaithfulness
- Moving to an isolated area
- Ensuring you lack transport or a telephone
- Making your friends or family feel uncomfortable when visiting so that they stop visiting or have contact
- Punishing you for being late home from work/social occasion by complaining, being in a bad mood, criticism or physical abuse
- Not allowing you to leave the house on your own or taking away your passport
- Demanding a detailed report on where you have been and conversations

- Prevent you from working
- Not allowing any activity which excludes the abuser
- Finding fault with your friends/family
- Insisting on taking you to and collecting you from work.

In extreme cases the victim may be reduced to episodes of literally becoming a prisoner; being locked in a room and denied basic necessities, such as warmth, food, toilet or washing facilities. Other family members or the perpetrator's friends can also be used to 'keep an eye on' the victim, acting effectively as prison guards.

Verbal Abuse

When thinking of Verbal Abuse we tend to envisage the abuser hurling insults at the victim, and while this obviously does happen, there are many more forms than name-calling. The abuser may use critical, insulting or humiliating remarks (eg you've got a brain like a sieve; you're stupid; you're ugly; you're fat etc). Verbal abuse undermines your sense of worth/who you think you are by discounting your ideals, opinions or beliefs.

Verbal abuse can include:-

- Yelling or shouting at you
- Making threats
- Insulting you or your family
- Being sarcastic or mocking; criticising your interests, opinions or beliefs
- Humiliating you either in private or in company
- Sneering, growling, name-calling
- Withholding approval, appreciation or conversation
- Refusing to discuss issues which are important to you
- Laughing or making fun of you inappropriately
- Leaving nasty messages
- Accusing you of unfaithfulness, not trying hard enough or purposely doing something to annoy
- Blaming you for their failures or abuse

This type of abuse stops normal, healthy interaction between two adults as well as displaying a lack of respect for individual thoughts, feelings, and opinions. A healthy, mutual interaction and conversation between two persons respects and promotes the right of each partner to their own individual thoughts, perceptions and values.

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse can take many forms; from denying money to making you solely responsible for all finances while handling money irresponsibly themselves. Money becomes a tool by

which the abuser can further control the victim, ensuring either financial dependence on the abuser or shifting the responsibility of keeping a roof over the family's head onto the victim while simultaneously denying your ability to do so or obstructing you.

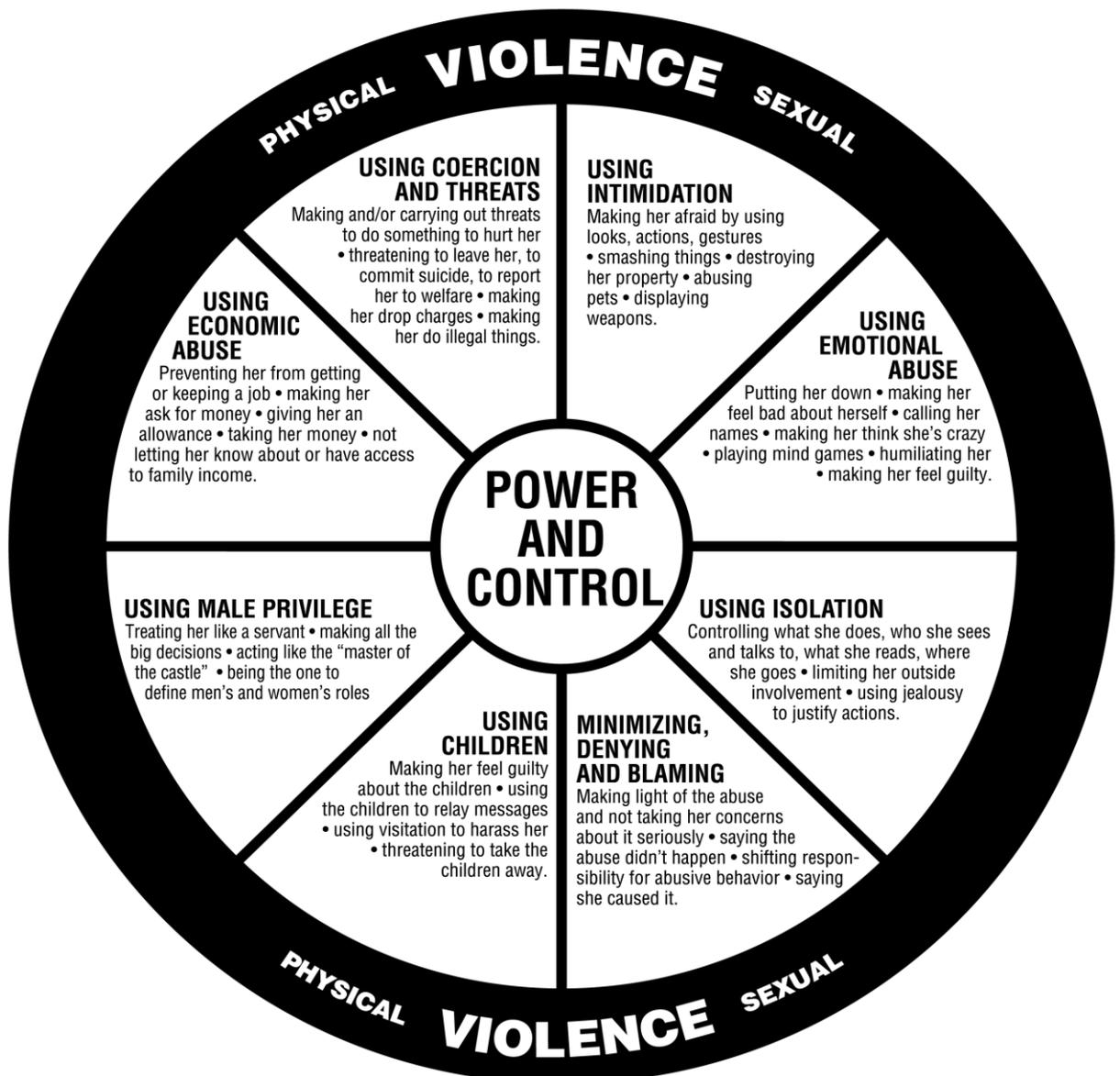
Financial abuse can include the following:-

- Preventing you from getting or keeping a job
- Denying you sufficient money to run the house and look after children
- Having to account for every penny spent
- Denying access to cheque book/account/finances
- Putting all bills in your name or in theirs
- Demanding your pay
- Spending money allocated to bills/food/children on themselves
- Forcing you to beg or commit crimes for money; eg benefit fraud, shoplifting or stealing
- Keeping child benefit

THE POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

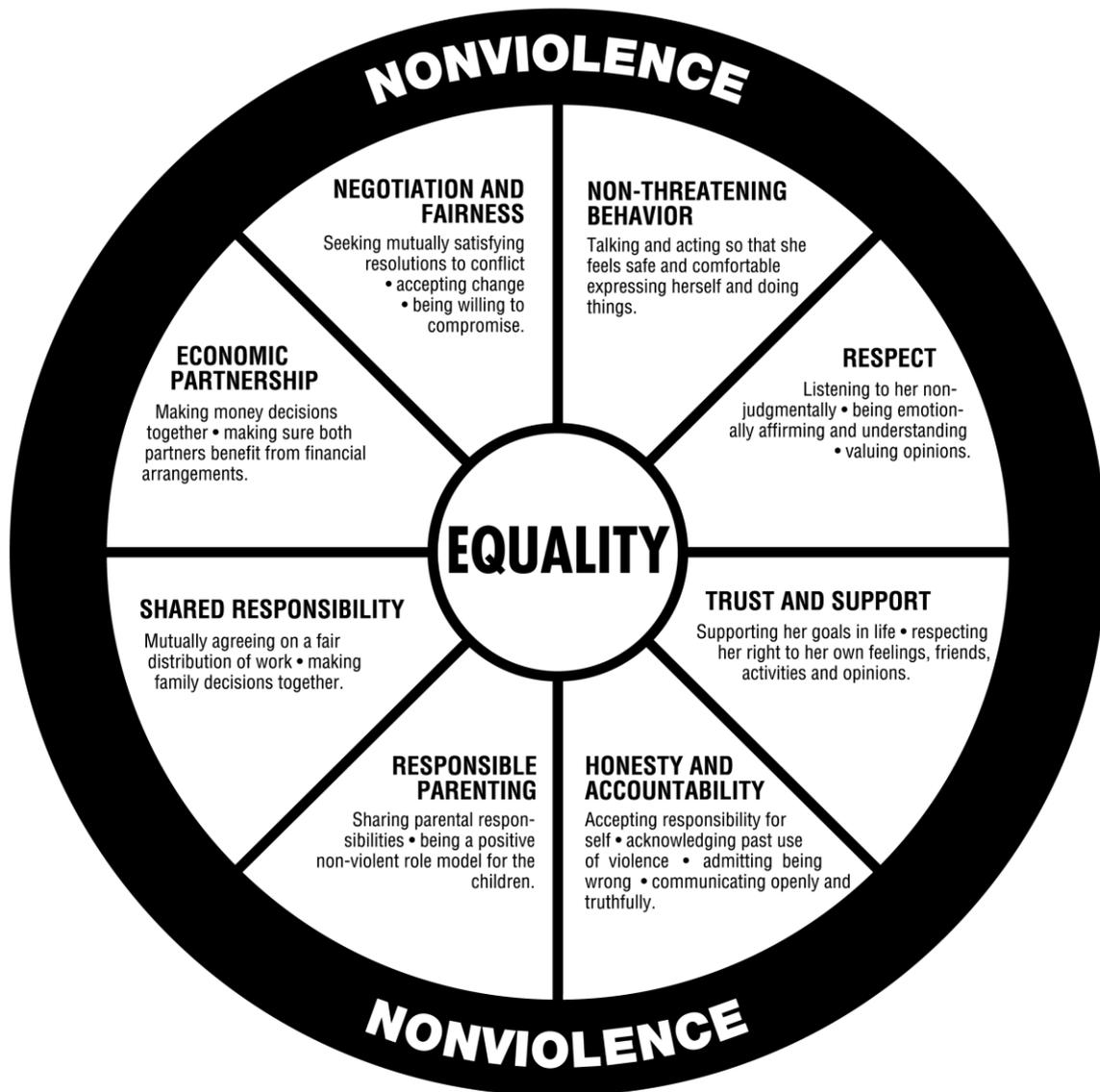
The Power and Control Wheel and the Equality Wheel (below) were devised by the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

The Power & Control Wheel provides a visual representation of the characteristic patterns an abuser uses to control their partner. The words "power and control" appear in the middle of the wheel and the spokes are ways abusers use threats, intimidation and coercion to retain their control. The use or threat of physical and/or sexual violence (around the outside of the wheel) holds the wheel together ensuring the abuser remains in control. Those who have been abused can often identify tactics on the wheel which have been used within their relationship and assist in identifying and understanding how their abuser can retain control.



THE EQUALITY WHEEL

The Equality Wheel was developed to describe the changes needed to move from being abusive into a non-violent partnership. The 'Emotional Abuse' segment on the Power & Control wheel is contrasted with the 'Respect' segment on the Equality Wheel. However, the Equality Wheel can also be used as a template for a healthy relationship and the expectations within a healthy relationship. ⁱ



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT

202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781
www.duluth-model.org

CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

Children are often described as the 'forgotten victims' of Domestic Abuse when in fact in 9 out of 10 incidents children are in the same or next door room. Children are affected not only by directly witnessing abuse, but also by living in an environment where generally their mother – usually the main caregiver – is being repeatedly victimised. Children in a home where the mother is being abused are also at greater risk of being abused themselves or being used to control their mother. Due to his own lack of self-worth the abusive partner feels the need to control all those to whom he/she considers themselves superior, including children.

*Please note that whilst the above is gender specific regarding abuse of mothers, it is also accepted that fathers who are abused the impact on children will also be significant.

Witnessing Abuse

Children witness violence in the home in a number of different ways. They may see or hear the abusive episode, be used or even involved in the violence (eg a child may be in his mother's arms when she is hit or try to intervene). Children will also experience the aftermath and sense the tension in the build-up to the abuse. Even when the parents believe the children were unaware of what was happening, the children can often give detailed accounts of the events. As well as physical violence often found in abusive relationships, the children would certainly be subjected to frequent emotional abuse of the abused in the form of name-calling, accusations and threats made by the abuser in their presence. As mentioned above, where abuse is occurring, children are also likely to be abused. This is most true of emotional abuse, where the children's own self-esteem is damaged by being shouted at, told they are stupid or are not trying hard enough, or given mixed messages by being favoured one moment and put-down the next. Quite apart from possible physical involvement or direct abuse, these emotionally damaging actions have a detrimental and often long-lasting effect on the children.

'One of my parents argues with the other and physically and emotionally abuses them. That parent then often, though not always, turns on us children, and abuses us too. Apart from this abuse we do 'love' the parent, but we do not 'like' them. We do not know where to go or what would happen if we reported it so we haven't, though this has been going on for as long as I can remember and for the whole of their marriage.' (17 year old girl)

The Effect of Witnessing Abuse

Many children who witness abuse parents demonstrate significant behavioural and/or emotional problems.

How your child or children will be affected depends on the individual child, their age and gender, how much they witness and whether or not they are personally involved in the abuse, their personality and support available to them. Although research in this field is still largely lacking, it is generally agreed that Domestic Violence or Abuse is highly relevant to the child's present and future well-being, and that there is a significant overlap with child abuse.

Children may experience emotional, behavioural and physical problems including:

- Anxiety and sadness
- Confusion
- Anger & aggression (which can be directed toward either parent or other children etc)
- Depression
- Suicidal behaviour
- Nightmares, fears and phobias
- Sleeping disorders
- Trouble school
- Withdrawing into or isolating themselves
- Regressing in behaviour (such as baby-talk, wanting bottles or dummies, etc)
- Lower academic achievements
- Bed-wetting
- Bullying
- Physical illnesses such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea or vomiting
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm
- Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Older children may hold themselves responsible for the abuse. They may miss school to try and protect the abused parent. Children living in an abusive environment may also condone violence or the threat of violence to resolve conflict in relationships. It has to be remembered that even in situations where the child is either not targeted directly with abuse or is 'only' witnessing abuse, it can lead to very serious psychological trauma with possible long-term effects, affecting not only the child's well-being during or shortly after the abuse, but affecting the child's ability to build and maintain healthy relationships in adult life.

Positive Parenting

Many parents whose children have been affected by living in a home where domestic abuse has been an issue are concerned about how it will affect the children as they grow up. They may be worried that the child may become aggressive themselves, copying the violent and/or abusive parent. They may consider abusive behaviour normal or get involved in an abusive relationship themselves. Further concerns may include the possibility of turning to drink or drugs to cope with the feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy, which are often legacies of either being or witnessing abuse. Leaving an abusive relationship and providing a more stable home is the best thing you can do as a parent. Most Refuges offer support to help children cope with the trauma and effects of abuse. However, parents themselves have the greatest influence over the child, and learning and implementing positive parenting techniques will be the greatest help available to the child.

WARNING SIGNS OF AN ABUSIVE PERSONALITY

It is sometimes possible to predict the likelihood of the person you are currently or are about to become involved with as being abusive. Below are a list of behaviours and traits, which are common in abusive personalities - 'warning signs'.

While not all abusive people show the same signs or display the tendencies to the same extent, if several behavioural traits are present, there is a strong tendency towards abusiveness. Generally, the more signs present, the greater the likelihood of abuse. In some cases, an abuser may have only a couple of behavioural traits that can be recognised, but they are very exaggerated (eg extreme jealousy/possessiveness).

Often the abuser will initially try to explain their behaviour as signs of love and concern and the victim may be flattered at first; as time goes on the behaviours become more severe and serve to dominate, control and manipulate the victim.

Jealousy

At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser may say that jealousy is a sign of love. They may question you about who you have spoken to or seen during the day, may accuse you of flirting or be jealous of time you spend with family, friends, children or hobbies, which do not include the abuser. As jealousy progresses, they may call you frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. The abuser may be unhappy about or refuse to let you work for fear you'll meet someone else, check the car mileage or ask friends to keep an eye on you. Jealousy is not proof of love; it is a sign of insecurity and possessiveness.

Controlling Behaviour

Controlling behaviour is often disguised or excused as concern; concern for your safety, your emotional or mental health, the need to use your time well, or to make sensible decisions. The abuser may be angry or upset if you were 'late' coming back from work, shopping, visiting friends etc, even if you told them you would be later back than usual. Your abuser may question you closely about where you were, whom you spoke to, the content of every conversation you held, or why you did something they were not involved in. As this behaviour gets worse, you may not be allowed to make personal decisions about the house, clothing, going out, how you spend your time or money or even make you ask permission to leave the house or room. Alternately the abuser may allow you to make your own decisions but penalise you for making the wrong ones. Concern for our loved ones to a certain extent is normal – trying to control their every move is not.

Quick Involvement

Many victims of abuse dated or knew the abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. The abuser will often claim 'love at first sight', that you were 'made for each other' or that you are the only person whom they could ever talk to so openly, feel so at home with, could understand them so well. The abuser may tell you that they have never loved anyone so much or felt so loved by anyone so much before, when you have really only known each other for a short amount of time. The abuser needs someone desperately and will pressure you to commit to them or commence a sexual relationship before you feel the relationship has reached that stage. The abuser may also make you feel guilty for not committing yourself to them.

Unrealistic Expectations

The abuser may expect you to be the perfect husband, wife, mother, father, lover, and friend. They are very dependent on you for all their needs, and may tell you they can fulfil all your needs as a lover, friend and companion. Statements such as 'If you love me, I'm all you need', and 'you are all I need' are common. Your abuser may expect you to provide everything for them emotionally, practically, financially or spiritually and then blame you for not being perfect or living up to expectation.

Isolation

The abuser may try to restrict your social interaction. They may prevent you from spending time with your friends or family and demand that you only go places 'together'. The abuser may accuse you of not being committed to the relationship, or view people who are your personal friends as 'causing trouble' or 'trying to put a wedge' between you. The abuser may want to move away from friends and family, not let you use the car, stop you from working or gaining further education or qualifications.

Blame Shifting for Problems

Very rarely will an abusive personality accept responsibility for any negative situation or problem. If they are unemployed, can't hold down a job, were thrown out of college or university or fall out with their family, it is always someone else's fault, be it the boss, the government or their mother. They may feel that someone is always doing them wrong or out to get them. The abuser may make a mistake and then blame you for upsetting them or preventing them from doing as they wished to.

Blame Shifting for Feelings

The abuser will deny feelings stem from within themselves but see them as reactions to your behaviour or attitude towards them. They may tell you that 'you make me mad', 'you're hurting me by not doing what I ask' or that they cannot help feeling mad, upset etc. Feelings may be used to manipulate you, ie 'I would be angry if you didn't ...'. Positive emotions will often also be seen as originating outside the abuser, but are more difficult to detect. Statements such as 'you make me happy' or 'you make me feel good about myself' are also signs that the abuser feels you are responsible for their sense of well-being. Either way, you become in the abusers mind the cause of good and bad feelings and are therefore responsible for their emotional well-being and happiness. Consequently, you are also to blame for any negative feelings such as anger, upset or depression.

Hypersensitivity

Most abusers have very low self-esteem and are, therefore, easily insulted or upset. They may claim their feelings are 'hurt' when they are really angry or take unrelated comments as personal attacks. They may perceive normal set-backs (having to work additional hours, being asked to help out, receiving a parking fine, etc) as grave personal injustices. They may view your preference for something that differs from their own as criticism of their taste and therefore themselves (eg blue wallpaper rather than pink etc).

Cruelty to Animals

The abuser may punish animals brutally, be insensitive to their pain or suffering, or neglect to care for the animals to the point of cruelty eg not feeding them all day, leaving them in areas he/she knows will cause them suffering or distress. The abuser may threaten to harm pets to gain your compliance. There is a strong correlation between cruelty to animals and domestic violence, which is still being researched.

Cruelty to Children

The abusers unrealistic expectations of their partner are often mirrored in their attitude towards children. The abuser will think of children as 'small adults' and blame the children for not being responsible, having common sense or understanding. They may expect children to be capable far beyond their ability (eg is angry with a two year old for wetting their pants or being sick on the carpet, waking at night or being upset by nightmares) and will often dish out punishments for 'naughtiness' the child could not be aware of. Abusers may tease children until they cry or punish children way beyond what could be deemed appropriate. The abuser may not want children to eat at the table, expect them to stay quiet or keep to their room all evening while they are at home. Since abusers want all your attention themselves, they resent your spending time with the children or any normal demands and needs the children may have. As with cruelty to animals there is a very strong link between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse.

'Playful' Use of Force in Sex

The abuser may pressurise you to agree to forceful or violent acts during sex or want to act out fantasies where you are helpless. A male abuser may let you know that the idea of 'rape' excites him. The abuser may show little concern about whether you want to have intercourse and uses sulking or anger to manipulate you into compliance. Starting sex while you are sleeping, demanding sex when you are ill or tired, or refusing any form of intimacy unless you are willing to go 'all the way' can all be signs that the abuser could be sexually abusive or sexually violent.

Rigid Gender Roles

Abusers usually believe in stereotypical gender roles. A man may expect a woman to serve him, stay at home, obey him in all things, even things that are criminal in nature. A male abuser will often see women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship. Female abusers may expect the man to provide for them entirely, shift the responsibility for her well-being onto him or heckle him as being 'not a real man' if he shows any weakness or emotion.

Verbal Abuse

In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, either in public or in private, this can include degrading remarks or running down any accomplishments. Often the abuser will tell you that you are 'stupid' or could not manage without them. The abuser may even say kindly things to your face but speak badly about you to friends and family.

Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde

Very rarely do abusers conform to the stereotypical image of a constantly harsh, nasty or violent person, either in public or private. More frequently the abuser portrays a perfectly normal and pleasant picture to the outside world (often they have responsible jobs or are respected and important members of the local community) and reserves the abuse for you in the privacy of your own home. Nor are abusers always overtly abusive or cruel, but can display apparent kindness and consideration.

This Jeekyll and Hyde tendency of the abuser serves to further confuse the victim, while protecting themselves from any form of suspicion from outsiders. Many victims describe 'sudden' changes in mood, one minute nice and the next explosive or hysterical, or one minute happy and the next minute sad. This does not indicate some special 'mental problem' but are typical of abusive personalities and related to other characteristics such as hypersensitivity.

Drink or Substance Abuse

While neither drinking nor the use of drugs are signs of an abusive personality, heavy drinking or drug abuse may be a warning sign and do increase the risks of abuse, especially violence, taking place. Often an abusive person will blame the drink for their abuse. However, a person who knowing there is a risk they could be violent when drinking or on drugs, chooses to get drunk or high, is in effect choosing to abuse. The link between substance abuse and domestic abuse is still being researched and it is apparent that while neither alcohol nor drugs necessarily cause violence they do increase the risk of violence. (See **What About Alcohol and Domestic Abuse**).

History of Physical or Sexual Violence

Very rarely is abuse or violence a one-off event; an abuser will beat any partner they are with; a sexually abusive person will be abusive toward all intimate partners. Situational circumstances do not make a person an abusive personality. Sometimes friends or family may try to warn you about the abuser. Sometimes the abuser may tell you themselves that they have hit or sexually assaulted someone in the past. However, they may further go on to explain that 'he/she made me do it by' Or in some other way not take responsibility and shift the blame on to the victim. They may tell you that it won't happen with you because 'you love them enough to prevent it' or 'you won't be stupid enough to wind me up that much'. Once again this is denying their own responsibility for the abuse, and shifting the responsibility for the relationship to remain abuse-free on to you. **Past violence is one of the strongest pointers that abuse will occur.**

Negative Attitude Toward Women

Some men may tell you that you are different to all the women they have known before, who display a lack of respect of women generally or who talk negatively and disrespectfully of their previous partners. They may tell you that you are special, not like the others and that they consider themselves to be the luckiest man alive to have found the last decent woman. It is not likely to be long before they remember that you are a woman and don't deserve their respect.

Threatening Violence

This would obviously include any threat of physical force such as 'if you speak to that person again I'll kill you', or 'if any wife of mine acted like John's did, I'd give her a slap'. Threats are designed to manipulate and control you, to keep you in your place and prevent you making your own decisions.

Most people do not threaten their friends, but an abuser will excuse this behaviour by saying 'everybody talks like that', maintaining they are only saying this because the relationship or you are so important to them. They may say you are 'over-sensitive' for being upset by such threats. Threats can also be less overt, such as 'if you leave me, I will kill myself, or 'you are so wonderful I will never let you go/couldn't live without you'.

Breaking or Striking Objects

The abusive person may break your prized possessions, beat their fists on the table or chair, hit the wall or throw something at or past you. Breaking or destroying your possessions is

often used as a punishment for some imagined misdeed on your part. Sometimes it will be justified by saying that now that you are with them you don't need these items any more. Breaking your possessions also has the effect of de-personalising you, denying you your individuality or literally trying to break links to your past. Beating items of furniture or throwing objects will often be justified by saying you wound them up so much they lost control, once again shifting the blame for this behaviour on to you, but is actually used to terrorise you into submission. Only very immature or abusive people beat on objects in the presence of other people in order to threaten or intimidate them.

Any Force During an Argument

An abuser may physically restrain you from leaving the room, lash out at you with their hands or other objects, pin you against the wall, block your exit out of a room or shout 'right in your face'. Basically any form of force used during an argument can be a sign that actual violence is a strong possibility.

WHAT ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Alcohol abuse does not cause domestic abuse and violence, though it is often used as an excuse for the violence. Not all alcoholics are violent, and not all abusers have a drink problem. It may be that your abuser is actually an alcoholic, but that is a separate issue to the domestic abuse, ie they are an alcoholic AND have an abusive personality.

Someone who is not abusive will not be abusive when they are either drunk or sober, and someone who is abusive is likely to be abusive whether drunk or sober. Alcohol is not the cause of either abuse or violence.

We may wish to believe that it is the alcohol causing the abuse because then we can also believe that there is an easy solution to the abuse. We can also believe that our abuser doesn't really mean to hurt us, that they simply 'lost control' and is not really responsible for the abuse. It allows us to believe that this is a problem that we can tackle together, that with our support and understanding and patience, the abuse can stop. Effectively, it allows us to feel that we still have some control over the situation.

The reality is that the majority of abusers are not alcoholics. They use alcohol as part of the wider abusive behaviour. People working with perpetrators of domestic violence even report that abusers will consciously:

- Go out and get drunk to create an excuse to get violent
- Act more drunk than they really are
- Use alcohol consumption to punish their partner, eg for confronting or disagreeing with them
- Pretend they don't remember what they did when drunk

Getting drunk can also be used as a way of manipulating you into doing what your abuser wants and avoiding doing those things the abuser doesn't want to do. If we know our partner is likely to be violent when drunk, then we are unlikely to confront them about not taking an equal share in the housework or childcare when they are drinking.

One of the aspects of the abuser using the excuse of alcohol for the abuse is that it is more likely to make us feel sorry for them and we end up comforting them for the pain they have caused us or trying to help them overcome the 'problem' and not feel guilty about it. Roles are effectively reversed and they don't have to face either the reality of what they have done or face the consequences. We may also, at some level, prefer this role-reversal as it gives us the illusion of power and being needed and valued, and we can continue to deny that our partner is willingly abusing us.

The reality is that your abuser has not 'lost control' but chooses to be abusive when drunk. Even when intoxicated, we still basically keep our behaviour within our own value system, eg if we don't believe we should rob a bank then getting drunk will not suddenly turn us into bank robbers! In much the same way our partners are not likely to be violent when drunk if their value system did not allow them to be so. If they do not use physical violence when sober, it is likely that they believe that drinking 'allows' them to lose control and not be responsible for their actions.

What happens when an abuser 'Gets Sober'?

We may wish to believe if our partner were sober, then there would be no abuse. That, sadly, is wishful thinking. Sometimes our partner may only be physically violent when drinking but if we look carefully we become aware that their behaviour when not drunk is also emotionally and psychologically abusive. Abusers who 'get sober' may for a while refrain from physical violence but the emotional abuse is likely to continue as sobriety is not the answer to abusive beliefs and attitudes – and the physical violence is likely to return, even if it is years down the road, when they find that simply using psychological, verbal and emotional abuse no longer works sufficiently.

In fact, their sobriety in itself can be used to help control and manipulate us, by threatening to drink if things don't go the way they wish. The threat can be quite subtle, eg 'you know that I find having your family round stressful, and I am concerned that will threaten my sobriety'. The aim is to isolate us from our family; the threat is drinking (and the unspoken threat of violence which may accompany it).

The alcohol abuse and the domestic violence have to be tackled individually for there to be any real change. If only the alcohol abuse is tackled, we don't end up with a partner who respects us, but simply a sober abuser rather than a drunk one.

Some Questions to ask Yourself

- When drunk, is your partner abusive only to you or to anyone?
- Is there a pattern to the drunkenness, eg is it likely to occur when you have invited friends around or intend going out for the evening or after you have had an argument?
- Does your partner believe that drunkenness caused violence?
- If you have confronted your partner on their abusive or violent behaviour when drunk, have they taken immediate and serious steps to stop drinking or does it just carry on, with apologies each time?
- Are you aware of emotional and/or psychological abusive behaviour towards you when your partner is not drinking?

THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

On 23 August 1973 three women and one man were taken hostage in one of the largest banks in Stockholm. They were held for six days by two ex-convicts who threatened their lives but also showed them kindness. To the world's surprise, all of the hostages strongly resisted the government's efforts to rescue them and were quite eager to defend their captors. Indeed, several months after the hostages were saved by the police, they still had warm feelings for the men who threatened their lives. Two of the women eventually got engaged to the captors. The term 'Stockholm Syndrome' was coined to describe the puzzling reactions of the four bank employees to their captor.

The Stockholm incident compelled journalists and social scientists to research whether the emotional bonding between captors and captives was a 'freak' incident or a common occurrence in oppressive situations. They discovered that it's such a common phenomenon that it deserved a name. Thus the label 'Stockholm Syndrome' was born. It has happened to concentration camp prisoners, cult members, civilians in Chinese Communist prisons, pimp-procured prostitutes, incest victims, physically and/or emotionally abused children, abused men/women, prisoners of war, victims of hijackings, and of course, hostages. Virtually anyone can get 'Stockholm Syndrome' if the following conditions are met:-

- Perceived extreme threat to physical or psychological survival
- The captive's perception of small kindnesses from the captor within a context of terror (letting the captive live is enough)
- Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor
- Perceived inability to escape.

Resulting in:-

- Intense feelings of gratitude
- Need to survive overwhelms all other feelings – captive becomes obsessed with need to pacify captor
- Captive loses all objectivity, adopts captors perspective of the world.
- Fear that interference by rescuers will provoke further violence; disrupt their survival strategy, therefore, may refuse to co-operate with any rescuers and will defend the captors.

A victim of Domestic Abuse will try to rationalise and minimise violence and look for justification of the abusers behaviour.

DOMESTIC ABUSE - SAFETY ADVICE

If you are staying with your abuser:

1. Seek professional advice and support from local groups and organisations, domestic violence services and helplines.
2. Work out the best way for those groups to safely make contact with you, eg through a work number or at a friend or relative's.
3. Make sure that you have quick and easy access to a telephone you can use to contact someone who can come to your help, memorise their numbers and those of your friends, police and support organisations.
4. Work out a signal that you can use with your children, family, neighbours, friends or colleagues that will alert them to call the police and come to your aid.
5. Make sure you have an escape route to get safely out of the house if necessary, avoid rooms with no exit or which may contain weapons, eg the kitchen or bathroom.
6. If your abuser injures you, make sure that you get medical help and that your injuries are recorded and photographed.
7. Keep money hidden in case you and your children have to leave unexpectedly.

If you are planning to leave your abuser:

1. Be careful who you tell about any plans that you are making to leave – keep your plans secret from your abuser.
2. Consider whether you need to get an injunction – see a solicitor.
3. Get an extra set of keys made for the house and car and keep them somewhere safe.
4. Keep these somewhere easy to hand in case you need them in a hurry:-
 - Birth certificates, National Insurance cards/numbers, drivers licence, divorce papers, housing documents (rental documents, mortgage papers etc), passports, school and medical records, welfare or immigration documentation, court documents.
 - Credit and bank cards, bank account details and some cash.
 - Medication and prescriptions, including those for your children.
 - Clothing and comfort items for you and your children
 - Photographs and other sentimental items, jewellery etc.

- Take identification that might help others to protect you from your abuser, such as a recent photo of them and details of their car.
- Take all your children whatever the long-term arrangements might be. If you leave your children, it may be more difficult or impossible to have them returned to your care.

If you are separated from your abuser whether in your own home or elsewhere:

1. Get legal advice on child contact arrangements, residence applications and the options to obtain an injunction.
2. Change your telephone numbers, go ex-directory, screen calls, put 999 on a speed dial button.
3. Alert your friends, neighbours, employer and your children's schools to call the police if they sight your abuser nearby.
4. Make sure that schools or nurseries know who is authorised to collect your children and have copies of any relevant injunctions (prohibited steps, residency orders).

Where appropriate:

1. Consider public places to facilitate handover during child contact, ie busy car park, somewhere that CCTV is used or using a third party.
2. Consider changing your children's schools, your work patterns, hours or route taken.
3. Avoid banks, shops or other places you used to go to with your abuser.
4. Have a code word for your family, friends, colleagues and teachers to they know when to call the police for help.
5. Keep copies of all-important documents with you, including injunctions and legal documents.
6. Keep a record of any contact with your abuser, however made, and the nature or, if possible, an exact record of what was said by both of you.

STALKING AND HARASSMENT - VICTIM ADVICE

You don't have to be rich or famous for someone to follow you or spy on you or try to get more involved in your life than you want them to be. A total stranger or someone you know, or used to know very well, could be involved. If you think you are being stalked, report your concerns to the police, no matter how trivial the harassment may seem to you. The police must treat it seriously and will investigate the complaint. **If you are in fear of immediate danger call 999**

Help the police to help you by gathering evidence:

1. Keep a record of what happened, where and when – time and date, every time you were followed, phoned, got post or email messages and details from any witnesses whilst the details are still fresh in your mind, as this may be used in any later court proceedings. Use 1471 on your phone and write down details of calls, even if you didn't answer them.
2. If possible, download and print out a hard copy of email messages, but do not delete the original, keep it for the police to examine. Make sure you keep any stored messages (including texts) or telephone numbers that you have received on your mobile and caller ID units.
3. If you have a mobile telephone do not tamper with or dispose of it or its SIM card without first consulting the police, it may contain valuable evidence.
4. Tape record telephone conversations if you can, and keep the tape.
5. Tell your neighbours, friends and work colleagues about what is happening; and keep notes of anything they see and hear (for example if others answer your phone at work) – they can act as independent witnesses, and tell you of anything they may see when you're not there.

How to Help Yourself

1. Ensure you have your mobile phone with you and charged at all times. Have your phone in your hand or pocket for easy, fast access.
2. Carry a personal attack alarm and learn how to use it.
3. Think about improving your home's security, ask the police for advice.
4. Try to alter your daily routines, ask friends to go with you whenever possible, and always try to let someone know what your plans are and if you have to change them while you're away from home or work.
5. When out and about, if you feel insecure, look out for places such as 24-hour petrol stations and shops or police stations and other emergency services where you could go to for help.
6. Don't confront the stalker/person who is harassing you, do not start a conversation, or agree a meeting.
7. Do not respond in any way to calls or letters, once they have your attention, they will be encouraged to carry on.
8. Avoid unwanted, offensive, threatening or otherwise worrying phone calls, just give a greeting such as 'good morning' when you answer, don't give your name or number.

9. Use an answer machine or a number display unit to avoid unsolicited calls and only talk to people you want to.
10. Contact your service provider to block numbers.
11. Consider changing your number.

Avoid Being Stalked on the Internet

1. Always remember you are never totally anonymous on the Internet.
2. Use an on-screen nickname that doesn't make it easy to guess your real identity or whether you are a man or woman.
3. Never give out your password to anyone – ever your partner.
4. If you are using social networking sites such as Facebook, do not include a photo of yourself or your children as a profile picture; restrict what the public can see of your profile; do not accept 'friend' requests from people you do not know; block your ex-partner, their family and friends; report any abuse to the provider.

USEFUL NUMBERS

The Sunflower Centre	01604 888211
Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service	0300 012 0154
Eve (Refuge)	01604 230311
Voice	0300 303 1965
National Centre for Domestic Violence	0844 8044 999
National Centre for Domestic Violence out of hours	0800 970 2070
Northamptonshire Rape and Incest Crisis Centre	01604 250721
National Women's Aid & Refuge	0808 200 0247
Relate	01604 634400
Community Legal Service	01604 636112
Family Law	01908 546580
Bastion Lloyd Morris Solicitors	01908 546 580
Immigration Law	01604 235770
Citizens Advice	0344 488 9629
Al Anon (Families of Alcoholics)	0207 403 0888
Aquarius Drug and Alcohol Service	01604 632421
S2S	01604 233277

Housing Advice:

Northampton Borough Council	01604 837837
Daventry District Council	01327 871100
Wellingborough Homes	01933 234450
Spire Homes	0300 123 6611
South Northants District Council	01327 322374
Kettering Council	01536 410333
Corby Council	01536 464626
Homelessness Team	0300 330 7000