

We're listening. We believe.

end violence  
*wise*  
share hope ♦ change lives

## **Surviving Domestic Violence**

Information, Tips and Resources

## Getting started

You have the right to be treated with respect and to feel safe emotionally and physically. If someone makes you feel unsafe in any way, it is not okay. Your relationships, especially the closest ones, should support and nurture you exactly as you are. No one deserves to be treated disrespectfully or in a way that takes away choice, power or control. If someone is doing this to you, it is not your fault.

This booklet is designed to offer information and resources that may be hard to get otherwise. It can help you make informed decisions and move towards making your life what you want and deserve. With information about domestic violence, you will see that the dynamics are remarkably similar from situation to situation, but only you know the details of what is happening to you. You are the expert in your own life and with information and support you can make the decisions that are best for you and your family.

**You are worthy of love, respect and support.  
You deserve safe and healthy relationships.**

## You are not alone...

- More than **1 in 4** women and **1 in 10** men have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner and reported significant short or long-term impacts, such as post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and injury (IPSVS, CDC, 2011).
- LGBTQ people experience higher rates of domestic violence than heterosexual and cisgender men and women. Bisexual women (**74.9%**) and transgender people (**80%**) experience some of the highest rates (CDC, 2013; Roch et al., 2010).
- **31%** of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend (Roark, 2011).
- Women are **7-14** times more likely to be injured by a partner than men (Chen et al., 2007).
- On average, more than **3** women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2016).

## What is domestic violence?

When people think about domestic violence, they often think of physically violent acts like hitting. Physical violence can be a part of domestic violence, but it is much more than that. For many, the emotional violence has a bigger impact.

Domestic violence, dating violence, relationship violence and intimate partner violence are different terms that describe the same thing: ***a pattern of behaviors that one partner uses to gain power and control over the other.***

Abusers are often not violent with anyone other than their partner and/or their children.

While the most prevalent gender dynamic is men controlling women, there are exceptions. There are instances when women abuse men, although it is not common. Even though domestic violence is often thought of as happening only in heterosexual relationships, this is not the case. Perpetrators can be any gender identity or sexual orientation.

In this booklet, we refer to people who use violence as “perpetrators” and “abusers.” We use “he” for the perpetrator and “she” for the victim/survivor to reflect the most common gender dynamic. Even if the specific words or pronouns are not quite right for you, please continue to read. The information will still be helpful. Feel free to insert the words that feel right for you.

Domestic violence is a type of **gender-based violence**. No matter who the perpetrators or victims are, the violence reflects a history of men being expected to have power over others. Domestic violence is one tool that is used to maintain this power imbalance.

Gender-based violence is used to include all of the identities that are so often impacted by violence: women, children, LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual), people of color, immigrants, refugees and people with disabilities, among others. The term recognizes how people with these identities are connected by oppression, which means that they all experience some form of inequality in society.

## The pattern

At the beginning of a relationship, perpetrators tend to be very nice. They use romance that is often over-the-top as a way to make the other person feel good and fall in love. With time, the relationship slowly begins to change because the perpetrator changes his behavior.

Abusers start to put down their partners to diminish their self-esteem. You may have shared your vulnerabilities with this person. In a healthy relationship, this is safe and an important step. But your abuser uses the information to hurt and belittle you. By making you feel less self-worth he makes you believe that you do not deserve anything better. He also blames you for his abusive behavior.

As you begin to believe the untrue and hurtful things, you may feel lucky to be in any relationship at all. You may believe that you deserve to be treated poorly or that no one could possibly love you. This is not true. No matter what you do - even if you lie or cheat - you do not deserve to be hurt physically or emotionally.

Jealousy can seem normal and even sweet at first. But it becomes a way to control where you go, what you do and who you see. The perpetrator makes it very challenging for you to have friends and family in your life. He may say that they are bad influences, they are trying to ruin your relationship or he does not trust them. He may make you choose him over them. After a while, friends and family may stop trying to be in touch. Without a support system, it is easier for your abuser to do whatever he wants. He has complete control.

Violent behaviors in abusive relationships tend to escalate. It might start with him breaking things around you. Maybe he destroys possessions that he knows are important to you. Usually, perpetrators use only as much violence as necessary to be in control. As the violence escalates, it becomes more dangerous. It is common for victims to become desensitized to how they are treated. Often, victims do not think it is as dangerous as it might be.

It is never okay for someone to intimidate you or physically hurt you. If this is happening, it is not your fault.

Perpetrators are so good at manipulation that anyone can be a victim. It can be hard to see what is really happening.

**WISE** advocates can help by talking with you about the dynamics of abuse, brainstorming options and supporting you in whatever way makes sense for you.

**This is your life. You are worth it.**



## The tactics

Perpetrators of domestic violence use many different tactics to have power over their partners. It can be confusing, especially when you remember what he was like at the beginning of the relationship. The control escalates and by the time you see what is happening, it can be very hard for you to get away. Not having a support system can make it much harder because there may be no one to point out that the behaviors are not okay.

**Targeting vulnerability.** One of the most destructive things that perpetrators do is use what they know to cause harm. For example, you may share your vulnerabilities with the realistic expectation that your partner will be supportive and helpful. Instead, he may use your vulnerabilities as a way to hurt you. This is a powerful tool for manipulation and is a huge betrayal of your trust.

**Psychological or emotional abuse.** This type of abuse can be one of the hardest tactics to deal with. It is also very hard for others to recognize. Psychological abuse can include any

behavior that makes you feel guilty, humiliated, or bad about yourself. The perpetrator denies or minimizes his behaviors to you and others. Psychological or emotional abuse can make you feel like you are “crazy.” The abuser does such a good job manipulating situations that you may not know what is real anymore. This is sometimes called gas-lighting.

**Creating isolation.** This tactic takes away your support system. You find yourself without your friends and family because of his behavior. He might physically isolate you by convincing you to move away. He may act jealous any time you are with other people. You may give up socializing. It may be embarrassing to spend time with other people because of how he acts around them. He might also act like the perfect partner in public, making it seem as though you are the problem.

Isolation can also include him controlling what you read, watch, or your access to information. The perpetrator creates his own reality for you because his voice is the only one you are allowed to hear. Isolation can also keep you from reaching out for help.

**Financial abuse.** Financial or economic abuse is when the perpetrator controls your access to money. He keeps you from going to work or school or makes it impossible for you to succeed. If you are “allowed” to work, he will likely take control of the income. He may forbid you from having a credit card or building credit or allow your name to be added to any financial documents. This makes it difficult to apply for loans, get housing, or even open a bank account.

It is also common for abusers to ruin their victims’ credit. He may have convinced you to take on debt or put a bill or asset in your name. He may refuse to pay bills, not pay what he agreed to, or make it impossible to save money.

**Sexual violence.** Abusers use sex as a tool of violence. Your abuser may have made you feel guilty for not wanting to engage in certain sexual acts or may have manipulated you to do things that were uncomfortable. He may have emotionally or physically threatened you to make you do something sexual or forced himself on you. It is never okay for someone to make you do anything sexual that you do not want to do even if you are in a relationship with him.

**Physical violence.** Any unwanted physical contact is not okay. Pushing, pinching, hitting, restraining, and choking are all part of the pattern of control. Sometimes abusers blame their violent behaviors on drugs or alcohol. He may say it is your fault or that you cause him to react that way. The only reason he uses violence is because he chooses to use it.

**Legal manipulation.** Perpetrators use court systems to control their partners. He may call the police when you try to defend yourself. Abusers are master manipulators and try to convince law enforcement that you are dangerous, crazy, or out of control. If you are married or have children in common he may use the divorce or custody process to continue to control and harass you.

**Using children.** Perpetrators know how important children are to their victims. You may experience him trying to make it seem like you are a bad parent. Some examples of this include saying negative things about you to your children, forcing you to punish or use physical force against your children, or disagreeing with your parenting decisions in front of the children.

It is also common for abusers to use custody arrangements as a way to maintain access to and have control over you. He may not show any interest in parenting while you are together, but he asks for more time with your kids when you are separated. He might fail to follow through with your visitation agreement or use your need to communicate about the children as an opportunity to continue to harass, intimidate, and control you.

**Using public opinion.** Perpetrators will often act like perfect partners and community members in public to make it impossible for others to believe that he is violent. They want people to think “no, not him!” so it will seem like you are the problem.

Your abuser may have told you about how his past partners were “crazy” or how they hurt him. He may even have past protective orders or domestic violence charges against him. He might claim that all of the information is false. He is using manipulative skills and the ignorance of the public to control you.

**Using pets.** Abusers will use their victims' affection for their animals as a way to control them. He may threaten or actually abuse animals. He knows that you want to protect and care for your pets. He uses that to hurt and manipulate you. You may have found your pet injured or even missing. He might claim that the pet's injury was caused by an accident or that he does not know where the animal is.

Leaving the relationship can be harder when you have animals. The animal may belong to both of you, or it might be hard to find a place to live that allows pets. This can be particularly difficult if you have large animals. You may not want to leave the relationship because you do not want to leave the animal with him. You can talk with a **WISE** advocate about options for keeping your pets safe.

**Controlling your body.** Abusers prevent their victims from taking care of themselves. This can include not allowing you to see a health care provider, or insisting that they go with you. They might steal your medications or keep you from getting prescriptions filled. Reproductive control is a common tactic in abusive relationships as well. Your partner

may not let you use birth control or may pressure you to have a baby. He may have made you get an abortion, or use your desire to have a baby against you.

He may control you by making you feel uncomfortable or insecure about your body. He may make comments about the way you look. It may seem like you are never attractive enough, or that you are trying too hard. You may be accused of trying to “get attention” from others and shamed for trying to look nice. It may feel like no matter what you do, it is not the right thing. If you have shared that there is something that you are insecure about, he might focus on that specifically. Often abusers will use the excuse that they are “just trying to help.” You may start to feel like your body is an enemy rather than a source of strength and comfort.

**Using alcohol, medications, and other drugs.** Alcohol and other drugs can make someone less inhibited and more physically violent, but they do not cause violence. Perpetrators use alcohol, medications and other drugs as an excuse for their behavior. They say things like, “I would never have done that if I hadn’t been drinking.” In fact,

controlling and manipulative behaviors (insults, isolation, intimidation, etc.) are present whether or not someone is using. Your abuser may have a substance problem but it is not the reason for his abusive behavior.

Perpetrators often encourage or force their victims to drink or use other drugs in order to increase vulnerability. If the drug use is illegal, he may threaten to report you. You may develop a physical dependence on substances, which he can use against you. When you are using substances you may not feel like you can leave the relationship or get help. He might know that you will not call the police if you are using.

Alcohol and other drugs make it easier for him to maintain power and control. You can talk with a **WISE** advocate about how substances may be impacting you.

**Using LGBTQIA identity.** Abusers who are LGBTQIA use the same behaviors of power, control, entitlement and ownership over their partners as heterosexual or cis abusers. Abusers use our society's biases to create additional layers of shame, depression, fear, powerlessness and silence.

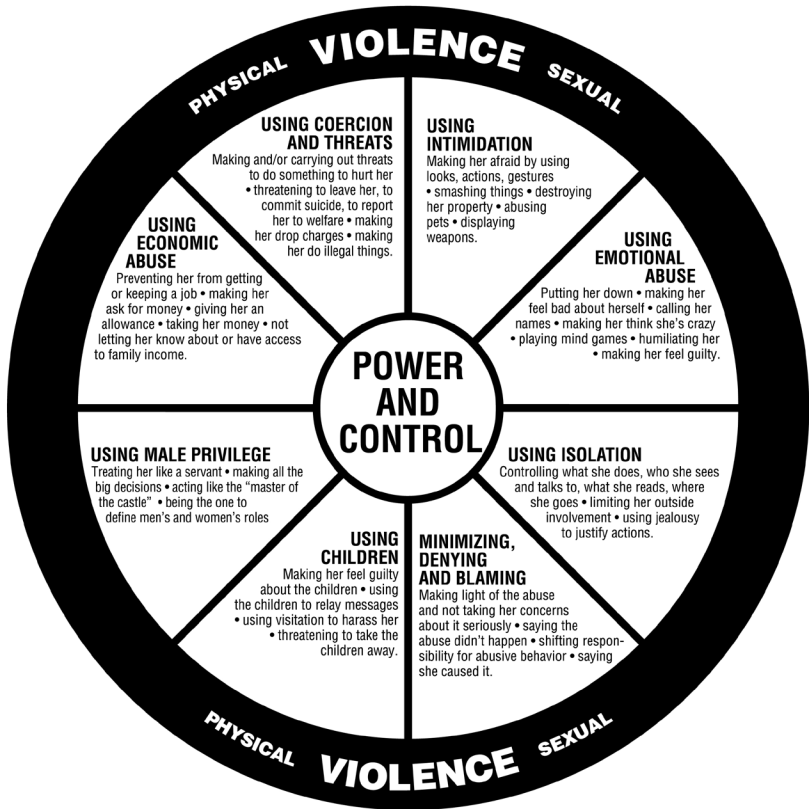


It may not feel safe to look for support from families, friends or communities who had previously excluded you because of your LGBTQIA identity.

If you or the abuser are part of the LGBTQIA community it may feel extra hard to reach out because of pressure from the group or fear of additional criticism from the outside world. **WISE** advocates support anyone affected by violence, no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity may be. You deserve support.

**Blaming you.** Perpetrators use these tactics to make it feel as though everything is their victims' fault. There may be things that he has used against you that are not captured in this booklet. You have probably tried - very hard - to do what you think will make him happy and avoid him getting mad at you. It is likely that no matter what you did, he still got mad or blamed you. His behavior is not a reflection of what you do, or do not do. It is his choice - and only his choice - to behave this way.

**It is not your fault.**



# PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

# SEXUAL

## POWER AND CONTROL

### USING ECONOMIC ABUSE

Preventing her from getting or keeping a job • making her ask for money • giving her an allowance • taking her money • not letting her know about or have access to family income.

### USING COERCION AND THREATS

Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her

- threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare • making her drop charges • making her do illegal things.

### USING INTIMIDATION

Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures

- smashing things • destroying her property • abusing pets • displaying weapons.

### USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Putting her down • making her feel bad about herself • calling her names • making her think she's crazy

- playing mind games • humiliating her • making her feel guilty.

### USING ISOLATION

Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes • limiting her outside involvement • using jealousy to justify actions.

### MINIMIZING, DENYING AND BLAMING

Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously • saying the abuse didn't happen • shifting responsibility for abusive behavior • saying she caused it.

### USING CHILDREN

Making her feel guilty about the children • using the children to relay messages

- using visitation to harass her • threatening to take the children away.

### USING MALE PRIVILEGE

Treating her like a servant • making all the big decisions • acting like the "master of the castle" • being the one to define men's and women's roles

# PHYSICAL

# VIOLENCE

# SEXUAL

## The impact

Your abuser can injure you physically, but there are lots of ways you might be affected that are not physical. They can be harder to identify and might have more of an impact.

**Feeling “crazy.”** Your abuser may make you feel as though you are somehow to blame for the violence. He may try to make other people believe that you are the problem or that you are “crazy.” This alone may make you feel unstable or confused about the truth. Sometimes it is called “crazy-making” for that reason. It is particularly difficult because the perpetrator is the person who you should be able to trust and care for more than anyone else. Without your support system or other people reinforcing the truth, you may be more likely to believe the lies.

**Confusion.** It is normal to try to make sense of what is happening, but there is no good reason for the controlling and abusive behavior. The only reason he acts this way is because he chooses to and our society allows it.

**Fear.** We react to dangerous situations in different ways. Sometimes our reactions are subconscious or we react in ways that surprise us. Our bodies do what is necessary to keep us as safe as possible. You may find that your senses are heightened, or that you react with fear to situations that were not scary before the abuse. Your body is reacting to keep you safe. You are not “crazy.” You are surviving.

**Drug and alcohol use.** Alcohol and other drugs may seem like they offer an escape or a way to relax and feel less anxious. This can be a dangerous way to cope long term, as it is easy to develop a physical dependence. Substance use often feels good at first, but the aftermath can feel bad physically and emotionally. If you have a dependency, it is very hard to stop using. Substance use can isolate you from the support you deserve, which may make you want to use more.

There are ways to cope that are safer. You can talk to a **WISE** advocate, health care provider or counselor about what you need. Advocates will not judge you for using substances and can help think of other ways to reduce anxiety and

dependence. You can find help with groups, medications, relaxation and other mind-body techniques such as Somatic Experiencing, meditation or yoga.

**Violence.** Sometimes victims yell at or use physical violence against their abusers. This is not “mutual abuse” because the abuser still has power and control. Victims may feel like they have no other options, they have “had enough” and that they can no longer take the torment. Abusers may provoke violence and use it as an excuse for their own pattern of violent behavior, saying “you hit me first.”

Sometimes victims fight back in self-defense. This is a normal response to being hurt. You may react to him in ways that surprise you, and he may make you feel guilty for “losing control” or “starting it.” He may try to convince you that your behavior is as bad as or even worse than his abuse. Sometimes abusers call the police saying the victim is abusing them.

There is a big difference between using violence in self-defense and how abusers use a pattern of behavior to

take away power and control. Just because you used violence to protect yourself, it does not mean that you are abusive.

**Trauma.** When we are in danger, our bodies get ready to protect ourselves by going into the “fight or flight” response. Our bodies release adrenaline and our heart rate goes up to help us survive. In domestic violence running away or fighting back are usually not real options. Instead we freeze or give in to stay safe.

Domestic violence is particularly traumatizing for a number of reasons. The danger is ongoing and is often happening in your home, which is where you should be able to go and be safe. The threat is coming from a person who you are supposed to be able to trust, depend on, and even go to for help. Isolation is a form of being held hostage when there is no escape.

Our bodies are designed to respond to danger in certain ways, but domestic violence does not allow for that response to fully happen. Our bodies get us ready for action but the kind of danger we are experiencing forces us to submit.

It can be extremely overwhelming. You may continually feel trapped and powerless. You might feel constantly on edge, because the danger is always there. When situations remind our bodies of past frightening experiences we react as if we are in danger, even if we are not. Your body might respond to a smell, or other sensory cues that may seem unrelated, but are connected to previous traumatic events. For example, you might notice that you become anxious when you enter a certain room, but it may be because something frightening happened to you in that room before and your body is remembering it.

This ongoing trauma response can lead to anxiety, stomach problems, headaches and many other health issues. Your body and mind are connected. Trauma impacts all parts of a person.

**You are a survivor.  
You can take back your life.**

## Children

Children are one of the most powerful tools that abusers use for control. Children are also a major reason that victims feel they can and must do something to change the situation.

Some moms stay with abusers because they want to keep the family together, or they think they cannot provide for their children financially. Other moms leave abusive relationships because they see the impact and abuse of the kids. You know what is best for you and your children. You know how to keep you and your children the safest. Whatever your choice may be, you can remind your children that the behavior their abusive parent is using is never okay.

## Leaving an abusive relationship

Leaving can be dangerous because it is the ultimate lack of power for the abuser, so they try to increase control. This is a time when violence tends to escalate. When victims are murdered it is usually after they leave. Safety planning can be a helpful way for you to explore your options to keep you and your children as safe as possible.



## Safety planning

Keeping you and your children safe is something you are probably very focused on already. “Safety planning” is all of the things you do to avoid more violence. You know more than anyone else how the perpetrator might act or respond to the strategies you may use. ***You are the expert in your situation.*** WISE advocates can brainstorm strategies with you but only you know what ideas are going to work. Here are some things to consider:

**Support.** Are there friends, family or coworkers who might be able to help? Are there people who your abuser would not think of that could be supportive? Does your abuser know where they are, or would he think to go there?

**Money.** Can you have money separate from your abuser? It is common for abusers to empty bank accounts once victims leave. If you plan to leave the relationship, it is reasonable to withdraw 50% of the money from any shared accounts. Withdraw 75% if you have children in common. You do not have to spend the money if you do not feel comfortable.

**Documents.** Is there a safe place to keep important documents (identification, financial records, etc.) accessible?

**Children.** Can you safety plan with your children? Perhaps you can inform their school or care providers of the situation. Are there other people your kids can talk to about how they are feeling? You may want to come up with a safe word that your children can use if they are feeling unsafe. If your children have visitation with your abuser you can talk with them about how that feels for them and what they can do if they feel unsafe.

**Access.** Are there ways to make yourself less accessible to your abuser? You might consider changing your locks, getting a new phone number, or changing passwords to email and social media accounts.

**Remember.** It is common to become desensitized to the danger an abuser poses when you are in an abusive relationship. We minimize in order to survive. While it is normal, it is good to recognize if this is happening so you can identify everything you can do to keep yourself safe.

## Restraining/protective orders

A “restraining” or “protective” order is a civil order, meaning that it is between two people. In most cases a judge decides whether or not to grant an order based on past physical harm, or the threat of physical violence. It limits how the perpetrator can have contact with you. Often it specifies that there can be no contact: physical, electronic, or by a third party. This means that family or friends cannot deliver messages for him. You do not need a lawyer to get a restraining order. **WISE** advocates can help you with the restraining order process.

Restraining orders do not go on criminal records, unless the perpetrator chooses to violate the order and is arrested.

Restraining orders can be helpful for many people, but not for everyone. Each situation is unique and you are the only person who knows if it could work for you. You can get more information about how to apply for an order from a **WISE** advocate.

## Laws/law enforcement

Threats to cause physical harm or actually causing injury are crimes. Other tactics that abusers use may not be illegal, but it can still be helpful to talk to police about them. Involving the police is a decision you should make based on your own situation and with as much information as possible. A **WISE** advocate can talk about the pros and cons with you. If you want a criminal case to be opened, the first step is to give police a statement about what happened or what is happening. A **WISE** advocate can go with you. Once you give your statement, police can investigate the report and possibly charge a crime if they think a law was broken.

Sometimes the police are called by someone else, like a neighbor or friend. If law enforcement thinks a crime was committed, they might make an arrest even if you do not want them to do it. Talking to a **WISE** advocate or a lawyer about your choices can be helpful. A **WISE** advocate may be able to connect you with a lawyer at a reduced fee.

## Health and healthcare

Ongoing abuse can affect your health in many ways beyond physical injuries. The health impacts can be present even after leaving an abusive relationship. Fear and survival responses flood our bodies with stress hormones, tighten muscles, and cause other changes. Our bodies bounce back when this happens occasionally, but in domestic violence, it can be happening on a regular basis because of the ongoing danger. You may have noticed changes in your body. The changes may be a result of the ongoing stress from the abuse. This stress affects digestion, muscle tension, mental health and much more. Your abuser may have prevented you from accessing medical care for injuries or illness. Without care, the impact might be even greater.

All healthcare facilities should have a policy outlining the care for victims of domestic violence. It is best practice to ask all women about violence in their lives because it is so common and affects health in so many ways. Sometimes health professionals are not able to make the connections between your current health and past abuse, and do not

properly diagnose what is happening to your body.

They may suggest mental health treatment or prescribe medications that do not address your concerns. Sometimes a mental health diagnosis can be helpful because it means that you can get the medications or support you need. Other times it can be limiting. It is very common for victims of domestic violence to be prescribed mood altering medications. Medications can be helpful for some people. Other people have said that it makes them feel different or numb. Numbness can make it difficult to process what has happened and make plans for your future. You may have had difficult experiences with doctors in the past and now have a hard time trusting them.

It is important to know that you are not the problem. There are real and physical impacts of trauma and abuse, even if they are not diagnosed. You know your body best. A **WISE** advocate can help you to access what you need to be healthy. You are worth it!

## Mental healthcare

Counseling can be helpful if you are talking to someone who understands the dynamics of domestic violence and trauma. There are body/mind approaches that can be helpful as well.

Couple's counseling is **never** recommended when domestic violence is present. Even an experienced counselor cannot make it safe for victims to talk about the reality of abuse with abusers present. The counselor also may not see or understand the abusive dynamics because perpetrators are so good at manipulation. You deserve to have support from professionals who understand the complicated realities of domestic violence.

A **WISE** advocate or your healthcare provider can make referrals to counselors with whom other survivors have had a good experience.

## Domestic violence and PTSD

When people experience trauma, are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or a traumatic brain injury (TBI), they might act in ways that they did not before. PTSD or TBI can sometimes lead to outbursts or violence, but do not cause the pattern of controlling behavior that defines domestic violence. Using the controlling tactics described in this booklet is a choice, not the result of injury or disease.

Sometimes abusers try to use experiences, diagnoses of trauma or a brain injury as an excuse for their behavior. A **WISE** advocate can be helpful in clarifying the distinctions between a pattern of abuse and other behaviors.

If the abuser is struggling with issues - whether they are physical or mental- you might feel bad for him and feel like he needs your support even if he is hurting you. While this is a reasonable feeling, it does not mean that you should give up your safety because he is having a difficult time. You can talk to a **WISE** advocate about how to care for your partner and keep yourself and your children safe.



## For providers

**Ask about domestic violence.** Victims will not necessarily know that they can bring it up unless you ask. Asking tells your patients that they can talk to you.

**Document.** Properly document your observations, what you do with your patient, any history of violence that you are aware of, the medical relevancy to the patient's health and their health history. Use the patient's words as much as possible in quotation marks. Use body maps to graphically represent injuries and take photographs with the patient's consent. Note the size, shape and color of injuries. Encourage follow-up as bruising changes. Do not use the words "allege" or "story" or insert your opinions about the abuse. Documentation can have a huge impact in court.

**Give as much control as you can.** Let the patient know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Explain the limits of your confidentiality (i.e., if you are concerned about child abuse). Domestic violence is not a mandated report in NH or VT unless it is against an "incapacitated adult" or there is

“serious bodily injury.”

**Make connections.** WISE advocates respond to all hospital departments in the Upper Valley every hour of every day when you call 866-348-9473. You do not have to do this alone, WISE advocates can continue to support survivors after their appointments end.

**No one can do everything,  
everyone can do something.**

## Supporting survivors of domestic violence

Supporting a friend or loved one who is in an abusive relationship can feel frustrating, overwhelming, and scary, but it is very important. One of the best things you can do is simply ask how you can be helpful.

**Listen and believe.** It is hard to believe that someone could actually treat another person this way. If someone is telling you about domestic violence it is probably true. Abusers intentionally make their victims feel guilty, embarrassed, “crazy” and confused. Listen openly and without judgment.

**Stay in touch.** Abusers frequently isolate their victims from friends and family. Do not take it personally if she is unable to see you. Do your best to stay in her life. Check in often, and let her know that you care.

**Focus on the abuse.** Point out the behaviors that are abusive, controlling and coercive rather than criticize the abuser. Talking about what an awful person the abuser is will likely make her feel defensive and think she cannot go to you for support.

**Put blame where it belongs.** The abuser does everything he can to make her feel responsible for the abuse. Remember that the abuse is not her fault. No one wants or deserves to be treated like this. Sometimes people think “why doesn’t she just leave?” There are many possible reasons. Sometimes it is more dangerous to leave or she may love him. Instead of being angry at her, be angry at how the abuser behaves.

**Safety plan.** The victim knows best how to keep her and her children safe. Ask how you can be a helpful piece of their safety plan. It is also important to keep yourself safe. The abuse may be directed at your friend, but you should also consider your own safety. This is particularly important if the perpetrator thinks that you have a relationship with the victim.

**Give her power and control.** Domestic violence strips a victim of her power and control. Do not tell her what you think she should do. Instead, support her to make her own decisions about her life.

## Ending domestic violence

To ultimately end violence we have to change the cultures that support and create it. It can be as simple as calling attention to behaviors and comments that degrade women and support violence. It can also be more systemic, like lobbying legislative systems to better address domestic violence. One critical way is by working with and supporting young people to grow up believing that equality and respect are fundamental expectations of them and their peers. Talk to the children in your life early and often. Encourage schools to include violence prevention education across all grade levels.

Abusive people must be held accountable for their behavior. Individuals who perpetrate domestic violence usually do not see themselves as being abusive. We often hear excuses like “boys will be boys” in response to boys acting in harmful ways which normalizes the behavior. Instead of ignoring violence, aggression, and a lack of empathy, we can teach boys alternatives and hold them accountable in ways that allow them to learn from their mistakes and make amends.

Men who see their fathers and other men abuse women are more likely to be abusive. We see men using violence in our media so often that it seems normal. Using violence, manipulation, and dominance is a learned behavior and a choice. Many men who are exposed to the violent messages in our culture pledge to act differently in their own lives.

Domestic violence is not caused by mental illness or substance abuse. Successful programs educate men about the behaviors they learned, hold them accountable and help them to make different decisions.

We must shift the culture that supports domestic violence. Many stereotypes about masculinity and femininity normalize gender-based violence against women, LGBTQIA people, children and other men. As we become more aware of how power dynamics are learned, we are better able as individuals and communities to notice, point out, and do the work to eliminate the underpinnings of violence.

We can all demand accountability and equality to end domestic violence. Call **WISE** to learn how you can help.

It is the policy of WISE to provide services to victims/survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence and stalking regardless of age, health status (including HIV-positive), physical, mental or emotional ability, sexual orientation/identity, gender identity/expression, socioeconomic status, race, national origin, parental responsibility, language, immigration status, or religious or political affiliation.

every hour, every day 866-348-WISE  
www.wiseuv.org

**Program Center**

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**Crisis Support** | Domestic Violence  
**Advocacy & Prevention** | Sexual Assault  
| Stalking