

NHS Fife Department of Psychology

A photograph of green tree foliage against a clear blue sky, positioned on the left side of the page.

Domestic Abuse

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



Keeping yourself and your family (children) safe.

It is important to understand that you are not to blame for the abuse you are experiencing. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect, to feel safe in their own home and to feel free to live their life without fear of physical harm, threats and controlling behaviour. It is a crime if someone physically hurts or threatens you or your children.

Everyone's experience of domestic abuse will be different. You may feel that you have no control over what you are experiencing. It can be stressful trying to control or work out when something is going to happen. This may lead to feelings of anxiety (or "walking on egg shells") or feeling very low. It may be that you have tried everything to 'keep the peace' and it makes no difference. You may also feel worthless or have noticed that you have little confidence as a result of being criticised or put down by your partner/ex-partner. In turn, this may affect, you self esteem and general confidence.

The following information and resources are provided to help you protect yourself and your family.

Assessing your situation

One of the first steps in breaking the cycle of domestic abuse is to acknowledge that there is a problem. Sometimes it can be hard to admit that you are in an abusive relationship. Since abuse often involves lots of small actions it can be difficult to see what is happening. Often these actions are about control, such as keeping you short of money; isolating you from your friends and family; or checking your mobile phone.

On the following page there are ten questions that you can ask yourself to help you think through whether you are experiencing physical, emotional and sexual abuse. It may also be helpful to talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling. You could go over these questions with them and discuss some of the conclusions you are coming to. This will also provide you with support. There is nothing to feel embarrassed or ashamed about. Nobody deserves to be treated in this way. The person abusing you is making a clear choice to treat you badly. Sometimes 'just saying it out loud' can be the first step forward.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Has your partner/ex-partner ever hurt or threatened you or your children?
2. Do often feel criticised, humiliated, insulted or threatened by your partner/ex-partner?
3. Do you ever feel afraid of your partner/ex-partner?
4. Does your partner/ex-partner try to control you by stopping you having contact with friends and family?
5. Are you stopped from leaving the house?
6. If you are separated from your partner, do you still feel controlled and or trapped by them?
7. Does your partner/ex-partner get jealous; do they check up on you, e.g. check your mobile phone, look at your email or check your online activity?
8. Does your partner/ex-partner control your finances?
9. Are you emotionally or physically drained as a result of your partner/ex-partner's behaviour?
10. Has your partner/ex-partner ever forced you to have sex or made you do things during sex that make you feel uncomfortable?

If you are living in an abusive relationship, it is important that you think about whether you are at risk and develop a safety plan. The following sections of this booklet are designed to help you do that. Ask yourself the questions on the following page to help you with this.

Questions to assess risk

1. Do you feel that you are in immediate danger? Does your partner/ex-partner follow you or have access to a weapon?
2. Do you feel threatened by your partner/ex-partner's family?
3. Do you or your partner/ex-partner have problems with drugs and/or alcohol?
4. Has your partner/ex-partner ever threatened or attempted suicide?
5. Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?

Developing a Safety Plan

Whether you are still living with an abusive partner, are thinking about leaving an abusive relationship or have recently left an abusive relationship, there are a number of steps you can take to keep yourself and your children safe. Below are some ideas to help you develop a plan to stay safe, and plan ahead.

If you are still living with an abusive partner.

The reality is that it may not be a 'simple case of just leaving'. There are a number of reasons, someone stays in an abusive relationship, for example, you may feel that it is your fault or feel that leaving could make things worse. You may also be worried about money and where you are going to stay. In addition, to this you may also be worried about the affect leaving will have on your children.

Staying in an abusive relationship is 'not the easy option' and it is not a sign of weakness. There are a number of support services available, to support you and your children. You are not alone

Clearly living in a household where domestic abuse is happening can be very distressing and confusing for a child. However, unfortunately this is the reality for some children.

On the next page, there are some ideas to help you develop a safety plan, to protect yourself and your children if you are still living with an abusive partner and you think they may assault you or if you feel that you and your children are in immediate danger.

Developing a Safety Plan

- **In an emergency dial 999** – the police will come to your house. Even if you can't talk, try and leave the phone off the hook after you have called so emergency services can hear what is happening.
- Carry a charged mobile phone with you at all times.
- Try keeping a phone in a room with a lock so you can call for help in an emergency.
- Make sure your children know what to do if they feel unsafe by teaching them how to phone the police, to not to get involved in what's happening – even if they are trying to help and to have a safe place to go to.
- Stay away from places you may become trapped e.g. bathrooms, cupboards.
- Stay away from the kitchen or other places that there may be weapons.
- Use a signal that will alert a neighbour, for example banging on a wall or knocking on the floor, which will enable them to call the police or call round.
- Plan and rehearse, escape routes from your house.
- Stay near a safe exit
- Call for help.

If you are thinking about leaving an abusive partner.

Thinking about leaving an abusive partner can be terrifying. There may be a number of reasons someone plans / thinks about leaving. You may have come to the realisation that your situation is not going to improve despite your best efforts to make the relationship work. The abuse may be getting worse, you may be concerned about the impact of the abuse on your children and you may be living with the fear that your life and or your children's lives could be in danger. You may slowly come to the decision to leave, or come to this decision quickly if you feel you or your children are in imminent danger. Leaving an abusive relationship can be a dangerous time. The abuse may escalate if your abuser thinks you are planning to leave and may also continue after you have left. It is important to understand that there are a number of support services available, to help you and your children. You are not alone.

On the next page are some ideas you could think about, if you are planning to leave, you could think about some of these before hand so things are in place.

- Try and talk to someone you trust about what is happening and that you are thinking of leaving. This will also help you plan and you may be able to leave important items / documents with them and get your mail directed there.
- Take or photocopy important documents e.g. you and your children's passports, birth certificates, national insurance details, driving licence, bank details and any other important documents. Take them with you or leave them with someone you trust.
- If you or your children have any medical conditions try and get spare medication and leave it somewhere safe. You may also find it helpful to discuss your situation with your doctor or another health care professional.
- Write down important phone numbers and contact details. Leave them somewhere safe in case you do not have access to a mobile phone.
- Think about opening a bank account and putting a small amount of money aside. Try and give a safe alternative address to where you currently live with your partner.
- If you can, try and get an extra set of keys cut for the house and car with an extra set of clothing for yourself and your children. Take a photo of your partner so the police can identify them as can your work and children's schools. This will help increase you and your children's security.
- Think about making arrangements for any pets you have, it can be common for abusive partners to threaten or hurt pets, or use them to stop you and your children from leaving.
- Think about where you could stay if you need to. Think about getting housing / legal advice to know what your rights are.
- Try and leave at a time, when your partner is not around.

If you have recently left an abusive relationship.

Leaving an abusive relationship may leave you feeling a great sense of loss for a relationship and lifestyle that you have invested time, energy and hope in. You may also be dealing with the loss of your home, extended family and shared friends. You may be feeling exhausted by the effort and courage it has taken to leave and shocked and bewildered by your new, found freedom. You may feel very anxious about you and your children's future or feel very low and / or angry about what has happen to you. You may also be adjusting to a new found sense of emotional and physical safety. Maybe for the first time in a long time you realise that you can make your own choices and do what you want without fear of abuse from your partner / ex partner. However, it is just after leaving an abusive relationship, that you and your children are most vulnerable. It may take sometime to disentangle yourself and your children from the control of your ex – partner.

Protecting yourself and your children after you leave.

- If you have to return home to collect belongings, ask for support from the police, (by calling 101) don't go back alone, your safety comes first.
- Think about contacting the Police Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers (DALOS) who can give specialist advice on domestic abuse and safety.
- Talk to family, friends, school, your employer, bank etc so they know that you may be at risk. Don't give out any information to your ex - partner e.g. your new address or phone number. Make sure your new address is kept confidential & doesn't appear on any shared paperwork with your ex – partner e.g. court papers, school related information and or appointments.
- Let the nursery / school know who will be picking up the children. You could think about using a password so they know that it is safe and you could also provide them with a photo of your ex – partner so that they know how to identify them.
- Think about talking to your employer / HR department about what is happening. Many employers have a domestic abuse policy and will support you. This may help if you need time off for any emergency appointments or family leave. It can also help with your safety. Colleagues could for example, check on your safety if you are unexpectedly absent, make sure your contact details are not disclosed and/or help with entering or leaving your place of work. They may agree to change your place of work temporarily.
- Try to avoid isolated places and make some changes to the usual routines that you had when living with your ex/partner. Try and plan a head what will you do if you met your ex – partner.
- Keep court orders and emergency contact numbers with you at all times. Keep a fully charged mobile phone with you at all times.

- Think about phone safety. If you do need to phone your ex/partner or anyone else he has contact with dial 141 (Scotland) before ringing so your number is not revealed. Talk to your phone provider about safety e.g. if you are receiving threatening or abuse text messages they maybe able to help you.
- If you are the victim of domestic abuse / stalking, you can join the electoral register anonymously. You need to provide evidence under the Family Law Act 1996 or the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. You can get advice about this from a support agency or a solicitor.
- If your ex-partner continues to harass, threaten or abuse you, phone the police and / or seeks advice about what measure might be available e.g. from citizen's advice or legal advisor. Keep a diary of what is happening along with dates and times. If possible photographic evidence of damage to your property or injuries you have.
- If you are hurt go to your doctor or hospital and ask them to document your visit.

Remember in an emergency always contact the police on 999

Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

