

Abuse

What is Abuse?

Abuse is the repeated occurrence of behaviour designed to intimidate another to gain control over them. Types of abuse include physical, emotional, financial, sexual and 'elder abuse.' To abuse is misuse use or treat something in a way incompatible with its nature and purpose. When abuse occurs in relationships, one person is seriously mistreating another. Abusive relationships between family members, usually in the family home, are also referred to as **Domestic Violence**.

When abusive behaviour occurs between partners in an intimate relationship, the situation is compounded. There could be more than one type of abuse occurring, as one tends to lead to another. Abusive behaviours are physically damaging, even if violence is not overtly present.

Forms of Abuse

Emotional Abuse is any behaviour designed to hurt you emotionally, including:

- ◆ **Humiliating:** making fun, excessive teasing, sarcasm, ridiculing, disregarding thoughts, opinions and feelings. Always 'being right' and the other 'always wrong.'
- ◆ **Dominating:** treating an adult like a child or inferior, chastising, making them get permission for small decisions, exercising unreasonable control over spending, excessively criticising, belittling, talking over, shouting over, making all the decisions, and preventing any independence.
- ◆ **Accusing:** blaming, making untrue accusations, cannot laugh at themselves, being overly sensitive to criticism, making fun of someone, blaming others for their 'mistakes,' name-calling, disrespecting valid requests, or cannot apologise when he/she ought to.
- ◆ **Emotional distancing:** silent treatment, tone of voice, isolation, emotional neglect, withholding attention or affection, failure to meet needs as a form of punishment, playing the victim instead of taking responsibility for own actions and attitudes, withholding empathy, refusing to listen, not responding, not facing, or cutting the other off.
- ◆ **Body Language:** rolling eyes, sighs, grimaces, disgusted looks, cold shoulder, banging dishes, slamming doors, shutting eyes, refusing to look, and walking away. (See also *Emotional Abuse*).

Financial Abuse is any behaviour designed to damage your financial wellbeing, including:

- ◆ Deliberately controlling your finances against your will
- ◆ Stealing, spending or misusing your money
- ◆ Stopping you working or earning money
- ◆ Interfering with your bank accounts
- ◆ Denying you access to money

Physical Abuse is any behaviour that is physically damaging or frightening, including:

- ◆ Preventing you from eating, sleeping or going to the bathroom
- ◆ Preventing you from leaving the house or locking you in a room
- ◆ Deliberately abandoning you or leaving you in an unfamiliar place or without means to get home
- ◆ Driving in a dangerous manner when you are in the vehicle with them
- ◆ Threatening you with weapons or using them on you
- ◆ Harming your children other vulnerable family members
- ◆ Forcing you to eat or drink something against your will, especially drugs or alcohol
- ◆ Hitting, slapping, kicking, pulling hair or any other physical hurting
- ◆ Grabbing you by the scruff of your neck and / or pushing their face right into yours
- ◆ Throwing your property around or deliberately damaging it

Sexual Abuse is specific, while Sexual Coercion is subtler. Sexual Abuse includes:

- ◆ Forcing you to have sex against your will or when you're sick or vulnerable
- ◆ Using physical force during sex, such as holding you down so you can't move
- ◆ Deliberately hurting you during sex, with or without weapons or other objects
- ◆ Deliberately passing on a sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- ◆ Not informing you that they have an STD before you have sex with them
- ◆ Forcing you to dress sexually or watch pornography against your will
- ◆ Saying sexually insulting things, or calling you sexually explicit names against your will
- ◆ Forcing you to terminate a pregnancy against your will

Sexual Coercion is manipulation, and could be either emotional or physical, including:

- ◆ Slyly plying you with drugs, alcohol or other things to influence you to have sex
- ◆ Saying you have to have sex to prove you love them, or prevent them from harming themselves
- ◆ Continually pressuring you to have sex when you have already refused
- ◆ Assuming they should be rewarded with sex if you're on a date or they've given you something
- ◆ Threatening you, reacting aggressively or 'sulking' if you refuse to have sex.
- ◆ Making you feel obligated to have sex or they'll go somewhere else for it.

Safety First

Whatever form of abuse you are suffering, help is at hand. **If you are in danger**, in need of help or to talk to someone, call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline on 1-800-799-7233](tel:1-800-799-7233). They have trained staff, ready to respond to your call 24-hours a day, 7-days a week, every day in the year.

Support is confidential, and if necessary, can involve immediate crisis intervention. See their website at: <http://www.thehotline.org> for more details. Don't stay unsafe when help is at hand.

Managing Abuse

Abuse is not your fault. Whatever you have done or not done, abuse is not okay. Check out the lists above to decide if it is abuse. Be honest about it – not making excuses for the abuser, even if you love him or her. If you are in danger, refer to the contact details above under 'Safety First.'

If you can, make it clear that you will not comply with unreasonable demands. Decide what your 'deal breaker' is. Make it clear and stick to it. If the perpetrator breaks it and then asks for another chance, be firm in your resolve. By now you know what the pattern is – you don't have to stick to it.

If you're not ready to leave right now, but know that you might have to leave at short notice, make a 'safety plan.' List people you can contact at short notice for help such as friends and family, especially if you can stay with them. Have their phone numbers handy and the phone numbers above.

- ◆ Prepare a bag of essentials or have them very handy so you can put them together very quickly.
- ◆ Have some money aside in a private bank account to support you if you leave in a hurry.
- ◆ If children are involved, consider their wellbeing when deciding whether to leave or stay. For safety, leaving may be best done when the perpetrator is not at home. In an emergency, contact:
- ◆ [National Domestic Violence Hotline on 1-800-799-7233](tel:1-800-799-7233), website: <http://www.thehotline.org>

If you want help recovering from abuse, or to manage anxiety and learn skills to stay calm and get your life back on track, contact us at the details below.

Dr Pauline Enright Mobile: 0409 191 342
Email: pauline@radiancehobart.com.au

PO Box 907, Sandy Bay, TAS 7006
Website: www.radiancehobart.com.au