

# ABUSE

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Abuse involves behaviour that cause emotional, physical, sexual or spiritual harm, and/or leaves a person feeling afraid and disempowered. Disturbingly, many forms of violence occur in the home. The Department of Community Services NSW (2002) found that when children are in a domestic violence situation they have a 50% chance of being directly harmed. The Young Australians and Domestic Violence Paper (2001) from the Institute of Criminology

found that 30% of 19-20-year-old women report being frightened or hurt by one or more episodes of "violence" while in a relationship. Over a lifetime, 48% of women experience at least one incident of physical violence.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately many young people, especially females, are the subject of violence in relationship and family contexts.

## IDENTIFYING ABUSE

Some forms of abuse are tricky to identify. The behaviours are very subtle, slippery and manipulative. Often victims don't know what they are dealing with. They are frequently blamed for causing the abuse and told they have brought the violence on themselves. Not surprisingly, they start to take on the responsibility for the perpetrator's actions.

The victim believes that if they improve their functioning, if they are a better son, daughter, or partner, the abuse will stop. Consequently, they live with high levels of fear and hypervigilance; people describe it as walking around on egg shells. Other emotions include shame, guilt and hopelessness. As a result their self worth takes a battering because their boundaries have been violated and they often lose a sense of who they are as a person. Therefore, abusive behaviours can eat away at person's sense of worth, confidence and identity.

It is not uncommon for the perpetrator of the violence to apologise for their actions. This can evolve into an ugly cycle where violence is followed by a heartfelt apology and a promise to change. Typically, this only lasts a short time before violence returns and the pattern starts all over again. The domestic violence cycle entraps a lot of people. The apologetic component of the cycle taps into the victim's desire for the perpetrator to change.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I AM BEING ABUSED?

If you are in an abusive situation remember that it's totally unacceptable. It's hard to comprehend but sometimes people who are supposed to love you, even protect you, such as parents, siblings and partners, can also harm you. This can be very confusing but violence from anyone is illegal and not OK.

Furthermore, you are not responsible for causing the abuser to mistreat you. This responsibility sits squarely on their shoulders. Their behaviour will not change until they take ownership for their behaviour. Learn about your rights; read up on the subject and if necessary protect yourself by calling the police.

Being caught in a web of violence creates a lot of emotional injury. As a result it is not easy to escape. You need help to free yourself. Make sure you talk to someone you trust: a teacher, a friend's parent, a church pastor or youth leader.

## NEED HELP?

**SALVOS COUNSELLING**

[salvos.org.au/more/get-help/abuse](https://salvos.org.au/more/get-help/abuse)

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# WHAT DO I DO IF MY FRIEND IS BEING ABUSED?

If you have a friend who is being abused it is highly likely they will feel disempowered and alone. They may believe their only option is to put up with the abuse. Remind them continuously that they deserve better and are valuable.

However do not place undue pressure on them. Your sense of justice will probably kick in but your friend will be vulnerable, so employ a lot of gentle support and encouragement. You may feel impatient at times with their lack of action but keep in mind what they are dealing with. Link them up with an adult or even better a counsellor, youth worker or chaplain.

If they are being physically or sexually abused it is imperative that an adult knows. Encourage your friend to tell someone, even the police. This will be a huge step but explain to them it is vital for them to be safe. The situation cannot remain a secret. If they do not take this course of action it leaves you in an awkward position, but you need to tell an adult, or call the police.

Do not try and deal with these heavy duty situations alone. They are serious, so access professional back up and support. Abuse is a reality within our society. We must do all we can to speak up and act against it. The exploitation of power is never acceptable.

## GET HELP

Kids Helpline  
National Sexual Assault, Family and  
Domestic Violence Counselling Line

1800 55 1800

1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Salvos Counselling  
Bursting the Bubble

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