



6. Family and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a widespread though often hidden problem across Australia. It occurs in all parts of society, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, age, cultural and ethnic background, or religious belief, and its often devastating effects – psychological, social and economic, short-term and long-term – rebound on families, children, and the community as a whole.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in a relationship or after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation. Many forms of domestic violence are against the law. For many Indigenous people the term family violence is preferred as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support.

(Partnerships Against Domestic Violence)

Domestic violence is the patterned and repeated use of coercive and controlling behavior to limit, direct, and shape a partner's thoughts, feelings and actions. An array of power and control tactics is used along a continuum in concert with one another.

(Almeida & Durkin 1999, p. 313)

Domestic violence is generally understood as gendered violence, and is an abuse of power within a relationship (heterosexual or homosexual) or after separation. In the large majority of cases the offender is male and the victim female.

Children and young people are profoundly affected by domestic violence, both as witnesses and as victims, and there has been growing recognition and concern about this in recent years.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prefer the term 'family violence'. 'Family' covers a diverse range of ties of mutual obligation and support, and perpetrators and victims of family violence can include, for example, aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships.

Domestic or family violence may involve a wide range of behaviours, including:

- **physical abuse** – including direct assaults on the body, use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation;
- **sexual abuse** – any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent, causing pain during sex, assaulting genitals, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly, criticising, or using sexually degrading insults;
- **verbal abuse** – continual 'put downs' and humiliation, either privately or publicly, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and spouse;
- **emotional abuse** – blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement (eg weeks of silence);
- **social abuse** – systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim knows nobody, and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people – in effect, imprisonment;
- **spiritual abuse** – denying access to ceremonies, land or family, preventing religious observance, forcing victims to do things against their beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence;
- **economic abuse** – complete control of all monies, no access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate 'allowance', using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses.ⁱ

Healthy or abusive relationships?ⁱ

Characteristics of SAFE AND HEALTHY Relationships	Characteristics of ABUSIVE Relationships
<p>Partnerships Joint decision making Shared responsibilities</p>	<p>Domination Abuser decides Servant/master mentality</p>
<p>Economic Equality Freedom to decide issues of work, school and money</p>	<p>Economic Control Deny job freedom Withhold money</p>
<p>Emotional Honesty Feel safe to admit and share fears and insecurities</p>	<p>Emotional Manipulation Use jealousy, passion, stress and frustration to justify actions</p>
<p>Sexual Respect Accept that "no" means no</p>	<p>Sexual Abuse Force partner to do things against her/his will</p>
<p>Physical Safety Respect partner's physical space Express self nonviolently</p>	<p>Physical Abuse Hit, choke, kick, pinch, pull hair, poke, twist arms, trip, bite, restrain, use weapons</p>
<p>Respect Respect right to differing feelings, friends and activities Support partner's goals</p>	<p>Intimidation Charming in public, menacing in private Destroy property or pets Make light of abuse: "You're too sensitive"</p>
<p>Support, Trust Listen and understand Value partner's opinion</p>	<p>Control Name calling, mind games Isolate partner from friends and loved ones</p>

ⁱ Commonwealth of Australia (2001) *Working Together Against Violence: the first three years of Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*.

ⁱ <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/relationship/recognize.asp>