

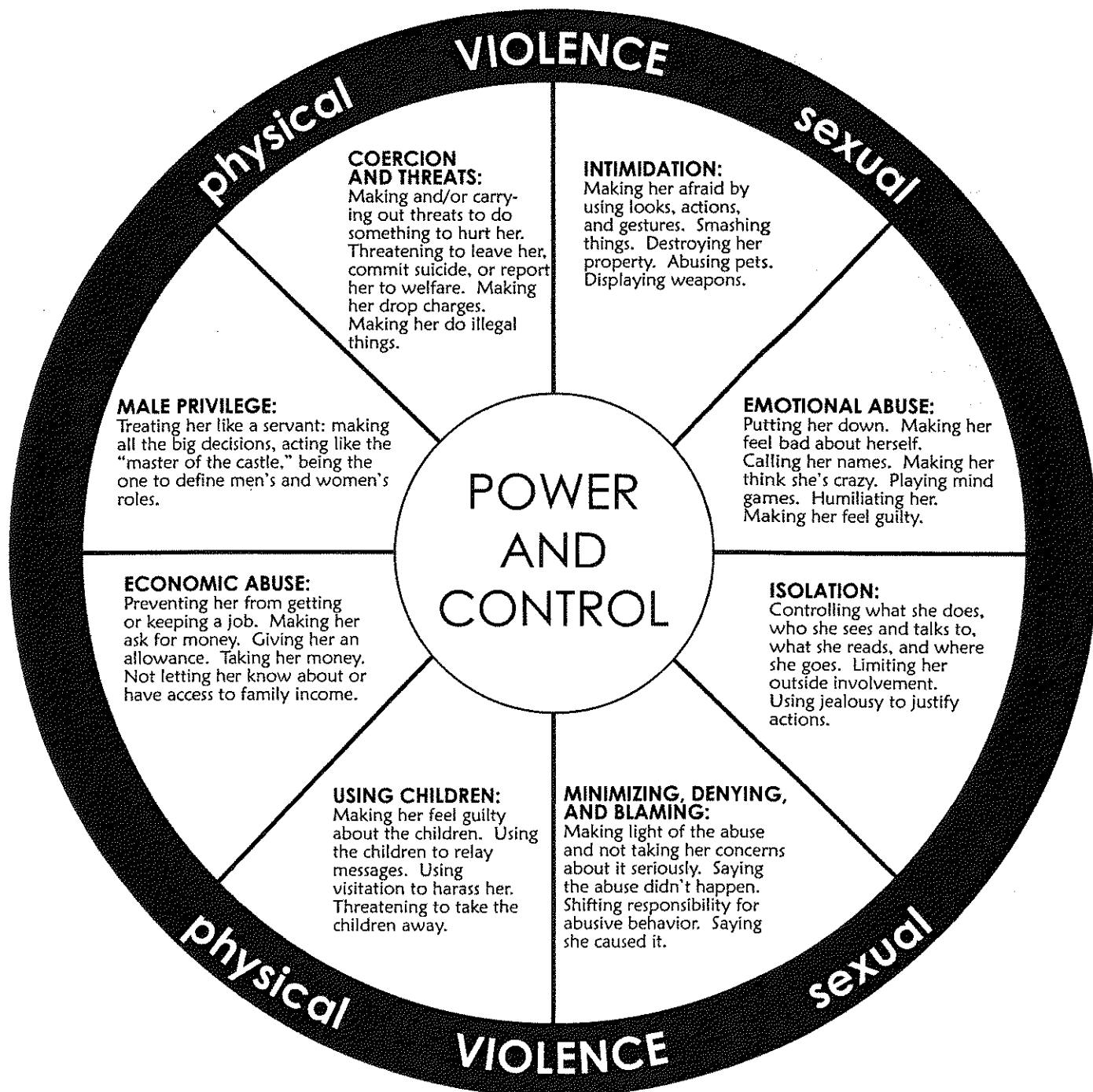
WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship. Controlling behaviors include physical, sexual, emotional and/or economic abuse, using tactics of coercion, terrorization, degradation, exploitation, manipulation and violence. Domestic violence crosses all cultural, religious, ethnic, economic, and social boundaries.

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



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What is Abuse?

There are many different definitions of abuse. Abuse can be physical, sexual, verbal/emotional, spiritual, or financial in nature and many survivors experience a combination of types of abuse. Whichever forms the abuse takes, it often escalates in frequency and severity over time.

In domestic violence, the abuser has typically claimed power in the relationship through emotional intimidation, sexual dominance, and/or physical coercion. The person with less power is usually the one who is hurt emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually, or financially.

There is often a pattern of ongoing abuse where one person is the primary aggressor and hurts his or her partner over and over again using a variety of tactics. This pattern of ongoing abuse is called “domestic violence.” While the survivor may occasionally resort to engaging in some of these behaviors herself, she is often simply trying to cope with and survive the violence. The abuser is the person who uses the abuse tactics repeatedly and methodically to degrade, hurt, or punish the survivor in a way that is meant to destroy body, mind, or spirit.

Abusers may be husbands, ex-husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, domestic partners, adult children, caregivers or parents. Abusers can be *anyone* - abusers can be any age, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. They may be unemployed or highly educated professionals.

Likewise, abuse can happen to *anyone* – young or old; gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans people; people who are disabled; people from all racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds; people who are rich, middle-class, or living in poverty; and people with any education level.

Sometimes people think they haven't been abused if they were never hit or seriously injured. What we know is that abuse happens in many more ways than just physical assaults, and that all forms of abuse are scary, painful, and shaming.

The abuse is never your fault. No one deserves to be hurt or to live in fear.

Physical Abuse

Abusers often target areas where injuries are less visible. Physical abuse often starts or escalates during pregnancy. Physical abuse includes tactics such as:

- Trapping, blocking, or restraining
- Locking a partner in a room or closet
- Strangling or smothering
- Biting, pinching, or pulling hair
- Slapping, kicking, tripping, punching, pushing
- Stabbing, burning, cutting
- Throwing objects at their partner
- Hitting a partner against a wall or floor
- Threatening with a weapon
- Forced taking of drugs or medications
- Not allowing sleep, food, or medication
- Murder

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse includes behaviors such as:

- Not allowing work or forced work
- Controlling all the household income
- Taking a partner's paycheck
- Getting a partner fired from his/her job by harassing or stalking at work
- Stealing a partner's bank cards or credit cards
- Taking SSI, SSD, savings or retirement
- Getting a partner evicted
- Ruining credit history
- Making a partner buy things he/she can't afford
- Having his/her name on all the property such as houses, cars, mobile homes, or apartments
- Forced prostitution

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse includes hurtful behaviors, words, and actions designed to degrade, intimidate, manipulate, isolate, or humiliate the survivor. Many women who have experienced multiple forms of abuse say that emotional abuse is the most damaging and most difficult to heal from because it can destroy their spirit and their sense of self.

Emotional abuse includes tactics such as:

- Calling names/humiliation
- Threatening to harm or kill their partner/threatening to commit suicide
- Forcing to do degrading things
- Constantly attacking a partner's self-esteem
- Destroying property (photos, clothing, sentimental items, etc.)
- Punching walls or throwing things
- Threatening to take or hurt the children
- Threatening to hurt or kill pet/s
- Isolating from friends and family
- Telling a partner it's her duty to God, your family, your children, or your community not to leave
- Threatening to tell friends and family lies or personal things
- Controlling activities (monitoring phone calls, checking odometer on car, etc.)
- Frightening or intimidating
- Prohibiting from getting a license or not letting their partner drive
- Questioning logic, sanity or ability to make decisions (calling her crazy, stupid, or overly emotional)
- Telling her no one else will ever love her
- Insulting intelligence, race, age, physical or mental abilities, religious beliefs, values or culture
- If in a same gender relationship, the abuser might threaten to "out" their partner
- If citizenship/immigration status is not stable, the abuser might threaten to turn a partner into the INS
- If their partner has a disability, the abuser might take away needed devices or medications

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes such behaviors as:

- Rape. Forcing, coercing, or intimidating into having sex or sexual contact that is not comfortable
- Forced sexual relations with others
- Forcing to watch other people engaged in sexual activity
- Refusing to share information about past sexual history or sexually transmitted diseases
- Knowingly infecting with STD's, including HIV
- Forcing to look at, enact, or pose for pornography
- Attacking breasts, genital or anal area
- Forced prostitution
- Refusing to wear condoms
- Forcing into or not allowing an abortion
- Flaunting affairs
- Making denigrating comments about a partner's body and/or sexual performance

Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse includes tactics such as:

- Forced conversion to a different religion
- Not allowing to attend religious services or practice religion
- Degrading what is most sacred to their partner
- Humiliation in front of people affiliated with religion or spirituality
- Using religion to justify abuse

How to be Supportive

- Tell me it's not my fault. *I didn't deserve to be assaulted. What happened to me was a crime.*
- Tell me you believe me.
- Please listen without interrupting. Don't press me to give details.
- Instead of telling me what to do, ask me what I need.
- Respect my confidentiality. Please don't talk to other people about it without asking me first.
- Be patient and understanding. Don't tell me to "get over it." It takes many survivors months or years to recover from being assaulted. Healing takes time, please respect my process.
- Validate my emotions—I may feel rage, a deep sense of loss, betrayal, confusion, or sadness. My feelings may change rapidly, and that's okay.
- Don't tell me what I "coulda done," "shoulda done," or what you "woulda done." Telling me these things will only make me feel worse. You may not understand or agree with my choices, but only I know what feels safest to me.
- Please don't put me in a situation where I feel like I have to comfort you.
- Please don't assume that you would have done anything differently that I did, you don't know.
- Please don't question how I handled the situation, I survived which means I made the best decisions possible under extreme conditions.
- Don't make jokes or comments to lighten the situation.
- Please don't pretend it didn't happen. Please don't minimize the experience in any way.
- Please be honest with me about your limitations as a support person.
- Please know that I appreciate your concern and caring, even when I might not show it.

