

# Breaking the Silence: Understanding Domestic Violence and When to Seek Help

written by SRFL Team | 14 November 2023



*Trigger warning: This article includes content about domestic violence which some readers may find disturbing. If you are triggered by any of the following content, please reach out to one of the Support Services listed at the end of this article.*

Family violence is a distressing and pervasive issue that occurs within the context of familial relationships and includes violence against children, older people, parents and other kin or family members. It encompasses a range of abusive behaviours where one family member seeks to assert power and control over another. These behaviours can take various forms, including physical violence, emotional abuse, psychological manipulation, financial control, and social isolation.

Family violence knows no boundaries, affecting people of all backgrounds, regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Its consequences are far-reaching, causing not only physical harm but also deep emotional and psychological scars. Recognising and addressing family violence is essential to protect the well-being and safety of those affected, fostering healthier, more supportive family dynamics.

Domestic violence is a subset of family violence and refers to abuse that is instigated within an intimate relationship and refers to violence or abuse perpetrated against an intimate partner or ex-partner. As with family violence domestic violence doesn't discriminate based on gender, culture, social status, or income, leaving behind a trail of pain and suffering. Let's talk about what domestic violence is and how to recognise when it's time to reach out for help.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) published 7th September 2023 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare highlighted the pervasive nature of family and domestic violence:

## Physical and/or sexual partner violence



**1 in 6 women** and **1 in 18 men**  
17% or 1.7 million and 5.5% or 527,000

have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15

(Source ABS 2023b)

## Partner emotional abuse



**1 in 4 women** and **1 in 7 men**  
23% or 2.3 million and 14% or 1.3 million

have experienced emotional abuse by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15

(Source ABS 2023b)

## Partner economic abuse



**1 in 6 women** and **1 in 13 men**  
16% or 1.6 million and 7.8% or 745,000

have experienced economic abuse by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15

(Source ABS 2023b)

## Sexual violence



**1 in 5 women** and **1 in 16 men**  
22% or 2.2 million and 6.1% or 582,000

have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15

(Source ABS 2023b)

# What Is Domestic Violence?

So, what is domestic violence? Let's break this down. Domestic violence is a pattern of harmful behaviour within an intimate relationship where one person seeks to control and dominate the other. It can take many forms: (David – can the numbers and bold words be in orange to stand out)

1. **Physical Abuse:** This involves physical harm like hitting, slapping, or restraining the victim.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** Any non-consensual sexual activity within a relationship is a form of abuse.
3. **Emotional Abuse:** Emotional abuse includes verbal threats, humiliation, and constant criticism that aim to erode a person's self-esteem.
4. **Psychological Abuse:** Abusers often use manipulation, intimidation, or mind games to control their partner.
5. **Financial Abuse**, also known as **Economic Abuse:** This involves controlling finances, denying access to money, or forcing the victim to depend on the abuser financially.
6. **Isolation:** Abusers might isolate their victims from friends and family, making it hard to seek help.
7. **Coercive behaviour**, also known as **Coercive Control:** forcing, intimidating or manipulating a person to do things they don't want to do.

## Coercive Control

Given that the Queensland Coercive Control Bill was recently been tabled to Queensland Parliament this type of abuse deserves a separate mention. Coercive control is a pattern of behaviours used by an abuser to dominate, manipulate, and intimidate their partner. It goes beyond physical violence, encompassing psychological, emotional, and financial abuse. The proposed Bill represents a significant step in addressing the deeply concerning issue of coercive control within intimate relationships.

The Bill seeks to criminalise these controlling behaviours, recognising that they can have profound and long-lasting effects on victims' mental and emotional well-being. By acknowledging the subtle yet devastating nature of coercive control and making it a criminal offense, the Queensland Coercive Control Bill aims to provide a legal framework to better protect individuals within intimate relationships and create a safer environment for those affected by this form of abuse.

## When to Reach Out for Help

Recognising the signs of domestic violence is crucial. Here's when to consider seeking help:

1. **Fear and Anxiety:** If you constantly feel fearful or anxious around your partner, it could be a sign of an abusive relationship.
2. **Physical Injuries:** When you notice frequent unexplained injuries on someone this can be a warning sign of physical abuse. If you are the recipient of physical violence, slapping, punching, pushing, or actions by your partner that result in you hurting yourself. Seek medical attention and share your concerns.
3. **Emotional Distress:** Persistent emotional distress, depression, or feelings of worthlessness, particularly ones that arise following interactions with your partner may indicate emotional or psychological abuse.
4. **Isolation:** Being cut off from friends and family or having your every move controlled or monitored either verbally or by technology, is a red flag.
5. **Financial Control:** Feeling financially trapped or having your finances controlled by your partner with no autonomy is a sign of abuse.
6. **Threats and Intimidation:** Never ignore threats of harm or intimidation to/of anyone – you, your children, your friends or extended family or pets.
7. **Sexual Coercion:** Any non-consensual sexual activity is a clear indication of abuse.

## Seeking Help

Reaching out for help is a brave step toward breaking free from domestic violence and:

1. **Talk to Someone You Trust:** Share your experiences with a friend, family member, or colleague who can provide emotional support and guidance.
2. **Contact Support Services:** There are organisations like domestic violence hotlines, shelters, and support groups that offer resources, counselling, and a safe haven for those in need.
3. **Legal Protection:** Explore legal options like protection orders, which can provide a legal barrier between you and the abuser.
4. **Therapy and Counselling:** Seek professional help from therapists, psychologists, or counsellors who specialise in trauma and abuse recovery.
5. **Safety Plan:** Work with a professional or support organisation to create a safety plan that helps you safely navigate the process of leaving an abusive relationship.

# Australian Support Lines

For those seeking help, there is support available:

1. **1800RESPECT:** Australia's national sexual assault, domestic violence, and family violence counselling service. You can reach them at 1800 737 732.
2. **Lifeline:** A crisis support service offering a listening ear and emotional support. You can call them at 13 11 14.
3. **DVConnect:** Queensland's domestic violence hotline provides support and assistance. You can call them at 1800 811 811.
4. In an emergency call **Police** on 000

Additionally, the **Domestic Violence Prevention Centre (DVPC)** on the Gold Coast provides a wide range of programs to support women and their children affected by domestic and family violence across the Gold Coast. DVPC also offers men's programs for perpetrators of domestic violence. You can reach them on 07 5591 4222.

Remember, you don't have to face domestic violence on your own. Help and support are available, and there is a path to healing and safety.

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