

respect
Phoneline

Helpline for people using violence
or abuse in their relationships

Information for men
who are concerned
about their behaviour
towards their partners

A few words about this booklet...

This booklet is for any man who has used any abusive or violent behaviours towards a female partner or ex-partner and wants help to change.

We know it can be tough facing up to difficult problems and if you're reading this it probably means you have some concerns about your behaviour. We want to support you to make the changes you need, so that you are safe around your partner and children (if you have children). Throughout this document we use the term 'partner' to include wife and girlfriend.

When you read the information we've put together for you we encourage you to think hard and face up honestly to the things you have done. You might have done some things only once or twice, but in many cases you'll notice that there is a pattern to the abusive things you do. By making yourself more aware of your abusive behaviours it will hopefully become easier to make changes and stop.

It will take a lot of hard work to stop being violent, controlling or abusive. This booklet can go as far as making you aware of some aspects of the problem. If you want to talk things through you can call us on the Respect Phonenumber on 0845 122 8609 (Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm) or email info@respectphonenumber.org.uk

Calls to the Respect Phonenumber are confidential. We do not use technology to identify callers, listening-in or call recording equipment. Calls provided by BT will be charged at up to 4 pence per minute at all times. A call set-up fee of 3 pence per call applies to calls from residential lines. Mobile and other providers' charges may vary. The Respect Phonenumber is a full member of The Helplines Association and in October 2007 it achieved accreditation status.

Is there abuse and violence in your relationship?

Emotional/mental abuse

Calling her names, shouting at her, smashing things, putting her down, threatening to harm her or her friends/family/pets, threatening to harm yourself, checking up on her, making all the decisions, opening her emails or going through her phone, controlling who she sees and making her account for her time when she's not with you, not letting her use the car or go out, driving recklessly to scare her, frightening her or making her feel bad about herself.

Sexual abuse

Pressuring her to have sex when she's not in the mood, touching her against her will, forcing sex on her, sulking or punishing her for not having sex, raping her, humiliating her, having unsafe sex without her consent, pressuring her to have sex with other people, taking sexual photos or videos of her without her consent and sending them or threatening to show them to other people

Physical abuse

Slapping, punching, hitting, pushing, kicking, grabbing, using a weapon, strangling, choking and any other forms of physical violence.

Financial abuse

Demanding a strict account of how she spends money, making a major financial decision without consulting her, withholding money or information about the family income, making her ask for or be grateful for money

Post-separation abuse

Making unwelcome contact by phone/text/letter/email/via relatives/friends, waiting for her outside her home/workplace/children's school without her agreement, checking up on her movements in some way, for example looking her up on Facebook

If you have used any of these behaviours towards your partner or ex-partner, you are being abusive.

How would *you* feel if someone treated you like that?

Remember:

- ! No matter how angry you feel, it is never ok to scare your partner
- ! No matter how she behaves, it is never ok to hurt her
- ! You can change your behaviour if you choose to do so
- ! Some abusive behaviours are criminal offences. The Police and the Criminal Justice System are taking domestic violence more seriously than ever before. They have the power to prosecute you even if your partner withdraws her statement

Choose to STOP!

What's it like for her?

How does your abuse affect your partner?

It's important to face up to how your behaviour affects your partner. If you can understand what it's like for her being on the receiving end of violence and abuse, it might make it less likely for you to do it again.

Health and physical effects:

Your behaviour is likely to be having a serious effect on your partner's health. If you've used physical violence, you've probably caused injuries. These might include:

Stiffness, soreness, aching, throbbing, numbness; headaches; cuts and other wounds; black eyes and bruising; hair being pulled out; burst ear drums; broken bones

In some cases women have been killed or permanently disabled by their partners.

Even if you haven't been physically violent, your partner may have developed physical problems as a result of your abuse, such as:

Feeling physically tense; having difficulty sleeping; feeling exhausted; having panic attacks, palpitations

In some cases women have said that:

Their periods stopped; they caught Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) from their partners; they were physically sick

Some women developed negative ways of coping such as:

Using alcohol/drugs/cigarettes; self-harming; developing eating disorders

Some women have tried to kill themselves. Some women have succeeded.

Every time he came back home after work I'd be terrified - I didn't know if he'd like the food or find the house untidy. I'd ask the kids to keep quiet and make sure I'd be out of his way to avoid being hit. He'd still find a stupid excuse to shout at me and hit me.

Sarah, 34

How abuse makes women feel:

As well as the physical effects, abuse also has an impact on women's emotional well-being. She may feel more and more:

Stressed, vulnerable, depressed, ashamed, drained, terrified, confused, nervous, hurt, unloved, worthless, destroyed, scared, humiliated, lost...

Abuse destroys trust and wrecks relationships

You've probably noticed that your relationship is suffering as a result of your behaviour. It sounds obvious, but it's impossible for anyone to feel the same about their partner when they're being abused, however hard they might try to pretend things are ok.

Although all relationships are different, what tends to happen is that the woman who's being abused ends up:

- Walking on egg shells, terrified of when the abuse might start up again
- Trying to pacify you or agreeing with you to try and stop you getting abusive again
- Being quiet and not sharing things with you
- Bottling things up
- Lying to protect herself (and the children)
- Losing all sexual feelings

Do you want your relationship to look like that?

If you have children, how are they affected by your abuse to your partner?

You may have children of your own or be a stepfather to your partner's children. Think about all of the children who might be affected by your abuse.

What I remember is being in bed and hearing it all the time. I know I saw it but I can't remember seeing it, can't explain it, it's really weird, just blocked it out, put it to the back of my mind

Jackie, aged 19

A lot of people tell themselves that children aren't really aware of the domestic violence that is going on in their family. But studies show that in households where there is domestic violence, in 9 out of 10 cases the children are in the same or next room.

Think about all the ways your children might be exposed to your abuse.

- Hearing or seeing the violence and abuse
- Being woken up or kept awake by your arguing
- Intervening - trying to protect their brothers / sisters / mother
- Getting hurt trying to intervene, or by getting caught up in the violence
- Seeing bruises or smashed furniture the next day

- Being brought into arguments
- Being used to ridicule or humiliate their mother
- Being used to divide loyalties, or to hold back or pass on information between you
- Being forced to take part in or to witness the violence and abuse

- Knowing their mother is distressed, depressed, angry, sulking or jumpy afterwards
- Being isolated from grandparents or mum's friends
- Experiencing direct violence

- Experiencing unpredictable behaviour from one or both of their parents
- Experiencing neglect from one or both of their parents
- Being told to leave the house or stay out to avoid the violence
- Knowing that their mum is anxious and scared when you are due home

- Knowing they must be different when you are around to avoid 'triggering' the violence
- Knowing that your violence is the thing to fear - "Just wait till your father gets home"
- Knowing that their mum is tired and worn out and doesn't have the energy for them

- Knowing that this is something that mustn't be talked about at any cost, especially outside
- Having to keep the violence a secret
- Knowing that some of the arguments are about them

- Having to leave temporarily or permanently for mum's and their own safety
- Having to stay in a refuge
- Having to see you in a contact centre

- Being made subject of child protection investigations or court proceedings
- Being teased or otherwise stigmatised by other children who know about the violence
- Having to comfort mum afterwards
- Having to call the police or get help

You may not realise the devastating effect that violence and abuse has on children. Even if your children haven't seen you be violent or abusive, it is almost certain that they will have overheard things. Imagine how terrifying it is to hear your mother being abused, not to know how it will end and not to be able to stop it.

Studies have shown that children suffer long-term harm if they live with violence and abuse at home, even if the abuse isn't directed at them. Some of the effects include:

Physical effects

Being physically hurt in the 'cross-fire'; having injuries; sleep deprivation; loss of concentration; bed-wetting; developing eating disorders; having panic attacks; stress and tension

Emotional effects

Fear; anger; distrust; anxiety; becoming jumpy/unable to relax; low self-esteem; loss of childhood; psychological problems

I failed all my exams, I put it down to him, what had happened at home. The atmosphere at school, the atmosphere at home was exactly the same, and whenever I heard the teacher shouting at a child, I just used to cover my ears 'cause I don't want to hear no one shouting. It's like, every time I heard someone shouting, it was like bells ringing in my head. I just don't want no more shouting, I used to just want to run out of the room and burst out crying because I don't want to hear no more shouting. **Karina, aged 16**

Effects on behaviour

Models him/herself on your violent behaviour; becomes violent to their mum; bullies other children; expects/accepts abuse – is bullied at school; steals or breaks the law in other ways; drinks alcohol, takes drugs; gets into trouble; does poorly in school work; misses time from school

Question: What were you frightened of? _____

Answer: My dad actually killing my mum _____

Seamus, aged 10 _____

Some things to think about:

- ! The impact of abuse doesn't stop when you do
- ! Your children will be harmed by your abuse even if they don't witness it
- ! You may be telling yourself "It's not that bad". How bad will it need to get before you do something about it?

Choose to STOP!

Facing up to what you've done

Most people get into relationships because they care for their partner. You may not intend hurting her, but you are. You may be feeling bad about how you've behaved – ashamed or guilty. It can be hard to face up to what you've done and how it's affected her.

You might find yourself minimising things, pretending things aren't that bad and making excuses. When you do this you're not taking responsibility for your actions.

Why do people not take responsibility?

- It makes you feel better in the short term – if you're telling yourself that you're not responsible for your violence, then you don't have to feel bad about it
- It means that you don't have to do anything about it – if you think that you're not the one responsible for your violence, then you stop yourself looking at your behaviour and attitudes or trying to change them

When people don't take responsibility for their violence/abuse, it makes it likely that it will continue.

These are some of the ways that people avoid taking responsibility for their behaviour:

Minimising your actions

Have you ever found yourself saying:

- “ I didn't hit her hard ”
- “ It doesn't happen often ”
- “ I'm not a violent man ”
- “ She bruises easily ”
- “ It was just a little slap ”

Playing down your actions serves to make it easier for you to live with your violence/abuse and avoid judgement by others. It is not until you face the seriousness of your actions that you can begin to change them.

Blaming your partner

Have you ever found yourself saying:

- “ She pushes my buttons ”
- “ She makes me angry ”
- “ She knows how to upset me, and she does it on purpose. ”
- “ She knows what I'm like. ”
- “ She never believes me. ”
- “ She nags me. ”
- “ She never listens to me. ”
- “ She's abusive to me. ”
- “ I was trying to get away but she wouldn't let me leave. ”
- “ She gets hysterical. ”
- “ She's a bad mother. ”

It's very tempting to try and deny responsibility for your behaviour by blaming your partner.

It's easy to spot when you are blaming your partner:

- You want to talk about your partner's behaviour rather than about what *you* did
- You think, "If only she would do/not do something, I wouldn't be abusive"
- You feel that *she* needs to change in order for *you* to stop your violence

Respect speaks to a number of men who want to talk about all the ways they feel 'wronged' by their partners. They feel that they are the 'victim' in the relationship. Some men are – for others, they are playing down/denying their own violence and trying to blame their actions on their partners.

One of the first steps to ending abuse is to take full responsibility for your behaviour. You need to recognise that it's up to you what you do and how you behave, and to stop blaming your partner.

Next time you notice yourself blaming your partner try this:

- ! Focus on *your* behaviour
- ! Think about your partner's feelings
- ! Remind yourself that *you* are in control of what *you* do

Other things to blame

There are many other ways in which you can wriggle out of responsibility for your behaviour by saying that the reason for it was some kind of outside influence. For example:

- Work problems
- Money worries
- Children
- Things that happened to you when you were a kid

But none of these things cause you to be violent. Plenty of people experience these things without using violence. Think of a time that you've been stressed about work, or the children or money when you weren't abusive. These things don't *cause* violence or abuse, but they may be something you argue about a lot and may feel very linked to your abuse.

Drink/drugs

Alcohol and drugs don't cause abuse, but they can make it worse. Many people use drugs and alcohol and never become violent or abusive. If you find that when you drink you become more abusive and you still do it – then you're making a choice to be abusive. You are still responsible for your behaviour even if you are drunk or high.

When people are drunk or high their violence might become worse; that is more severe or frequent. When you are drunk or high it can be more difficult to stop yourself or limit your behaviour. This means you may cause more damage than you intended to your partner or family.

Remember that:

- You may harm your partner or family more than you intended when you have been drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Most people can choose how much and where to use drugs or alcohol. If you must use try cutting down gradually and drink or use away from your family. This may mean staying at a mate's place after the pub or sobering up before going home.
- Being out of it is not an excuse. You are still responsible for your own behaviour, drunk, high or sober.

I was ashamed to admit what was going on. I used to kid myself that I was out of control or that it was the drink, and that it wasn't really my fault. I've begun to realise that it was my problem - and although I didn't like facing up to that at first, it made me realise that if it was my problem then I could change things" **Jack, 33**

Other excuses

Momentary insanity

When you're struggling to understand your violence, you may be tempted to believe that some strange force came over you and that you had what we might call *momentary insanity*. Have you ever said to yourself:

“ I lost control. ”

“ I just flipped. ”

“ I saw red. ”

The 'human pressure cooker'

Often you may want to say that such pressure had built up inside you that it was too late to make any other choice than to be violent. You might then say something like:

“ I just exploded. ”

“ I just blew. ”

But think about it. Most of the time your violence isn't random, but specifically directed towards your partner. You don't 'explode' randomly at passers-by when you feel bad, nor do you 'see red' and hit just anyone who happens to be near.

If you believe that you're overwhelmed by these strange forces that cause you to be violent, you won't be able to stop. It's one of the ways of avoiding understanding what your violence is about. In reality you could make different choices. If you're honest with yourself you can probably see that you choose to control lots of things:

- Where to hit her
- How hard and how long for
- Who in front of
- When to stop
- What kind of violence – why a slap and not a punch? Why punch her, not strangle or stab her?

So, why does abuse happen?

Abuse doesn't just happen. Rather than being about loss of control, most of the time it's about you trying to be in control.

Think about the times when you abused your partner and if you are honest to yourself you will be able to work out what was really going on.

You might have wanted to:

- Stop her doing something or make her do something
- Shut her up
- Punish her for doing something you didn't like
- Punish her for hurting your feelings
- Show her who's boss
- Win the argument
- Get your own way

This is what we mean when we say that domestic violence is about power and control. Whenever you're trying to make her do something she doesn't want to do or stop her doing something she wants to do, you're trying to control her.

Remember:

- ! Your violence and abuse is a decision. It's a choice that *you* have made from the many different options open to you and you can choose differently
- ! If you want to move away from a relationship based on power, fear and control to one based on intimacy and respect, you must stop blaming your partner for your behaviour and make changes
- ! Just because you've been violent and abusive in the past doesn't mean you have to be again

Choose to STOP!

What can you do?

Spot the warning signs!

This section will help you to be more aware of when things are heating up and you're getting into a situation where you may be abusive towards your partner. The more you are aware of your 'warning signs', the more you will be able to stop yourself from being abusive.

When you notice the following 'warning signs' in yourself, do something about it: take a time-out (we explain how further down).

Sore points

Sore points are typical situations in which you've been abusive in the past. Examples might include conflicts over money, relatives, friends, sex, or who is right about something that happened in the past. You may be particularly touchy when tired, at a particular time of day, or when you've not eaten recently.

Think about your typical sore points.

Physical warning signs

Think about what is happening for you physically as you begin to build towards violence and abuse:

What do you feel in your body? For example, tension in your stomach/shoulders/neck/jaw, heat, changes in breathing and heart rate.

Think about what you begin to do. For example, point a finger, close your fist, flail your arms, pace up and down the room, raise your voice or shout, glare at her, interrupt, go quiet, issue orders.

Think about your physical warning signs.

Emotional warning signs

You may be aware of different feelings that come just before you become abusive or violent. For example, feeling resentful, angry, trapped, confused, persecuted, got at, challenged, guilty, embarrassed, upset, hurt. These are your emotional warning signs. If you know that you have been abusive in the past when you have felt embarrassed or guilty, then it's important that you are able to recognise these emotional warning signs in the future. Anger and hurt and all these other feelings are unpleasant and can be difficult to manage, but they do not have to lead to violence. There will be times in your life when you have dealt with difficult feelings without being violent or abusive.

Think about your emotional warning signs.

Mental warning signs

What are you thinking just before you are abusive? Often you will be winding yourself up, thinking negative things about your partner or trying to justify yourself. This is negative self-talk.

It can be phrases like "She's doing this deliberately to wind me up", "She's so stupid", "She never gets anything right", "She never listens to me"...

You may want to make a note of the negative self-talk/typical thoughts you have as you get closer to being abusive.

Note also the things you *don't* think about, such as how she's feeling, trying to understand her, reflecting on her good points, or listening to what she says.

Remember, it's never too late to make a different choice. A positive choice: you can walk away. Right up to the very moment you are violent, you can choose to do otherwise.

Take a 'Time-out'!

What is a time-out?

A time-out is the most basic alternative to being violent – if you're not near your partner, you can't hurt her physically. A time-out gives you breathing space – one hour to reflect on your abusive behaviour, away from your partner.

Taking a time-out means that you notice your warning signs and decide to get away before things build up and you are violent. As soon as you recognise any of these signs in yourself, *don't wait until you get worse*. Tell your partner "I need to take a time-out" – *and leave*.

You should *calmly* leave your home or wherever you may be for exactly *one hour* – not 50 minutes, nor three hours. There are two important reasons why you need to stick to the hour:

- Your partner is more likely to trust you if you stick to a standard format.

- One hour is a realistic length of time in which to calm down and review what was happening. If you start to shorten this time, you increase the risk of returning and being abusive.

During that period, do the following:

Calm yourself down

Don't drink alcohol or take drugs. Don't drive. During this first part of the hour (*about 20 minutes*), calm yourself down. Think of how you can control your own behaviour, rather than controlling hers. You might want to do something physical, such as going for a walk or a jog, which may reduce the physical build-up of tension. You might want to do something else such as pray, meditate, or ring up a friend who is supporting you in being non-abusive. Whatever you decide to do, make sure it's something that helps you to calm down.

Examine your behaviour

During the second part of the hour (*about 40 minutes*) think about **your** behaviour and any negative thoughts you were having about your partner. You may want to write some of these down if that helps you. What did you want to change about your partner? If you're going to be non-abusive, you will need to be able to return to the situation and be different rather than try to make your partner different. Think about alternatives to your abusive behaviour and about what you're going to do or say when you go back to discuss the issue with her.

Return home

Before you return, it's a good idea to ring your partner to let her know you've calmed down and will be back at the end of the hour. When you return, let her know you're back. If she wants to discuss the situation with you, do so in a non-abusive and non-blaming way. This is the occasion for you to let her know what your thoughts about **your behaviour** have been during your time-out. If during the discussion you find yourself building up towards abuse again, tell her so and take another time-out.

If she doesn't want to talk when you return, propose a time when you could both be available. If she is not prepared to talk to you at all yet, **leave her alone** until she's ready to do so. If you try to force her to talk about things, you are being abusive.

Talk to your partner about time-outs

It's very important to talk about time-outs with your partner well ahead of when you will need to use one. Do this at a time when you're calm and she has agreed to discuss it with you. Show her this information and give her time to read it.

She may not want to talk about it with you. If this is the case, leave this information with her, when she can read it at another time if she chooses to. A time-out is a tool for **you**, not for your partner – you don't need her support to use it. However, it's essential that you let her read this information if she so chooses.

Don't abuse the time-out

It's important that you don't abuse the time-out. Some ways of abusing the time-out process are:

- Using it against her by storming out in the middle of an argument and pretending you are taking a time-out
- Using it as an excuse to go to the pub or to stay out late
- Telling her that **she** needs to take a time-out
- Returning from a time-out without having calmed down/still wanting to argue
- Using it to control your partner in any way

If you abuse the time-out or don't use it properly and respectfully, it will become another form of abuse.

The time-out has been very useful. At first it was difficult to use but I learnt that it's entirely up to me to leave before I get too angry.

Mark, 52

Join a domestic violence prevention programme

I never really saw myself as an abusive man. The programme made me think about all the little things I did to control my partner, like stopping her going out with her friends and checking her mobile phone. I realised this was about my jealousy and insecurity - and it was making her miserable.

Gavin, 29

These programmes are designed to support and help men to change their abusive behaviours and develop respectful, non-abusive relationships. They are run in groups so men have the chance to learn from each other and support one another.

I used to pretend that the violence wasn't that bad - pushing and shoving and stuff like that. It wasn't till we looked at the effects of violence on women on the programme that I realised how frightened she was of me.

Tariq, 44

Other support

Call the Respect Phonenumber – 0845 122 8609

We will listen to you in a non-judgemental way, discuss your situation and help you think about how to change. We can give you contact details for a domestic violence prevention programme, if there is one in your area. Our helpline is confidential and the cost for the phone call is the same as a local call.

Have a look at our website: www.respectphonenumber.org.uk

Get support from friends or family
who can help you change

Books

If you enjoy reading you might find the following books useful:

- *From Fear to Freedom: Masculinity, Control and Change: A Workbook for Men* by Dave Morran (Editor), Venture Press, 2009, ISBN 1861780826
- *Violent No More* by Michael Paymar, Hunter House Publishers, 2000, ISBN 0897932684
- *Man to Man: A Guide for Men in Abusive Relationships* by Edward W. Gondolf and David M. Russell, Sulzburger & Graham Pub Co, ISBN 0945819617
(This can be downloaded from our website www.respectphonenumber.org.uk/pages/what-can-you-do.html)

If you are finding it hard to change

If you are frequently violent to your partner, you should think about moving out of the house and not seeing her for a while. It's the only way to keep her and your children safe.

Believe in yourself – you can change if you really want to

Choose to STOP!

This booklet was written for you.
Please let us know if you found it useful or
if you think there is something missing:
info@respectphoneline.org.uk

Quotes from 'Jackie', 'Seamus' and 'Karina' are from the book
Childhood Experiences of Domestic Violence by Caroline
McGee, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd, 2000

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RNID typetalk



If English is not your first language,
please call and ask for an interpreter

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