

If you are being abused

- **Contact domestic violence programs** before you are in a crisis or emergency, whenever possible. Call the numbers below for help.
- **Make a safety plan for yourself and your children.** Choose the safest time to leave and figure out where you will go and how to get there. Keep important papers (including your children's health and school records), keys, a set of clothes and some money with someone you trust. Domestic violence programs can help with safety plans.
- **Tell someone you trust what is happening.** Make a "code word" or signal so that other people now when to call for help. Memorize phone numbers of trusted people. Do not tell the abuser that you are planning to leave.
- **Keep medical records** if you are treated for injuries, and keep any torn clothing, photos of bruises, etc. Your doctor can help you document what is happening.
- **Get help for your children.** If you are reported to child welfare, cooperate and participate in family service planning. Remember, it is their job to see that your child is not being abused.
- **Remind yourself that no one deserves to be abused** and that you and your children have a right to live without violence! You have many strengths and good qualities that will help you keep your family safe.

For information and support, contact:

National Domestic Violence Hotline

(Toll-free, 24 hours) • 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) • www.ndvh.org

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

www.pcadv.org • Lists all local programs in PA



Pennsylvania
Family Support Alliance™

Protecting children from abuse

- Training for professionals
- Support for families
- Education for communities



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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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2000 Linglestown Rd., Suite 301, Harrisburg, PA 17110

1-800-448-4906 • (717) 238-0937 • Fax (717) 238-4315

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Protecting children from abuse

Parenting When There is Domestic Violence

Parenting Series



About domestic violence

Domestic violence can be physical (hitting, kicking, slapping), sexual (forced sex or unwanted sex acts), economic (no access to money or credit cards) or emotional (threats, control, disrespect). Anyone — no matter what sex, race, religion, occupation, educational level, sexual orientation or ethnic group — can be a victim of domestic violence.

- Many victims of domestic violence blame themselves for the abuse. Remember that only the abuser is responsible for his/her behavior and only he/she can make it stop.
- Victims with children may stay in an abusive relationship because they feel they are unable to care for their children alone. They may not have enough money to support the family or they may believe that a single parent family is not good for children. Also, violence is often increased when the victim tries to leave and many victims are seriously injured or killed at this time.
- Children in violent homes are more likely to be abused. Close to 50% of men who abuse women are abusive toward their children or children living with them. Child welfare systems may be called if abuse is suspected. Some children are injured if they are close to an adult victim during an incident, or if they try to defend the victim.

Domestic violence can be called other things: wife battering, domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, dating violence or relationship violence. Each of these terms describes an aspect of domestic violence. It's not always easy to tell if a relationship may be abusive; some signs are:

- Showing jealousy of your friends or activities that take time away from the relationship.
- Insulting, shaming or demeaning you.
- Controlling money, taking your money.
- Behaving in ways that scare you.
- Controlling where you go, who you see, what you do.
- Destroying your property, threatening to hurt or kill you.
- Threatening to harm or take away your children.



Children and domestic violence

When there is violence in the home, children are “silent witnesses.” Children pay attention to what is happening around them. You may think your children “don’t know what’s going on,” but they probably do. Children often tell you how they are feeling by their behavior. Here are some ways that children may react to violence in their home:

- Withdraw or act as if the abuse is no big deal.
- Have trouble sleeping, or nightmares.
- Loss of appetite, stomach aches or headaches.
- Become anxious, fearful or moody, and worry about your safety.
- Demand adult attention and misbehaving when they don’t get it.
- Have trouble learning or behaving in school.
- Argue or fight with other children; become violent or bully other kids.
- Dating violence, mistaking jealousy and controlling behavior for love.
- Use drugs or alcohol, run away from home, or get into trouble with the law.

Factors like your child’s age, relationship with the abuser, type of abuse, and availability of other supports can affect the impact on your child.

You can help your children

- **Provide a chance to talk** about the violence. When children share their worries they feel less alone. Ask how they are feeling and really listen.
- **Let them know you love them and want to keep them safe.** Make a safety plan for your children, identifying people you can trust to help them.
- **Be realistic.** Don’t make promises to children (“I won’t ever go back to him ...” or “We will be safe now ...”) that you may not be able to keep. Reassure, but be realistic in what you tell them.
- **Understand their feelings.** Children often feel guilty when they cannot stop the abuse, and they also feel guilty when they have good feelings toward the abusive parent. Children often feel confused, overwhelmed, anxious and unsure of their feelings toward both parents. They may grieve the loss of a parent when they are separated from them.
- **Reassure your children** that the abuse is not their fault.
- **Do your best** to build a loving, peaceful home for your children. Parenting classes and support groups can help you to be a consistent, nurturing parent.

There are more ideas on the back of this brochure.