

Domestic Violence



What's the difference between normal conflict and domestic violence? Conflict is part of every intimate relationship—that's why conflict resolution skills are important. Domestic violence, however, has no place in a healthy relationship, whether the couple is dating, cohabiting, engaged, or married.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses, or threatens to use, to control an intimate partner. The two key elements are threat and control. Domestic violence can take various forms:

Physical – Violent actions such as hitting, beating, pushing, and kicking. In many cases physical abuse becomes more frequent and severe over time.

Sexual – Includes any sexual acts that are forced on one partner by the other

Psychological – Includes a wide range of behaviors such as intimidation, isolating the victim from friends and family, controlling where the victim goes, making the victim feel guilty or crazy, and making unreasonable demands

Emotional – Undermining an individual's self-esteem, constant criticism, insults, put-downs, and name-calling

Economic – Examples include limiting the victim's access to family income, preventing the victim from working or forcing the victim to work, destroying the victim's property, and making all the financial decisions

Both women *and* men can be victims of domestic abuse. According to [the National Domestic Violence Hotline statistics](#), approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men over the age of 18 have been the victim of physical domestic violence, and almost 50% of both sexes have experienced some form of domestic psychological aggression.

Characteristics of victims

- Female, although men can also experience domestic violence
- Younger, often in their 20's and 30's
- More likely to be dating or cohabiting than married
- Nearly half live in households with children

Why do women stay?

Women often stay with their abusers because of fear. They are afraid that the abuser will become more violent if they try to leave. Some fear that they will lose their children. Many believe that they cannot make it on their own.

Some abused women believe that the abuse is their fault. They think that they can stop the abuse if they just act differently. Some cannot admit that they are abused women. Others feel pressured to stay in the relationship. They may feel cut off from social support and resources. Abused women often feel that they are alone, and have nowhere to turn for help.

Why do men batter?

Abusive men come from all walks of life. They may be successful in their career and respected in their church and community. Abusive men often share some common characteristics. They tend to be jealous, possessive and easily angered.

Many abusive men believe that women are inferior. They believe that men are meant to dominate and control women.

Typically, abusive men deny that the abuse is happening or they minimize it. They may blame their partner for the abuse, saying, "You made me do this."

Alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence but they do not cause it. An abusive man who drinks or uses drugs has two different problems: substance abuse and violence. Both must be treated.

What the Catholic Church teaches about domestic violence

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have made clear that "violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified. Violence in any form- physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal is sinful; often it is a crime as well." ([When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women](#))

WHERE TO FIND HELP

For abused persons

- Believe that you are not alone. Help is available for you and your children.
- Talk in confidence to someone you trust: a relative, friend, pastor or family doctor
- If you choose to stay in the situation, set up a plan of action to ensure your safety. This includes hiding a car key, personal documents, and some money in a safe place and locating somewhere to go in an emergency. For more information about safety planning go to the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#).
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides crisis intervention and referrals to local sources of help in all 50 states. Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

For those who abuse

- Admit that the abuse is your problem, not your partner's. Begin to believe that you can change your behavior if you choose to do so.
- Be willing to reach out for help. Talk to someone you trust who can help you to evaluate the situation. Contact Catholic Charities or other church or community agencies for the name of a program for offenders.
- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233) for information about where to find help.

Domestic violence and the permanence of marriage

Some abused women believe that Catholic Church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Catholic Church.

In [When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women](#), the Catholic bishops emphasize that "no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage." Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. The abuser has already broken the marriage covenant through his or her abusive behavior. Abused persons who have divorced may want to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment.

What the Bible says

Abusive men may take a text from the Bible and distort it to support their right to batter. They often use Ephesians 5:22 ("Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord") to justify their behavior. This passage (v. 21-33), however, refers to the mutual submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. It means that husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church.

The Catholic bishops condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form. Men and women are created in God's image. They are to treat each other with dignity and respect.

Forgiveness

Men who batter also cite the Bible to insist that their victims forgive them (see, for example, Matthew 6:9-15). A victim then feels guilty if she cannot do so. Forgiveness, however, does not mean forgetting the abuse or pretending that it didn't happen. Neither is possible. Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse. Rather, forgiveness means that the victim decides to let go of the experience, to move on with life and not to tolerate abuse of any kind again.