

Survivor Guide



A project by the Gardner Domestic Violence Taskforce

2021

Hello & Welcome!

This e-booklet has been put together by the Gardner Domestic Violence Taskforce as a guide for anyone experiencing an abusive or unhealthy relationship with an intimate partner. This guide may also be helpful for people who are unsure if what they are experiencing is abusive or unhealthy. Relationships are complicated and it is normal to need help assessing if what you are going through is a rough patch or a pattern of behaviors likely to get worse. We understand it is scary to think about your loved one potentially engaging in abusive behaviors. It is scary to talk about, especially for the first time. We encourage you to talk to someone you trust about your situation – a friend, family member, therapist, faith leader, etc. – but we also recognize sometimes it is easier to start with learning information about abuse and the available supports and resources. Wherever you are in your personal journey, we hope this e-booklet may serve you. Below is a table of contents to navigate directly to specific topics of interest. Be well and remember you are not alone.

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Definitions

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DV) is an umbrella term that encompasses abusive relations between intimate partners, family members, and even roommates. This e-booklet focuses on domestic violence in intimate relationships (intimate partner violence), though some of the resources and information may still be helpful to those experiencing abuse from family or a roommate.

ABUSE is any sexual, emotional, economic, or physical actions or threats of actions that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, and/or wound someone. An **ABUSER** is a person who has recurring problems with abusing, disrespecting, insulting, or devaluing their intimate partner. Abuse is a tool of control in relationships.

Examples of Abusive Behaviors:

<u>SEXUAL</u>	<u>EMOTIONAL</u>	<u>ECONOMIC</u>	<u>PHYSICAL</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Penetrative & non-penetrative forced sex• Forced to strip• Forced to watch pornography• Secretly recording sex acts• Denying use of birth control• Purposeful exposure to STIs• Coercing partner to 'agree' to sex• Denying or ignoring sexual preferences• Using sexually degrading language to belittle or humiliate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manipulation, gaslighting• Threat of suicide if relationship ends• Spying, monitoring movements• Checking phone, private accounts• Verbal & non-verbal threats of harm to partner, children, partner's loved ones• Baseless accusations of infidelity• Harsh/persistent criticism• Belittlement• Humiliating or degrading partner• Silent treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Controlling all the money, having allowances• Prohibiting or interfering with partner's work or schooling• Harassment at work• Destroying credit score, identity theft• Removing partner from accounts• Spending partners money without contributing• Tracking every penny partner spends• Selling partner possessions• Taking over debt or bills and not paying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, pulling, pinching, scratching, etc.• Throwing objects at or around partner• Breaking partner's property• Punching holes in walls/doors• "choking" / strangulation• Spitting• Restraining• Blocking doorways/exits• Using or brandishing weapons

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to gain and then maintain power & control over a current or former partner. An abuser's power is maintained through manipulation and a cyclical pattern of abuse that compels the victim/survivor to comply. IPV can be perpetrated consciously or unconsciously, but it is always intentional, and the abuser is always solely responsible for their behavior.

MANIPULATION is type of social influence that aims to change the behavior or perceptions of another person(s) through deceptive, or unethical tactics. Social influence is not inherently negative (think persuasion) but has the potential to be abusive when the influencer does not respect the right of the influenced to accept or reject the influence. Manipulation is often an abusers' first control tactic; if attempts at manipulation are rejected, then they will escalate to other tactics to assert their desired level of control. A prevalent and particularly damaging form of manipulation is gaslighting.

GASLIGHTING – presenting false information in such a way it makes the targeted person doubt their own memories, perceptions, and sanity. Gaslighting interrupts a person's ability to trust themselves and set boundaries making them more vulnerable to further abuse.

Examples of Gaslighting Techniques:

COUNTERING – making the victim question their own recollections with statements like...

- *"Huh?? That's not how it happened!"*
- *"There you go making things up again."*

WITHHOLDING – pretending they don't understand what the victim is saying no matter how clearly communicated or simply refusing to listen...

- *"You're not making any sense."*
- *"I don't want to hear this again."*

BLOCKING – victim's thoughts are questioned, or the abuser diverts the subject...

- *"You are imagining things."*
- *"Did your mother put you up to this??"*

REPETITIVE QUESTIONING – making the victim doubt what they think, know, or feel...

- *"Are you sure?"*
- *"Do you really think so?"*

TRIVIALIZING – making the victim believe their needs and feelings are not important...

- *"It was just a joke. Get over it."*
- *"You are too sensitive!"*
- *"You are going to get all upset over something so small?"*

DENYING – pretending to forget about past events or statements or directly denying they took place...

– “I never said I would do that.”

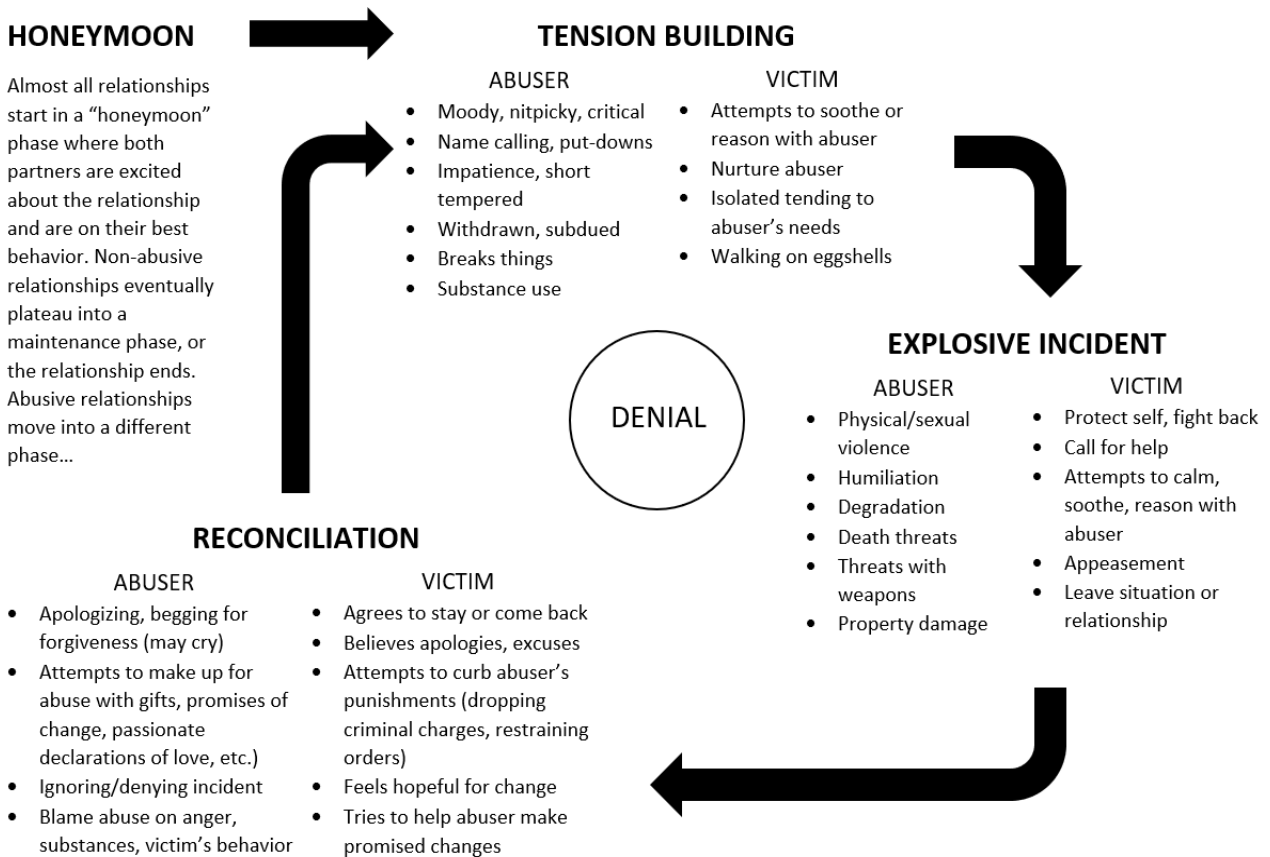
– “I don’t know what you’re talking about, there wasn’t a party.”

REVEALING HIDDEN THOUGHTS OF OTHERS – “revealing” what other people are “really” thinking about the victim...

– “You made a fool of yourself at dinner. Everyone was rolling their eyes at your pathetic jokes.”

– “Everyone can see through you. They can’t stand you.”

CYCLE OF ABUSE



Going through the cycle of abuse causes **TRAUMA**, which can be defined as:

1. emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may be associated with physical shock and sometimes leads to long-term impacts.
2. a real or perceived threat to life, liberty, or bodily integrity.
3. a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

TRAUMA BONDING is the development of an intense emotional attachment between two people, with one person intermittently harassing, beating, abusing threatening, or intimidating the other.

- The existence of a power imbalance where one person is dominated by the other.
- The intermittent nature of the abuse.

Traumatic bonding is different from healthy bonding and attachment. Check out this graphic from blogger, Dominee [@BlessingManifesting](#) to see how the two differ:

Trauma Bonding	Healthy Bonding
The relationship is all high highs and low lows.	The relationship feels steady with some dips.
You don't think you can survive without the other.	You recognize that you are your own person.
You hate them and love them in equal measure.	You love them even when you are angry with them.
The other person's needs are more important.	Both your needs are important and respected.
You stop reacting to unacceptable behavior.	There are boundaries and also trust.
You think if someone changes everything will magically get better.	You focus on growing separately and together.
No one else will want you.	Honest communication.
	Your needs are met.

BlessingManifesting

Common Excuses for Abuse

An interrogation of common justifications used to excuse abusive behavior. (Adapted from *Why Does He Do That?* By Lundy Bancroft)

Momentary loss of control

- This excuse can be tempting to believe because it is relatable – many of us have felt out of control at one time or another. But if IPV was an issue of simple loss of control there would be no pattern to it, there wouldn't be a cycle, and there wouldn't be observable consistently used tools/behaviors.
- A loss of control doesn't explain an abuser's insistence on minimizing, denying, and refusing accountability for their actions. Non-abusers typically make amends for hurtful behavior.

Experiences of childhood abuse

- An abuser almost never behaves in a way they feel is morally indefensible, thus revealing some level of awareness of their behavior.
- A connection exists between experiencing childhood abuse and perpetrating violence as an adult, but the link between childhood abuse and perpetrating violence *specifically & exclusively* against intimate partners is weak.
- If abuse was caused by childhood trauma, psychotherapy and treatment for that trauma would address the abusiveness, but it doesn't. Sometimes psychotherapy helps an abuser refine their use of emotionally abusive behaviors therefore making the abuse worse.
- Most often used as a sympathetic excuse to resist changing behavior: *"I'm abusive because I was abused."* However, most people who have been abused do not abuse intimate partners.

Victimization in a previous intimate relationship

- Past experiences of relationship abuse can definitely throw off a person's ability to set boundaries, communicate honestly, and react appropriately to conflict, but it does not cause a desire to control a partner.
- Issues from previous relationships are **ours** to resolve, not our new partners'.
- Similarly, to childhood abuse, this is a sympathetic excuse to escape culpability for causing harm.

Deep insecurities / fear of losing their partner

- Feelings do not actually cause behavior. Attitudes and belief systems do. We respond emotionally based on what we believe about ourselves, what we believe about the other person, and how we perceive the world.
- A lot of people are insecure or afraid of losing their partner, but do not attempt to abuse them as a result - because they do not believe that it is acceptable to do so.

Repressed emotions

- It is true that some people are not allowed space to fully feel and experience their emotions, but repressed feelings do not cause abuse because feelings do not cause behaviors.
- Many people struggle with repressed emotions, but do not abuse their partners as a result.
- If you look more closely, most abusers do not have trouble expressing their emotions; they have a problem when their partner expresses emotions, particularly any anger about the victimization. Abusers will often center their own

experiences/emotions/perceptions as a way to avoid talking about the harm they've caused and evading accountability.

Poor / untreated mental health problems

- There is no DSM diagnosis that adequately explains the cycle of abusive behaviors.
- The rate of diagnoses among the most extreme physical abusers is somewhat higher than their non-abusive counterparts, but there is no consistency in diagnoses.
- Mental illness can certainly exacerbate abusive behaviors, but there is no evidence-based reason to believe abusive behavior is caused by poor mental health.

Substance misuse

- The rate of addiction among abusers is somewhat higher, but there are only a few substances that *cause* violence and/or aggression (anabolic steroids, for example).
- Substances like alcohol are depressants meaning they lower inhibitions thus allowing abusers to feel freer to abuse. But the alcohol itself is not causing a desire to control an intimate partner.
- Substances cannot create an abuser out of someone who was not one to begin with. Likewise, sobriety will not cure the abuse.

Poor anger management or conflict resolution skills

- Many people struggle with anger, sometimes so severely that they cause themselves health problems, but anger problems do not cause a desire to control a partner.
- If the abuser can control their anger with others (say in front of a police officer), then they have the ability to control their anger with their partner.
- Always needing to be centered and denying their harmful behaviors sets abusers up to feel attacked at any attempt by their partner to hold them accountable. Abusers aren't abusive because they're angry, they're angry because they're abusive.

IPV is caused by a framework of (sometimes consciously held, sometimes unconsciously held) beliefs and attitudes that justify coercive control by any means necessary.

If you recognize some of the abuse excuses and believe your partner has a genuine problem with drinking, anger, mental health, etc., try to understand their issue as separate from the abuse. Those other issues may inform which abusive behaviors your partner feels comfortable using (for example, only using physical violence while drunk), but **abusing a partner is always a CHOICE**. Your partner can make different choices with effort and commitment.

How to Tell if it is Getting Worse



When abuse gets worse, it is called **ESCALATION**. Escalation happens when the abuse transitions from one form to another (manipulation → threats → physical/sexual violence) or when abusive behaviors/tools intensify and increase in severity or frequency over time. It can occur gradually or suddenly.

Any form of escalation may be dangerous, so it is important to **always trust your gut** about your safety. However, [research](#) has identified certain behaviors that are more closely correlated with deadly outcomes for people abused by intimate partners. Those factors are listed below.

USE OR THREAT TO USE A GUN is always a dangerous and alarming behavior. The ease of use and impersonal nature of firearms makes them a particularly lethal weapon. Threats to use a gun, even veiled or ambiguous threats, should always be taken seriously.

STRANGULATION, sometimes referred to as “choking”, is when an external force (hands or a ligature) applies pressure to a person’s neck or throat impeding normal breath or blood flow. Strangulation may cause unconsciousness within seconds and death within minutes. It is an ultimate form of power and control where the abuser has literal control over the victim’s next breath. A victim who has experienced at least 1 strangulation assault is 7-10 times more likely to experience a deadly attack from the abuser in the future. The initial strangulation itself is also very dangerous and can easily cause serious injuries. We encourage anyone who has experienced strangulation to seek medical attention as soon as possible, but especially if you have any of the following [symptoms and signs](#):

Symptoms (self-reported) include raspy and/or hoarse voice; coughing; unable to speak; complete loss of voice; trouble with or painful swallowing; neck pain; nausea; drooling; difficulty breathing/unable to breathe; hyperventilation; restlessness; combativeness; problems concentrating; amnesia; agitation; hallucinations; complete loss of vision; black & white vision; seeing stars; blurry vision; dark vision or fuzziness; complete loss of hearing; gurgling, ringing, bussing, popping, pressure or tunnel-like hearing; memory loss; unconsciousness; dizziness; headache; involuntary urination or defecation; loss of strength; going limp

Signs (observable) include pinpoint red spots (called petechiae) on the scalp, face, in the eyes, on the eyelids, and inside or outside the ears; bumps; skull fracture; concussion; stretch marks; bloodshot eyes; bleeding from ears; bloody nose; broken nose; tongue/lip swelling; bruising, abrasions, swelling, cuts, and red marks on the body

VIOLENT AND/OR CONSTANT JEALOUSY is a signal the abuser feels entitled to their partner's time, body, and life. Jealous feelings are normal, and many people feel them, but jealous behaviors are a red flag. When those jealous behaviors are violent and/or constant, it could be an indicator of lethal escalation.

SEXUAL ASSAULT that takes place within an intimate relationship sometimes is not recognized as such. Just because you are in a relationship doesn't mean consent no longer matters. Sex acts without consent are sexual assaults. Such behavior is rooted in the display of power, specifically the power to violate sexual boundaries without consequence. Experiencing sexual assault by an intimate partner is scary and confusing, and it can be easy to brush off as "bad sex". But it is not just bad sex, it is a very damaging tool of abuse, and it can be a major red flag of worsening violence.

PRESENCE OF A GUN IN THE HOME can be a lethality indicator depending on why there is a gun present in the home. Some people live in communities where gun ownership is commonplace, some people hunt, some people collect old historical guns, etc. A gun in your home becomes more dangerous when gun ownership in your community is uncommon and if the gun serves no purpose beyond as a weapon. Follow your gut on whether the gun in your home poses a danger to you.

INCREASE IN SEVERITY OF VIOLENCE is a troubling occurrence especially if it happens post-separation. Increases in the severity of physical violence can cause serious injury even if it doesn't escalate to a deadly attack. Always trust your instincts about your safety.

CONTROLS DAILY ACTIVITIES, like violent and/or constant jealousy, shows that the abuser feels a high level of entitlement to their partner's time, body, and life. Controlling daily activities includes things such as what you do, where you go, who you see, who you talk to, etc. If manipulation is not sufficient to gain control, a form of monitoring or surveillance is often used to force compliance (for example: checking mileage after going out, checking receipts, tracking through phone, etc.)

SUBSTANCE ADDICTION AND/OR SEVERE ALCOHOLISM is associated with abusers who escalate to lethal acts of violence, but that doesn't mean every abuser with a substance use disorder will escalate to deadly assault. As always, it's best to use your instincts to determine if your partner's substance use disorder makes them more dangerous to you.

SUICIDE THREATS: Abusers who are prepared to end their own lives may have less inhibitions about attempting to end yours. A "nothing to lose" mentality can be dangerous. As always, it is helpful to trust your gut about the sincerity of any threats.

If you recognize these risk factors within your relationship, it may be worthwhile to seek assistance from a [domestic violence program](#) (see resources on page 20). Advocates are available to help you come up with a personalized safety plan to help you feel more in control and prepared. You do not need to leave your partner to work on a safety plan. Advocates will support you no matter what choices you make about your relationship.

How to Tell if Your Partner is Changing

One of the most asked questions from people who have experienced abuse from an intimate partner is *"how can I tell if they're really changing?"* Promises of change are a central part of the reconciliation phase of the abuse cycle, so it can be very difficult to know when a partner is being genuine about making changes. The best way to tell if a partner is really making the effort is to pay attention to their behaviors more so than their words. The following is adapted from a publication by Women Against Domestic Violence (WADV).

Positive Signs:

- ✓ **They acknowledge and accept responsibility** for what they have done, and aren't blaming you, other people, stress, work, or any other outside circumstances for their choices. They acknowledge that they chose to behave this way and understand that you have a right to be upset and angry about it.
- ✓ **They understand fully that you (and your children) have been hurt** by the abuse and understand the specific ways they caused that hurt. They will talk with you in depth about how you feel, your fear, your hurt, your anger, your rights, and your lack of trust for them, and understand that it is their behavior that has caused it.
- ✓ **They stop using abuse tactics to control you.**

Troubling Signs:

- ✓ **They say, "I can't change unless you do,"** which means that they're trying to get you to agree to give up your rights and freedoms in exchange for them not abusing you. They may also say *"I'm not the only one who needs help."*
- ✓ **They are still lying to you,** the children, your family, or other people about what they've done. They won't acknowledge that it was wrong.
- ✓ **They refuse to let the subject of the abuse come up or get angry when it does.** They won't discuss their controlling behaviors and attitudes. They still try to deny it, minimize it, excuse it, or justify it. They defend their abuse and insist you get over it.
- ✓ **They will not get help,** or say they'll get counseling or other help but never do.
- ✓ **If they do get help, they will try to convince you they're cured** after a short period of time. They'll argue you need to take them back now that they've done all this work for you, *"Now that I'm in this program you have to be more understanding."*
- ✓ **They don't recognize the damage they've done.** They're mad or seem confused as to why you fear them, don't trust them, or are hurt or angry. They try to get out of the consequences by trying to convince you that something's wrong with you for allowing them to suffer consequences for the abuse. They're mad that you left.

Change is a very difficult, often painful, process that doesn't happen without commitment and sustained effort. Your partner might appear to be making changes and then backslide. Backsliding into old behaviors is normal, but if the efforts are genuine your partner will acknowledge the harm and then will try to do better, not lapse further into old patterns.

Issues Pertaining to Children and Co-Parenting

Many people who experience abuse by an intimate partner are parents. Often the abuser is the other parent, making issues of separation even more fraught and complicated. Parents who are surviving abuse face a lot of difficult choices. Wanting to keep the family together, while also protecting the children from witnessing abuse is a tightrope walk. There is rarely an easy path forward.

You may not think your children are aware of the dynamic between you and your partner, but children often know more than we think. It is helpful to understand the impact of exposure to intimate partner violence on children so that you may recognize it if/when you see it and know how to help them.

Most parents surviving abuse make strong efforts to keep their children from seeing or “witnessing” any violence. But there are other forms of witnessing that can still affect children, such as overhearing violence or scary arguments (usually from another room in the house) and seeing the aftermath of abuse (like broken furniture, holes in the walls, blood, injuries, their victimized parent distressed, etc.).

Take a look at the following for some examples of how children who have been exposed to domestic violence may feel and behave:

COMMON FEELINGS

- Afraid
- Angry
- Confused
- Sad
- Guilty (for loving abuser; for failing to protect non-abusive parent)
- Self-blame
- Numbness
- Helpless
- Worried
- Powerless
- Anxious

COMMON BEHAVIORS

- May be aggressive towards others and/or animals
- May be passive, shy, withdrawn
- May be cruel, abusive, disrespectful to the non-abusive parent
- Forgetful
- Difficulties concentrating
- Complaints of stomach aches, headaches, body aches, nausea.
- Loss of interest in play
- Over sensitive to loud noises
- Take on parental roles

Below you will find some suggestions that may help your children heal from exposure to intimate partner violence:

- **Safe space to talk about it:** It is not unusual for children to not want to talk about it, but nevertheless you want them to know that they can whenever they are ready. If you don't feel equipped to talk to them, find someone you trust who can.

- **Consistency and stability:** This can be a difficult one when dealing with abuse which is disruptive and unpredictable, but you can try to find pockets of consistency and stability. For example, setting up small rituals you're confident you can maintain such as game nights, pizza night, religious services, sports, etc.
- **Positive role models:** Seek out people you feel are good role models for your children. If they have been exposed to abuse, they may pick up some of the behaviors they have witnessed which makes it valuable to show them healthy alternatives.
- **Safe and supportive adults:** This could be friends or family, or a professional like a therapist/counselor; could also be a faith leader or mentor. Try to increase your children's access to adults who will support them.
- **Opportunities for a sense of control:** Often, children feel helpless, providing a sense of control may help. Find little areas of life where you can give your children choices.
- **Opportunities to safely express their thoughts and feelings:** Much like adults in abusive relationships, children who bear witness to abuse stifle their real thoughts and feelings. Help them to regain their voices and show them you care about how they feel.

It can be scary to address intimate partner violence with your children. No parent wants to hear that their children have been harmed, but ignoring it causes its own harms.

It can be helpful to get support from people outside the family unit, however, be aware that disclosing domestic violence to entities like police, courts, schools, therapists, doctors, and other professionals has a high likelihood of triggering a mandated report to the [Department of Children and Families](#). If you are a parent and are unfamiliar with the Department of Children and Families, it is beneficial to learn more about them – learn more [here](#) and [here](#).

Co-parenting vs Parallel parenting

Quick Note on Custody: Married people have shared custody rights. With unmarried parents, absent any court orders, the person who birthed the child has custody rights. The other parent must go to the family court to access their legal custody rights: *signing the birth certificate does not confer legal rights*

If you have split from your partner, you might be facing a complicated “co-parenting” situation. Ideally co-parenting is a type of partnership where the parents consult each other on things regarding the child. No one parent makes decisions unless the other parent has given them the “okay.” In other words, both parents can see past who is right/wrong and the kids are their only concern. You may notice this ideal is not compatible with an abuser who still desires control post-separation. Attempts to continue control and domination makes traditional co-parenting impossible.

PARALLEL PARENTING is an alternative model that may work better. It is defined as “an arrangement in which divorced/separated parents are able to co-parent by means of disengaging from each other.” Parallel parenting sets clear boundaries for the abuser, which can cut down the opportunities for them to try to control and intimidate you.

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Have minimal interaction. Necessary interaction only.

2. Keep all communication in writing. Speaking on the phone or in person leaves an opening for harassment or threats the abuser doesn’t want recorded. It can also leave you open to manipulation (crying, pleading, guilt). When communicating state only the facts; leaving out emotions or opinions allows you to reduce opportunities for the abuser to pick a fight.

3. No interference. Since there is trouble agreeing over even the simplest things, there will be trouble with each other’s parenting styles. This “no interference” eliminates phone calls of “why did you allow ...” No interference also means letting go of trying to influence how your ex-partner parents the children. It is important to remember that your ex is an adult equally responsible for the children as you are. (NOTE: If the abuser is putting the children’s safety at risk by abusing or neglecting them, then you should interfere and use all tools at your disposal to protect them). Letting go is key to making parallel parenting work.

4. It reduces stress. Keeping communication and interaction to a minimum is meant to reduce your stress levels thus leaving you more energy to be present with your children and in your life.

Your Rights and Legal Options

RESTRAINING ORDERS

Restraining orders are civil court orders, issued by a judge upon reviewing an application, that are meant to protect people from abuse perpetrated by a partner or family member. The state of Massachusetts defines domestic violence under the law (Ch. 209A) as the occurrence of one or more of the following acts between family/household members/dating partners:

- (1) attempted to cause physical harm;
- (2) caused physical harm;
- (3) placed in fear of imminent serious physical harm; or
- (4) engaged in sexual relations by force, threat, or duress.

The law focuses heavily on physical harm, however provision 3 can cover a lot of different behaviors that might cause fear. No criminal charges need to be brought. If you are afraid of your partner, it may be useful to consider if a restraining order could help ease your fear. There are specialized advocates, called SAFEPLAN advocates, available in almost every

courthouse in Massachusetts to assist survivors with restraining order applications and consultations (see resources on page 20 for direct numbers for local SAFEPLAN advocates).

SAFEPLAN Advocates will assist you by answering your questions, walking you through the application process, helping you correctly fill out the paperwork, standing with you before the judge, and providing emotional support. If you are at all interested in considering a restraining order, we highly encourage you to seek support from the SAFEPLAN advocate.

If you're not quite ready to speak with an advocate, but are curious about [restraining orders](#), here are some **FAST FACTS**:

- Obtaining a restraining order requires going through an application process that involves writing an affidavit (sworn statement) and going before a judge. If court is closed, applicants can apply at the police department where they telephone an on-call judge.
- Restraining orders will order the abuser to stop abusing or threatening you as well as remove any legal firearms from them. You may also request the following:
 - No contact (directly or through a third party)
 - Stay away (usually 100 yards)
 - Leave and stay away from home (even if they're on the lease or mortgage) / school / workplace
 - Stay away from other frequented locations
 - Custody and no contact with children
- The evidentiary standard for a restraining order is preponderance of the evidence – which means the judge just has to believe the applicant's claims are more likely true than not.
- Applicants do not have to bring definitive proof of abuse to gain protection. The affidavit is evidence. However, if there is other evidence (texts, photos, voicemails, etc.) it is helpful to present those.
- Orders issued at first application are only temporary lasting no more than 2 weeks; a second hearing is required to issue the order long-term, and the accused is entitled to be present.

Meaning, you cannot obtain a restraining order without facing your partner in court (unless they choose not to appear for the hearing)

- Once an order is issued any violations of it are prosecutable criminal offenses. For charges to issue, violations must be reported to police.
- Restraining orders can be renewed and even made permanent if the applicant makes the case to the judge that there is a continuing need.

Restraining orders can be a useful tool for some survivors, but not for others. Sometimes well-meaning people pressure survivors into applying for orders as an “obvious” solution to abuse, but some abusers become more violent and enraged when an order is issued. A survivor will know their abuser best and whether a restraining order will help or hurt.

CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS are complex and have many different factors influencing their progression and outcomes. There are a few ways to become involved in criminal proceedings as the victim of a crime –

- (1) Victim contacts authorities themselves and reports a crime committed against them; sometimes survivors call for help during a frightening incident without realizing they are reporting criminal activity to the authorities.
- (2) A witness sees or overhears something they feel concerned enough about to contact authorities; in this scenario the victim may not have wanted police involved at all.

In either scenario, the victim is not the one bringing the charges against the offender, it is the state. If police find probable cause to make an arrest based on the evidence they gather (statements and observations), they make the decision to arrest. Victims do not make that choice. All criminal matters are cases of the offender v. the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Crime victims do not have the authority to drop cases.

If you have found yourself involved in a criminal matter, check out the Massachusetts [Victim Bill of Rights](#). You have a right to be informed about the process. Each case should have a victim/witness advocate assigned to it whose role it is to keep all victims and witnesses in the case up to date on procedure. If you do not know who the victim/witness advocate assigned to your case is, you can find out by contacting the Office of the District Attorney prosecuting the case (see page 22 for a link to a directory of District Attorneys in Massachusetts).

NOTE: Victim/witness advocates are employees of the District Attorney’s Office and as such are **not** confidential advocates. They must share any information given to them with the prosecuting attorneys who then must share it with the defendant (your partner).

There are a few **HOUSING RIGHTS** survivors have in Massachusetts that we would like to highlight. However, housing is very complicated, and we recommend seeking out specific and personalized legal advice regarding housing issues (see legal resources on page 22).

Survivors of domestic violence (as well as rape, sexual assault, and stalking) the right to:

- Break a lease
- Have apartment locks changed
- Not be retaliated against for needing to access the rights in bullets 1 and 2
- Not be evicted because you got a restraining order or called the police
- Not be forced by a landlord to waive these rights when signing a new lease

If you are facing an eviction and believe it is related to the domestic violence you have suffered, seek legal support to find out if your eviction is in violation of [the law](#).

For more information click this [link](#) to find fact sheets on:

- Updated Q&A on the New Housing Law for Victims of Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Assault and Stalking
- Q&A on Lock Change
- Q&A on Breaking Lease
- Notice to Landlord to End Lease/Rent Agreement (Draft Form)
- Sample Third Party Provider Letter for changing locks
- Sample Tenant Affidavit for changing locks
- Sample Tenant Letter for changing locks

LEAVE FROM WORK is a newer right established by a 2014 law. The provision of the law protecting survivors' employment mandates that employers with at least 50 employees provide any who are themselves or have a family member experiencing domestic violence (or sexual assault or stalking) with up to 15 days leave from work during any 12-month period. The employee is expected to use the leave to address issues related to the domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, such as:

- Obtaining medical care
- Obtaining counseling
- Obtaining a restraining order
- Appearing in court or before a grand jury
- Meeting with the District Attorney or other law enforcement official
- Attend child custody proceedings

Unfortunately, even though the law protects employment status, the employer determines if the leave is paid or not as well as if the employee must exhaust all available paid time off.

Employees must provide advanced notice of the need for leave whenever possible. When it is not possible due to the nature of the domestic violence, the employer must be notified within 3 days and may request documentation (restraining order, medical record, police report, professional letter, sworn statement by employee) of situation that caused the absence within 30 days. Employers are prohibited from taking punitive action against the employee for an unscheduled absence caused by documented threat of imminent harm.

Employers must keep all information pertaining to an employee's domestic violence leave confidential. All employers with over 50 employees should have a written policy regarding the implementation of the law.

Violations of this law are enforced by the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General. Complaints can be filed [online](#).

Safety Planning

A safety plan is a set of actions or intentions that can reduce risk of harm from a specified threat. Survivors often already use safety planning techniques without calling it that. There is a wealth of safety planning resources online. Below are some helpful questions to consider while looking at safety planning tools:

- **Are you in or out of the relationship?** Safety planning within the relationship and safety planning after you've left the relationship will look very different. Make sure you're looking at safety planning tools that actually fit your situation.
- **If in the relationship, do you live together?** Residing together presents a host of safety challenges that don't necessarily exist for people who are not living together.
- **Do you have access to trusted friends and family? Do they know what is happening? If not, can you let them know?** It is perfectly normal to keep the painful realities of your relationship to yourself. You don't want your loved ones to hate your partner but telling someone you trust about what is happening before it gets worse can be helpful because they can support you in safety planning.
- **Is your partner using technology to stalk or abuse you?** Technology is a wonderful thing that has brought many people together. However, it can also be used as a tool of surveillance and abuse. Your partner does not need to be tech savvy to be able to use technology in this way. Check out these [technology safety toolkits](#) from the National Network to End Domestic Violence.
- **Are you noticing any signs the abuse is escalating?** (See page 9-10) The most dangerous time for a survivor is when they are planning to leave and up to 1 year after they have left. If this is where you are at, pay close attention to signs the abuse is getting worse (more frequent or severe). Make sure your safety plan addresses your gut concerns.
- **Are police/courts an option?** Some people are not comfortable bringing police and courts (restraining orders) into their lives for various reasons. Ask yourself if the police/courts are an option for you or if you need to safety plan without purposely involving them. Even though law enforcement remains a go-to entity to handle abuse, you do not need to involve them in your safety plan if you do not want to.
- **What is the financial situation?** The importance of your financial situation will depend on your goals (leaving, staying, etc.), but no matter what your goals are, knowing your assets and financial options is helpful to the safety planning process.
- **What are your coping skills?** Even the most thorough safety plans will require the survivor to sit with some level of risk. When risks cannot be eliminated, figuring out how to cope with them is beneficial. What helps you calm down? What soothes you? Be intentional about incorporating these things into your life.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ The survivor is the expert on their safety
- ✓ Safety plans are fluid
- ✓ Safety plans should be realistic and practical
- ✓ Safety plans should be individualized and personal

If you're interested in a safety plan, it is helpful to reach out to a local domestic violence agency to speak with an advocate. But if you aren't quite ready to speak with someone, check out these safety planning tools [here](#) and [here](#).

How to Access Help

ADVOCATES are trained professionals who work for [Domestic Violence Organizations](#). Advocates are not clinicians, therapists, or social workers, but they are experts on the dynamics of domestic violence and the available supportive resources for survivors in the community in which they work.

All domestic violence services are **FREE & CONFIDENTIAL**. You can speak to an advocate one time or on an on-going basis. On-going services are short-term but occur on the survivors' schedule – meaning meetings can be frequent (high needs), bi-weekly, monthly, or as needed.

Advocates provide:

- Information (about abuse dynamics, systems, healing, etc.)
- Options (promoting choices)
- Support (non-judgmental listening ear, emotional processing)
- Referrals/Resources (possibly including material assistance such as gift cards, cab fare, flex funding, etc.)
- On-going safety planning

The [YWCA Central Massachusetts](#) provides these services locally. To connect with an advocate there, contact their 24-hour Helpline or 24-hour Chatline at:

508-755-9030 | www.ywcahelp.com

Resources

Local Domestic Violence Advocates & Counselors

[YWCA](#) 24-Hour Helpline: **508-755-9030**

Gardner/Winchendon SAFEPLAN (restraining orders) Cell: **508-835-8664**

Leominster Counseling/Advocacy Office: **978-537-2306**

[Spanish American Center](#): **978-534- 3145**

Local DV Support Groups

YWCA 24-Hour Helpline: **508-755-9030**

Spanish American Center: **978-534-3145**

[Voice of Truth](#) (faith-based): **978-230-6446**

Sexual Assault Advocates & Counselors

[Pathways for Change](#) 24-Hour Helpline: **1(800) 870-5905**

Population/Culturally Specific Resources

State-wide DV/SV Supportive Services for Specific Populations

Deaf, Deaf Blind and Hard of Hearing National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-787-3224** or **1-855-812-1001** for video phone.

Our Deaf Survivors Center: **978-451-7225** to reach a cultural broker

[Asian Taskforce Against Domestic Violence \(ATASK\)](#) 24-Hour Helpline: **617-338-2355**

Llamanos y Hablemos (Spanish Sexual Assault) Helpline: **1-800-223-5001**

[Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers \(MAPS\)](#): **617-864-7600**

[SAHELI Friendship for South Asian Women](#): **1-866-472-4354**

[The Network/La Red](#), Ending partner abuse in LGBT/Q, SM and Polyamorous Communities.
24-Hour Helpline: **617-742-4911**

LGBTQ+

[LGBTQ Support Group of North Central Mass](#), held monthly on Wednesdays

“We welcome all members of the LGBTQ+ communities in our area, as well as friends, families and allies. The majority of our current members are between the ages of 18 to about 40, but we welcome high school students and older people. We will also welcome middle school students with parent/guardian knowledge. Our goal is to provide a safe space for our members to be open about who they are and to share experiences as a way of finding acceptance and understanding. To find out how to join or attend a meeting, email lgbtqncm@gmail.com.”

[LBGT Resource Guide](#): put together by the Worcester LBGT Elder Network, this guide contains LGBT-friendly physical and mental health resources, legal services, religious services, financial services, and other supportive services

Elders

[Aging Services of North Central Massachusetts](#): 978-537-7411 (formerly known as Montachusett Home Care)

Elder Protective Services Hotline: 1-800-922-2275

Immigrants

[Immigration Legal Services Directory](#)

[Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition \(MIRA\)](#): 617-350-5480

[Office for Refugees and Immigrants](#): 617-727-7888

Faith-Based

Faith can be an important part of a survivor’s journey of healing, but in some cases, it can also complicate their path to safety. Some survivors may be faced with abusers who manipulate religious beliefs and religious teachings or faith leaders who lack the knowledge to provide counsel, creating additional barriers to escaping the abuse. Learn more about domestic violence and faith from the following resources:

[SPIRITUAL ABUSE WHEEL](#)

[The Rave Project](#)

[Jewish Women International](#)

[Peaceful Families Project](#)

[Catholics for Family Peace](#)

[Sojourners Women & Girls Project](#)

[We Will Speak Out](#)

Legal Help

[Community Legal Aid](#): 1-855-252-5342

[Victim Rights Law Center](#) (sexual assault): 508-669-7020

[Women's Bar Foundation Family Law Project](#): 617-423-6666

[Worcester County Bar Association](#) Lawyer Referral Line: 508-752-1311

[Directory of District Attorney's Offices](#)

[List of Phone Numbers for Massachusetts Court Houses](#)

Food, Housing, Financial

[Department of Transitional Assistance](#), 49 Nursery Ln #101, Fitchburg, MA 01420

DTA Domestic Violence Specialist: 978-665-8713

([SNAP](#)) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: 877-382-2363

[Gardner Food Pantry](#): 978-632-8700, 294 Pleasant St, Gardner, MA 01440

[Ginny's Helping Hand](#): 978-537-1387, 52 Mechanic St, Leominster, MA 01453

[Shelter Directory](#) (non-DV specific)

DV Shelter Helpline (SAFELINK): 1-877-785-2020

Children Services

[LUK, Inc](#): 978-345-0685 (8am-5pm); 800-579-0000 After 5pm

[YOU, Inc](#): 978-632-2321

[Community HealthLink](#): 978-534-6116

[UMASS Link-Kid system](#) (directory for trauma-informed therapy): 774-455-4127

Youth Mobile Crisis Directory: **1-877-382-1609**

Family Support

[North Worcester County Healthy Families](#): **978-632-1230**

Service for first time parents from pregnancy up to age 23. They give parents the tools and resources to build self-confidence and gain life-long skills to ensure children grow up safe and healthy.

Mental Health Counseling

All children's resources listed above (except the two directories) also offer adult mental health services. Another good resource for finding therapy for adults is Psychology Today's Therapist Search Engine. If you go to their [website](#), you can search for a therapist based on your insurance plan and personal preferences.

For the Abusers

Below are two local options for [Intimate Partner Abuse Education Programs](#):

New Hope, Inc. [RESPECT Program](#): **508-753-3146**

Site Director: Amanda Lison; amandal@new-hope.org

Spectrum Health Systems, Inc., [P.A.V.E. Program](#): **978-466-3820 X 4238**

Site Director: Maureen Casey; Maureen.casey@spectrumhealthsystems.org

[10 to10 Helpline](#): **877-898-3411**

This is newly launched helpline available 10am-10pm every day for people who use abuse to control and terrorize their intimate partners and family members. The helpline is also open to friends and family of the abusive person. All calls are free, anonymous, and confidential.



**Gardner Domestic Violence
Task Force**