

#Loveisrespect

Breaking free from domestic violence

HELP GUIDE





Domestic violence includes “*all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim*”¹ and is one of the most persistent and troubling problem faced by the international community as well as a major health problem and a violation of human rights punished under international, European and national law. Although domestic violence is usually associated with physical abuse and injuries (as they are considered the most obvious dangers), it is essential not to overlook nor minimize emotional abuse which is usually less visible but just as severe and destructive. Regardless of the identity of the abuser (man, woman, teenager, older adult), abusive behavior is never acceptable! You deserve to feel valued, respected and safe!

No one should live in fear of the person they love! There is help available! Reach out!



¹ Council of Europe, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence , November 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/548165c94.html>

I. Recognizing the signs of domestic violence

Types of abuse

Domestic violence can take various forms and involve different types of abuse.



1. Emotional

Always accompanies and in most cases precedes physical abuse. It includes verbal abuse such as yelling, name calling, blaming, shaming, but also isolation, controlling behavior and threats of physical violence if the victim does not comply with the abuser's request.



2. Physical

Use of physical force against someone with the intention of causing fear, injury or submission. The violence is usually targeted (directed to parts of the body where the injuries are less likely to show).



3. Sexual

Any unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity. It can include (marital) rape and forced pregnancies.



4. Economic

Complete power and control of the abuser over the finances of the victim. It can include withholding money/credit cards or basic necessities (such as food, clothes, medication, shelter etc...), preventing the victim from working or sabotaging her job, stealing or taking her money.

The cycle of violence

Domestic violence follows a common pattern also known as “cycle of violence” which includes the following phases: abuse, honeymoon, fantasy, set up.



1. Abuse

The abuser verbally or physically abuses the victim. This includes anger, intimidation, blaming, threats and other forms of abuse. The abuse typically worsens over time.



2. Honeymoon

The abuser apologizes for the abuse committed, begs for forgiveness and acts remorseful in order to avoid being caught and having to face the consequences of his actions. The abuser may shower the victim with love, affection and promise her that the abuse will never happen again. During this peaceful honeymoon phase the victim usually hopes and believes that the abuse is over and that the abuser has really changed this time.



3. Fantasy

The abuser fantasizes about abusing the victim again. He makes a plan to turn the fantasy into reality by thinking about how to make the victim pay for what she has done wrong.



4. Set up

The abuser puts his plan into action and sets the victim up by creating a situation which we allow him to justify the abuse.

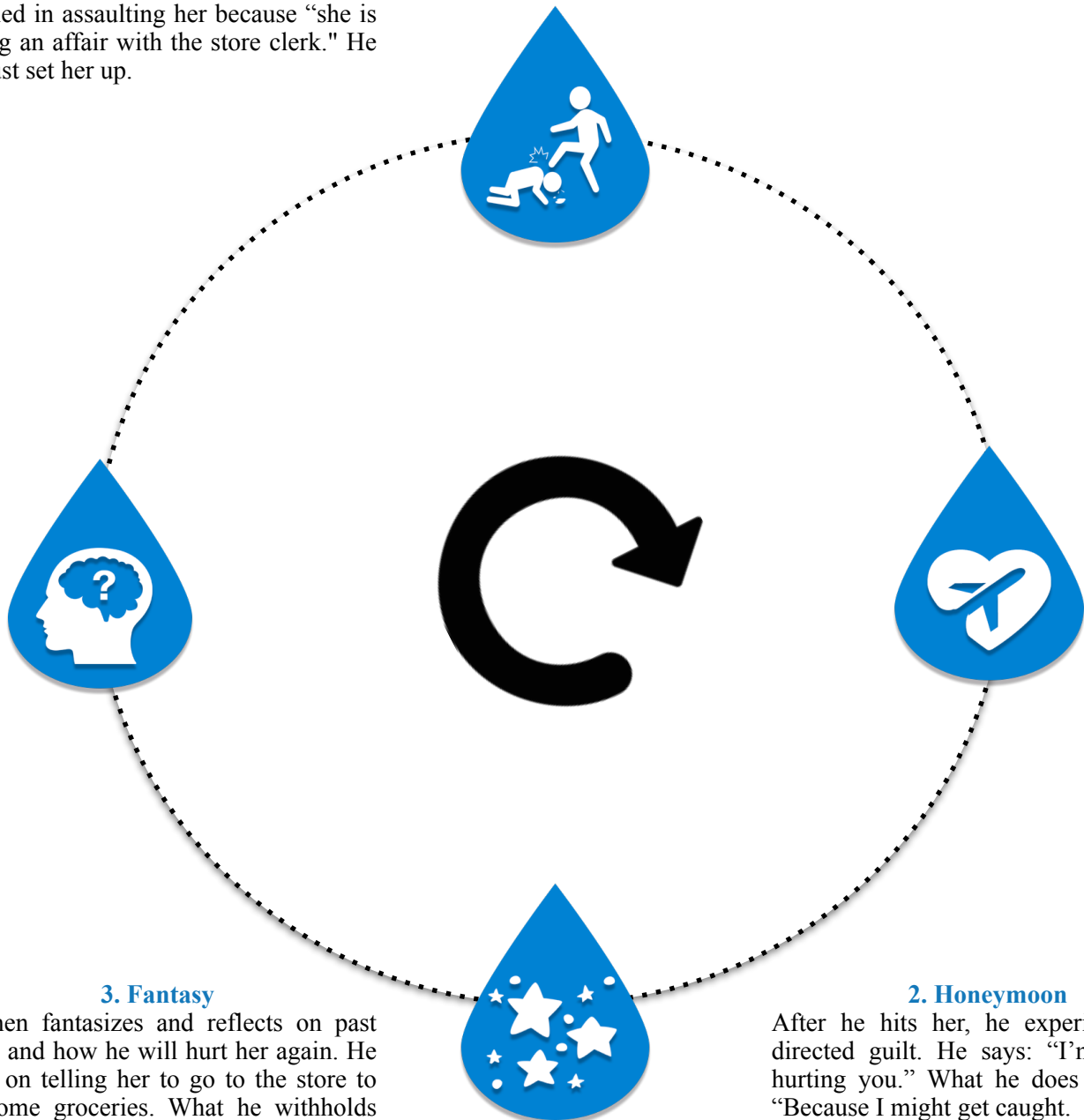
Example of the full cycle of violence²

4. Set up

When she is held up in traffic and is a few minutes late, he feels completely justified in assaulting her because “she is having an affair with the store clerk.” He has just set her up.

1. Abuse

A man abuses his partner.



3. Fantasy

He then fantasizes and reflects on past abuse and how he will hurt her again. He plans on telling her to go to the store to get some groceries. What he withholds from her is that she has a certain amount of time to do the shopping.

2. Honeymoon

After he hits her, he experiences self-directed guilt. He says: “I’m sorry for hurting you.” What he does not say is: “Because I might get caught.”

² Source: Help guide international.

Warning signs of abuse

If your relationship presents the following signs, chances are that you're in an abusive relationship.



1. Control

The abuser controls every aspects of the victim's life; where she goes, what she does, who she talks to, what she wears, what she thinks etc... The abuser treats the victim as his own possession.



2. Blame and criticism

The abuser's goal is to destroy the victim's self esteem. He blames her for his behavior, shifting the responsibility onto her. He puts her down, sabotages her dreams, calls her names, and makes threats against her, her loved ones and even her pets. Over time the victim does not longer believes she deserves to be treated with respect and dignity and therefore starts blaming herself for the violence inflicted.



3. Isolation

The abuser makes the victim emotionally dependent by keeping her from seeing her friends or family and having to ask permission to go anywhere.



4. Jealousy

The abuser is extremely possessive and becomes angry and irrational when the victim is interacting with people (especially people from the opposite sex), constantly accusing her of having affairs.



5. Excessive charm

The abuser may seem to be prince charming in the beginning by being excessively charming, giving the victim lots of attention everyday (tons of phone calls/texts, surprise visits etc...). The abuser appears engaging, considerate and charismatic in order to gain information about the victim that will be used later for his advantage to get what he wants.

How abusers manipulate

Abusers use various tactics to manipulate their victim and exert their power, including the following:



1. Dominance

Abusers need to feel in control of the relationship; they make decisions for their victims, tell them what to do and expect them to naturally obey and submit.



2. Intimidation

Abusers use threatening looks or gestures, destroy property in front of their victims or put weapons on display to make clear that violent consequences will be faced if the victim does not obey.



3. Threats

Abusers commonly use threats to scare their victims into dropping charges and preventing them from leaving. They may threaten to hurt or kill their victims and/or their loved ones, or threaten to commit suicide or file false charges against them.



4. Humiliation

Abusers' goal is to make their victims feel bad about themselves and feel inadequate.



5. Isolation

Abusers cut their victims from the outside world in order to create an emotional dependence by preventing their victims from seeing their friends/family or even go to work or school.



6. Denial and blame

Abusers will blame their behavior on circumstances (bad childhood, bad day at work etc...) or shift the responsibility on their victims. They usually minimize the abuse or denied that it even occurred.

II. Getting out of an abusive relationship: protect yourself

Before you leave

1. Make the decision to leave

The first step to get out of an abusive relationship is to make the decision to leave. Although it can be scary and you may be afraid of retaliation from your abusive partner and uncertain of where you will go/stay or how you will support and raise your children; don't let fear of the unknown keep you in a dangerous and unhealthy situation

2. Make an escape plan

Once you have decided to leave, preparing a plan is an essential step to ensure a safe and quick escape. It helps you visualize which steps need to be taken and prepares you psychologically to do so.

Be ready to leave at any moment

Keep the car fueled up and facing the driveway exit, with the driver's door unlocked. Hide a spare car key somewhere you can easily access it. Have emergency cash, clothing, important phone numbers and documents (passports, medical prescription, birth certificates etc...) in a safe place (at a friend's/family member's house, for example).



Practice your plan

Rehearse your escape plan (if you have children, practice with them too) in order to be ready and know exactly what to do in case of attack from your abuser.

Prepare a list of emergency contacts

Find people you can trust and who will help you at any time with whatever you need (a ride, a place to stay, contacting the police etc...). Memorize their numbers as well as the ones of relevant services such as local shelters and domestic violence hotlines.



3. Safety planning

In order to protect yourself before you actually implement your plan and leave, follow these following safety tips which can make the difference between being severely injured or killed and escaping with your life.

Know your abuser' red flags

Identify signs and clues which precede the abuse. Find plausible reasons for you to leave the house both during the day and at night in order to have a way out if you sense that trouble is on the way.



Identify safe areas in your home

Identify safe areas where you can take refuge in if attacks or an argument arise (preferably a room with a phone and an exit). Avoid small spaces without exits (closets for example) or rooms with potential weapons (kitchen for instance).

Establish a code word

Agree on a word, phrase, or signal with your children, friends, family members, neighbors or even co-workers to let them know you are in danger and they should contact the police.



After you leave

1. Relocate

Keeping yourself safe from your abuser is just as important after you have escape as it is before. As a result, you may need to relocate to ensure that your former abuser will not find you. In this context, domestic violence shelters are a safe place to stay until you figure your situation out because its location is kept confidential. Such shelters generally welcome both mothers and their children and cover all their basic living needs, including food and childcare. In addition to accommodation, the majority of shelters also provide other types of services (such as legal support, counseling, financial assistance, support groups etc...) and help victims find a permanent home, job, and anything else necessary to ensure them a fresh start.

If you were to decide to remain in the same area, modify your routine and keep a phone on you at all times in order to call the police if you see your former abuser. Avoid areas where you could come in contact with him such as places he could think of locating you (cancel and reschedule any appointments he might know about, change your usual way to work and the places you usually run errands at or go to for grocery shopping etc...).

2. Protect your privacy

In order to ensure your privacy it is essential for you to cut all communication with your former abuser. However it is not enough as abusers often monitor their partner' activities (phone, computer, internet etc...). In this case different steps need to be undertaken to guarantee your safety and privacy:

Purchase a second cell phone

Abusers often use smartphone apps to monitor their victims by listening to their conversations, reading their texts/emails and tracking their location. To protect yourself against it and keep your communication and movements private, you may consider purchasing another smartphone or a prepaid cell phone that your abuser doesn't know about.



Change your user names and passwords

Even if you don't think your abuser knows your passwords, he may have guessed or used a spyware program to get them. Choose new passwords and create new usernames for your email, online banking, social media and any other sensitive accounts, that your abuser cannot guess (avoid birthdays, nicknames, and other personal information). In addition, cancel your old bank accounts and credit cards, especially if you shared them with your abuser and use a different bank when opening new accounts.

Consider getting a restraining order or protective order

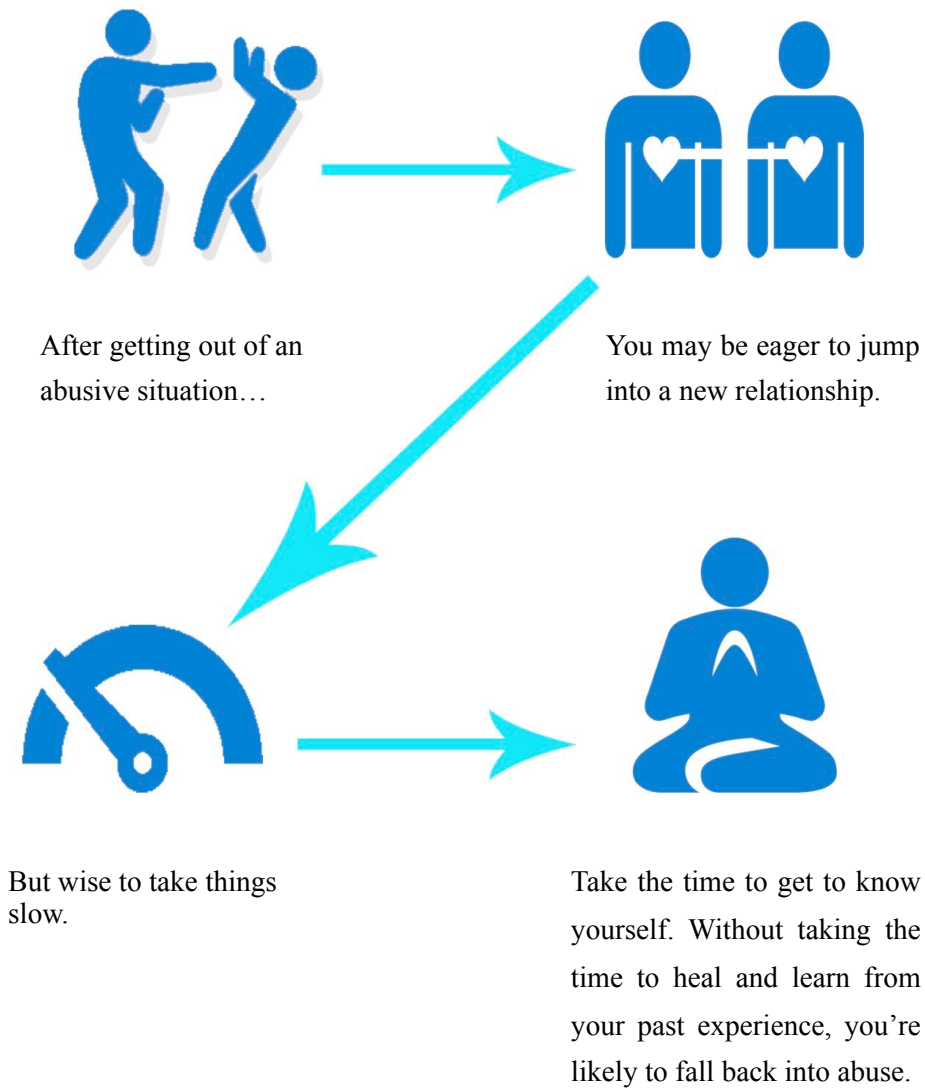
Survivors of domestic violence have various options to protect themselves from being abused and threatened. Orders of protection and restraining orders both impose certain conditions on the abuser and allow the courts to intervene and impose punishments if the abuser violates those conditions. The two orders are similar regarding whom they protect, but are different in how long they are issued for and the penalties for violation. However stay vigilant and don't feel falsely secure with a court order. Your former abuser may ignore it, and the police may do nothing to enforce it.



3. Move on

Escaping the abusive situation does not mean that you are suddenly healed from what you've been through. On the contrary, the emotional and psychological trauma can stay with you for a long time after you have escaped and make you feel disconnected, unsafe, scared and unable to trust others. However, regardless of the extent of what you have been through and how long ago it occurred; you can heal and move on! Appropriate treatment such as counseling, therapy, support groups for domestic abuse survivors as well as support from family and friends can speed up your recovery and help you process what you've been through and learn how to build new and healthy relationships.

Building new healthy relationships³



³ Source: Help Guide international

III. Helping if you suspect domestic violence

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, speak up! If you're hesitating because you're feeling that it is none of your business and/or are clueless about the best way to help, don't let it prevent you from reaching out and keep in mind that expressing your concern will let the person know that you care and may even save their life. Many victims of domestic violence feel lonely, isolated, and filled with fear; reaching out and letting them know that you are there for them can provide tremendous relief and help them escape an abusive situation and begin the healing and recovery process. Intervening in situation of domestic violence is extremely sensitive and can be dangerous for both you and the victim if handled the wrong way. The following tips will help you offer the best support to someone in this vulnerable situation:

1. Make time

If you decide to reach out to an abused victim, be intentional about it and make sure to set aside plenty of time in case the victim decides to open up. If the person indeed decides to disclose years of abuse, trauma, fear and frustration, you will not want to end the conversation because you have other commitments.



2. Start the conversation

You can bring up the subject of domestic violence by talking to the person in private and let her know that you're concerned. Point out the things you've noticed that concern you. Do not try to force the person to open up; let the conversation unfold at a comfortable pace (take it slow and easy!). Let the person know that you will keep any information disclosed between the two of you and will support her in any way possible.

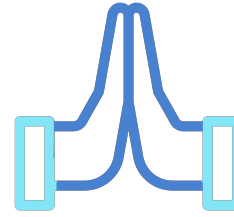
3. Listen without judgment

If the person does decide to talk, give her the full opportunity to talk and tell her story without being judgmental, offering advice, or suggesting solutions (for example don't tell her to leave or criticize her for staying!). While listening actively and carefully, there's a high likelihood that the person will tell you exactly what she needs.



4. Believe the victim

The victim is often the only one who sees the dark side of the perpetrator and others are shocked to learn that a person they know could commit violence. As a result, victims often feel that no one would believe them if they told people about the violence they suffer from. Believing the victim and reassuring her by expressing it ("I believe you", "this is not your fault", "you don't deserve this" etc...) can bring her a sense of reassurance, hope and relief.



5. Validate the victim's feelings

Victims often express conflicting feelings about their partner and their situation (can range from guilt and anger, love and fear to hope and despair for instance). It is important to firstly validate her feelings by letting her know that having these conflicting thoughts is normal. However, it is equally vital to insist that abuse and leaving in fear are not part of a healthy relationship and express your concerns regarding her safety due to the dangerous situation she is in. Indeed, some victims may not realize that their situation is abnormal because they have gradually become accustomed to the cycle of violence and don't have examples of healthy relationships around them that they can look up to.

6. Offer specific help

Help the victim find support and resources (brochures/ leaflets, telephone numbers for shelters, social services, domestic violence agencies, attorneys, counselors, support groups etc...). Acknowledge her strengths and frequently remind her that she is coping well with her challenging and stressful situation in order to motivate her to help herself. If the victim asks you to do something specific don't hesitate to help if you are willing and able to. In case you are unable to, try to find other ways to meet her needs. Let the victim know that you are there for her and available at any time (tell her how to contact you).





7. Help create a safety plan

Help the victim create a safety plan that can be put into action if violence occurs again or if she decides to leave the situation by asking her if she has thought about the steps she would take if she decided to leave. Help her think through each step of the safety plan, weighing the risks and benefits of each option and ways to reduce the risks. Making a plan can help her visualize which steps need to be taken and prepare her psychologically to do so.

8. Call the police

If you hear or see physical abuse taking place or if you know that violence is actively occurring, call the police immediately. The police is the most effective way to remove the immediate danger to the victim and her children. Do whatever is necessary to ensure their safety, even if it means going against the wishes of your victim friend or of the abuser (by calling child protective services for example).



Do's and don'ts⁴

DO	DON'T
Ask if something is wrong	Wait for him or her to come to you
Express concern	Judge or blame
Listen and validate	Pressure him or her
Offer help	Give advice
Support his or her decisions	Place conditions on your support



⁴ Adapted from: *NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence*

CONTACT US

UNION OF WOMEN ASSOCIATION OF HERAKLION PREFECTURE



info@kakopoiisi.gr



ksonona@hotmail.com



Meramvellou 56, 71202 Heraklion

SOS HELPLINE

801-11-16000

OTHER USEFUL SERVICES



Legal services

Tel: 2810-392111



Police Stations

Tel: 2810-274010, 2810-274190

Hospitals of Heraklion

Venizelion Peripheral Hospital



Tel.2810-368000-1

University General Hospital

Tel.2810-392111

*** For abuse suffered outside of your country of residence, contact your consulate**

Written by



Myriam Didry

Designed by



Rebeca Rodrigo