



Abuse Articles

2

Abuse Recovery

12

Bullying

19

Dating Violence and Stalking

23

Domestic Violence

33

Elder Abuse

40

Sexual Assault and Rape

Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse

by Sharie Stines, Psy.D on January 30, 2016

Sexual abuse can profoundly damage a child's sense of value, mainly by the perpetrator of the abuse, and secondarily by the non-abusive parent who either doesn't believe the child, or somehow is oblivious to the abuse happening right in their own household. So often child sexual abuse occurs in families, and in social contexts in which the family knows and trusts the perpetrators. Sometimes children are sexually abused within families in which the non-abusive parent resides mentally in a world of make-believe where no problem exists.

If you have been victimized by emotional incest, physical touch, rape, voyeurism, frotteurism, fondling, inappropriate conversations or non-verbal communication of a sexual nature or in any other way used by a person of more power than you as an object, then these steps will help you overcome the impact of your objectification and emotional hurt. There is no greater injury than being a small child who is used for the sexual gratification of an adult.

Following is a list of healthy steps to take in order to heal and recover from sexual abuse:

Break your silence.

The saying, you're as sick as your secrets definitely applies to childhood sexual abuse. Children and adults who have been subjected to the dishonorable experience of having an adult use them for their sexual gratification, have no desire, ever, to tell anyone of their secret, because of their deep seated feelings of shame and humiliation. However, the only way to heal from this horrendous crime is for the victim to find her voice.

Journal

Journal often about how you have been personally affected by the abuse. List how you were betrayed by those who were supposed to protect you and nurture you. List and describe the different ways you suffered and what you lost because of the abuse. It is important to assess and face the damage in order to heal.

Face the Shame

There is great healing to be found in facing the shame your perpetrator put on you; talk about it, and place it off yourself and back on the shoulders of the person responsible for abusing you. Facing your shame and giving it back to your abuser (figuratively) helps you embrace your vulnerability and see yourself in a new light.

Grieve your losses

In order to recover from abuse, it is necessary to fully discover and complete the pain caused by your losses. You may feel many losses from being abused, such as, a loss of safety, comfort, innocence, trust, a childhood; a loss of being seen, known, and valued, etc. Think specifically about how your life has been impacted by abuse and write each loss, fully allowing yourself to grieve. Write about how you've been betrayed. Share your experience with a safe listening partner.

Be Compassionate with yourself

Do not abuse or neglect your value and needs as others have. Learn to talk to yourself with kindness and acceptance. Do not condemn yourself for the past or in the present. Recovery is a lifelong process and developing a constant inner compassionate companion will help the rest of your life be a satisfying experience. No longer do you have to be victim to others and to the negative dialogue within your own head. Remind yourself that being abused is not the fault of the victim, for any reason, ever.

Coping with Emotional Abuse and Bullying

Katherine Mayfield

Many people put up with abusive behavior without really knowing it's abusive. We see it happening to someone else at work, or in our family, or see it on a TV show, and think maybe everyone does this. But everyone does not, and learning to perceive emotional abuse and bullying is the first step in healing from the pain of being abused and bullied.

What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is any behavior designed to control and subjugate another person by using fear, humiliation, and repeated verbal assaults. It can include constant criticism, intimidation, belittling, berating, and refusal to ever be pleased. Emotional abuse happens often in dysfunctional families, and occasionally even in the workplace.

Emotional abuse is similar to brainwashing in that it steadily wears down the victim's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-esteem. Sometimes the abuse is disguised as "guidance," "teaching," or "advice," but the results are the same. The recipient of the abuse eventually loses all sense of self, and stops believing in his (or her) personal value.

Verbal abuse can take the form of blaming, ordering, threatening, and name-calling. Emotional abusers may also invalidate the perceptions of the victim by denying reality when the victim confronts the abuser, saying "I never did that" or "I never said that," or by telling the victim she doesn't know what she's talking about. People who abuse and bully will not accept responsibility for their actions.

Abusers may also refuse to listen, refuse to communicate, or withhold attention from the victim, in essence giving him "the silent treatment." Withholding any kind of praise, encouragement, or support is also common. In some cases, emotional abuse can cause severe physical problems as the body attempts to reveal the effects of the abuse in a desperate plea for help.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is essentially the same as emotional abuse, though it can include physical assaults as well. The bully uses force or coercion to affect others, usually in the form of intimidation ("If you don't do things my way, I won't be happy, and you'll be in big trouble"). People who bully use their power to control or harm others, and people being bullied often have difficulty finding a way to defend themselves because of the bully's irrational tactics (also known as "bully games").

Check your reaction to the person. Do you feel supported, or do you feel small and "less-than"? Are you fearful of them? These are signs that you're being bullied. Anyone can be a bully: a parent, a spouse, a friend, a child, a teacher, a minister. Just because someone is in a position of authority doesn't mean they are immune to bullying. Some people who hold powerful positions use their power to intimidate others.

Children who bully others at school have often learned bullying at home from their parents or siblings, either by seeing someone else bullied, or being bullied themselves.

How to Cope with Emotional Abuse and Bullying

The first step is simple: begin to pay attention to how the other person talks to you. Do you feel encouraged and cared for? Or do you feel like you're being cut down? Feeling "smaller" than the other person, or feeling like a second-class citizen, are good indications that you're being emotionally abused. If possible, discontinue your relationship with the

Coping with Emotional Abuse and Bullying, Continued

Also, begin to pay attention to your self-talk – what you say to yourself. Do you encourage your good efforts, or do you only put yourself down? Most people are not taught to talk to themselves in a supportive way, but this is the most important step in healing from an abusive past.

People who have been abused learned to mimic the abuser's words in their own minds, and consequently put themselves down every chance they get. Human beings have limitations, and we make mistakes. No one is perfect. Start to encourage yourself for the things you do right instead of focusing only on mistakes, and your self-esteem will begin to grow.

For more support in coping with emotional abuse and bullying, read *Stand Your Ground: How to Cope with a Dysfunctional Family and Recover from Trauma*.

Coping with Feelings

As you begin to heal the pain of being abused, you must acknowledge and express your feelings. If we don't admit our feelings to ourselves, we repress them, and their roots grow even deeper into the psyche. Over time, repressed feelings can cause cancer, heart disease, ulcers, back pain, and a host of other physical ailments.

Though the feelings are very painful, looking at them and expressing them will help release them so the pain will eventually diminish. This is the only way to heal completely from an abusive past and develop solid self-esteem. Crying, punching sofa pillows, or working anger out with exercise are very healthy ways of releasing difficult emotions.

Try to keep a part of yourself aside as an "empathic witness" while you release the feelings, and let that part of you take care of your hurt self as you would take care of a child. You can comfort yourself as well as or even better than another person can.

If you listen to your body, it will tell you how it wants to let go of the feelings, and it will become much healthier as you let go of the stress hormones that have built up in your system as a result of the abuse.

Emotional Abuse: My Story

During the last eight months of my father's life, I lost weight at an alarming rate. At 5'5" and 120 pounds, I didn't have any extra to lose, but the pounds kept dropping off in spite of eating several good-sized, healthy meals every day. I went to a doctor, to specialists, had tests and CAT scans, and no abnormality was found. But I knew exactly what was happening. I was suffering from the effects of five decades of emotional abuse. My body was telling me that I was literally disappearing. By the time my father passed away, I had lost almost 20 pounds, and I could barely stand up.

After my father died, I regained the weight and my health within three months. Soon after, I read Martha Beck's wonderful book *Steering by Starlight*, and I came across her definition of "Spider Love": a love that's consumptive, not giving. Suddenly, it all made sense. All of the bullying and belittling, the criticizing and complaining, had drained me until I was holding on to life by a slender thread. After suffering depression and anxiety for most of my life as a result of the abuse, when my father died I began a journey of healing from the trauma, building my self-esteem and creating a much more fulfilling life, a process which I wrote about in *The Box of Daughter*.

I encourage you to begin your own journey of healing. Sometimes it's painful to face the past, but it's the only way to create a more fulfilling life. Reading Alice Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* is a good way to start.

Recovery For Survivors of Abuse

The subject of recovery for survivors of abuse is not often talked about. What happens after you leave? How to you go about rebuilding a normal life after divorcing an abusive husband? For anyone who has left an abusive relationship, the following article offers help and guidance to make the transition a little easier.

I'm out - now what?

Change is always difficult, even if it's what we want and a change for the better. The adjustments we must make not only to our daily life, but our way of thinking are so huge we may be left feeling overwhelmed. This puts us at risk of losing sight of our dream or worse – back in the arms of the abuser. It's important to make sure we don't feel overwhelmed and adjust comfortably to our new life.

Relationships

Many women who have just come out of a long-term abusive relationship are just dying to get a 'real' relationship as soon as possible. Many feel they have been emotionally alone for a very long time - and they have. Unfortunately, getting into another relationship too soon isn't always wise. We haven't had time to find ourselves and we are at risk of falling into the same trap of abuse again. Behavior changes slowly, not just for the abuser but for us as well. If you already have your eye on some guy and are afraid you will lose him, don't be. If the feeling is mutual, he will wait and allow you time to heal. Don't allow yourself to get desperate and jump from the frying pan into the fire!

New dreams

While in the abusive relationship we dared to dream. Now is the time to look at those dreams and see if it's what we still want. Our needs and wants change and that's ok. Better to change our mind and move forward than to plug away at something we no longer want just because we said we would.

Make a new treasure map: Get a big sheet of paper and write big words on it like “my job is...” “I live in” Have a good think about what you want and write it down. Get pictures from magazines, draw sketches, look at it every day. That way it becomes a reality. Then start planning how you can get those things. The important thing is to write it all down like it has already happened. Don't say “ I want to live in Atlanta with my family.” Say “ I NOW live in Atlanta with my family”. It's not some wish that may or may not be fulfilled. It's a statement of reality, a reality which WILL BE.

Make a new list of goals, let your imagination run wild...Get excited, know it can happen. You once dreamed of being free from abuse, it happened. Believe in yourself and follow your heart.

Practical matters

Now we have to take care of everything for ourselves; paying rent, bills, dealing with finances, taxes, insurance. If we didn't deal with these things before this may all seem a little bit daunting. If a problem seems to big, break it down into small chunks and deal with it one little chunk at a time. If you need help, ask for it.

If he abuses your credit

If your ex is applying for credit with your social security number here are some things you can do to stop him:

Contact the creditors who gave him credit under your name and SSN and tell them he acquired credit fraudulently using your information without your permission.

Recovery For Survivors of Abuse, continued

File a police report.

Contact the fraud department of the major credit bureaus. You can get the contact information for the fraud department of the different credit bureaus and find out how to place a fraud alert at

creditsourceonline.com/credit-bureau-fraud-alert.html

Tell them another person is applying for credit using your social security number and ask them to place a red flag.

This will require creditors to contact you before approving additional credit using your name and number. Ask them how long the flag is posted on your account and how you can extend it if you need to. Follow up all your phone calls with a letter and keep a copy.

Here is a really good link for information on what to do if someone misuses your social security number:

<https://blog.ssa.gov/protecting-your-identity-is-important-to-us/>.

You can also have your social security number changed. Here is a link to the Social Security Administrations Domestic Violence page: <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10093.pdf> (PDF).

Planning time

You won't constantly be running around like a headless chicken making sure everything is 'just so'. You may however be working for the first time in years and not used to this new schedule. Plan ahead. Make a day for paying bills, a day for laundry, a day for shopping and spread it out over the week so that it suits your new lifestyle and you don't get overwhelmed. You won't get it right first time! Just move things around until you have a system that works.

Hobbies and interests: what are they?

What ever you want them to be! I always wanted to do crafts and make soap. Make sure you allow yourself to indulge in 'you' things. Hobbies give us pleasure and also help us to reclaim who we are. It could be something you loved to do before your abuser came along and then life with him made it impossible or he made you stop. Maybe it's a new thing you want to try. Sewing, reading, rock climbing, watching TV, what ever, it doesn't matter. Remember, this is a choice, you are not compelled to take up a hobby! Perhaps you like to sit and watch an old movie, or read a book, go ahead, indulge yourself. The important thing is you are pleasing your self, quite literally.

Support network

It's a whole new world out there and you don't want to face it alone! We know jumping into an intimate relationship isn't the answer, but we do need a support network. Hopefully we were able to build a support network as part of our escape planning. Friends, family, co-workers, counselors, it's important to maintain these relationships after we get out. If we weren't able to form these relationships before leaving the abuser, now is a great time to start. Many of us were distanced from our family and friends by the abuser who tried to isolate us. Now is the time to pick up the phone and call your friend, your sister or who ever you used to share a good relationship with. Reforming these bonds with our loved ones will also help us to heal.

Time to heal

Ah, so much to do and it's a struggle that's for sure. But please, take time to smell the roses. Look around, appreciate what you have –freedom from abuse and peace. Admire the beauty in nature, watch the squirrels, walk through autumn leaves, feel the sun on your face - or the rain!

Recovery For Survivors of Abuse, continued

Healing is important. Join a survivors support group, physically or online. Get into counseling even if you didn't before you left. (Online counseling services like BetterHelp* can help you cope with the emotional trauma you've endured.) Make sure you recognize the signs of abuse and your own self worth so that you don't get involved in another abusive relationship.

*Please note our website receives compensation for referrals to BetterHelp.

Rewire your brain

After enduring years, possibly decades of negative input about our bodies, cooking, skills, abilities, sexuality, personality and everything that makes us what we are, our thought patterns become stuck into believing it's true. We learned to act in certain ways in order to protect ourselves from further abuse and harm. We built up mental ways of coping with the impossible and bearing the unbearable. We learned to survive.

Those survival mechanisms and thought patterns got us through and they are still with us, but they are now obsolete. We need to rewire our brains to react positively to daily events and to ourselves. We no longer need to apologize for things that aren't our fault, or blame ourselves for another person's behavior. (For help breaking free from these patterns, check out "It's My Life Now")

We need to understand that everyone is responsible for their own behavior, including us! We can't make someone abuse us, they choose to do it. We can't make them stop abusing us either, for the abuser must choose to stop the abuse themselves. You are not responsible for his behavior, you never were. You are responsible for your own behavior, however.

How do you want to wear your hair? What clothes do you want to wear? What kind of music do you like to listen to? Watch what you want on TV. Do the laundry/housework/dishes when you want to. Make your life suit your convenience.

Habits are hard to break. Just be aware and catch yourself if you slip into your old ways and stop for a moment and think 'does this work for me?' Make sure you break the cycle and don't let it happen to you again.

Dealing with him

If you still need to have contact with him because of joint property and/or children, make it as easy on yourself as possible. If you are selling a house, let your realtor deal with him as much as possible. If you have legal issues about divorce, see if your courthouse has a Family Law Facilitator or some other form of mediation. Check with your local Women's crisis center too.

In the case of child custody, he may use picking up or dropping off the children as an excuse to harass you. I have read posts on the message boards recently of abusers using this opportunity to grope their ex-partners and then fly into rages when their crude advances are rejected. Have him collect your children in a public place, or from a location at which you are not present. Have someone else around if he must come to your home – that way he can't harass you.

If he does begin to harass you, get a restraining order and call the police every time he violates it. Having the restraining order and a police record of his violations will also help you should you need evidence of the abuse in court.

He has a new girlfriend:

How could we be replaced so easily? This is a tough one and let me tell you, I'll bet my side of the bed didn't even get cold the day I left! He doesn't love this woman, he is just insecure and needs someone, anyone, who will have him. Pity her, you know what he has in store for her...He will use his new girlfriend as an emotional punch bag and sooner or later, a physical one too.

Recovery For Survivors of Abuse, continued

Knowing all that doesn't make it any easier though does it? You are going to feel what ever you feel; anger, shock, pain, humiliation, jealousy, confusion... That's ok, don't be hard on yourself for having feelings. It's your capacity to feel and be human that makes you what you are. Acknowledge your feelings, give yourself a day to 'mourn' if it makes you feel better, but don't wallow in it. Allow yourself to feel – don't allow yourself to be overcome by your feelings. Post on the board, talk to a friend or counselor, express your feelings in a healthy way. Remember: YOU LEFT HIM. Remember WHY you left him and get on with your day.

Being in an abusive relationship strips us of all our self-confidence, makes us feel worthless and unattractive. We need time to heal and reclaim ourselves. By pursuing our hobbies we reclaim a part of our personalities and outline our strengths. By dreaming and planning, we assert our own importance and define our right to have what we want. By planning our time we become decision makers. By beginning or expanding our support network we create a social life. By helping ourselves, healing ourselves and loving ourselves, we will in turn be able to help, heal and love others.

Copyright © Heather Jayne 2001, 2002. If you are in an abusive relationship, Heather's site offers extensive information and resources about domestic violence, tips for leaving your abusive relationship, and support for after you leave. You can visit her site at <http://www.leavingabuse.com>

www.womansdivorce.com/recovery-for-survivors-of-abuse.html

7 Unspoken Secrets About Life After Abuse

Looking from the outside, you would think when someone finally escapes an abusive relationship, the worst is over. No more torture. No more hell. No more emotional blackmail or physical violence. And with the source of the hurt removed, healing can begin. But after the external danger is gone, and the abuser is (at least physically) out of the picture, the survivor's internal journey is only beginning. And parts of it can, surprisingly, be tougher and more painful, in a way, than the suffering they endured at the hands of their tormentor.

While certain wounds are healing, different ones—wounds hidden by the relationship itself—erupt in agony, not only endangering recovery but also making the survivor wonder if getting out was really worth it. This is one reason it takes the average survivor of intimate partner violence seven times to leave for good. And it's one reason most people have no idea why it takes so long to heal. Here are seven unspoken (or rarely spoken) truths about the unique challenges survivors face after they've gotten out. It requires completely rewriting your self-concept to include your victimization without allowing yourself to become a victim.

You have to stop living in denial.

After you're out and the past abuse is out in the open, you are forced to acknowledge it instead of pretending, at least on some level, that it wasn't happening. This requires you to integrate the awful things that happened to you into who you are, without letting them define you. It's way beyond reinventing yourself by changing careers or going through a massive paradigm shift. It requires completely rewriting your self-concept to include your victimization without allowing yourself to become a victim. There is a kind of sleight of hand involved in this similar to when the magician runs the knives through the lady in the box but doesn't actually cut her, because letting go of one self-concept (in which you've invested months or years of your life) before the new one is fully formed requires an act of faith.

How can you pine for someone who hurt you?

You have to walk away—and stay away—from something you believed was love.

No matter how you look at it, this means heartbreak. Loss of innocence. Shattered hopes and dreams. And unbearable loneliness. How can you pine for someone who hurt you? How can you long to return even though you know it's the worst possible thing you can do? Because you didn't want to let go of love, or what you convinced yourself was love, or what some part of you still sees as a chance for love. And because your feelings don't change the second you decide you can't live with a person. You may flip from love to hate, but the intensity is no different, and in many cases, you (or a part of you that you hate) may still love that person, even though you know he or she is unhealthy and unsafe. You wanted it to be better, not over. You had no choice, and yet, your choice was terrifyingly difficult. You learned to be submissive and silent, to second- or even third-guess yourself, to start every sentence with "I'm sorry."

You have to unlearn your unhealthy coping strategies.

You learned every trick to try to keep your abuser happy, or at least to avoid triggering his or her rage. You learned to be submissive and silent, to second- or even third-guess yourself, to start every sentence with "I'm sorry." You learned to walk around minefields and stay out of the line of fire. To tiptoe around insecurities, walk delicately on eggshells, and act as if parts of you—needs, desires, dreams—didn't exist. You learned to diminish your own value, and to accept utterly unacceptable treatment. The mind-bends you went through to achieve a modicum of harmony and keep yourself—and perhaps your children—safe from harm—are staggering. And they're all not only useless but counterproductive and unhealthy in a healthy supportive relationship. So you become a relationship novice again. Some relationships may never regain the closeness and intimacy they once had.

7 Unspoken Secrets About Life After Abuse, continued

You have to repair broken bonds with family and friends.

This is one of the hardest tasks a survivor faces, particularly if you denied the abuse and defended your abuser while it was happening. These critical relationships are damaged, and even though your family and friends may be tremendously supportive, you may not be aware of the extent of their pain—and they may not want to burden you with it during the early part of your recovery. Some relationships may never regain the closeness and intimacy they once had, especially if you—or your abuser through you—pushed someone away. Your old life doesn't just snap back into place immediately. You changed, and others changed along with you. Restoring broken relationships is hard work, and focusing on finding a new way to enjoy family and old friends will be more productive than trying to go back to the way things were before. Forgiving yourself for abandoning yourself, and for the pain that abandonment caused for you and other people you love is different.

You have to forgive yourself

This sounds easy, because you forgive yourself for stuff all the time. We all do. You forgive yourself for being late or screwing up at work. You rationalize the time you waste on unproductive activities (e.g., Facebook). You find ways to let yourself off the hook, because ... because it feels good. But forgiving yourself for abandoning yourself, and for the pain that abandonment caused for you and other people you love is different. You obsessively try to understand why you got into an abusive relationship—what was it about you that made you vulnerable, what was it about your abuser that seemed so incredibly appealing. You blame yourself, your childhood, your abuser's childhood ... and yourself again, until you come to a place of true forgiveness and acceptance. "I could have made a healthier choice. But I didn't. And that's OK. I lost a lot. But I'm going to be OK. I'm going to be OK, and I'm going to move on."

You have to start loving yourself again

The hardest thing is squaring the hatred you were subjected to with the idea that you are worthy of love. When you hate yourself for what you feel you allowed to happen to you, it's hard to find much self-love. And self-love wasn't exactly encouraged by your abuser either. You were likely told repeatedly you weren't lovable—not by anyone except your abuser. So now, who will love you? The answer has to be—you first. Restoring your healthy esteem for yourself must follow self-forgiveness and will allow you to start drawing boundaries that protect you from further harm. A self-care regimen, maintained consistently, can create the feeling of self-love even if you're not generating it inside. Also, if you are a person of faith, remembering that God loves you can help you through the darkest spaces. The hardest thing is squaring the hatred you were subjected to with the idea that you are worthy of love. The trick? It's both/and.

You have to deal with a host of naive, insensitive, self-righteous, but mostly well-meaning people

Bad advice from good people is still bad advice. Everyone who hasn't lived through an abusive relationship has answers—and questions—for you, especially if they read something on the Internet. And anyone who has been through one, or knows someone who has, listens—quietly and patiently. It's hard enough to share your truth with yourself (see #1), but to share it with people who don't get it or think they know how to solve your problems is frustrating and painful. When someone says, "Come on. You're still young. You have your whole life in front of you," you don't want to be rude and say, "Yes, but I'm stinging from the loss of the 15 years I squandered." But bad advice from good people is still bad advice. This is why it's so important to find communities of survivors, to talk to people who have experienced the same things you have. It is also crucial to choose carefully the people with whom you share your truth and only do so with those you can trust fully and you know will not use it to hurt you.

The unspoken secret about life after abuse is that, in many ways, it's harder than before. Because the seven things listed, along with a whole lot of others, make for excruciating work. And when you see that work as the requirement for leaving, you can see why it's so hard for people to leave abusive relationships.

<https://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/the-unspoken-secrets-about-life-after-abuse-fiff/>

What Is Bullying?

www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/what-is-bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Types of Bullying

There are three types of bullying:

- **Verbal bullying** is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:
 - Teasing
 - Name-calling
 - Inappropriate sexual comments
 - Taunting
 - Threatening to cause harm

Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:

- Leaving someone out on purpose
- Telling other children not to be friends with someone
- Spreading rumors about someone
- Embarrassing someone in public

Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:

- Hitting/kicking/pinching
- Spitting
- Tripping/pushing
- Taking or breaking someone's things
- Making mean or rude hand gestures

Where and When Bullying Happens

Bullying can occur during or after school hours. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the Internet.

Frequency of Bullying

There are two sources of federally collected data on youth bullying:

The 2017 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice) indicates that, nationwide, about 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying.

The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that, nationwide, 19.5% of students in grades 9–12 report being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Understanding Bullying

Why People Bully

People bully because it can be an effective way of getting what they want, at least in the short term, and because they lack the social skills to do so without harming others. Bullying also is a way of establishing social dominance, although over time, as children's behavioral repertoires generally broaden, it becomes an increasingly dysfunctional way.

Are bullies born or made?

Bullies are made, not born, and it happens at an early age; if the normal aggression of 2-year-olds is not handled with consistency, children fail to acquire internal restraints against such behavior. Bullying remains a very durable behavioral style, largely because bullies get what they want—at least at first.

What are the psychological features of a bully?

Research finds that bullies have a distinct psychological makeup. They lack prosocial behavior, are untroubled by anxiety, and do not understand others' feelings. They exhibit a distinctive cognitive feature, a kind of paranoia: They misread the intentions of others, often imputing hostility in neutral situations. Others may not like them, but they typically see themselves quite positively. Those who chronically bully tend to have strained relationships with parents and peers.

Can girls be bullies too?

Girls are just as likely as boys to be bullies, but they are far less likely to engage in overt aggression. Instead, they tend to hurt others by damaging or manipulating their relationships. They may spread false rumors about someone, tell others to stop liking someone in order to get even with him or her, engage in social exclusion, threaten to withdraw friendship to get their way, or give someone the silent treatment.

Who Bullies Target

Bullies couldn't exist without victims, and they don't pick on just anyone. Research shows that those singled out for bullying lack assertiveness even in nonthreatening situations and radiate fear long before they ever encounter a bully. These are children who don't stand up for themselves.

How do bullies decide who to pick on?

Up to about age 7, bullies pick on almost anyone. After that, they single out kids to prey on, engaging in a "shopping process" to determine which other children would make suitably submissive victims. Bullies like victims who become visibly upset when they are picked on and who do not have friends or allies. Researchers find that those chosen as victims evince insecurity and apprehension.

What are the distinguishing features of a victim?

Studies of children show that victims easily acquiesce to bullies' demands, handing over bikes, toys, and

Understanding Bullying, continued

other playthings. They cry and assume a defensive posture; their highly visible displays of pain and suffering are rewarding to bullies and serve as an important signal of the bully's dominance. Children who become victims offer no deterrent to aggression, which can make them disliked even by their non-bullying peers.

What are the effects on victims?

Bullying causes a great deal of misery to others, and its effects on victims can last for decades, perhaps even a lifetime. The pain of bullying may be felt most acutely around adolescence, a developmental stage where sensitivity to rejection heightens greatly. Victimization is a common source of school avoidance, leads to feelings of shame and self-worthlessness, and may lead to chronic depression and anxiety.

Why Bullying Is So Harmful

Bullying carries the implicit message that aggression and violence are acceptable solutions to problems when they are not. Cooperation and the peaceful resolution of differences support an increasingly interconnected world. Bullying not only harms its victims but it harms the perpetrators themselves. Most bullies have a downwardly spiraling course through life, as their aggressive behavior interferes with learning, holding a job, and establishing and maintaining intimate relationships.

Do bullies grow out of it?

Some bullies do leave the behavior behind. But many do not; aggression is a very stable social interaction style. Many who were bullies as children turn into antisocial adults, who are far more likely than nonaggressive kids to commit crimes, batter their wives, abuse their children—and produce another generation of bullies.

Why don't bystanders stop bullies?

Bullies frequently carry out their aggression before an audience of peers, and the presence of an audience can boost a bully's sense of power. But bystanders seldom stop the aggression; they may in fact enjoy the spectacle. Even if they don't approve of the situation, they may dislike the victim or fear retaliation by the bully.

How does bullying harm others?

Bullying causes a great deal of emotional harm to individuals, and being a victim of bullying is a major reason why many young people drop out of school. Bullying also harms society at large by creating a source of aggression and violence; those who bully are at increased risk of engaging in criminal behavior as adults.

Cyberbullying

As the social life of young people has moved onto the internet, so has bullying, with electronic bullying becoming a significant new problem in the past decade. Whereas bullying was once largely confined to school, the ubiquity of handheld devices affords bullies constant access to their prey. Cyber harassment can be especially disturbing because it can often be carried out anonymously; victims may have no idea who the perpetrators are.

Understanding Bullying, continued

How has the internet changed bullying?

The anonymity of cyberbullying removes many restraints on meanness and amplifies the ferocity of aggression. It's easier to inflict pain and suffering on others when you don't have to look them in the eye. Constantly evolving digital technologies enable new ways of spreading false information about targets.

How do bullies harm others on the internet?

Both direct harassment and relational aggression thrive on the internet. Cyberbullies can spread false rumors with viral speed on social media. They can falsely impersonate someone and conduct all manner of mischief in someone else's name. Sexual harassment and cyberstalking particularly target women. And long after the active bullying has stopped, malicious information can linger on the internet and continue to harm.

Why is cyberbullying so damaging?

Cyberbullying is particularly unsettling and extremely difficult to combat because victims often do not know who is behind it. Further there is no opportunity for bystanders to witness incidents and to potentially intervene. But perhaps most distressing of all, it can be inescapable and relentless, affording victims no safe haven.

How to handle a bully.

The best defense against bullying is being socially skilled—teaching all children social skills and allowing them to develop confidence in their own abilities. As social engineers for young children, parents are especially important in bully-proofing their children: They can regularly inquire about social challenges their children face and role-play possible solutions. The second-best defense against bullying is to walk away and not fight back.

How do you deal with a bully?

Studies show that the most effective way of stopping a bully is to activate bystanders; after all, bystanders reward bullies with attention. Since most children are witnesses to bullying at some point, teaching all children that they have an important role to play in stopping bullying is essential. A bully may make an effort to retaliate against one person who speaks up but is not likely to target several.

Do school antibullying programs work?

During the past decade or so, schools have widely adopted anti-bullying programs. The report card on their effectiveness, however, is mixed. Experts explain that schools are where most bullying takes place but they are not where attitudes about power and aggression, skills of emotion regulation, or social skills—the key influences on bullying—are learned.

Should parents get involved?

Children are deeply ashamed of being bullied and may not let anyone know when they are being victimized. Therefore parents have an obligation to know something about their children's general competence with peers and how peers treat them—by asking teachers during school conferences and by gently asking their children about their social life. Teaching children to fight back is not effective; helping them gain social skills is.

Dealing with Bullies

Bullying is a big problem. It can make kids feel hurt, scared, sick, lonely, embarrassed, and sad. Bullies might hit, kick, or push to hurt people, or use words to call names, tease, or scare them.

A bully might say mean things about someone, grab a kid's stuff, make fun of someone, or leave a kid out of the group on purpose.

Some bullies threaten people or try to make them do things they don't want to do.

Bullying Is a Big Deal

Bullying is a big problem that affects lots of kids. Three-quarters of all kids say they have been bullied or teased. Being bullied can make kids feel really bad, and the stress of dealing with it can make them feel sick. Bullying can make kids not want to play outside or go to school. It's hard to keep your mind on schoolwork when you're worried about how you're going to deal with the bully near your locker.

Bullying bothers everyone — and not just the kids who are getting picked on. Bullying can make school a place of fear and can lead to violence and more stress for everyone.

Why Do Bullies Act That Way?

Some bullies are looking for attention. They might think bullying is a way to be popular or to get what they want. Most bullies are trying to make themselves feel more important. When they pick on someone else, it can make them feel big and powerful.

Some bullies come from families where everyone is angry and shouting all the time. They may think that being angry, calling names, and pushing people around is a normal way to act. Some bullies are copying what they've seen someone else do. Some have been bullied themselves.

Sometimes bullies know that what they're doing or saying hurts other people. But other bullies may not really know how hurtful their actions can be. Most bullies don't understand or care about the feelings of others.

Bullies often pick on someone they think they can have power over. They might pick on kids who get upset easily or who have trouble sticking up for themselves. Getting a big reaction out of someone can make bullies feel like they have the power they want. Sometimes bullies pick on someone who is smarter than they are or different from them in some way. Sometimes bullies just pick on a kid for no reason at all.

Gemma told her mom that this one kid was picking on her for having red hair and freckles. She wanted to be like the other kids but she couldn't change those things about herself. Finally, Gemma made friends at the local swimming pool with a girl who wished she had red hair like Gemma's. The two girls became great friends, and Gemma learned to ignore the mean girl's taunts at school.

Bullying: How to Handle It

So now you know that bullying is a big problem that affects a lot of kids, but what do you do if someone is bullying you? Our advice falls into two categories: preventing a run-in with the bully, and what to do if you end up face-to-face with the bully.

Dealing with Bullies, continued

Preventing a Run-In With a Bully

Don't give the bully a chance. As much as you can, avoid the bully. You can't go into hiding or skip class, of course. But if you can take a different route and avoid the mean kid, do so.

Stand tall and be brave. When you're scared of another person, you're probably not feeling your bravest. But sometimes just acting brave is enough to stop a bully. How does a brave person look and act? Stand tall and you'll send the message: "Don't mess with me." It's easier to feel brave when you feel good about yourself. See the next tip!

Feel good about you. Nobody's perfect, but what can you do to look and feel your best? Maybe you'd like to be more fit. If so, maybe you'll decide to get more exercise, watch less TV, and eat healthier snacks. Or maybe you feel you look best when you shower in the morning before school. If so, you could decide to get up a little earlier so you can be clean and refreshed for the school day.

Get a buddy (and be a buddy). Two is better than one if you're trying to avoid being bullied. Make a plan to walk with a friend or two on the way to school, recess, lunch, or wherever you think you might meet the bully. Offer to do the same if a friend is having bully trouble. Get involved if you see bullying going on in your school — tell an adult, stick up for the kid being bullied, and tell the bully to stop.

If The Bully Says or Does Something to You

Ignore the bully. If you can, try your best to ignore the bully's threats. Pretend you don't hear them and walk away quickly to a place of safety. Bullies want a big reaction to their teasing and meanness. Acting as if you don't notice and don't care is like giving no reaction at all, and this just might stop a bully's behavior.

Stand up for yourself. Pretend to feel really brave and confident. Tell the bully "No! Stop it!" in a loud voice. Then walk away, or run if you have to. Kids also can stand up for each other by telling a bully to stop teasing or scaring someone else, and then walking away together. If a bully wants you to do something that you don't want to do, say "no!" and walk away. If you do what a bully says to do, the mean kid is more likely to keep bullying you. Bullies tend to pick on kids who don't stick up for themselves.

Don't bully back. Don't hit, kick, or push back to deal with someone bullying you or your friends. Fighting back just satisfies a bully and it's dangerous, too, because someone could get hurt. You're also likely to get in trouble. It's best to stay with others, stay safe, and get help from an adult.

Don't show your feelings. Plan ahead. How can you stop yourself from getting angry or showing you're upset? Try distracting yourself (counting backwards from 100, spelling the word 'turtle' backwards, etc.) to keep your mind occupied until you are out of the situation and somewhere safe where you can show your feelings.

Tell an adult. If you are being bullied, it's very important to tell an adult. Find someone you trust and talk about what is happening to you. Teachers, principals, parents, and lunchroom helpers at school can all help to stop bullying. Sometimes bullies stop as soon as a teacher finds out because they're afraid that they will be punished by parents. This is not tattling on someone who has done something small — bullying is wrong and it helps if everyone who gets bullied or sees someone being bullied speaks up.

Dealing with Bullies, continued

What Happens to Bullies?

In the end, most bullies wind up in trouble. If they keep acting mean and hurtful, sooner or later they may have only a few friends left — usually other kids who are just like them. The power they wanted slips away fast. Other kids move on and leave bullies behind.

Luis lived in fear of Brian — every day he would give his lunch money to Brian, but Brian still beat him up. He said that if Luis ever told anyone, he would beat him up in front of all the other kids in his class. Luis was embarrassed and felt so bad about himself and about school. Finally, Brian got caught threatening Luis and they were both sent to the school counselor. Brian got in a lot of trouble at home. Over time, Brian learned how to make friends and ask his parents for lunch money. Luis never wanted to be friends with Brian, but he did learn to act strong and more confident around him.

Some kids who bully blame others. But every kid has a choice about how to act. Some kids who bully realize that they don't get the respect they want by threatening others. They may have thought that bullying would make them popular, but they soon find out that other kids just think of them as trouble-making losers. The good news is that kids who are bullies can learn to change their behavior. Teachers, counselors, and parents can help. So can watching kids who treat others fairly and with respect. Bullies can change if they learn to use their power in positive ways. In the end, whether bullies decide to change their ways is up to them. Some bullies turn into great kids. Others never learn.

But no one needs to put up with a bully's behavior. If you or someone you know is bothered by a bully, talk to someone you trust. Everyone has the right to feel safe, and being bullied makes people feel unsafe. Tell someone about it and keep telling until something is done.

<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/bullies.html>

Early Warning Signs of Dating Violence

www.rainn.org/news/early-warning-signs-dating-violence

The way dating violence is often portrayed in the media suggests acts of physical and sexual violence. That's one part of dating violence—but in dating and intimate partner relationships, sexual violence is often an escalated act that follows other acts of emotional or physical abuse. Identifying these early signs of abuse may provide a chance for a person at risk to exit a relationship safely before further harm occurs.

IT'S OKAY TO SET "DIGITAL BOUNDARIES" FOR TEXTING AND OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

“Dating violence doesn't have an age restriction. It isn't defined by gender identity. And it doesn't look the same for every relationship,” said Brian Pinero, RAINN's vice president of Victim Services. “The answer to the question, ‘What does dating violence look like?’ isn't so straightforward—and that's what can make it difficult to spot.”

The warning signs for dating violence can be similar to warning signs for sexual assault and abuse. With dating violence, early warning signs often begin with behaviors that are not physically violent. These behaviors may violate a person's boundaries, be emotionally abusive, or otherwise controlling. “Small controlling behaviors might not seem like a big deal at the time, but they can escalate and eventually put someone at risk,” added Pinero. “For example, demanding to know where someone is at all times, touching or pinching parts of someone's body in public when they've made it clear it's unwanted, or controlling what type of clothes someone wears—these are all abusive behaviors that violate someone's boundaries.”

The laws about sexual violence and dating violence vary by state and situation. The following information is not a legal guide or an exhaustive list—rather it's a general list of early warning signs for behaviors that are, or could become, violent.

Early warning signs of an abusive partner

For teens and those new to dating and relationships, it's can be difficult to identify controlling behaviors from caring behaviors. Consider this list of warning signs to identify unhealthy or abusive behaviors.

It's not OK for a partner to:

- Demand details about how you spend your time. While it's normal for a partner to express interest in your day, it's not okay for a partner to demand to know where you are and who is spending time with you every minute of the day—or to limit with whom you spend time.
- Restrict contact with family or friends. Sometimes abusive partners will force someone to cut ties with family or friends who don't approve of the relationship. Remember that who you trust and spend time with is your choice.
- Criticize you or what's important to you. Partners who put you down or belittle your beliefs are not respectful partners. While it's healthy to have challenging conversations about ideas, it's not OK to tell someone that their thoughts, opinions, or bodies are not important.
- Control what you wear or what you look like. Partners should not place restrictions on your clothes, makeup, hair, or other aspects of your physical body. This includes forcing you to eat a certain way to engage in certain exercise routines.

- Touch you in public without permission. If a partner grabs or pinches you in front of friends or family when you've asked them not to, or insists on public displays of affection that you're not comfortable with, this is a sign of ignoring your boundaries.
- Coerce or pressure you into physical activity. Coercion can include using phrases such as "If you really loved me, you would sleep with me." In the LGBTQ community, pressuring someone to "prove" their sexuality is also a form of coercion.
- Ignore or violate your physical boundaries. Setting clear boundaries about physical intimacy is part of a healthy relationship. If pumping the breaks or asking to stop an activity is seen as "silly" or "lame," these might be warning signs that a partner won't respect your boundaries down the road.
- Control your reproductive choices. Refusing to use a condom, lying about using forms of birth control, or forcing someone to take a hormonal birth control—these are all signs that a partner does not respect the choices you are making for your body and your future.

Support for unhealthy relationships

It can be unsettling to recognize abusive behaviors in a relationship. Know that you are not alone, and there are people you can talk to.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or practice a prepared safety plan.

www.loveisrespect.org

If you are a teen or young adult, you can learn more about healthy relationships by visiting Love Is Respect or using their confidential hotline services.

www.thehotline.org

The National Domestic Violence Hotline also has a hotline for anyone experiencing domestic violence, seeking resources or information, or questioning unhealthy aspects of their relationship.

www.rainn.org

If you have experienced sexual assault and need to talk, RAINN is here for you. You can talk to someone from the National Sexual Assault Hotline online in English or Spanish, or over the phone at 800.656.HOPE (4673)

Safety Planning

www.rainn.org/articles/safety-planning

For many people who have been affected by sexual assault, current and long-term safety can be an ongoing concern. Safety planning is about brainstorming ways to stay safe that may also help reduce the risk of future harm. It can include planning for a future crisis, considering your options, and making decisions about your next steps. Finding ways to stay and feel safer can be an important step towards healing, and these plans and actions should not increase the risk of being hurt.

Safety planning when someone is hurting you:

Become familiar with safe places. Learn more about safe places near you such as a local domestic violence shelter or a family member's house. Learn the routes and commit them to memory. Find out more about sexual assault service providers in your area that can offer support.

Create a code word. It might be a code between you and your children that means "get out," or with your support network that means "I need help."

Keep computer safety in mind. If you think someone might be monitoring your computer use, consider regularly clearing your cache, history, and cookies. You could also use a different computer at a friend's house or a public library.

Lean on a support network. Having someone you can reach out to for support can be an important part of staying safe and recovering. Find someone you trust who could respond to a crisis if you needed their help.

Prepare an excuse. Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times or for existing situations that might become dangerous. Have these on hand in case you need to get away quickly.

Stay safe at home. If the person hurting you is in your home, you can take steps to feel safer. Try hanging bells or a noise maker on your door to scare the person hurting you away, or sleep in public spaces like the living room. If possible, keep the doors inside your house locked or put something heavy in front of them. If you're protecting yourself from someone who does not live with you, keep all the doors locked when you're not using them, and install an outside lighting system with motion detectors. Change the locks if possible.

Safety planning when someone is stalking you:

Be prepared to reach out. If possible, keep your cell phone charged and have emergency contact numbers programmed ahead of time. You may want to save these contacts under a different name. Memorize a few numbers in case you don't have cell phone access in the future.

Change your routine. Be aware of your daily routine and begin to alter it over time. Switch up the way you commute more often, taking different routes or different modes of transportation. Visit the Stalking Resource Center for more ways to stay safe.

Tell someone you trust. Stalking shouldn't be kept a secret. Tell your loved ones, parents or other trusted adults, or the local police to determine if a report can be made.

Safety Planning

www.rainn.org/articles/safety-planning

Safety planning when leaving the person hurting you:

Make an escape bag. Pack a bag that includes all important papers and documents, such as your birth certificate, license, passport, social security card, bills, prescription drugs, and medical records. Include cash, keys, and credit cards. Hide the bag well. If it's discovered, call it a "hurricane bag" or "fire bag." If you are escaping with children, include their identifying information as well.

Plan a destination. If you're not going to stay with someone you know, locate the nearest domestic violence shelter or homeless shelter.

Plan a route. Then plan a backup route. If you are driving, have a tank of gas filled at all times. If you rely on public transportation, know the routes departure times. Many public transportation systems have mobile apps that update their schedules and arrival times.

Prepare your support network. Keep your support network in the loop. Let them know how to respond if the perpetrator contacts them.

Important Safety Note: If the dangerous situation involves a partner, go to the police or a shelter first. If you are in a domestic violence situation and need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800.799.SAFE(7233). You can also visit their website to learn more about safety planning.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

Are you or someone you care about in an abusive relationship? Here's how to recognize the signs of domestic abuse—physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, or financial—and get help.

What is domestic violence and abuse?

When people think of domestic abuse, they often focus on domestic violence. But domestic abuse includes any attempt by one person in a marriage or intimate relationship to dominate and control the other.

Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control over you. An abuser doesn't "play fair." An abuser uses fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear you down and keep you under their thumb.

Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone; it does not discriminate. Abuse happens within heterosexual relationships and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds, and economic levels. And while women are more often victimized, men also experience abuse—especially verbal and emotional. The bottom line is that abusive behavior is never acceptable, whether from a man, woman, teenager, or an older adult. You deserve to feel valued, respected, and safe.

Domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal assault to violence. And while physical injury may pose the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also severe. Emotionally abusive relationships can destroy your self-worth, lead to anxiety and depression, and make you feel helpless and alone. No one should have to endure this kind of pain—and your first step to breaking free is recognizing that your relationship is abusive.

Signs of an abusive relationship

There are many signs of an abusive relationship, and a fear of your partner is the most telling. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around them—constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive.

Other signs include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and having feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

To determine whether your relationship is abusive, answer the questions below. The more "yes" answers, the more likely it is that you're in an abusive relationship.

Are you in an abusive relationship?

Your inner thoughts and feelings

Do you:

- feel afraid of your partner much of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
- feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?
- believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
- wonder if you're the one who is crazy?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

Your partner's belittling behavior

Does your partner:

- humiliate or yell at you?
- criticize you and put you down?
- treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see?
- ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?
- blame you for their own abusive behavior?
- see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?

Your partner's violent behavior or threats

Does your partner:

- have a bad and unpredictable temper?
- hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you?
- threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- threaten to commit suicide if you leave?
- force you to have sex?
- destroy your belongings?

Your partner's controlling behavior

Does your partner:

- act excessively jealous and possessive?
- control where you go or what you do?
- keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- limit your access to money, the Internet, phone, or car?
- constantly check up on you?

Physical and sexual abuse

Physical abuse occurs when physical force is used against you in a way that injures or endangers you. Physical assault or battering is a crime, whether it occurs inside or outside of a family. The police have the power and authority to protect you from a physical attack.

Any situation in which you are forced to participate in unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity is sexual abuse. Forced sex, even by a spouse or intimate partner with whom you also have consensual sex, is an act of aggression and domestic violence. Furthermore, people whose partners abuse them physically and sexually are at a higher risk of being seriously injured or killed.

It is still domestic abuse if...

- The incidents of physical abuse seem minor when compared to those you have read about, seen on television, or heard other people talk about. There isn't a "better" or "worse" form of physical abuse; severe injuries can result from being pushed, for example.
- The incidents of physical abuse have only occurred one or two times in the relationship. Studies indicate

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

- that if your partner has injured you once, it is likely that they'll continue to assault you.
- The physical assaults stopped when you became passive and gave up your right to express yourself as you desire, to move about freely and see others, or to make decisions. It is not a victory if you have to give up your rights as a person and a partner in exchange for ending the assault!
- Physical violence has not occurred. Many people are emotionally and verbally assaulted. This can be just as frightening and is often more confusing to try to understand.

Emotional abuse: It's a bigger problem than you think

Not all abusive relationships involve physical violence. Just because you're not battered and bruised doesn't mean you're not being abused. Many men and women suffer from emotional abuse, which is no less destructive. Unfortunately, emotional abuse is often minimized or overlooked—even by the person experiencing it.

The aim of emotional abuse is to chip away at your feelings of self-worth and independence—leaving you feeling that there's no way out of the relationship, or that without your abusive partner, you have nothing. Emotional abuse includes verbal abuse such as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior are also forms of emotional abuse.

Abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in threats of physical violence or other repercussions if you don't do as they want.

The scars of emotional abuse are very real and they run deep. You may think that physical abuse is far worse than emotional abuse, since physical violence can send you to the hospital and leave you with physical wounds. But emotional abuse can be just as damaging—sometimes even more so.

Economic or financial abuse: A subtle form of emotional abuse

Remember, an abuser's goal is to control you, and they will frequently use money to do so.

Economic or financial abuse includes:

- Rigidly controlling your finances.
- Withholding money or credit cards.
- Making you account for every penny you spend.
- Withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter).
- Restricting you to an allowance.
- Preventing you from working or choosing your own career.
- Sabotaging your job (making you miss work, calling constantly).
- Stealing from you or taking your money.

Abusive behavior is a choice

Despite what many people believe, domestic violence and abuse does not take place because an abuser

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

loses control over their behavior. In fact, abusive behavior and violence is a deliberate choice to gain control. Perpetrators use a variety of tactics to manipulate you and exert their power, including:

- **Dominance.**
Abusive individuals need to feel in charge of the relationship. They may make decisions for you and the family, tell you what to do, and expect you to obey without question. Your abuser may treat you like a servant, child, or even as their possession.
- **Humiliation.**
An abuser will do everything they can to lower your self-esteem or make you feel defective in some way. After all, if you believe you're worthless and that no one else will want you, you're less likely to leave. Insults, name-calling, shaming, and public put-downs are all weapons of abuse designed to erode your self-worth and make you feel powerless.
- **Isolation.**
In order to increase your dependence on them, an abusive partner will cut you off from the outside world. They may keep you from seeing family or friends, or even prevent you from going to work or school. You may have to ask permission to do anything, go anywhere, or see anyone.
- **Threats.**
Abusers commonly use threats to keep their partners from leaving or scare them into dropping charges. Your abuser may threaten to hurt or kill you, your children, other family members, or even pets. They may also threaten to commit suicide, file false charges against you, or report you to child services.
- **Intimidation.**
Your abuser may use a variety of intimidation tactics designed to scare you into submission. Such tactics include making threatening looks or gestures, smashing things in front of you, destroying property, hurting your pets, or putting weapons on display. The message behind these actions is that violent consequences will follow if you don't obey.
- **Denial and blame.**
Abusers are adept at making excuses for the inexcusable. They may blame their abusive and violent behavior on a bad childhood, a bad day, or even on you and the kids, the victims of their abuse. They may minimize the abuse or deny that it occurred. Often, they will shift the responsibility on to you: somehow, their violent and abusive behavior is your fault.

Abusers are able to control their behavior—they do it all the time

Abusers pick and choose whom to abuse. They don't insult, threaten, or assault everyone in their life who gives them grief. Usually, they save their abuse for the people closest to them, the ones they claim to love.

Abusers carefully choose when and where to abuse. They control themselves until no one else is around to witness their behavior. They may act like everything is fine in public, but then lash out

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

instantly as soon as you're alone with them.

Abusers are able to stop their abusive behavior when it benefits them. Most abusers are not out of control. In fact, they're able to immediately stop their abusive behavior when it's to their advantage to do so (for example, when the police show up or their boss calls).

Violent abusers usually direct their blows where they won't show. Rather than acting out in a mindless rage, many physically violent abusers carefully aim their kicks and punches where the bruises and marks won't show.

The cycle of violence in domestic abuse

Domestic abuse falls into a common pattern or cycle of violence:



- Abuse
Your abusive partner lashes out with aggressive, belittling, or violent behavior. This treatment is a power play designed to show you “who is boss.”
- Guilt
Your partner feels guilt after abusing you, but not because of their actions. They're more worried about the possibility of being caught and facing consequences for their abusive behavior.
- Excuses
Your abuser rationalizes what they have done. The person may come up with a string of excuses or blame you for provoking them—anything to avoid taking responsibility.
- “Normal” behavior
Your partner does everything in their power to regain control and ensure that you'll stay in the relationship. A perpetrator may act as if nothing has happened, or they might “turn on the charm.” This peaceful honeymoon phase may give you hope that the abuser has really changed this time.
- Fantasy and planning
Your abuser begins to fantasize about repeating the abuse. They spend a lot of time thinking about what you've done wrong and how they'll make you pay for it. Then they form a plan for turning the fantasy of abuse into reality.
- Set-up
Your abuser sets you up and puts their plan in motion, creating a situation where they can justify abusing you.

Your abuser's apologies and loving gestures in between the episodes of abuse can make it difficult to leave.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

They may cause you to believe that you are the only person who can help them, that they will change their behavior, and that they truly love you. However, the dangers of staying are very real.

Recognizing the warning signs of abuse

It's impossible to know with certainty what goes on behind closed doors, but there are some telltale signs of emotional abuse and domestic violence. If you witness these warning signs of abuse in a friend, family member, or co-worker, take them very seriously.

People who are being abused may:

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner
- Go along with everything their partner says and does
- Check in often with their partner to report where they are and what they're doing
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness

Warning signs of physical abuse

People who are being physically abused may:

- Have frequent injuries, with the excuse of "accidents."
- Frequently miss work, school, or social occasions, without explanation.
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises or scars (for example, wearing long sleeves in the summer or sunglasses indoors).

Warning signs of isolation

People who are being isolated by their abuser may:

- Be restricted from seeing family and friends.
- Rarely go out in public without their partner.
- Have limited access to money, credit cards, or the car.

Psychological warning signs of abuse

People who are being abused may:

- Have very low self-esteem, even if they used to be confident.
- Show major personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn).
- Be depressed, anxious, or suicidal.
- Speak up if you suspect domestic violence or abuse

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, speak up! If you're hesitating—telling yourself that it's none of your business, you might be wrong, or that the person might not want to talk about it—keep in mind that expressing your concern will let the person know that you care and may even save their life.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm

Talk to the person in private and let them know that you're concerned. Point out the signs you've noticed that worry you. Tell the person that you're there for them, whenever they feel ready to talk. Reassure them that you'll keep whatever is said between the two of you, and let them know that you'll help in any way you can.

Remember, abusers are very good at controlling and manipulating their victims. People who have been emotionally or physically abused are often depressed, drained, scared, ashamed, and confused. They need help getting out of the situation, yet their partner has often isolated them from their family and friends. By picking up on the warning signs and offering support, you can help someone escape an abusive situation and begin healing.

Do's and Don'ts

Do:	Don't:
Ask if something is wrong	Wait for the person to come to you
Express your concern	Blame or judge them
Listen and validate	Pressure them to act
Offer to help	Give advice
Support their decisions	Place conditions on your support

Help for Men Who are Being Abused

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/help-for-men-who-are-being-abused.htm

Domestic abuse against men can take the form of physical violence, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse. Whatever your circumstances, though, you can find help and break free from an abusive relationship.

Domestic violence against men: You're not alone

If you're a man in an abusive relationship, it's important to know that you're not alone. Abuse of men happens far more often than you might expect—in both heterosexual and same sex relationships. It happens to men from all cultures and all walks of life, regardless of age or occupation. Figures suggest that as many as one in three victims of domestic violence are male. However, men are often reluctant to report abuse because they feel embarrassed, fear they won't be believed, or are scared that their partner will take revenge.

An abusive partner may

- Hit, kick, bite, punch, spit, throw things, or destroy your possessions.
- To make up for any difference in strength, they may attack you while you're asleep or otherwise catch you by surprise.
- They may also use a weapon, such as a gun or knife, or strike you with an object,
- abuse or threaten your children, or harm your pets.

Of course, domestic abuse is not limited to violence.

Emotional and verbal abuse can be just as damaging. As a male, your spouse or partner may:

- Verbally abuse you, belittle you, or humiliate you in front of friends, colleagues, or family, or on social media.
- Be possessive, act jealous, or harass you with accusations of being unfaithful.
- Take away your car keys or medications, try to control where you go and who you see.
- Try to control how you spend money or deliberately default on joint financial obligations.
- Make false allegations about you to your friends, employer, or the police, or find other ways to manipulate and isolate you.
- Threaten to leave you and prevent you from seeing your kids if you report the abuse.

As an abused man, you may face a shortage of resources, a lack of understanding from friends and family, and legal obstacles, especially if trying to gain custody of your children from an abusive mother. Whatever your circumstances, though, you can overcome these challenges and escape the violence and abuse.

If you're gay, bisexual, or transgender

You may be in an abusive relationship if your partner:

- Threatens to inform friends, family, colleagues, or community members about your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Insists that the police won't help someone who's gay, bisexual, or transgender.
- Ridicules your attempts to escape the relationship by labeling you as someone who deep-down believes that gay, bisexual, or transgender relationships are aberrant or unnatural.
- Accuses you of not really being gay, bisexual, or transgender.
- Justifies their abuse with the excuse that all men are naturally aggressive and violent.

Help for Men Who are Being Abused

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/help-for-men-who-are-being-abused.htm

Why men don't leave abusive relationships

Regardless of gender, ending a relationship, even an abusive one, is rarely easy. It becomes even harder if you've been isolated from friends and family, threatened, manipulated, and controlled, or physically and emotionally beaten down.

You may feel that you have to stay in the relationship because:

- You feel ashamed. Many men feel great shame that they've been abused, been unable to stand up for themselves, or somehow failed in their role as a male, husband, or father.
- Your religious beliefs dictate that you stay or your self-worth is so low that you feel this abusive relationship is all you deserve.
- There's a lack of resources. Many men worry they'll have difficulty being believed by the authorities, or that their abuse will be minimized because they're male, or find there are few resources to specifically help abused men.
- You're in a same sex relationship but haven't come out to family or friends, and are afraid your partner will out you.
- You're in denial. Just as with female domestic violence victims, denying that there is a problem in your relationship will only prolong the abuse. You may still love your partner when they're not being abusive and believe they will change or that you can help them. But change can only happen once your abuser takes full responsibility for their behavior and seeks professional treatment.
- You want to protect your children. You worry that if you leave, your spouse will harm your children or prevent you from having access to them. Obtaining custody of children is always challenging for fathers, but even if you are confident that you can do so, you may still feel overwhelmed at the prospect of raising them alone.

Protecting yourself as an abused male

Domestic violence and abuse can have a serious physical and psychological impact. The first step to protecting yourself and stopping the abuse is to reach out. Talk to a friend, family member, or someone else you trust, or call a domestic violence helpline.

Admitting the problem and seeking help doesn't mean you have failed as a man or as a husband. You are not to blame, and you are not weak. As well as offering a sense of relief and providing some much-needed support, sharing details of your abuse can also be the first step in building a case against your abuser.

When dealing with your abusive partner:

- Leave if possible.
Be aware of any signs that may trigger a violent response from your partner and be ready to leave quickly. If you need to stay to protect your children, call emergency services. The police have an obligation to protect you, just as they do for a female victim.
- Never retaliate.

Help for Men Who are Being Abused

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/help-for-men-who-are-being-abused.htm

An abusive partner may try to provoke you into retaliating or using force to escape the situation. If you do retaliate, you're putting yourself at risk of being arrested or removed from your home.

- Get evidence of the abuse.
Report all incidents to the police and get a copy of each police report. Keep a journal of all abuse with a clear record of dates, times, and any witnesses. Include a photographic record of your injuries and make sure your doctor or hospital also documents your injuries. Remember, medical personnel aren't likely to ask if a man is a victim of domestic violence, so it's up to you to ensure that the cause of your injuries are documented.
- Keep a mobile phone, evidence of the abuse, and other important documents close at hand.
If you have to leave instantly in order to escape the abuse, you'll need to take with you evidence of the abuse and important documents, such as a passport and driver's license. It may be safer to keep these items outside of the home.
- Obtain advice from a domestic violence program or legal aid resource about getting a restraining order or order of protection against your partner and, if necessary, seeking temporary custody of your children.

Moving on from an abusive relationship

Support from family and friends as well as counseling, therapy, and support groups for domestic abuse survivors can help you move on from an abusive relationship. You may struggle with upsetting emotions or feel numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people. After the trauma of an abusive relationship, it can take a while to get over the pain and bad memories but you can heal and move on.

Even if you're eager to jump into a new relationship and finally get the intimacy and support you've been missing, it's wise to take things slowly. Make sure you're aware of any red flag behaviors in a potential new partner and what it takes to build healthy, new relationships.

Authors: Lawrence Robinson and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

Are you or do you know an elderly adult who's being abused, neglected, or exploited financially? These guidelines can help you spot the warning signs and stop the abuse.

What is elder abuse and neglect?

Elder abuse includes physical, emotional, or sexual harm inflicted upon an older adult, their financial exploitation, or neglect of their welfare by people who are directly responsible for their care. In the U.S. alone, more than half a million reports of elder abuse reach authorities every year, and millions more cases go unreported.

As older adults become more physically frail, they're less able to take care of themselves, stand up to bullying, or fight back if attacked. Mental or physical ailments can make them more trying companions for those who live with them. And they may not see or hear as well or think as clearly as they used to, leaving openings for unscrupulous people to take advantage of them.

Elder abuse tends to take place where the senior lives: where their abusers are often adult children, other family members such as grandchildren, or a spouse or partner. Elder abuse can also occur in institutional settings, especially long-term care facilities.

If you suspect that an elderly person is at risk from a neglectful or overwhelmed caregiver, or being preyed upon financially, it's important to speak up. Everyone deserves to live in safety, with dignity and respect. These guidelines can help you recognize the warning signs of elder abuse, understand what the risk factors are, and learn how to prevent and report the problem.

Types of elder abuse

Abuse of elders takes many different forms, some involving intimidation or threats against the elderly, some involving neglect, and others involving financial trickery.

The most common are:

Physical elder abuse

The non-accidental use of force against an elderly person that results in physical pain, injury, or impairment. Such abuse includes not only physical assaults such as hitting or shoving but the inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, or confinement.

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

Emotional elder abuse

The treatment of an older adult in ways that cause emotional or psychological pain or distress, including:

Intimidation through yelling or threats.

Humiliation and ridicule.

Habitual blaming or scapegoating.

Ignoring the elderly person.

Isolating an elder from friends or activities.

Terrorizing or menacing the elderly person.

Sexual elder abuse

Contact with an elderly person without their consent. Such contact can involve physical sex acts, but activities such as showing an elderly person pornographic material, forcing the person to watch sex acts, or forcing the elder to undress are also considered sexual elder abuse

Financial exploitation

The unauthorized use of an elderly person's funds or property, either by a caregiver or an outside scam artist.

An unscrupulous caregiver might:

- Misuse an elder's personal checks, credit cards, or accounts.
- Steal cash, income checks, or household goods.
- Forge the elder's signature.
- Engage in identity theft.

Typical scams that target elders include:

- Announcement of a "prize" that the elderly person has won but must pay money to claim.
- Phony charities.
- Investment fraud.

Healthcare fraud and abuse

- Carried out by unethical doctors, nurses, hospital personnel, and other professional care providers. This can include:
 - Not providing healthcare, but charging for it.
 - Overcharging or double-billing for medical care or services.
 - Getting kickbacks for referrals to other providers or for prescribing certain drugs.
 - Overmedicating or undermedicating.
 - Recommending fraudulent remedies for illnesses or other medical conditions.
 - Medicaid fraud.

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

Elder neglect

Failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation. This constitutes more than half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It can be intentional or unintentional, based on factors such as ignorance or denial that an elderly charge needs as much care as they do.

Elder self-neglect

One of the most common forms of elder abuse encountered by geriatric care managers is self-neglect. Physical or mental impairment or diminished capacity can mean that an older adult is no longer able to perform essential self-care. They may lack basic personal hygiene, appear dehydrated, malnourished, or underweight, live in increasingly unsanitary or dirty conditions, and be unable to pay bills or properly manage their medications.

Self-neglect can be a sign of depression, grief, dementia, or other medical problem, and in many cases, the older person will refuse to seek assistance. They may be in denial, feel ashamed about needing help, or worried about losing their independence.

Warning signs of elder abuse

Signs of elder abuse can be difficult to recognize or mistaken for symptoms of dementia or the elderly person's frailty—or caregivers may explain them to you that way. In fact, many of the signs and symptoms of elder abuse do overlap with symptoms of mental deterioration, but that doesn't mean you should dismiss them on the caregiver's say-so.

Frequent arguments or tension between the caregiver and the elderly person or changes in the personality or behavior in the elder can be broad signals of elder abuse. If you suspect abuse, but aren't sure, you can look for clusters of the following warning signs.

Physical abuse warning signs

- Unexplained signs of injury, such as bruises, welts, or scars, especially if they appear symmetrically on two sides of the body.
- Broken bones, sprains, or dislocations.
- A report of drug overdose or an apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should).
- Broken eyeglasses or frames.
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on wrists.
- Caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the elder alone.

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

Emotional abuse warning signs

- Threatening, belittling, or controlling caregiver behavior.
- Behavior from the elder that mimics dementia, such as rocking, sucking, or mumbling to themselves.

Sexual abuse warning signs

- Bruises around breasts or genitals.
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding.
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.

Elder neglect or self-neglect warning signs

- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration.
- Untreated physical problems, such as bed sores.
- Unsanitary living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes.
- Being left dirty or unbathed.
- Unsuitable clothing or covering for the weather.
- Unsafe living conditions (no heat or running water; faulty electrical wiring; other fire hazards).
- Desertion of the elder at a public place.

Financial exploitation warning signs

- Significant withdrawals from the elder's accounts.
- Sudden changes in the elder's financial condition.
- Items or cash missing from the senior's household.
- Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles, and policies.
- Addition of names to the senior's signature card.
- Financial activity the senior couldn't have undertaken, such as an ATM withdrawal when the account holder is bedridden.
- Unnecessary services, goods, or subscriptions.
- Healthcare fraud or abuse warning signs
- Duplicate billings for the same medical service or device.

Evidence of overmedication or under-medication.

- Evidence of inadequate care when bills are paid in full.
- Problems with the care facility: poorly trained, poorly paid, or insufficient staff; crowding; inadequate responses to questions about care.

Risk factors for elder abuse

It's difficult to take care of a senior who has many different needs, and it's difficult to be elderly when age

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

brings with it infirmities and dependence. Both the demands of caregiving and the needs of the elder can create situations in which abuse is more likely to occur.

Many nonprofessional caregivers—spouses, adult children, other relatives and friends—find taking care of an elder to be satisfying and enriching. But the responsibilities and demands of caregiving, which escalate as the elder’s condition deteriorates, can also cause significant stress. The stress of elder care can lead to mental and physical health problems that leave caregivers burned out, impatient, and more susceptible to neglecting or lashing out at the elders in their care.

In addition to the caregiver’s inability to manage stress, other risk factors for elder abuse include:

- Depression in the caregiver.
- Lack of support from other potential caregivers.
- The caregiver’s perception that taking care of the elder is burdensome and without emotional reward.
- Substance abuse by the caregiver.
- The intensity of the elderly person’s illness or dementia.
- Social isolation—the elder and caregiver are alone together almost all the time.
- The elder’s role, at an earlier time, as an abusive parent or spouse.
- A history of domestic violence in the home.
- The elder’s own tendency toward verbal or physical aggression.

Even caregivers in institutional settings can experience stress at levels that lead to elder abuse. Nursing home staff may be prone to elder abuse if they lack training, have too many responsibilities, are unsuited to caregiving, or work under poor conditions.

Preventing elder abuse and neglect

If you’re a caregiver to an elderly person and feel you are in danger of hurting or neglecting them, help and support are available. Perhaps you’re having trouble controlling your anger and find yourself screaming louder and louder or lashing out at the person in your care? Or other people have expressed concern with your behavior or the tension between the two of you? Or maybe you simply feel emotionally disconnected or overwhelmed by the daily needs of the elderly person in your care?

Recognizing that you have a problem is the biggest step to getting help and preventing abuse.

Prevention tips if you’re a caregiver

As a caregiver, the following steps can help you prevent elder abuse or neglect:

- Take immediate steps to relieve stress and burnout. Stress is a major contributor to elder abuse and neglect. You can help reduce your stress levels by regularly practicing stress-relieving techniques such as yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises.
- Request help from friends, relatives, or local respite care agencies or find an adult daycare program. Every caregiver needs to take regular breaks from the stress of caring for an elder and to attend to their own needs, if only for a couple of hours.

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

- Learn techniques for getting your anger under control
- Take care of yourself. If you are not getting enough rest, you are much more likely to succumb to anger. Eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and take care of your own medical needs.
- Seek help for depression. Family caregivers are especially at risk for depression, but there are plenty of things you can do to boost your mood and outlook and overcome the problem.
- Find a support group for caregivers of the elderly. Sharing your concerns and experiences with others facing the same challenges can help relieve the isolation you may be feeling as a caregiver. It can also be a great place to gain valuable tips and insight into caring for an elder.
- Get help for any substance abuse issues. It's never easy, but there are plenty of actions you can take to address drug or alcohol abuse.
- Get professional help. If you can't seem to stop yourself no matter how hard you try, it's time to get help by talking to a therapist.

Prevention tips if you're a friend or neighbor

If you're a concerned friend, neighbor, or family member, the following can help to prevent abuse of an elderly person:

- Call and visit as often as you can, helping the elder to see you as a trusted confidante.
- Offer to stay with the elder so the caregiver can have a break—on a regular basis, if possible.
- Monitor the elder's medications to ensure the amounts being taken correspond with the prescription dates.
- Watch for financial abuse by asking the elder if you can check their bank accounts and credit card statements for unauthorized transactions.
- Identify the warning signs of abuse or neglect and report it without delay.

How to protect yourself from abuse as an elder

- Make sure your financial and legal affairs are in order. If they aren't, enlist professional help to get them in order, with the assistance of a trusted friend or relative if necessary.
- Keep in touch with family and friends and avoid becoming isolated.
- If you are unhappy with the care you're receiving, whether it's in your own home or in a care facility, speak up. Tell someone you trust or call an elder abuse helpline.

Reporting elder abuse

If you are an elder who is being abused, neglected, or exploited, tell at least one person. Tell your doctor, a friend, or a family member whom you trust. Or call one of the helplines listed below.

If you witness an older adult being abused or neglected, don't hesitate to report the situation. And if you see future incidences of abuse, continue to call and report them. Each elder abuse report is a snapshot of what is taking place. The more information that you can provide, the better the chance the elder has of getting the quality of care they need. Older adults can become increasingly isolated from society and, with no work to

Elder Abuse and Neglect

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm

attend, it can be easy for abuse cases to go unnoticed for long periods.

Many seniors don't report the abuse they face even if they're able. Some fear retaliation from the abuser, while others view having an abusive caretaker as better than having no caretaker and being forced to move out of their own home. When the caregivers are their children, they may feel ashamed that their children are inflicting harm or blame themselves: "If I'd been a better parent when they were younger, this wouldn't be happening." Or they just may not want children they love to get into trouble with the law. In any situation of elder abuse, it can be a real challenge to respect an older adult's right to autonomy while at the same time making sure they are properly cared for.

Reporting abuse by a caregiver

In the case of an elder experiencing abuse by a primary caregiver, such as an adult child:

- Do not confront the abuser yourself. This may put the older person in more danger unless you have the elder's permission and are able to immediately move them to alternative, safe care.
- Find strength in numbers. If a family caregiver is suspected of abuse, other family members may have the best chance of convincing the older adult to consider alternative care.
- Feelings of shame can often keep elder abuse hidden. You may not want to believe a family member could be capable of abusing a loved one, or you may even think that the older adult would be angry at you for speaking up. But the earlier you intervene in a situation of elder abuse, the better the outcome will be for everyone involved.

Reporting self-neglect

In the case of self-neglect:

- Even if the elder refuses your help, keep checking in with them. Enlist others to express their feelings of concern to them. Sometimes a peer or a neutral party, such as a geriatric care manager, may have a better chance of getting through.
- Make sure the older adult is connected with medical services. Since self-neglect can have medical causes, share your concerns with the elder's doctor if possible.
- Offer the elder home services on a trial basis. This can help them see the positive changes they can experience, and open them up to considering alternative care. For example, encourage them to try house-keeping help for a month or a meal delivery service for a few weeks.
- Tour assisted living or other senior housing facilities without any immediate pressure to move. This may help dispel any myths or eradicate the older person's fears about moving.
- Consider legal guardianship. If you are concerned that a person's ability to take care of themselves safely is compromised, you can look into legal guardianship or legal conservatorship. If there is not an appropriate family member available, a guardian can be appointed by the court.

Authors: Lawrence Robinson, Joanna Saisan, MSW, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.

What Is Sexual Assault?

www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault

Sexual assault can take many different forms, but one thing remains the same: it's never the victim's fault.

What is sexual assault?

The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

Attempted rape

- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body
- Penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape

What is rape?

Rape is a form of sexual assault, but not all sexual assault is rape. The term rape is often used as a legal definition to specifically include sexual penetration without consent. For its Uniform Crime Reports, the FBI defines rape as "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." To see how your state legally defines rape and other forms of sexual assault, visit RAINN's State Law Database.

What is force?

Force doesn't always refer to physical pressure. Perpetrators may use emotional coercion, psychological force, or manipulation to coerce a victim into non-consensual sex. Some perpetrators will use threats to force a victim to comply, such as threatening to hurt the victim or their family or other intimidation tactics.

Who are the perpetrators?

The majority of perpetrators are someone known to the victim. Approximately eight out of 10 sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, such as in the case of intimate partner sexual violence or acquaintance rape.

The term "date rape" is sometimes used to refer to acquaintance rape. Perpetrators of acquaintance rape might be a date, but they could also be a classmate, a neighbor, a friend's significant other, or any number of different roles. It's important to remember that dating, instances of past intimacy, or other acts like kissing do not give someone consent for increased or continued sexual contact.

In other instances the victim may not know the perpetrator at all. This type of sexual violence is sometimes referred to as stranger rape.

Stranger rape can occur in several different ways:

- Blitz sexual assault: when a perpetrator quickly and brutally assaults the victim with no prior contact, usually at night in a public place
- Contact sexual assault: when a perpetrator contacts the victim and tries to gain their trust by flirting, luring the victim to their car, or otherwise trying to coerce the victim into a situation where the sexual assault will occur
- Home invasion sexual assault: when a stranger breaks into the victim's home to commit the assault
- Survivors of both stranger rape and acquaintance rape often blame themselves for behaving in a way that encouraged the perpetrator. It's important to remember that the victim is never to blame for the actions of a perpetrator.

To speak with someone who is trained to help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or chat online at online.rainn.org.

Getting/Being Help for Sexual Assault, Abuse, or Rape

www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/bullying-safety-privacy/sexual-assault-abuse-rape

What should I do if someone sexually assaulted, abused, or raped me?

If you experienced sexual assault, abuse, or rape, you may be feeling shocked, scared, and uncertain of what to do next.

Here's what to do right away:

1. **Get to someplace safe as soon as possible.** Your safety is important. Depending on where you are, you might want to get to an area with more people, or find someone to help you.
2. Once you're in a safe place, **don't change anything on your body.** You don't have to decide right away if you're going to talk with the police or press charges. But just in case you do, it's super important that the police have the evidence that may be on your body. So don't take a shower or bath or wash off any parts of your body. Also if you can, don't go to the bathroom, comb your hair, eat, smoke, drink, or take any drugs. If you change your clothes, take the clothes you were wearing during the assault to the hospital or police department in a paper bag.
3. **Tell a parent, guardian, or another adult in your life who you trust.** They can help you figure out what to do next, which might include seeing a doctor or nurse for an exam or calling the police.
4. **See a doctor or nurse.** Medical care is important after a sexual assault. You can go to the emergency room or you may be able to go to your nearest Planned Parenthood health center.

The doctors and nurses who take care of people after sexual assault are usually specially trained. They know how to be gentle, caring, and sensitive. They will:

- Examine you to see if you were harmed in any way
- Give you medical care that may include emergency contraception (if there is a risk of pregnancy), tests for STDs, and medicine to help prevent HIV (post-exposure prophylactics).
- Collect evidence, so you have the option to press charges if you decide that's right for you. Evidence might include semen, hair, or skin cells from the person who assaulted you.

5. **Get help from an expert.** The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network offers a 24-hour, 7-day a week hotline. www.rainn.org They can tell you about your options and connect you with local resources. A rape crisis center in your area can help you find a doctor or nurse, counselor, and other support. Your nearest Planned Parenthood health center may also be able to help.

6. **Decide if you want to talk to the police.** Sexual assault is a crime, and you have the right to report it to the police if you want to. You can call them yourself or ask a rape crisis counselor or a parent, guardian, or someone else you trust to do it for you. The police will ask you questions, and they'll also talk to you about whether or not you want to press charges.

If you choose to speak with the police, you may want to have someone with you for support. If a police officer asks to speak with you alone, you don't have to unless you want to. You can have someone you trust like a family member or friend there, or have a trained advocate with you. RAINN may be able to connect you with one of these advocates.

Getting/Being Help for Sexual Assault, Abuse, or Rape

www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/bullying-safety-privacy/sexual-assault-abuse-rape

7. No matter what, **remember that what happened wasn't your fault.** Sometimes people think it's their fault if the attacker is a friend, family member, or person they were dating. It's still not your fault in any of those situations. Even if you started doing something sexual with this person but didn't want to continue and they forced you anyway, it's still not your fault. What you were wearing or drinking or how you were acting doesn't make it your fault. You didn't ask for this and you didn't deserve it.

It can take a lot of time to feel safe again after abuse or sexual assault. Talking to a therapist or counselor who's trained to work with sexual assault, abuse, and rape survivors can really help. So can connecting with other people who have been through the same thing, like a support group or with people you already know. You're not alone. Unfortunately, many people experience sexual abuse, assault, or rape at some point in their lives. You can get through this — and there are people who can help.

How can I help a friend who was sexually assaulted?

One of the biggest things you can do is to just be there. Here are some basic dos and don'ts for helping a friend who's been raped, abused, or assaulted:

Do:

- Listen to their story and believe them
- Tell them that what happened wasn't their fault
- Share resources like RAINN, your nearest rape crisis service, or your nearest Planned Parenthood health center with them
- Encourage them to talk with a trusted adult if they haven't already
- Offer to go with them to get help

Don't:

- Tell them how they could've avoided what happened
- Tell anyone else what happened unless they ask you to
- Pressure them into talking with the police
- Threaten to hurt the person who hurt them

Dealing with any kind of sexual violence takes time. They might not even think of it as assault/abuse/rape right away. There's no such thing as a "right way" for someone to react.

It's also really important to take care of yourself when you're trying to be there for a friend who's been hurt. Hearing about the sexual violence of someone you love, even when you're not the one it happened to, can be really upsetting.

RAINN has really great information on how hearing about this stuff might make you feel and how you can take care of yourself. www.rainn.org

Sexual Assault of Men and Boys

www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault-men-and-boys

Sexual assault can happen to anyone, no matter your age, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Men and boys who have been sexually assaulted or abused may have many of the same feelings and reactions as other survivors of sexual assault, but they may also face some additional challenges because of social attitudes and stereotypes about men and masculinity.

Common reactions

Men and boys who have been sexually assaulted may experience the same effects of sexual assault as other survivors, and they may face other challenges that are more unique to their experience.

Some men who have survived sexual assault as adults feel shame or self-doubt, believing that they should have been “strong enough” to fight off the perpetrator. Many men who experienced an erection or ejaculation during the assault may be confused and wonder what this means. These normal physiological responses do not in any way imply that you wanted, invited, or enjoyed the assault. If something happened to you, know that it is not your fault and you are not alone.

Men who were sexually abused as boys or teens may also respond differently than men who were sexually assaulted as adults. The following list includes some of the common experiences shared by men and boys who have survived sexual assault. It is not a complete list, but it may help you to know that other people are having similar experiences:

- Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, flashbacks, and eating disorders
- Avoiding people or places that remind you of the assault or abuse
- Concerns or questions about sexual orientation
- Fear of the worst happening and having a sense of a shortened future
- Feeling like "less of a man" or that you no longer have control over your own body
- Feeling on-edge, being unable to relax, and having difficulty sleeping
- Sense of blame or shame over not being able to stop the assault or abuse, especially if you experienced an erection or ejaculation
- Withdrawal from relationships or friendships and an increased sense of isolation
- Worrying about disclosing for fear of judgment or disbelief

Who are the perpetrators of sexual assault against men and boys?

Perpetrators can be any gender identity, sexual orientation, or age, and they can have any relationship to the victim. Like all perpetrators, they might use physical force or psychological and emotional coercion tactics.

Can being assaulted affect sexual orientation?

Sexual assault is in no way related to the sexual orientation of the perpetrator or the survivor, and a person’s sexual orientation cannot be caused by sexual abuse or assault. Some men and boys have questions about their sexuality after surviving an assault or abuse—and that’s understandable. This can be especially true if you experienced an erection or ejaculation during the assault. Physiological responses like an erection are involuntary, meaning you have no control over them.