

## **Sexual and Domestic Violence**

### **Definition**

Domestic Violence is the use or threat of force by a member of a family or household, boyfriend or girlfriend, members of a former relationship, or other relative against another member of the same family or household. The goal of domestic violence is domination and control.

Emotional abuse can be a major part of domestic violence. Emotional abuse usually involves an abuser constantly doing or saying things to shame, insult, tease, embarrass, belittle or mentally hurt and isolate another person. Emotional abuse can include constant criticism, manipulation through threats, humiliation, name calling, embarrassment, mind games, isolation, cutting off support systems, controlling your money, captivity, brainwashing, the silent treatment and ignoring your feelings.

### **Prevalence in Virginia**

Domestic violence is far from an isolated problem. Each year, the Virginia Department of Social Services provides services to tens of thousands of men, women, and children, who have been victims of domestic abuse. Virginia domestic violence shelters provide a safe refuge for some victims, but many others are turned away because of a lack of capacity. Hotlines receive thousands of calls each month, both from victims of domestic abuse and from concerned friends, family members, and professionals working with victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and stalking.

### **If You are Being Abused**

If someone you love or once loved has abused or threatened you, there is a good chance it may happen again. It may even get worse. You can't tell when a person will try to threaten or abuse you. But you can think ahead about how to reduce risks for you, your children, or others in your care. This is called safety planning. The

following information will help you plan for your safety.

**If you want to talk, call the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-838-8238).**

To get started, first think about ...

- Where and when you might be in danger: Are you living with your abuser?
- Do you work at the same place?
- Do you have children with this person?
- Do you have the same friends or visit the same family members?
- Do you shop in the same places?
- Will you be going to court at the same time?
- Are there other times or places when you might not be safe?

Then think about...what you can do to be safe. These are ideas that other domestic violence victims have shared:

- When things seem very dangerous, try to think about ways to calm things down. This might give you time to think about what to do next.
- Tell people about what is happening and let them know how they can help. Examples: tell your neighbors and ask them to call the police if they see or hear any fights or tell your employer and make a plan for what to do if your abuser shows up at work.
- If you sense that your partner is about to become violent, try to get to a place where there is a door and/or phone.
- If you don't live with the abuser, try to change your routine. Shop and bank in a different place than usual, get rides with friends or take someone along when you go out, or change your phone number and your locks.
- Remember that you don't deserve to be hit or threatened. You can act to protect yourself.

Take Warning Signs Seriously. There may be signs that you are at high risk of your abuser hurting you if:

- You have recently left your abuser and your abuser threatens to kill you or to kill himself or herself,
- The threats and violence against you have become more and more violent or sick,

- You are going to court about criminal charges or custody and your abuser's making more threats instead of backing down
- Your abuser has threatened you or used a weapon against you before and can find a weapon again
- You are doing "better" than your abuser...getting on with your life, making more money, or getting more support and your abuser seems to be very jealous and is making new threats,
- Your abuser seems to feel he or she has nothing to lose...

Act to protect yourself:

- Try not to be alone.
- Think about moving.
- Call a domestic violence program or the hotline..now.
- Seek shelter.
- Keep your children with you.
- Get a protective order and keep it on you (it is good wherever you go in the United States).
- Write down threats made against you.

Domestic violence is a serious crime in Virginia. Police and sheriffs have been trained to answer your call, to make an arrest, collect evidence, and to request a protective order to keep you safe. When you call the police, tell them: if your abuser has any weapons, if anyone saw or heard the abuse, and if you have any injuries or damaged property.

Safety planning works. Others who have been where you are have told us it can work. You can't change your abuser, but you can act to protect yourself. This information may help. Every day, victims of domestic violence take action that is the beginning of putting an end to the violence in their lives. It may take more than one try, even more than two or three, but it happens. You can make it happen.

Local domestic violence programs can offer safe shelter to you, your children and sometimes your pet. Domestic violence programs have people you can talk to any time, day or night. They also have trained staff to go with you to court when you need them. Some programs can help you to get cell phones or alarm systems to increase your safety. **To reach the program nearest you, call 1-800-838-8238.**

## Costs

Providers working in the field of domestic violence know that their work is about the healing and rebuilding of lives. Therefore, public and private not-for-profit domestic violence services rarely charge a fee for their programs. When fees are collected for services associated with a domestic violence program, such as child care, they are usually based upon income and a sliding scale fee. Typically, a woman staying in a domestic violence shelter is encouraged to use any service of the agency, at no cost, to improve her life. Private resources that work in domestic violence, such as therapists or counselors, may charge a higher fee.

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Last Reviewed

Thursday, March 21, 2024