

wholewoman

Essential information for mums

# Fact

One in four women experiences domestic violence at some time in their lives.

# Fact

Mums and their children don't have to face it alone.

# The signs

## **Does your husband, partner or ex:**

- Call you names and put you down?
- Threaten and/or frighten you?
- Physically hurt you?
- Force you to have sex or do other sexual acts against your wishes?
- Control what you do, where you go and who you see?

- Allow or encourage other family members to be abusive towards you?
- Take or keep money from you?
- Harm your pets or destroy your belongings?
- Stalk you?

**If any of these sound familiar, remember you are not alone and you can get help.**

# Domestic violence can affect anyone.

It usually happens between two people who are in a relationship now or have been in the past. It is usually men being abusive to women, and sometimes there are other family members involved. But men can experience it too, and it can also happen in same-sex relationships.

Domestic violence can include physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Some women will face all these forms of cruelty; others experience one or two. It is always devastating and you need support.

**Some women say that the emotional hurt is the worst part of domestic violence.**

You might feel:

- isolated
- frightened of the person who is hurting you
- angry or upset that someone you may love is treating you this way
- confused because sometimes this person is loving or charming
- powerless or lacking in confidence
- tired and depressed
- ashamed
- guilty
- unable to give your children all the care and attention you would like to give them.

**It's time to act.**

““ The emotional scars take longer to heal than the physical scars; the pain is with you everywhere you go. ””

(Mother, St Helens)

## **Domestic violence can have a damaging effect on your children.**

They often know a lot more about what's going on than you realise. It is very common for children to see or overhear physical violence. They will also be able to pick up on how your partner treats you generally. Even babies and very young children know when something is wrong.

““ When I was little and I knew he was due in I used to put my head on the floor of the bedroom and listen. ””

(Girl, 15, Macclesfield)

## **Children who have witnessed domestic violence are often:**

- afraid
- withdrawn
- angry
- lacking in confidence
- suffering from health or sleeping problems
- struggling at school
- ashamed to bring friends home
- violent or showing other behaviour problems
- physically hurt or abused.

**Some children who have lived with domestic violence explain how it feels:**

**“ You feel low and lonely. ”**

(Boy, 10, Belfast)

**“ It makes children feel sad and upset, but they pretend that everything is OK. ”**

(Girl, 10, St Helens)

**“ You feel heartbroken. ”**

(Girl, 8, Leeds)

You can make things better for your children.

**Children often get caught in the middle of domestic violence situations, and feel that they have to defend one parent against the other.**

It can be very confusing and upsetting for them. Sometimes children can blame themselves for the violence, thinking that it's happening because of them.

Children may hide their feelings or problems from you because they think you have enough to deal with.

“ You feel responsible,  
like maybe if you weren't there  
they wouldn't be arguing. ”

(Girl, 14, Liverpool)

**Many women will say that they are staying in a relationship for the sake of their children.**

But domestic violence often starts during pregnancy and can get worse as your children grow up. If your partner is abusing you, there's a much greater chance that your children will be harmed too.

**Remember:** living with domestic violence is always harmful for children – they need a safe environment in which to grow up.

You and your children have the right to live your lives free from abuse and fear.

**Many women describe living with an abusive partner as being in a no-win situation.**

Nothing they do seems to stop the abuse.

“ No matter what you do, you can never get it right in his eyes. He was always moving the goal posts and setting me up to fail so that then he could punish me. ”

(Mother, Haywards Heath)

You must remember that domestic violence is **never your fault**. Your partner is responsible for their own behaviour, and it's not up to you to change them. No one has the right to hurt or intimidate either you or your children. Someone who is supposed to care about you should not treat you this way. There is never any excuse for domestic violence.

# What can you do?

“ Sit your children down and talk to them – explain that it’s not their fault. ”

(Boy, 13, Liverpool)

Talk to your children, if you can, and listen to how they feel. Understanding how they feel might help you make a decision about the best thing for you to do. Asking for help will protect your children. If you are in an abusive relationship, but don't think you can leave, there is still help and support available. The sooner you get help for you and your children the sooner things can start to improve.

# Don't be afraid to act

“ For me the first step was the hardest. But often you are stronger than you realise, and once I got help I haven't looked back.” (Mother, Cardiff)

Many women say they are afraid to ask for help as they think their children will be taken away from them.

Seeking help **does not** mean you will lose your children. It is very rare that children are taken away from their mothers as a result of asking for help.

Remember you are not the one in the wrong.

# Getting help

There is help for you and your children whenever you feel strong enough to ask for it. You don't have to deal with domestic violence on your own; there are people who will understand your situation and support you.

The first step is to tell someone you trust, like a family member or a friend. If you can, try to speak to a professional, like your doctor or health visitor. They can tell you how to protect yourself and your children, and what help is available locally.

“ Once I got help  
everything changed for  
the better, my children  
could be children again.”

(Mother, Stockton-on-Tees)

There is also help available for your children to help them cope with their feelings. Children are able to recover from the effects of domestic violence as long as they know they are safe and no longer feel afraid.

# Keep on asking

If the first person you speak to can't help you, keep trying until you get the support you need. You can always call a helpline and speak to a professional who is used to working with people who live with domestic violence.

The helpline numbers on the following pages are of organisations that provide practical help and support so that children are not separated from their mothers, but can live without the fear of domestic violence.

## National Domestic Violence Helpline

Tel: 0808 200 0247

(Calls to this number may show up on phone bills.  
Check with your telephone company)

Email: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk)

A free, 24-hour helpline for women or children experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic violence.

## NSPCC Helpline

Tel: 0808 800 5000

(Calls made from mobiles may  
show up on bills)

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

A free, 24-hour helpline  
that provides counselling,  
information and advice to  
parents, and anyone worried  
about the safety and wellbeing  
of a child.



## **National Child Protection Helpline (Scotland)**

**Tel: 0800 022 3222**

**[www.infoscotland.com/childprotection](http://www.infoscotland.com/childprotection)**

The helpline provides information to the public about what steps to take if they are concerned about a child and may be contacted 24hrs a day.

**In an emergency call 999 for help.**

## Useful websites for your children

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

ChildLine is the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people. The website offers information and advice, and trained volunteers are on hand to provide advice and support, by phone and online, 24 hours a day. Whenever and wherever children need us, we'll be there.

[www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

Provides help, information and advice for children and young people living with domestic violence. Visits to the site can be hidden using the on-screen instructions.

With thanks to the women  
and children using NSPCC  
services who helped to write  
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**NSPCC** ™  
**Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.**

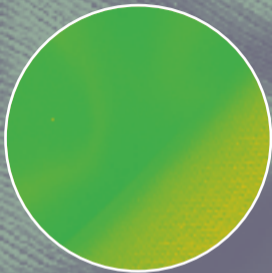
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