

# A Guide for Women who may be experiencing Domestic Violence



Are you worried about how you are being treated by your partner or husband, boyfriend, family member or carer?

It can be difficult to recognise the signs of abuse.

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour carried out by a family member or other significant relationship (e.g. de-facto partner, parent to child) that is threatening or harmful to other members of the family or relationship. It involves the use of power and control by one person over another or others, and results in fear, distress and often isolation.

There are other types of violence that can occur in families and relationships. These are not necessarily linked to behaviour patterns of power and control, but they can be harmful to individuals and to family and community harmony. All violence is unacceptable.

Remember, you are not to blame for the abuse. You have a right to feel safe and to live free from violence and intimidation.

## HOW MIGHT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BE AFFECTING ME?

All forms of violence have damaging consequences. Your confidence can become worn down by abuse.

*If you have been in an abusive relationship you may feel:*

- Afraid to tell anyone
- Worried that it's your fault
- Depressed and alone
- Confused
- Scared of coping on your own
- Scared it will get worse if you leave
- Worried about what others will think
- Afraid that no-one will believe you
- Frustrated and sad because you've tried everything.

**Emotional abuse:** When someone regularly puts you down, criticises you, threatens to stop you from seeing your family or children, or threatens to commit suicide if you leave the relationship.

**Spiritual abuse:** Preventing you from making or keeping connections with your religious ceremonies or practices or preventing you from expressing your spiritual identity.

**Social abuse:** When someone prevents you from seeing your friends and family, makes you feel guilty about socialising or working, constantly checks up on your whereabouts.

**Financial abuse:** When your partner/family member takes control of your financial affairs and you don't want them to, preventing you from accessing money.

**Sexual abuse:** When someone makes you do sexual things that you don't want to do.

**Stalking:** When a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you say you don't want this contact.

**Physical abuse:** Includes pushing, hitting, throwing objects, driving dangerously to frighten you, threatening to physically harm you, other people, children or pets.

**Neglect:** Denying you from having adequate or appropriate food, shelter, and/or clothing

## IS THIS AFFECTING MY CHILDREN?

Children can't feel safe or happy if their mother is being hurt. They may feel frightened or helpless. Some children may try to protect you, or they might feel angry and blame you. Some children may even think it is their fault.

Children may:

- Feel unwell with stomach cramps or headaches
- Have trouble concentrating at school
- Have difficulty with friendships
- 'Act out' or withdraw
- Learn that violence can give them control over others.

## YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME

Some abusers try to damage the relationship between a mother and her children.

The abuser may:

- Tell your children that you are a 'bad mother'
- Encourage your children to ignore what you say
- Stop you from attending to your children
- Be jealous of your pregnancy or when you are breastfeeding your baby

## WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CHILDREN

A warm and supportive relationship with you or another family member makes a positive difference for your children. You can:

- ♥ Give lots of cuddles
- ♥ Tell them you love them
- ♥ Ask them how they feel, listen and give them opportunities to talk about the violence
- ♥ Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault
- ♥ Show them respect and help them show respect for others
- ♥ Let them know it is not their role to protect you
- ♥ Let them know that other children have similar experiences and that feeling upset is normal
- ♥ Get help and support for your children and for yourself

## WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

No-one likes, asks for or deserves to live with abuse or violence. Working out what to do can be hard.

Your safety is important. Whether you decide to stay or leave the relationship:

- ➔ Plan where you can go and who you can call in an emergency
- ➔ Keep important items together in a safe place in case you need to leave suddenly – such as birth certificates, bank card, Centrelink details, money, medication, keys, clothes. Or leave these things with a trusted family member or friend.
- ➔ Teach your children what to do and who to call if they don't feel safe.
- ➔ Talk to someone you trust. You don't have to go through this alone. Talking about the abuse and how you feel can help you decide what to do. Talk to a friend, a family member, or a counsellor. Whoever you talk to shouldn't judge you.

*'As people of faith, we cannot remain silent in the face of violence. We reject any behaviour which erodes the human person and diminishes their unique identity and dignity.'*

**Most Rev Anthony Randazzo, 2020**

## SERVICES THAT CAN HELP A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

POLICE – Call '000' for immediate assistance

### 1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732

A national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling and advice service.  
24 hours, 7 days a week.

### FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Call 131 450 for an interpreter

### CATHOLIC CARE BROKEN BAY

Central Coast: 02 4356 2600

Northern Beaches: 02 8043 2600

Naremburn: 02 8425 8700

Waitara: 02 9488 2400

