

tip sheet

Are you using violence or abuse in your family or intimate relationships?

Talk it over
**Mens
Line**
AUSTRALIA

Family violence is any abusive behaviour in a family or intimate relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over another. Violence is usually the most direct means chosen to have power and control over another person.

Family violence can take many forms including physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, social or financial control and it is important to remember that abuse does not have to be physical or sexual to be considered family violence. Whereas both men and women can use abusive behaviour and violence in their relationships, most family and intimate partner violence is perpetuated by men.

How will you know?

Do you?

- Use any form of physical violence, intimidation or assault – including unwanted sexual activity?
- Use emotional and psychological means to control another's behaviour – name calling, belittling, continuous criticism, or exclusion?
- Threaten and put pressure on another – threatening to leave, to harm yourself, or not support the family?
- Restrict another's behaviour – going everywhere with them, questioning what they have been doing, stopping them from contacting family or friends, isolating them from support, dictating what they can or cannot do?
- Exhibit negative behaviour when faced with stress in your life, including family disagreements, or when you have been drinking or using drugs?

● Justify your violent and abusive behaviour by:

- **Denying its occurrence** - 'I wasn't being abusive'
- **Minimising its impact** - 'I only pushed her, she wasn't hurt'
- **Justifying your actions** - 'If she stopped annoying me, I wouldn't have had to do it'
- **Blaming others** - 'It's not my fault' or 'I'm under a lot of pressure at the moment'
- **Deflecting responsibility** - 'I didn't know what I was doing' or 'I was drunk'
- **Avoiding the issue** - 'I don't know why I hit her'

If you identify yourself in the statements above, it is time to take responsibility for your actions and control your behaviour.

What problems can it lead to?

There is no justification for using violence and abuse in your family or intimate relationships. The consequences for you and the other person can be significant and include:

- Suffering physically, emotionally, psychologically and with significant and lasting impact
- Break down and loss of important relationships, including access to children rights, and financial loss
- Legal action, with long-term impact on freedom, lifestyle and employment
- Loss of social networks and exclusion from your friends and community

1300 78 99 78
mensline.org.au

MensLine Australia is a professional telephone and online support, information and referral service for men, specialising in family and relationship concerns.

Common questions and concerns

“Is the violence affecting my children?”

Family violence has severe impacts for children who witness it. It is now known that witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly. Parents often believe that they have shielded their children from spousal violence, but research shows that children see or hear some 40% to 80% of it.

Children who witness family violence can experience feelings of fear, anger, depression, anxiety and shame. They may experience physical symptoms such as stomach cramps, headaches and sleeping problems.

Children who witness the violence suffer the same consequences as those who are directly abused. In other words, a child who witnesses spousal violence is experiencing a form of child abuse.

“Will I go to jail?”

Violence is a criminal offence, and some other forms of abuse and control are similarly viewed as illegal activities. Your chances of going to jail or being in trouble with the law increase if you do not take responsibility and change your behaviour.

“It feels hopeless. I’m not sure I can overcome it.”

You may feel your behaviour can’t be changed, especially when you are in the middle of a crisis. Overcoming the problem is not easy, but with the right support, you can start to do things differently.

Your future can be different if you reach out for help now.

What can you do?

Accept that you have a problem - Own your problem of violence and abuse. It is your responsibility to do something to stop the violence and abuse. Calling on other people and resources for support is important, but unless you understand that you must commit to changing, the likelihood of fixing the problem will be greatly reduced.

Stop using violence and abuse - If you can’t do this, then you must ensure that you are no longer in a situation where it can occur. This may mean temporarily leaving the environment where you are causing damage to others, restricting your contact or only being in that environment

when there are other people around other than your intimate family or intimate relationship.

Take proactive steps – Usually the best time to start to fix a problem is when things in your relationship are settled and stable, not at a time of crisis or in the middle of an argument. When things are settled, conversations with everybody involved are usually more helpful.

Put in effort – Changing long-term patterns of behaviour can take considerable time and effort. Be prepared to work on the problem for a while to reduce its impact on your relationships and be ready for challenging times when your commitment will be tested.

Get assistance – Few men are able to change these patterns of behaviour and thinking without ongoing support. It is important to find someone who has an understanding of the issues you are facing and can help you think through reasons for your behaviour and plan strategies for managing it in the future. Call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 for information, support and services in your local area.

Develop strategies – Gain understanding of situations and circumstances when violence and abuse has occurred in the past. Find ways to avoid or better manage these situations and create positive strategies to deal with arguments or conflict. Learn the right time to step away from a situation to give yourself time and space to think clearly so the situation doesn’t get worse.

Work on associated issues – Make a commitment to understanding and working on all of the factors that led to the behaviour occurring, not just the immediate signs.

Support and resources

There are programs, groups and telephone services that specifically deal with family violence issues.

MensLine Australia offers 24/7 professional non judgemental and anonymous support for any family violence concern. MensLine Australia offer telephone anger management and behavioural change programs alongside a call back service which can provide professional ongoing support. You can also book an online counselling appointment at mensline.org.au

This tip sheet is part of a series of self-help tools for men. More tools can be found at mensline.org.au. For more information and assistance, call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78.

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