

INTRO TO ABUSE

On this page, you will find information on types of abuse and how to spot signs for each.

Anybody can experience abuse. Abuse can occur to people of all ages, cultures, sexual orientations, religions and ethnicities, to people with disabilities, and regardless of financial status.

Definition

The **UK Government defines domestic violence and abuse as:**

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, economic and emotional forms of abuse. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a person.”

Abuse is a crime. All forms of gender-based violence are crimes in the UK.

In line with these definitions, sTandTall uses the term 'domestic abuse' as an umbrella term, referencing all categories of abuse or gender-based violence, including but not limited to:

Psychological & Emotional

Physical

Sexual Abuse & Rape

Financial

Spiritual & Cultural

Stalking

Bullying

FGM

Forced Marriage

No matter what abuse you're going through, sTandTall is here to support you.

Domestic Abuse

What is Domestic Abuse?

Sometimes it can be difficult for someone who is in an abusive relationship to realise that they are being abused. The perpetrator may not always act abusively; sometimes they may be loving and kind.

The questions below can help identify whether abuse is taking place.

Does your partner, friend, carer, or a family member:

- Make you feel uncomfortable or afraid?
- Often put you down or make fun of you?
- Always monitor what you do and where you go?
- Try to stop you from seeing your own friends or family?
- Control your money, spending, or simply take money away from you?
- Make you feel afraid to disagree or say 'no' to them?
- Tell others that you make things up?
- Scare or hurt you by being violent or threatening you?
- Pressure or force you to perform sexual acts that you don't want to do?
- Insist on visiting the doctor with you?
- Say they will take your children away from you if you do something with which they disagree?
- Tell you no one will believe you if you tell them what is happening to you?
- Threaten to hurt you, or people around you, if you decide to end the relationship?

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above questions, then you may be experiencing domestic abuse.

It is still abuse...

- If these things happen rarely.
- If sometimes they are loving, kind, give you gifts and/or go above and beyond to make you happy.
- If no one sees it but you. Your family, friends and those around you may see the abuser as a charming and loving person, but they are not experiencing what you are, and you should not be afraid to tell them.
- If they blame their actions on you. They are still the one committing abuse.

Remember, if you are being abused, **it's not your fault**. Just because someone has treated you badly, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. They are the one to blame. You are not to blame for the abuse.

It can be hard to admit you are being abused when you love or depend on that person, but you deserve to have healthy, respectful relationships in your life.

In the sections below, we explain different types of domestic abuse in detail. Identifying the type or types of abuse you may be going through can help you reach out to the right organisations when you are ready to start looking for help and advice.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or scared, please know there are people who can help and support you - you are not alone. If you need to talk to someone immediately call the 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on: 0808 2000 247.

Emotional & Psychological Abuse

What is Emotional & Psychological Abuse?

Emotional & psychological abuse can be wide and varied. It can be hard to identify emotional & psychological abuse because it doesn't leave physical signs. But it happens often and is just as serious and harmful as physical abuse.

You can tell whether the behaviour is abusive by how it makes you feel. If you feel like a person is stopping you from being able to be yourself, they are being **abusive**.

If a person's behaviour makes you feel small, controlled or you feel unable to talk about what's wrong, **it's abusive**.

If you feel you have to change your actions to accommodate the person's behaviour, **it's abusive**.

If you have to watch what you say in front of someone for fear of how they might react, **it's abusive**.

Below you will find information on: **Gaslighting, Control, Coercion & Manipulation, Narcissism, Exploitation & Blackmailing**. These are all types of emotional & psychological abuse.

Gaslighting

What is Gaslighting?

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation. A gaslighter will lie and distort the truth to make you question your own **memory, reality, perception and sanity**.

Gaslighting can seem harmless at first, as you might think maybe you did forget about a certain detail or got confused about how things happened.

But it is one of the most serious means of emotional abuse, as it slowly eats away your self-confidence. Over time, you begin to believe the lies your abuser is feeding you, and you may second-guess what you know to be the truth; what you know to be reality.

You might feel confused and isolated, and end up turning to the person gaslighting you for direction and to help point to what's real and what's true. That is the gaslighters' goal - to manipulate your thoughts and exercise control over you.

Signs of Gaslighting

Below are common things a gaslighter might say or do:

You question them about something they said or did and they deny it ever happened. Even if you have proof, they find a way to ignore it or turn it against you.

They constantly lie. They might lie to turn you against your friends and family, making you feel like the only person you can trust is the them.

They embarrass you by telling others you are lying or are crazy. They say you remember certain events wrong (when you do not), or say you are confused, or claim something happened when it didn't.

You ask them to do something and they don't. When you question them, they say you never asked in the first place - that you are making it up.

You lack the energy or are scared to challenge things they say, because they always find a way to twist your words and make you feel in the wrong.

Example of Gaslighting

My son has to pay my bills as I don't work anymore. He gives me cash every month on the 1st, and he usually brings it in person or sends it through my grandson when either of them come to visit me. Last month my grandson forgot to bring it when he visited. He said he would bring it next week. When I asked him about it the following week he said he had already given me the cash. I knew he hadn't because I immediately go to the bank with it to pay my bills, but when I questioned him he said he had and I must have misplaced it or forgotten. When I spoke to my son, he said he had sent the cash and that my grandson assured him he'd passed it to me. But I am certain that he didn't and when I spoke to some friends about the situation, they made me aware of gaslighting. I know I am older and my memory is not as sharp as it used to be, but I trust myself in this instance and I know I didn't forget or misplace the cash, but that my grandson never gave it to me and is trying to make me believe he did.

If you wish to read more about the gaslighting, you can visit this page on [Psychology Today's](#) website.

Control, Coercion & Manipulation

What is Controlling & Coercive Behaviour?

Power and control are at the centre of abuse.

Controlling behaviour: An abuser uses control so that you behave in a way that pleases them. They manipulate you to get something they want, without being honest or asking for it directly.

Examples of controlling behaviour include: telling someone they can't do certain things, isolating them from their friends/family, regulating their behaviour, such as what they eat or how they dress. These behaviours occur repeatedly, causing serious long-lasting effects on your emotional & psychological well-being.

Coercive behaviour: in 2015, coercive control was introduced as a crime under new UK legislation. Its legal definition is "a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim" (Home Office, 2015).

Signs of Controlling & Coercive Behaviour

There are many ways in which an abuser can be controlling and coercive. Below are some examples:

They limit how much time you spend with your friends or family, or don't allow you to see them at all. This is a type of social abuse which can leave someone feeling isolated and alone. The consequence of this is that it removes your support system and isolates you.

They will remind you of an occurrence that you feel bad about to "guilt trip" or manipulate you into doing something for them.

They control where you go, who you see or the people you speak to.

They verbally assault you in order to put you down and shatter your self-confidence. Examples include: "you are unattractive, no one will ever love you, you are stupid, I am the best thing that will ever happen to you".

They persuade you to change something about yourself. This may include altering aspects of your personality or appearance to make you "more loveable". For example, they might not let you wear tight clothes because they think they're "too revealing".

Example of Controlling & Coercive Behaviour

When I first started seeing my partner he would constantly forget his keys and phone. To help him out I gave him access to my phone and facebook passwords so he could contact people if he needed to. After a while, he would start going on my phone without my permission. He would demand to look at my messages and would log onto my Facebook when I wasn't there. He used the GPS on my phone to track me. He told me this was so he could make sure I was safe, but he would call me up angry if I took a different route home from work, or left the office late. I felt guilty if I went somewhere on my own or talked to certain friends because he would get upset and angry.

If you want more information on controlling and coercive behaviour go to the [UK Gov's website](#). If you wish to read more about the signs, you can visit this page on [Psychology Today's](#) website.

Narcissism

What is Narcissism?

The term 'narcissist' describes someone who is focussed on themselves to an unhealthy level and lacks the ability to empathise with others.

Narcissists usually hide behind an idealised version of themselves. They strive to always be the centre of attention, and they are often impatient and demanding. In some cases a narcissist can become abusive as a defence mechanism, or as a way to cope with their own problems and insecurities.

The spectrum for narcissism is wide, and in extreme cases some people can suffer from [Narcissistic Personality Disorder](#) (NPD).

Not all those who abuse are narcissists, and not all narcissists will become abusers.

However, recognising if your abuser is a narcissist can be very important in understanding how to deal with your situation.

Signs of Narcissism

Below are some examples of how an abuser who is a narcissist might act:

They think the world revolves around their wishes and their sense of self-importance.

They love talking about themselves and will ignore your comments if you are not in agreement with how they view themselves.

They feel entitled to certain things, often at the expense of other people. They have a sense of superiority, of feeling better than another person.

They love being praised and being the centre of conversation. They can often be charming, controversial, mean, or impulsive - all to gain attention.

Example of Narcissism

My mother is very demanding and expects me to be the best student at school, do well in sports and maintain my lean appearance so I can "find a rich and beautiful husband". When I do well on a test, she won't acknowledge or congratulate me, but will call her friends and show off, boasting about being an amazing mother. One day I fell and got a cut on my face. Instead of helping me, my mother got angry, because it could leave a scar, and I was "worthless with an ugly face".

If you wish to read more about the signs of narcissism, you can visit this page on [Psychology Today's](#) website.

Exploitation & Blackmailing

What is Exploitation & Blackmail?

Exploitation is when someone deliberately takes advantage of you and manipulates you for their own personal gain. This usually happens when the relationship is not entirely consensual or one partner has more power than the other, and they use this to their advantage.

Exploitation can be discrete and subtle, but it is illegal.

Blackmail in a relationship usually happens when the abuser demands something by using threats, manipulation, or instilling fear.

They use power and control to make you feel as if you have no option but to do what you're being told to do. Blackmail can be a very serious offence. There are strict rules in the UK, under section 21 of the Theft Act 1968 (see link at end of this section).

Signs of Exploitation & Blackmail

Exploitation and blackmail can happen face-to-face or in writing. The abuser could be with you, or they could be far away - even in a different country. Here are some examples of these two types of abuse:

Threatening to post a photo or expose something personal of yours if you don't do what they ask. This has become very common over the internet, in particular through the posting of private photos without consent or engaging in what is known as 'revenge porn'.

Giving you gifts, money, affection, drugs, or alcohol, in order to get something for themselves, such as sexual activity.

Asking for a favour, and later telling you that you owe them something in return, making you feel uncomfortable.

Threatening to hurt themselves or hurt someone you like if you don't do what they are asking.

Example of Exploitation & Blackmail

My partner suffers from depression and drinks a lot as a way of coping. The relationship took a mental toll on me, and after spending years trying to help them, I felt as if I had no other choice but to leave the relationship. When I told them this, they threatened to take their own life if I left. I knew they were mentally ill and I loved them so much, but they made me feel trapped and like I had no option. I couldn't leave the relationship because I was scared about what they would do; at the same time I didn't want to be around them anymore. They said if I told anyone I would be making them worst and be the one to blame.

You can read how blackmail is defined under the Theft Act 1968 [here](#).

Physical Abuse

What is Physical Abuse?

Physical abuse is the most **visible form** of domestic abuse. The abuser's aim is to intimidate and cause fear. Assaults often start small - maybe with a small shove during an argument, or a forceful grab of the wrist - but over time they usually become more frequent and more severe. Physical abuse can happen alongside other abusive behaviours, such as verbal or emotional abuse.

The abuser may feel bad afterwards, they may be tearful and apologetic. Or they may insist that you started - or even caused - the violence. They may argue that they didn't mean to be physically abusive and they may invent an excuse for it happening, such as "I was drunk".

There is **no excuse for physical abuse**.

Signs of Physical Abuse

It can include, but is not limited to:

- Beating
- Biting
- Burning
- Hitting
- Kicking
- Pinching
- Pushing
- Slapping
- Stabbing
- Strangling
- Throwing objects
- Driving dangerously to frighten you

This behaviour may leave you feeling confused, but remember it is **NEVER** your fault. Nothing excuses violent behaviour, in or out of the home.

The person being abused will often try to hide any marks left on their bodies, by wearing clothes which cover it or using makeup. If you suspect someone is being physically abused, try to look out for cuts, bruises, burns or black eyes, and try and detect if there is a pattern of injury or if they are hurt on a regular basis.

Example of Physical Abuse

My partner is loving, charming and caring. But sometimes when I do something he doesn't agree with, such as not picking up my phone when he calls, he gets very angry and shouts at me. One day, he had a few drinks and got very upset with something I did, and he hit me. I was shocked and hurt, I never thought he was capable of doing something like that. He apologised afterwards and said it would never happen again, that he loved me so much and he would never do it again. He said it had only happened this time because he had been very stressed at work and had had a few drinks. Even though it hasn't happened again, every time we have an argument, or he drinks, I am frightened he will get aggressive.

Sexual Abuse & Rape

What is Sexual Abuse & Rape?

Sexual abuse includes rape, forced sexual acts and sexual degradation.

The **NHS defines sexual abuse** as:

"...any sexual act that a person did not consent to or is forced into against their will. It is a form of sexual violence and includes rape (an assault involving penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth), or other sexual offences, such as groping, forced kissing, child sexual abuse or the torture of a person in a sexual manner. Sexual assault is an act that is carried out without the victim's active consent. This means they didn't agree to it."

For someone to sexually abuse you, they don't need to have had any physical contact with you. It can happen online, or the abuser can force you to do something like watch pornography. Rape, on the other hand, involves non-consensual physical contact and penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis. Assault by penetration is when someone uses an object or any other part of the body that isn't the penis to penetrate someone without their consent.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

If any of the following happens to you, against your will, it is sexual abuse:

- They ask you to remove your clothes and/or to take naked photos or videos.
- They touch you or ask you to touch them (clothed or not) in a sexual way.
- They prevent you from using contraception.
- They expose themselves to you online or in person.
- They send you unwanted sexual messages, also known as 'sexting', via text message, tweet, Facebook, or any form of social media.
- They tell people you engaged in sexual activities with them, even if you didn't.
- They say that because you're in a relationship they are entitled to engage in any sexual activity with you.

What do different types of rape mean?

Marital rape: Your spouse or partner forces you to engage in a sexual act.

Date rape: A person you know, are friends with, or on a date with forces you to engage in a sexual act. This is often associated with the Date Rape Drugs. This is where you are drugged against your will by any intoxicating substance that does not allow you to consent to any activities.

Rape or gang rape: A person or a group of people you've never met before force you to engage in a sexual act.

Statutory rape: Engaging in a penetrative sexual act with someone under the legal age of consent. In the UK, the age of consent to any form of sexual activity is 16 for both men and women. People aged 12 and under are not legally able to give consent to any sexual activity.

Other types of rape include: oral, digital and anal. To find out more, follow the link at the end of this section.

Example of Sexual Abuse & Rape

During the first years of my marriage, me and my partner used to have sex a lot. Now we've been married for 10 years and our lifestyle has changed so much - I don't feel like having sex as often as I used to. But my partner doesn't take no for an answer. They always push for it, and I end up having sex even when I really don't want to. Even when I sometimes ask them to stop, they don't. I really don't enjoy it and it is making me feel upset and avoiding being around them at home.

To learn more about ages of consent for sexual activity, visit one of our partner's, The Mix, [information page](#).

If you want to read more about sexual abuse and rape, you can visit this page on [Victim Support's website](#).

Financial Abuse

What is Financial Abuse?

Financial abuse is a way of controlling your ability to acquire, use and maintain your own money and financial resources. By doing this, the abuser aims to make you dependent on them and keep you in a relationship.

Financial abuse can happen at key life events, such as moving in with a partner, getting married or having a baby. It can be hard to notice at first. Sometimes, it can be very obvious, such as stealing money directly from your partner's purse.

Unfortunately, this type of abuse can continue even when a relationship is over, as the abuser can leave you without access to your own bank accounts or independent income and/or with debts that have been put against your name.

Signs of Financial Abuse

Below are some examples of how financial abuse can occur.

The person abusing you could:

Ask you to have access to your bank account, propose a joint account, or use finances that belong to you both without your consent.

Invest in something and put it in your name without your permission.

Directly put debts in your name.

Closely monitor your spending and not allow you to buy things you want.

Make you feel guilty for spending money.

Ask you to quit your job, or try to prevent you working or having your own income.

Sign cheques or documents in your name.

Ask or force you to change a will.

Take away your possessions, such as a valuable item like a TV, or basic amenities.

Example of Financial Abuse

After my husband passed away, my son moved me into a care home and took over my finances and bank account. Now, when I ask him for money so I can buy some new clothes, gifts or personal items, he says these things are unnecessary and there isn't enough money. Sometimes he gets angry and tells me I am old and will be gone soon, so I need to stop trying to spend money that will be his. I told my nurse about this, but when she confronted my son he was charming and said I was lying and that I have full access to my money. I feel that no one will believe me or stand up to him.

Spiritual & Cultural Abuse

What is Spiritual & Cultural Abuse?

Spiritual & cultural abuse is when someone uses your spiritual beliefs or cultural identity against you.

These spiritual beliefs or cultural practices will be important to the person being abused. They can be a major part of their personal identity, of their purpose in life, or simply their treasured traditions and family values.

Signs of Spiritual & Cultural Abuse

Spiritual and cultural abuse is often very specific to a particular person. The abuser will target your faith, what you believe in and practices and customs that are important to you. Therefore, it is difficult to explain all the ways in which this abuse happens, but general actions can include:

They mock your beliefs or stereotype you in a negative way.

They force you to convert and adhere to their personal beliefs and practices. This could be in direct conflict with your own beliefs, or simply something you don't want to do.

They deny you access to your practices such as: ceremonies, fasting, singing/chanting and/or deny you access to sacred materials, your community, and places of worship.

They manipulate or interpret your beliefs as a means to justify abuse against you.

Four very serious abusive practices that fall under this category are so called 'Honour' Killing, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and Breast Ironing.

Honour Killing: murdering someone because they have brought shame to their family. In regards to relationships, this commonly happens for: refusing to marry someone, cheating, divorcing, among others.

Forced Marriage: when one or both parties getting married don't consent to the marriage, but are abused into it.

Female Genital Mutilation: is a procedure done to remove external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is based on a cultural and religious conventions, and illegal in the UK

Breast Ironing: This often happens when girls first start puberty. Their breasts are flattened using heated tools (such as hot stones) to prevent them from developing. This is often done to 'protect' girls from sexual assault and rape.

Example of Spiritual & Cultural Abuse

When I was 10 I decided I wanted to wear a hijab. My parents said I didn't have to if I didn't want to, but it made me feel part of my community. My older sister helped me tie my hijab every morning and I felt proud of myself. When I arrived at school the kids at school made fun of me and called me names. When I told my teachers they told me I should just remove my hijab to stop the bullying and fit in.

1. You can read more about Female Genital Mutilation on the NSPCC's [website](#).
2. For more information on Forced Marriage, you can visit Childline's [website](#).
3. And to learn more about Honour Killing, you can visit IKWRO's [website](#).

Stalking

What is Stalking?

Stalking is when someone gives you unwanted and often obsessive attention. The abuser, or stalker, may use multiple methods over a period of time that make you feel uncomfortable, anxious, paranoid, unsafe, or intimidate you.

Stalking can happen from a distance, without any physical contact or violence. It is incredibly distressing and is also considered a type of emotional and psychological abuse.

Signs of Stalking

Below are some signs that someone might be stalking you:

They watch you outside your home or workplace. They follow you and/or appear unexpectedly in a restaurant or a shop.

They make unwanted contact. This could be by calling you, sending you letters or items, or by messaging you on social media and email.

They break into your home, work, or car in order to scare you, damage your property or steal personal items.

They use surveillance equipment, such as cameras, to watch and track you.

They know details about your life and use it against you. For instance, threatening you by saying they know where your children go to school or where your parents live.

They track you using your mobile phone through apps such as 'find my friend'.

Example of Stalking

When I was at university, I went to a party and was introduced to this guy who seemed really nice, and we exchanged phone numbers. After I got home that night, I had five missed calls from him and a few texts asking why I wasn't answering and saying he was worried. It was a bit strange, but sweet that he wanted to know if I got home okay. But over the next few weeks, he kept calling me and his texts were getting a bit angry, so I blocked him. He found my email address and began messaging me again. When I blocked his email, he showed up at my home and started following me. I finally spoke to the university, involved the police and warned my stalker not to contact me again.

Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is physical, verbal or social behaviour that mocks a personal trait. The bully will often attack your identity, such as your sexual orientation, disability, gender, race and religion. All abuse is a form of bullying.

A bully can be defined as “a person who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those whom they perceive as vulnerable”.

Although bullying is most commonly associated with school environments and young people, it can happen anywhere and at any age. This includes bullying in the workplace, at home, or online (cyber bullying).

Signs of Bullying

Below are some forms of bullying:

Physical

The bully might hit you, push you or hurt you in other ways. They could also destroy your possessions or steal from you. They may also make offensive hand gestures to upset or hurt you.

Verbal

The bully might name-call, make sexual comments, make threats, or tease you. This could happen face-to-face, over text message, online or over the phone.

Social

The bully will isolate you or turn your friends against you. This can happen through lies or rumours about you. The bully might threaten to embarrass you in public.

Example of Bullying

My younger sister and I go to the same school. I worry about her because she has a speech impediment and is very shy. Over time, I noticed she was always upset when we left school and she started talking less and less to my parents and me. I later found out that two kids in her class were constantly making fun of her and imitating how she spoke. They would laugh when she would answer something in class and they pushed her once because she 'was in their way'. The bullying made her very upset to the point she didn't want to speak at all.

Tech Abuse

What is Tech Abuse?

Technology can be a lifeline for someone experiencing abuse. However, it can also be used by an abuser to stalk, isolate and control the person they are abusing. Tech abuse is when someone has gained access to your personal, work or home devices, online accounts and even children's toys and devices without your permission. They may be able to track you, access your personal messages, see what you've been looking at online, and gain access to your finances.

With technology being all around us, abusers have tapped into this new world in order to control and abuse people.

Signs of Tech Abuse

Your partner/abuser...

constantly calls/texts or messages you

has threatened to share confidential information or intimate images of you online

has knowledge of conversations you've had / places you've been with other people that you haven't told them about

has access to all your passwords/emails/social media and banking accounts and uses them without your permission

tells you to take down social media posts/not post stuff online because they think its inappropriate/provocative

constantly harasses your friends, family, work colleagues or employers by text/call/friend requests/direct messages

made you install tracking devices on your phone such as 'find my friend'

Your partner/abuser gives your children the latest tech gadgets such as games/Xbox/Playstation, and uses it to contact or track them

Example of Tech Abuse

My partner was calling me but I had had a really long day and wasn't in the mood to talk, I just wanted to sit down and watch TV. Later she came home screaming at me, asking why I didn't pick up the phone when she knew I had just been sitting on the sofa. I later found out that she had downloaded Skype on our smart TV and was able to spy on me via the hardware she had installed. This was one of the first signs that I was in an abusive relationship.