

Domestic Violence

During the Pandemic, Shelter in Place and Beyond

Domestic violence incidents, which are defined as, “violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner,” and includes intimate partner violence, child abuse, neglect and mistreatment, have been found to have spiked during the stay at home orders put into place by many states. Many victims of abuse have become trapped at home with no access to support or resources, as they are finding social services difficult to access and are now unable to just leave the home and stay elsewhere.



A study that will be published in the American Journal of Criminal Justice next month states, “Reported incidents of domestic violence spiked during the beginning of shelter-at-home orders to stem the coronavirus pandemic (12.5%) and then gradually dropped off.” Due to the shelter in place orders, victims can be afraid to call for help as they are either constantly being monitored by their abusers, or have just given up, as the orders drag on and services are harder to come by.

Another explanation for the drop in domestic violence calls, is that much of the child abuse that is reported, comes from teachers, neighbors, family members and religious leaders. Without any contact with outside support systems, parents are not reporting on themselves or siblings who abuse siblings, so victims are left without help and caring adults to intervene.

If you suspect that a child is being abused, you should report it now and do not wait. It is probable that there will be a surge of calls once many shelter in place orders are lifted and supports services may be inundated and even overwhelmed with calls at that time.

What is Domestic Violence and What are the Types?

When we discuss domestic violence, people typically think of four main types: Emotional, Psychological, Verbal and Physical Abuse. However, this leaves out more sophisticated and harder to recognize behaviors such as Financial, Sexual, and Spiritual Abuse. Emotional Abuse can also be broken down to include mental and verbal abuse, and physical abuse can include threats and intimidation. These behaviors can be difficult to recognize, so let’s look at common explanations and examples.

Physical Abuse and Intimidation: Physical abuse is the type of abuse that most people recognize, it is the most “visible” and is defined as, “any intentional act causing injury or trauma to another person or animal by way of bodily contact.” This is true for abuse perpetrated on both adults and children, often inflicted in the guise of discipline. Generally, this starts with threats and intimidation, which escalates to physical assault, including smacking, punching, kicking, shoving, throwing objects at victims or threatening with weapons. Abusers may also try to physically restrain their victims from leaving, physically isolate them from friends and family, or threaten and intimidate victims by damaging property, injuring pets, threatening the safety of their children, or showing weapons.

Emotional/Mental/Verbal and Psychological Abuse: This type of abuse may not seem that damaging and is very often minimized. But truthfully, the effects of this type of abuse are long lasting and incredibly damaging to the victim. You can treat, mend, or even ‘prove’ a broken bone, for example, but it can be very difficult to do the same with emotional abuse. Mending a broken soul and psyche is very difficult and painful work that can take years of counseling for many.

Abusers will attack their victims psychologically and demean them by calling them names, assaulting the victims’ character, or verbally attacking them in public in front of family, friends or strangers with the intention of breaking them down. Abusers often deny their actions, blame the victim and minimize victims’ complaints about their behavior. This gaslighting behavior makes victims question who they really are, the type of parent or spouse they are and even have them questioning their own reality - which often creates paranoid thinking and low self-esteem. Often abusers have cut off victims’ support systems by either bad-mouthing and belittling family and friends, or literally not allowing access, which the victim is left without having loving people to talk to about the abuse, to get support or to have a reality check on the abusive behaviors. Silence perpetuates abuse.

It is known that people who have experienced childhood trauma are highly prone to be victims of psychological, emotional and verbal abuse as adults and their tolerance for bad behavior is much higher than someone who has not experienced abuse. These behaviors can result in psychological trauma and often creates chronic anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts. There is also a strong correlation between trauma and substance abuse.

Financial or Economic Abuse: This type of abuse is prevalent among female victims. Here, the abuser might prevent their partner from working, or force them to quit their existing job. Abusers may demand money from their partner and threaten or abuse them when their request is denied. Some abusers hide or remove access to family income, or completely control all decisions surrounding income, during the relationship or during divorce/separation. All of these abusive behaviors can cause severe, long lasting financial impact on the victim.

I don't think people realize how much strength it takes to pull your own self out of a poisonous situation with someone you love deeply. So if you've done that today or any day, I'm proud of you.

HORACIO JONES

Sexual Abuse: Defined as, “any undesired sexual activity, including unwanted sexual advances, forced exposure to pornography, or sexual encounters tied to emotional, physical, social, or spiritual abuse” and is another tactic used by the abuser to exert power and control over their partner. This abuse attacks the victims trust and combines sexual betrayal with physical and emotional abuse, and for some, causes spiritual harm due to the religious undertones regarding sexual responsibilities in marriage or a partnered relationship.

Spiritual Abuse: is when an abuser uses religion as a way to exert control and power over their victim, while inflicting many of the other above mentioned types of abuse, and then the abuser uses religious beliefs or customs as a way to justify their abusive behaviors. Spiritual abuse can be used to mock/embarrass, shame and manipulate the victim, so they do not feel free to express or practice their spiritual beliefs, which can take away their source of strength and support needed to endure abuse.

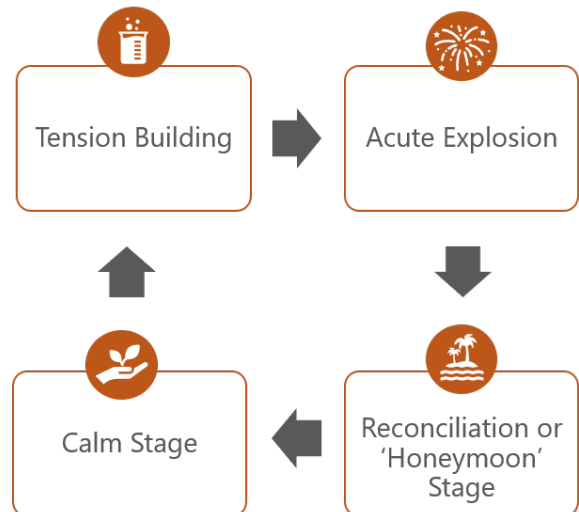
Bringing it all together: Additional educational points regarding domestic violence to consider and remember are things like: early warning signs to look for in abusers, things to look for in others who may be experiencing abuse, and the stages we see in domestic violence.

Early warning signs are usually minor forms of self-centered, controlling and jealous behaviors that escalate as time goes on. These are often justified as love and blamed on the victim as a “result” of their behaviors.

Symptoms in victims can range from the obvious unexplained physical injuries, to chronic abdominal pain, headaches, constant cancelling of plans, not allowing others in their home, a lot of unexplained sick days at work or school, or making excuses for the abusive behaviors of their partner.

The Domestic Violence Cycle confuses victims and keeps victims in relationships. Although people stay in abusive relationships for various reasons, there is usually a pattern of behaviors that keeps the victim around. These predictable stages include: Tension Building Stage, Acute Explosion, Reconciliation or ‘Honeymoon’ Stage, and the Calm Stage. While the first two stages are the build-up to the abuse and the abuse itself, the last two stages offer the victim time to “forgive and forget” enough to stay until the next explosion and the cycle continues.

Domestic Violence Cycle



YOU ARE NOT ALONE and there is help! Hotlines, support groups and shelters can offer emotional support, resources, safety planning, connect you to authorities, help with legal issues and personal protection orders, as well as shelter for victims of abuse and their children.

National Domestic Violence Hotline at **800.799.7233**

National Parent Helpline at **855.427.2736**

Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. **Text 741741 any time to connect with a crisis counselor, or visit crisistextline.org**

If you are looking for something more local, or counseling-based support and resources option, please remember when an organization partners with the **Ulliance Life Advisor Employee Assistance Program**—we provide free, short-term, solution-focused counseling services. Our consultants are standing by, ready to listen, and happy to help. The most important words to remember are – *you are not alone.*

Hundreds of organizations support their employees through The Ulliance Life Advisor EAP. Ulliance not only provides face-to-face counseling services as part of our EAP benefit, but counseling and coaching services are also just a phone call away!

This allows employees to speak to a counselor or coach on the phone when it's convenient for them, even during evening hours. We can help keep your employees on track to meet their goals, and we're available 24/7!

To find out more about our EAP services, visit www.ulliance.com, or call 866-648-8326. Enhancing people. Improving business.