

United to Support: How to respond to Domestic Abuse

A guide for UN personnel

AUGUST 2020

UNITED TO SUPPORT: HOW TO RESPOND TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse can be defined as the use of power and force to control victims. A pattern of behaviors that may include:

- verbal & psychological abuse
- social isolation
- deprivation
- intimidation
- control of finances
- physical or threat of physical abuse
- sexual assault

RISKS WHILE ISOLATING DUE TO COVID-19

- The stay-at-home restrictions that have resulted from COVID-19 have led to what amounts to forced co-habitation in confined spaces for an indefinite period – this may increase the risk of Domestic Abuse
- Domestic Abuse victims, even without the pandemic situation and social distancing measures, already tend to be isolated from their friends, family, and support networks.
- Perpetrators of abuse are using the stay-at-home situation as an opportunity to further exert control over their victims.
- Stress is not the cause of Domestic Abuse but can serve to aggravate and catalyze Domestic Abuse in situations such as the one we are experiencing.
- Staying home may be more dangerous than the coronavirus itself – and experts foresee added stress possibly leading to explosive episodes of violence.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS? AND WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Thousands of victims live silently with domestic abuse, trapped by their fears of physical harm, custody concerns and emotional or economic abuse.

Abuse occurs in all societies, all economic groups, and at all educational levels. Any household member may potentially perpetrate or become a victim of domestic abuse regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or other social group. Therefore, potential victims include an intimate partner, a child or other relatives.

Most victims of domestic abuse are women and children, but cases involving male victims are increasingly common.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

In almost half of homes with partner abuse, child abuse also occurs. Abuse complicates a child's relationship with both parents. Children don't necessarily need to understand what's happening to respond emotionally and physically. Children may display some of the following responses:

- Anxiety, depression, anger, aggression, low self-esteem
- Stomach aches, headaches, sleeping problems
- Behavior change
- Extreme sensitivity

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Does your partner...

- Embarrass or make fun of you in front of your friends or family?
- Put down your accomplishments?
- Make you feel like you are unable to make decisions?
- Use intimidation or threats to gain compliance?
- Tell you that you are nothing without them?
- Treat you roughly – grab, push, pinch, shove or hit you?
- Call you several times a night or show up to make sure you are where you said you would be?
- Use drugs or alcohol as an excuse for saying hurtful things or abusing you?
- Blame you for how they feel or act?
- Pressure you sexually for things you aren't ready for?
- Make you feel like there is “no way out” of the relationship?
- Prevent you from doing things you want – like spending time with friends or family?
- Try to keep you from leaving after a fight or leave you somewhere after a fight to “teach you a lesson”?

Do you...

- Sometimes feel scared of how your partner may act?
- Constantly make excuses to other people for your partner's behavior?
- Believe that you can help your partner change if only you changed something about yourself?
- Try not to do anything that would cause conflict or make your partner angry?
- Always do what your partner wants you to do instead of what you want?
- Stay with your partner because you are afraid of what your partner would do if you broke up?

ALWAYS REMEMBER...

If any of these things are happening in your relationship, talk to someone. Without help, the abuse will continue. Making that first call to seek help is a courageous step.

- NO ONE deserves to be abused. The abuse is not your fault. You are not alone.
- DON'T worry about threats to your visa. We have information about visa options for your situation.
- DON'T worry if you do not speak the local language. We can get you help in many languages

HOW TO HELP A VICTIM

DOs

- DO encourage talking in a safe, private place.
- DO listen, believe, and let the victim know she/he is not alone.
- DO encourage the victim to talk with a professional who knows about intimate partner abuse.
- DO help put together a “safety plan” (assemble important documents, agree on a safe haven, etc.) in case the victim needs to escape in a hurry.
- DO be patient and offer continued support.
- DO express admiration for the victim’s courage in trying to make a change.
- DO bear in mind that it may take the victim several attempts to successfully leave an abusive situation.

DON'T

- DON'T judge or criticize a victim’s decisions.
- DON'T insist the victim make quick decisions.
- DON'T take on too much—it may increase the danger to the victim. Let her/him decide when to act.
- DON'T underestimate the danger of a situation.

RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION AND HELP

NON-EMERGENCY HELP

Please check with your designated security official(s), health provider(s), and/or HR partner for available local and national services.

- [UN Women Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence](#)
- [Hot Peaches: International Directory of Violence Agencies](#)
- [The Pixel Project: Domestic Violence Resources](#)

Note: The UN is not responsible for the information provided by external sources.

UN RESOURCES

- **Staff Counsellors:**
New York: scohq@un.org
Geneva: staffcounsellor@un.org
Other locations: undsscismu@un.org
- **Ombudsman and Mediation Services:**
unoms@un.org
- **Administrative Guidance:**
stopdomesticviolence@un.org