

Four types of abuse

Abuse can take on many forms. Some types are more subtle than others and might never be seen or felt by anyone other than the woman experiencing the abuse. The abuser uses a combination of tactics that work to control the victim. The abuse also usually increases in frequency and severity over time.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is easier to recognize and understand than other types of abuse. It can be indicated when the batterer:

- Scratches, bites, grabs or spits at a current or former intimate partner.
- Shakes, shoves, pushes, restrains or throws her.
- Twists, slaps, punches, strangles or burns the victim.
- Throws objects at her.
- Subjects her to reckless driving.
- Locks her in or out of the house.
- Refuses to help when she's sick, injured or pregnant, or withholds medication or treatment.
- Withholds food as punishment.
- Abuses her at mealtime, which disrupts eating patterns and can result in malnutrition.
- Abuses her at night, which disrupts sleeping patterns and can result in sleep deprivation.
- Attacks her with weapons or kills her.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Sexual violence and abuse can be extraordinarily difficult for victims to talk about because of the ways in which this type of violence often is perpetrated. Sexual violence or abuse can be indicated when the batterer:

- Is jealously angry and assumes she will have sex with anyone.
- Withholds sex and affection as punishment.
- Calls her sexual names.
- Pressures her to have sex when she doesn't want to.
- Insists that his partner dress in a more sexual way than she wants.
- Coerces sex by manipulation or threats.
- Physically forces sex or is sexually violent.
- Coerces her into sexual acts that she is uncomfortable with, such as sex with a third party, physically painful sex, sexual activity she finds offensive or verbal degradation during sex.
- Inflicts injuries that are sex-specific.
- Denies the victim contraception or protection against sexually transmitted diseases.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

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It is the abuser's use of physical and sexual force or threats that gives power to his psychologically abusive acts. Psychological abuse becomes an effective weapon in controlling a victim, because she knows through experience that her abuser will at times back up the threats or taunts with physical assaults. Psychological abuse can be indicated when the batterer:

- Breaks promises, doesn't follow through on agreements or doesn't take a fair share of responsibility.
- Verbally attacks and humiliates his partner in private or public.
- Attacks her vulnerabilities, such as her language abilities, educational level, skills as a parent, religious and cultural beliefs or physical appearance.
- Plays mind games, such as when he denies requests he has made previously or when he undercuts her sense of reality.
- Forces her to do degrading things.
- Ignores her feelings.
- Withholds approval or affection as punishment.
- Regularly threatens to leave or tells his partner to leave.
- Harasses her about affairs he imagines her to be having.
- Stalks her.
- Always claims to be right.
- Is unfaithful after committing to monogamy.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

Economic abuse can be indicated when the batterer:

- Controls all the money.
- Doesn't let her work outside the home or sabotages her attempts to work or go to school.
- Refuses to work and makes her support the family.
- Ruins her credit rating.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND OTHER TACTICS OF CONTROL

Domestic violence is not an isolated, individual event but rather a pattern of repeated behaviors. Assaults are repeated against the same victim by the same perpetrator. These assaults occur in different forms, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic. While physical assaults might occur infrequently, other parts of the pattern can occur daily. The use of these other tactics is effective because one battering episode builds on past episodes and sets the stage for future episodes. All tactics of the pattern interact and have profound effects on the victims. Examples of commonly used control tactics include:

- Isolation
- Using the children
- Damaging relationships
- Attacking property and pets
- Stalking partner or ex-partner

