



What would you do?

Brief for March 2017 theme for the localisation of the National Awareness Campaign 'What Would You Do?'

Psychological and emotional domestic abuse

The National Awareness Campaign as part of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021



What is emotional and psychological domestic abuse?

Often when we think of domestic abuse we think of physical violence but emotional or psychological domestic abuse can be far more insidious. Not all abusive relationships involve physical violence. People don't have to have physical injuries to be a victim of domestic abuse. We also know from studies of domestic abuse that emotional abuse is an important predictor of physical violence in intimate relationships.

Couples argue and shout at each other from time to time. It is an unfortunate fact that people in loving relationships sometimes call each other hurtful names or put each other down. When this behaviour becomes a consistent pattern, becomes increasingly one-sided and one partner is in constant fear of 'setting off' the other, then the relationship is not normal and has become abusive.

Furthermore, very often emotional or psychological abuse has very little to do with the abuser losing their temper or losing control, but is, in fact, the exact opposite. Abusers use emotional or psychological abuse to control and manipulate their partner.

The effects of emotional or psychological domestic abuse are less obvious to spot, it is often overlooked, minimised and disregarded, not only by those who carry out the abuse but often by the victim or people who witness the abuse.

Emotional and psychological domestic abusers use many tactics to exert their power over their victims. Many want to exert their dominance over their partner and they want to feel in charge. They will often humiliate their partner and want to make them feel bad about themselves and attack their self-esteem. They may try to isolate the victim and cut them off from families and friends.

Abusers use threats to control such as threatening to kill or hurt the victim or threaten to kill or hurt pets or the victim's children. They can threaten to make false charges against the victim in order to control access to children. Victims of domestic abuse in homosexual relationships can be threatened to be 'outed'.



Emotional and psychological domestic abuse

Respondents to the national survey on domestic abuse of women and men in Ireland (2003) often identified emotional abuse or the emotional consequences of abuse – such as fear, distress and loss of confidence – as the “worst thing” that they experienced in relation to their experiences of domestic abuse. This was true for both men and women. The study found that one in thirteen women have experienced severe emotional abuse and were three times more likely to have experienced it than men. (Source: Watson and Parsons, 2005).

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey on violence against women (2014), found that:

- 23% of women in Ireland surveyed had experienced controlling behavior by a partner since the age of 15.
- 31% of Irish women surveyed had experienced some form of psychological violence by a partner since the age of 15.

The FRA survey findings are based on face-to-face interviews with 42,000 randomly selected women (approximately 1,500 per country) aged 18-74 years, across the EU’s 28 Member States.

Examples of emotional and psychological domestic abuse

- Constant putdowns
- Humiliating or embarrassing a partner in public or in front of friends and family
- Hypercriticism
- Monitoring what their partner is doing all the time
- Excessive jealousy and accusing their partner of being unfaithful
- Use of technology to spy on partner

- Belittling accomplishments and goals
- Use of intimidation or threats to gain compliance
- Undermining of self esteem
- Preventing their partner from seeing friends and family
- Threatening to hurt people or pets their partner cares about
- Unreasonable and unnegotiable demands

- Threatening to remove access to children
- Threatening to commit suicide
- Making their partner doubt their own memory, perception and sanity
- Emotional manipulation
- Restricting their partner’s mobility and communications



Signs of emotional and psychological domestic abuse

Before you get involved, ask yourself if it's safe and legal to intervene. If the situation is already violent or looks like it's escalating quickly, don't directly intervene. Call the Gardaí on 999. The only effective bystander intervention is a nonviolent one. If you try to "rescue" a victim or fight off an abuser, you'll not only be endangering yourself, but the abuser might take out their anger on the victim later. The victim could end up more isolated and less likely to seek help later on.

When you are concerned about someone you know

These are some warning signs that people who are concerned about someone they care about can look out for:

Someone experiencing abuse may seem:

- Anxious to please their partner
- Afraid of their partner, talking about their temper, possessiveness, or jealousy
- Restricted from seeing family and friends
- Limited in access to money or a car
- Depressed, anxious, or suicidal
- Seem to have very low self esteem

Follow your instincts. If you've noticed these warning signs and expect that someone you know is being abused, then it is likely that they are.

When you are concerned about a stranger

Unfortunately, bystanders to abuse between strangers have a limited amount of time to assess the situation and decide how to best intervene.

There are some warning signs that a situation might be abusive:

If the person suspected of being an abuser is:

- Acting excessively jealous of their partner
- Insulting or embarrassing their partner in public
- Yelling at or trying to intimidate their partner

Or, if the person suspected of being a victim is:

- Acting afraid of their partner
- Acting submissive

If these signs are apparent, then the behaviour being witnessed could well be abuse



Advice for bystanders/witnesses concerned about someone they know

Don't wait for them to approach you. Look for a private moment where you can express concern and let them know you're there to support them. A simple question like "are you ok?" could give you both an opportunity to talk.

Express concern

Tell your friend that you've been concerned for them or that you're worried. This is a non-judgmental approach that might make them feel comfortable in opening up. If they deny that anything is wrong, don't push, but communicate that you'll be there for them if they ever want to talk.

Assure them that the violence is not their fault.

This can be such an important thing for a victim of violence to hear. Some useful things to say might be, "No one deserves to be treated this way," "You are not to blame," or simply, "What's happening is not your fault."

Support, but don't give advice

This can be so hard to do, especially if the victim is someone close to you. But remember that you cannot make someone leave a relationship if they are not ready to do so. **Be aware that leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim. The victim is best placed to assess the danger to themselves.** Give them options and offer to help and support them along the way, but pressuring a victim to leave a relationship who does not want to may only isolate them further by making them feel like they can't confide in you. Remember that abusive behaviour is a pattern of getting power and control over someone else. Validating a victim's choices and encouraging them to make their own decisions about their life can help to break the cycle of power and control.

Give resources

There are plenty of services in Ireland which can offer help and support to the person you are concerned about. Check out www.whatwouldyoudo.ie for a list of services and advice on how to find the one most appropriate.



Advice for people witnessing abuse between strangers

If you've decided that a situation requires an intervention and you are happy that it is safe to do so, try following one or more of the three D's.

Distract

Creating a distraction is an indirect and non-confrontational way to intervene, and it can help keep a dangerous situation from escalating. You can try distracting either the person about to commit violence, or the potential victim. Either way, your goal is to prevent a situation from getting worse, or better yet, buy enough time to check in with the potential victim.

Examples: Ask for directions, the time, help looking for a lost item, or anything else that you think might keep them from leaving quickly. Better yet, if you can use a distraction that will get you a moment alone with the victim, to ask is there a problem.

Delegate

Even if you don't know the victim and the abuser, someone else in the room might. Friends of the people involved might be in a better position to get involved, and they might have a better opportunity for a sustained intervention than you. You could say to them, "Look, I'm concerned about that person. Their partner seems really angry. Would you be able to check in on the situation now or later?"

Or, if you don't feel comfortable intervening but it doesn't seem like the situation calls for Garda involvement, look for someone else who might be in a better position to get involved. If you're at a bar, look for the bouncer or someone in a similar role and point out what's happening.

Direct

In a direct approach you either approach the potential victim or potential abuser and intervene. The problem with directly approaching an abuser is that they may attack you and they might end up taking it out on their partner later. If you're going to have any direct contact with a possible abuser it's probably best to be subtler, like using body language to communicate disapproval and make your presence and concern known. You could do this just by watching what is happening and making it obvious that you're keeping an eye on the situation.

If you're going to try a direct approach, your best bet will probably be to approach the victim. You can simply say, "I'm concerned about what just happened. Is anything wrong?" Or, if you only have an instant and there's no opportunity for even a brief conversation, you could say, "No one deserves to be treated like that," or, "That wasn't your fault." Don't try to give advice or judge or blame the victim for what's just happened. Use the opportunity to say that you're concerned, that you want to help, and that it's not their fault.