

What Is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is abusive behavior - emotional, psychological, physical, or sexual - that one person in an intimate relationship uses in order to control the other. It takes many different forms and includes behaviors such as threats, name-calling, preventing contact with family or friends, withholding money, actual or threatened physical harm and sexual assault. Stalking can also be a form of domestic violence (for further information on stalking, see page 9.) Most domestic violence is committed against women by their male partners or ex-partners. It also occurs in lesbian and gay relationships and is common in teenage dating relationships. In a small number of cases, men are abused by female partners, but because 91 to 95 percent of all adult domestic violence assaults are perpetrated by men against their female partners, this booklet sometimes refers to victims as female and abusers as male. Every victim of domestic violence, whether female or male, gay or heterosexual, has the right to legal relief and supportive services.

The following checklist may help you decide if you or someone you know is being abused.

Does your partner:

- constantly criticize you and your abilities as a spouse/partner, or parent?
- behave in an over-protective manner or become extremely jealous?
- threaten to hurt you, your children, pets, family members, friends or himself?
- prevent you from seeing family or friends?
- get suddenly angry or lose his temper?
- destroy personal property or throw things around?
- deny you access to family assets like bank accounts, credit cards, or the car, or control all finances and force you to account for what you spend?
- withhold medication or deny you access to health care?

- threaten to reveal your HIV status?
- force you to work in jobs not of your choosing?
- use intimidation or manipulation to control you or your children?
- hit, punch, slap, kick, shove, choke or bite you?
- deny you access to your immigration documents?
- prevent you from going where you want to, when you want to, and with whomever you want to?
- make you have sex when you don't want to or do things sexually that you don't want to do?
- control your expression of gender identity or sexual orientation?
- threaten to "out" you if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual?
- humiliate or embarrass you in front of other people?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a victim of domestic violence. You are not to blame and you are not alone - millions of people are abused by their partners every year. Not all acts of domestic violence are violations of the law. In any case, you do not have to face domestic violence alone. You deserve help, and help is available.