

WHAT IS DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will. This may involve having to significantly modify their behaviour in an attempt to mitigate threats to their safety or wellbeing or the safety and wellbeing of people they care about. Domestic and family violence can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, i.e. married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, de facto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or who are dating.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see adjacent – Family Violence), extended family relationships, and family of choice within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) communities.

People living in the same house, people living in the same residential care facility and people reliant on care may also be considered to be experiencing domestic and family violence when one or both people in the relationship try to create an imbalance of power to establish coercive control and commit violence.

Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic and family violence and those who use violence are overwhelmingly male. Domestic and family violence can be perpetrated by a partner, family member, carer, house mate, boyfriend or girlfriend. Women also commit domestic and family violence against men, as do same-sex partners (Domestic Violence NSW, 2018). Domestic and family violence is also committed by and committed against people who identify in non-gender binary terms.

The term ‘**Family Violence**’ is preferred in an Indigenous context. It is used to describe the range of violence that takes place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetrated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence; on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships. It has also been used in the past decade to include acts of self-harm and suicide, and has become widely adopted as part of the shift towards addressing intra-familial violence in all its forms. (Gordon, 2002).



Violence and abuse costs us all.

Lives are lost.

Homicide. Femicide. Filicide. Suicide.

Indignity, injury, suffering, grief, and loss extends within families, across communities and throughout our country.

Poverty endures.

Children's hopes and futures are sabotaged.

National, state and territory definitions of domestic and family violence and criminal codes vary, however violence and abuse is never acceptable in any community, family, institution, place or context.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work and services operate and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We extend this respect to all First Nations peoples across the country and the world. We acknowledge that the sovereignty of this land was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

BEHAVIOURS

The behaviours that may represent domestic and family violence include

- **Physical violence including physical assault or abuse;** for example non-fatal strangulation, suffocation and head injuries*, other forms of harm or injury, abuse of pets, damage to property or belongings.
- **Reproductive coercion or abuse** (when a woman is stopped from making her own choices about her reproductive system).
- **Sexualised assault and other abusive or coercive behaviour of a sexualised nature.**
- **Emotional or psychological abuse** including verbal abuse (humiliation, degradation and dehumanisation), threats of violence (to harm a victim or someone close to the victim/survivor, as well as pets, property or belongings), threats of self harm or suicide, blackmail and bribery (kidnapping or deprivation of liberty), the manipulative use of children to control partner/family members (NSW Government, 2014), isolating the victim from their supports and support services, threatening to 'out' a partner's identity as LGBTIQ or to disclose HIV status without the victim/survivors consent, undermining the victim's sense of reality (gaslighting).
- **Financial abuse;** for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support or accruing debt in their name.
- **Stalking;** for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person, or the person's family, in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment (online-harassment, stalking, surveillance and control of victim's movements).
- **Technology facilitated abuse;** for example harassment, impersonation, monitoring/stalking, threats and attacks through mobile phones and other devices, social media and online accounts (like email and banking).
- **Spiritual or religious abuse;** for example using spiritual or religious beliefs to scare, hurt or control you, stopping you or shaming you for practising your spiritual or religious beliefs, forcing you or your children to take part in spiritual or religious practices when you don't want to, forcing you to raise your children according to spiritual or religious beliefs you don't agree with, using religious or spiritual leaders or teachings to force you to stay in the relationship or marriage, as an excuse for their violent and abusive behaviour, stop you or your children from getting medical or health care, force you into a marriage you don't want (NSW, Department of Communities and Justice).

** Note: A person may use more plain language descriptions for words like 'strangulation' or 'suffocation' to describe assaults. For example: "choked me"; "pressed me up against..."; "held me by the neck"; "squeezed my neck"; "hands around my neck"; "had me in a choke hold"; "throttled me"; "sat/ lay on top of me/on my chest"; "pinned me down"; "smothered me"; "gagged me"; "tried to drown me". (DVSM Domestic and Family Violence and Acquired Brain Injury Project Report, 2018)*

What is coercive control?

The use of coercive control is a form of abuse and violence.

The person using violence uses 'entrapment that renders the victim hostage-like in the harms they inflict on their **dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood** as well as to their physical and psychological integrity.' (Evan Stark Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life (Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 15.)

The person using violence (in any form) may use some or all of the behaviours listed, or develop new behaviours (for example how Covid 19 virus and measures have been used to threaten or harm a victim) to achieve entrapment and inflict harm.

What is financial abuse?

The terms financial and economic abuse are often used interchangeably. Economic abuse is a form of family violence that: "... involves behaviors that control a [person's] ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources, thus threatening her [or his] economic security and potential for self-sufficiency."

Economic abuse includes a range of behaviours carried out by a perpetrator such as:

- controlling a victim's access to cash and bank accounts
- hiding financial information and assets
- sabotaging study and/or employment opportunities
- forcing a partner to take out debt, and
- manipulating finances to avoid or reduce child support payments.

Adams, A. (2008). 'Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse'. *Violence Against Women*, 14, 563-588.

What is sexualised violence?

Sexualised violence is a form of 'violence' not a form of 'sex'.

Sexualised violence always involves the use and abuse of power. The perpetrator ignores the need for consent and suppresses the resistance of the victim. The perpetrator uses a range of tactics such as direct and indirect, subtle and psychological, forceful and physical behaviours.

Sexualised violence encompasses all behaviours used by a perpetrator to threaten, coerce, violate, or force the targeted person (victim) into sexualised activity.

These behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Forcing genital contact.
- Forcing contact with the perpetrator's mouth.
- Vaginal, anal or oral penetration by a penis, finger or any other object.
- Groping the victim's breasts, genitals or buttocks.
- Reproductive coercion or abuse (when a woman is stopped from making her own choices about her reproductive system. The reproductive system includes the parts and functions of the body involved in the menstrual cycle, sex and sexual pleasure, pregnancy and birth.) *More about Reproductive abuse on 1800 Respect* <https://www.1800respect.org.au/violence-and-abuse/reproductive-abuse/>
- Voyeurism – for example, the perpetrator watches the victim in intimate locations such as their bedroom or bathroom through hidden video-cameras, or through a window/door.

- Exhibitionism – for example, the perpetrator exposes their genitals to the victim.
- Forcing the victim to watch or involve the victim in pornography.
- Forced use of intoxicants to minimise the victim's resistance to sexualised violence or exploiting the victim's use of alcohol and other drugs to commit sexualised violence.
- Sexualised harassment including intrusive verbal comments or sexualised body language. (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Perpetrators of sexualised violence often use physical force to constrain the resistance of victims. This often includes the use of:

- objects and restraints
- non-fatal strangulation*
- suffocation
- physical assaults to the victim's head, neck and face

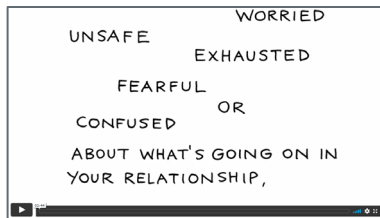
These physical assaults can (in one assault or a combination of assaults) develop into acquired brain injuries, other serious life-changing injuries and death.

** Note: A person may use words other than 'strangulation' or 'suffocation' to describe these assaults. For example: gagging, choking/choking during sex, 'breath-play' (erotic asphyxiation), 'rough sex'. Some of these terms can be mutualising and conceal the violent and abusive nature of the behaviour).*

My Dignity - My body is mine - My Dignity is for anyone who may be or has experienced sexualised violence and for anyone who may be responding.

Are you reflecting on your own relationships and experiences?

My Safety Kit is a reflection resource designed to support people who are, or may be, experiencing domestic and family violence. Read and/or download [My Safety Kit](#)



View the **My Safety Kit** animation

An introduction [for people reflecting on their relationships](#) (2.4mins)



View the **My Safety Kit** animation

An introduction to the [decision-making tool](#) (3.5 mins)

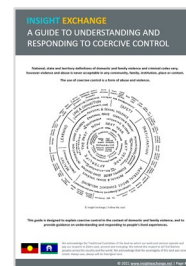
Are you wanting to know more about being a responder?



[View the Follow My Lead Animation \(4min\)](#)

Follow My Lead seeks to reveal a snapshot (in first person voice) the complexity of lived experience of violence and how violence is used to undermine, oppress and control a person's liberties, safety and wellbeing across many aspects of their life.

Read and/or download [Follow My Lead](#)



Explore the Insight Exchange Guide [Guide to understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence](#)

This guide serves to reveal perpetrator responsibilities for the use of coercive control, abuse and violence, and to provide guidance in understanding and responding to people's lived experiences.

Insight Exchange centres on the expertise of people with lived experience of domestic and family violence and gives voice to these experiences.

Insight Exchange is designed to inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to domestic and family violence.

Insight Exchange has been established, developed and is governed by Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) a registered charity (ABN 26 165 400 635.).

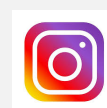
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