

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Dealing with an Aggressive or Abusive Partner

Domestic abuse affects far more people than commonly realized. In addition to reported cases, numerous unreported situations continue unabated. Abusers often isolate their partner from family and sap the victim's self-confidence until even the act of seeking help seems overwhelming.

If you are currently with an aggressive or abusive partner, understand that it is not your fault. It is important that you seek help for yourself, and for any children you may have. Witnessing abuse makes a child much more likely to become either an abuser or a victim of abuse themselves. Many excellent resources are available.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

The first critical step for victims of domestic abuse is accepting that the abuse exists and that without intervention the cycle of abuse will only get worse. Many aggressive partners follow up abuse with apologies and promises that it won't happen again, but unless the abuser gets help, this is just lip service to the idea of change and the beginning of another round of abuse.

Abusive behaviors may include:

- Hitting, shoving, slapping, grabbing, kicking, hair pulling
- Forced sexual activity
- Threats or intimidation
- Explosive shouting or yelling
- Destroying possessions
- Cutting the victim off from family and friends
- Attempting to control the victim’s movements or activities
- Name-calling and other demeaning language
- Cruelty to animals—often leading to cruelty to other people

Often these are exacerbated by alcohol or drug problems.

Reaching out for help

Depending on circumstances, there are a variety of services available. These range from emergency housing and legal or financial services to crisis counselling for victims, their children or the abuser. Other sources of help include:

- If your partner is open to help, there are effective treatment programs for people who abuse their partner.
- In urgent situations, call 911, a local distress centre or crisis line.
- If you have any concerns for the safety of yourself or your children, leave the house and call the police immediately.

Taking charge of your safety

You may not have control over your partner but you can control how you respond to danger—be sure to have a safety plan in place.

- Talk to a community resource or professional about appropriate safety measures.

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- Keep phone numbers of distress centres or crisis lines handy.
- Confide in at least one friend about the violence.
- Plan a place to stay for a night or two if you need to leave your home urgently.
- Keep keys and money in an accessible place, ready for an urgent exit.
- Leave spare keys, extra money and a change of clothing with a trustworthy friend or relative, along with copies of important documents.
- Make yourself safe financially. Abusers often keep their partners hostage with financial dependence. Open a savings account and make regular contributions, no matter how small.
- Teach your children how to use the phone in an emergency.

Abuse is never the victim’s fault. You have nothing to be ashamed of and you do not have to struggle alone. Seek out the help you need to end or prevent violence.