# What is Domestic and Family Violence?

The first thing to know is that domestic violence, domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, and family violence can be used interchangeably when talking about domestic and family violence.

Domestic violence or abuse is used by someone that the other person is or has been in a relationship with. The person using violence can be a family member, a current partner or ex-partner, or their carer.

The person using violence is often wanting to have power and control over the other person, and to create fear, isolation, and dependency. Although both people can use abusive behaviours towards each other, the reason for doing so is often very different. The impact or the result of the violence also looks very different.

## Let’s look at the different types of violence.

It’s not uncommon for people to believe that unless it’s physical, it’s not domestic violence, however this is a myth. There are many other forms of domestic violence or abuse that are not physical.

Let’s start with looking at the physical and I’ll give some examples for each. Keep in mind there will be others that I may not say but also could be included. Also keep in mind that the types of violence are often used together to form a pattern of violence used by the person against the other.

The pattern can change at times and escalate, for example when there is impending or actual separation, or during pregnancy. The person who is being abused is often very aware of the pattern used by the other person even without being able to name it as such.

**Physical abuse** can include pushing, hitting, hairpulling, slapping and strangulation. It can also involve the use of weapons like guns or knives.

**Verbal abuse** can be used with or without physical violence and can include screaming, swearing, put-downs, name-calling, accusations, sarcasm, and ridiculing the other’s beliefs, opinions, or cultural background.

**Threats and intimidation** are tactics used to control and can make the other person feel powerless and afraid. The person may smash or destroy things, put a fist through the wall, show weapons, drive recklessly, use intimidating body language, and constantly interrogate the other with endless questions and accusations. They can also threaten to commit suicide, or harm or take the children.

**Emotional abuse** is very common and can leave the other person feeling confused and feeling like they are going crazy or insane. It can be described as ‘mind-games’ played by the person using this type of violence that can include the ‘silent treatment’ for hours or even days, leaving the other person feeling like they are being punished.

**Social abuse** is used to isolate the other person from their social networks and supports by preventing or making it difficult for them to have contact with family or friends. The person may also verbally or physically abuse the other in front of their family or friends. They may also verbally put their family and friends down to the point where the other person may end up disconnecting or cutting ties from them.

**Economic abuse** means being financially dependent or having to financially provide for the person using this type of abuse. The person may stop the other from having or getting money including their own money. They may demand that they live with hardly any money for what they need for themselves and their children. It can also include being forced to sign documents that leave them responsible for debts that have nothing to do with them.

**Sexual abuse** means doing sexual things that are not wanted by the other person. It can mean rape, forcing the person to do sexual acts that can cause pain or humiliation and can result in injury, as well as forcing the person to watch porn or have sex with others.

**Cultural and spiritual abuse** means ridiculing or putting down beliefs and culture that are important to the person. Like social abuse, the person using this type of abuse may prevent the other from belonging to a group or practising ways that are important to their spiritual beliefs.

**Stalking** can be extremely frightening either in or after a relationship with a person who uses this type of violence. The person may loiter around places the other person goes to like work or the gym. They may also watch them without their knowledge, use tracking devices, make constant calls, or send unwanted love letters, cards, and gifts.

**Cyber abuse means** using social media of any sort to stalk and intimidate. It can include posting pictures, videos, or information about the person online.

**Separation violence** means exactly that, violence that continues following any separation. This is known to be a very dangerous time because the person who uses this type of violence may be perceiving a loss of control over the other. Their pattern of violence may escalate or change, and they may become more unpredictable.

If you or someone you know needs help and lives in the Gold Coast or Beenleigh region, contact the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre on (07) 5532 9000 or visit domesticviolence.com.au.

For all other areas, call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit 1800respect.org.au to chat online or find services in your area.

*Transcript from video: What is Domestic and Family Violence?   
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