

Tip Sheet

Are you using violence or abuse in your family or intimate relationships?

Family violence is any abusive behaviour in a family or intimate relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over another.

Family violence is not limited to physical violence or sexual assault, it can also include emotional abuse and social or financial control.

How will you know?

If you use any or a combination of the following, you are using violence/abuse in your family or intimate relationships:

- Any form of physical violence, intimidation or assault – including unwanted sexual activity
- Emotional and psychological means to control another's behaviour – name-calling, belittling, continuous criticism, or exclusion
- Threaten and put pressure on another – threatening to leave, to harm yourself, or not support the family
- Restrict another's behaviour – going everywhere with them, questioning what they have been doing, stopping them from contacting family or friends, isolating them from support, dictating what they can or cannot do
- Exhibit negative behaviour when faced with stress in your life, including family disagreements, or when you have been drinking or using drugs
- You justify your violent and abusive behaviour
 - **Denial** – 'I wasn't being abusive'
 - **Minimising impact** – 'I only pushed them, they weren't hurt'
 - **Justification** – 'If they stopped annoying me, I wouldn't have had to do it'

- **Blaming others** – 'It's not my fault' or 'I'm under a lot of pressure at the moment'
- **Deflecting responsibility** – 'I didn't know what I was doing' or 'I was drunk'
- **Avoidance** – 'I don't know why I hit them'

If you identify yourself with those statements, it is time to take responsibility for your actions and control your behaviour.

What problems can it lead to?

There is no justification for using violence and abuse in your family or intimate relationships. The consequences for you and the other person can include:

- Suffering physically, emotionally and psychologically with a significant and lasting impact
- Break down and loss of important relationships, including access to children rights, and financial loss
- Legal action, with long-term impact on freedom, lifestyle and employment
- Loss of social networks and exclusion from your friends and community

Common questions and concerns

"Is the violence affecting my children?"

Family violence has severe impacts for children who witness it. It is very distressing for the children. Parents often believe that they have shielded their children from spousal violence, but research shows that children often see or hear some of it.

Children who witness family violence can experience feelings of fear, anger, depression, anxiety and shame. They may experience physical symptoms such as stomach cramps, headaches and sleeping problems.

“Will I go to jail?”

Violence is a criminal offence, and some other forms of abuse and control are similarly viewed as illegal activities. Your chances of going to jail or being in trouble with the law increase if you do not take responsibility and change your behaviour.

“It feels hopeless. I’m not sure I can overcome it.”

You may feel your behaviour can’t be changed, especially when you are in the middle of a crisis. Overcoming the problem is not easy, but with the right support, you can start to do things differently. Your future can be different if you reach out for help.

What can you do?

Accept that you have a problem

Own your problem of violence and abuse. It is your responsibility to do something to stop it. Calling on other people and resources for support is important, but unless you understand that you must commit to changing, the likelihood of fixing the problem will be greatly reduced.

Stop using violence and abuse

If you can’t do this, then you must remove yourself from situations where it can occur. This may mean temporarily leaving the environment where you are causing damage to others, restricting your contact or only being in that environment when there are other people around.

Take proactive steps

Usually, the best time to start to fix a problem is when things in your relationship are settled and

stable, not at a time of crisis or in the middle of an argument. When things are settled, conversations with everybody involved are usually more helpful.

Put in effort

Changing long-term patterns of behaviour can take considerable time and effort. Be prepared to work on the problem for a while to reduce its impact on your relationships and be ready for challenging times when your commitment will be tested.

Get assistance

It is challenging to change these patterns of behaviour and thinking without ongoing support. Find someone who has an understanding of the issues you are facing and can help you think through reasons for your behaviour and plan strategies for managing it in the future.

Call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 for information and support.

Develop strategies

Understand the situations and circumstances when violence and abuse have occurred in the past. Find ways to avoid or better manage these situations. Create positive strategies to deal with arguments or conflict. Learn the right time to step away from a situation to give yourself time and space to think clearly so the situation doesn’t get worse.

Work on associated issues

Make a commitment to understanding and working on all of the factors that led to the behaviour occurring, not just the immediate signs.

MensLine Australia is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with professional counsellors providing information and support for all relationship issues. Call us on **1300 78 99 78** or visit mensline.org.au.