

# DOMESTIC ABUSE

SPOTTING THE  
WARNING  
SIGNS



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

## The UK Government defines domestic violence as:

'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'

Priests can often recognise when someone is hiding their inner feelings or anxieties. Despite this it can be difficult to know when to 'dig a little deeper' to see if there is something sinister taking place within a couple's relationship. You may know couples within your parish where everything seems well on the surface, yet when one of the couple is on their own things appear different.

Domestic abuse is a hidden killer and while we are quick to respond when we know it is taking place, spotting the signs can be difficult.

Physical abuse is potentially the easiest form to spot. There may be a pattern of repeated injury with questionable explanations or evidence of violence such as cuts, bruises or broken bones. Someone may fail to attend an event they are usually committed to, appearing wary, with inconsistent explanations when they do reappear. Clothing may seem inconsistent with an occasion (such as long sleeves in summer or sunglasses indoors) or reactions to a partner within close proximity might be heightened or fearful.

Emotional and psychological abuse is often much harder to spot. It can be more subtle and subversive - sometimes an individual themselves may not realise that they are in this type of coercive relationship. Fear is the key indicator that all is not well in a relationship, though this can be difficult to measure.

If someone you know has undergone a shift in personality, becoming withdrawn when they were previously outgoing, demonstrating low self-esteem or anxiety, signposting depression or suicidal tendencies, then further investigation should be considered.

## SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- They seem afraid of their partner or are always very anxious to please them.
- They anxiously defer to their partners opinion.
- They are contacted by their partner frequently when out without them.
- They check in with their partner frequently.
- One partner seeks to control the other, checking what they are doing and who they are talking to.
- When out together one partner belittles or humiliates the other under the guise of humour.
- One partner dismisses the accomplishments or opinions of the other as futile or worthless.
- Their children appear afraid, have behavioural problems or are withdrawn or anxious.
- One feels embarrassed and exhibits a sense of 'walking on eggshells' around the other.

# IN CONVERSATIONS WITH YOU

## THEY REVEAL OTHER PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR:

- They talk about their partner's jealousy, bad temper or possessiveness.
- They say their partner pressurises or forces them to engage in sexual behaviour they do not feel comfortable with.
- They describe a lack of independence in terms of money - an imbalance in decision making, an imbalance in access to funds.
- They describe a sense of isolation and lack of independence including which friends they can see and when.
- They describe feelings of being crazy, confused as to whether they really experienced something or not.
- They imply that they deserve to be hurt or mistreated.
- They describe themselves as numb or helpless.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following list may be a useful tool to have during a discussion.

Does your partner, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend, your carer, or a family member:

- make you feel uncomfortable or afraid?
- often put you down, make fun of you, or make you feel worthless?

- always check up on what you're doing or where you are going?
- try to stop you from seeing your own friends or family?
- make you feel that no one will believe you if you say you are unhappy?
- stop you from having any money yourself or tell you what you can and can't spend money on?
- refuse to help with your personal support needs when you ask?
- make you feel afraid to disagree or say 'no' to them?
- tell other people you make things up and easily get confused?
- scare or hurt you by being violent e.g. hitting, choking, smashing things, breaking or removing disability aids, locking you in, driving dangerously to frighten you)?
- pressure, force or trick you into doing sexual things that you don't want to do?
- insist in always going in to see the doctor with you?
- threaten you with losing your children?
- threaten you that you will have no one to help you if you leave the relationship?
- threaten you that will be placed in an residential accommodation service?
- threaten to hurt you if you say you want to end the relationship?

Have your children heard or seen these things or been hurt themselves?

# IMPACT ON FAMILY

If you have concerns it is VITAL that you act upon them. The health and welfare of the individual is paramount as is the impact that living in this type of situation may have on the rest of the family.

Living in a home where domestic abuse takes place can have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental and physical wellbeing and behaviour, which can last into adulthood.

Children may witness domestic abuse directly though they can also witness it indirectly by:

- hearing abuse from another room
- seeing a parent's injuries or distress afterwards
- finding disarray such as broken furniture
- being hurt, either accidentally or through trying to stop the abuse
- experiencing reduced quality parenting as a result of the abuse

**It is a Child Protection matter requiring a referral to children's services if there are under 18s in a house where domestic abuse is taking place.**



**If you are concerned about an individual or a family but unsure how best to help, please contact:**

**Marriage and Family Life Adviser**

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**Freephone 24-Hour  
National Domestic  
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