Cosc

The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence
An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhoréigean Baile, Gnéasach agus Inscnebhunaithe a Chosc

Worried about Domestic or Sexual Violence?

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This document is a brief guide for adults who are experiencing domestic or sexual violence. It also contains advice on how to help someone you know who may be experiencing domestic or sexual violence.

1. National Helpline Services:

In an emergency always call 112 or 999

• **Women who are experiencing domestic violence** can call Womens' Aid: 1800 341 900 (10am to 10pm, 7 days a week)

• **Men who are experiencing domestic violence** can call Amen: 046 902 3718 (9am to 5pm, Monday – Friday. For help outside these hours please call: 086 194 7270)

• If you need to talk to someone in confidence about **sexual assault** call: 1800 77 88 88. (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

• **Older people** who are experiencing abuse in the home can call the HSE Infoline: 1850 24 1850 (8am to 8pm, Monday – Saturday)

2. Am I in an abusive relationship?

Abusive people often make their partners feel that any problems that are happening in the relationship are the fault of the person being abused. As a result, it can be often very difficult for an abused person to identify the fact that they are living in an abusive relationship.

If you are wondering whether you or someone you know might be living in an abusive relationship we have listed some warning signs below to assist you. Any one of the following signs is serious. You do not need to experience several, or all of them, for your relationship to be abusive.

- Your partner has been in a violent relationship before. If they have been abusive before it is likely they will be abusive again, even with a new partner.
- You are afraid of your partner.
- You are constantly 'walking on eggshells' because of their mood swings. You spend your time working out what kind of mood they are in and the focus is always on their needs.
- They lose their temper easily and over minor things.
- They criticise your friends or family and/or make it difficult for you to see them or talk to them on your own.
- They regularly criticise or undermine you - about the way you look, the way you dress, your abilities as a parent etc.
- Your needs are not considered important or are ignored, and they make the decisions in the relationship.
- You find it hard to get time away from them - even when you ask for it. When you spend time away from them, they want to know who you were with and where.
- They control your access to basic essentials such as the telephone, car, food or money.
- They try to control aspects of your life such as whether you work, and where; who you see and when; what you can spend; where you go and how; and what you watch or listen to on radio or television.

3. I am in an abusive relationship, what can I do?

Whether you are currently living with domestic violence, want to leave an abusive partner or are a survivor of domestic violence there are supports available to you, where you can talk through the options that will be right for you and any children you may have.

Things you could consider doing are:

- Make contact with a support service. You can access a list of these services on the Cosc website (www.cosc.ie) or contact the helplines listed in Section 1. You can also check your local phone book or community services directory for the refuge and counselling services closest to you.
- Talk to someone you trust: a friend, relative or neighbour. Remember you may need to go to them in an emergency or if you have to leave your family home
- You can make a Safety Plan (see Section 5)

- You can talk to your GP
- You can report the abuse to your local Garda station.
- See Section 4 for information on Court Orders that could help protect you and any children you may have.

The Women's Aid National helpline phone number is 1800 341 900. Open 7 days a week, from 10am to 10pm each day. It offers confidential information, advice, support and understanding to women who are being physically, sexually or mentally abused in their own homes. The Helpline also acts as a referral to refuges, counselling services, solicitors, legal aid and other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which are helpful to women experiencing abuse within a relationship.

Men who are living with domestic abuse can contact Amen which is a voluntary group which provides a confidential helpline, information and a support service for male victims of domestic abuse. You can contact them by calling (046) 9023718, it is open from 9am to 5pm Monday – Friday. If you need help outside these hours please call: 086 194 7270.

If you have experienced sexual violence you can contact the Rape Crisis Centre's 24 hour helpline: 1800 778888 (operated by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre).

If you are thinking of leaving your partner:

If you are planning to leave your partner it is best to contact one of the helplines above for advice on how to do so safely and try to:

- Leave when they're not around, and if you have children take all of them with you.
- Remember to take important personal documents concerning you and your children such as your passports, driving licence, marriage and birth certificates, PPS numbers, medical cards, address book, bank books, cheque books, credit cards, court orders and any other legal and financial documents.
- Pack enough clothes to last you several days.
- Pack any medicine you or your children might need.
- Pack some of your children's favourite toys/possessions.
- Bring any personal possessions of sentimental value with you.

4. Domestic Violence Court Orders:

You can get a Protection Order from the courts, which is a temporary safety order which will protect you while you apply for a Safety or Barring Order. The Protection Order bans a person from using violent or threatening behaviour towards you.

In exceptional circumstances a judge can grant an interim Barring Order, without your abuser being present, where they believe you are at immediate risk. If your

abuser breaches a Protection, Safety or Barring Order it is an offence and you should call your local Garda Station.

To get an order go to your local District Court. You do not need a solicitor to make an initial application, but the courts highly recommend you have legal representation for full hearings. Contact your local District Court to find out what day family law cases are heard. Contact details for your local District Court can be found in the centre pages of your local telephone directory or at www.courts.ie. If you would like someone to come with you, contact Women's Aid (1800 341 900) or your local refuge.

For more information contact a family law solicitor or the Legal Aid Board on 1890 615 200 (Monday to Friday; 10am – 12.30pm & 2pm – 4pm)

5. Making a Safety Plan:

If you are in an abusive or violent relationship having a Safety Plan ready helps you protect yourself and any children you may have, especially if you have to leave the family home in a hurry.

Below are suggestions which you might consider when making a Safety Plan:

- Is there a relative, friend or neighbour you trust? If so, think about telling them what is going on as you may need to go to them in an emergency.
- Prepare a bag for you, and any children you may have, with an extra set of house and car keys, money, a list of phone numbers you may need and a set of clothes each. Leave this bag with someone you trust.
- Keep your mobile phone with you at all times. Find somewhere you can quickly and easily use a phone if you don't have access to a mobile. This could be a public payphone, or one at a neighbour's, friend's or relative's house.
- Write out a list of numbers you might need in an emergency. Include friends, relatives, local police, GP, Women's Aid, your nearest refuge. Remember, even if you have numbers stored in your mobile you may not be able to access or use it, so copy out all numbers you might need. Keep this list with you at all times.
- Keep a small amount of money with you at all times for phone calls and/or taxi, train or bus fares etc.
- If your children are old enough to understand, explain that you might have to leave in a hurry and make sure they know what to do if that happens. You could consider arranging a meeting point should you get separated from them.
- Teach your children to dial 999 if there is an emergency. Make sure they know what they will need to say: name, address and telephone number.
- If you think your partner is about to attack you, try to stay out of the kitchen or garage where there may be knives and/or other weapons. Try to stay away from small rooms such as the bathroom where you may find it difficult to escape an attack.

If you are thinking about leaving your partner see Section 3.

6. How to help someone you know who is in an abusive relationship:

If you think someone you know is in an abusive relationship there are things you could do to help. The important thing to remember is to do it sensitively and, of course, in a way that keeps both of you safe.

You can't make decisions for the person you are trying to help. What's important is that they know they have your support whatever they choose to do.

Practical Tips:

- Ask them how they are. Let them know that they can talk to you.
- Assure them that you are there to help should they need it. For example, you could agree a code word or signal they could make when they are in need of help and/or are unable to access support themselves.
- Always prioritise safety - yours and theirs. The abuser won't appreciate you getting involved so be careful about what you do and where and when you do it. Confronting the abuser is not a good idea.
- Find out information on available support services and encourage them to contact a service so that they can make informed choices. Details of local and national services can be found at www.cosc.ie
- If you would like advice on how best to safely support the person you are concerned about, you too can contact one of the helplines listed in Section 1.

7. Help for those who have experienced sexual violence/assault:

If your concern is related to a current incident of sexual abuse of a child please contact Children at Risk Ireland Foundation Helpline: 1890 924 567

The following notes are specifically for adults who have experienced sexual violence/assault.

Incidents of sexual violence/assault can be reported to your local Gardaí. Persons affected can also contact the local Rape Crisis Centre, Women's Aid or any of the other relevant local support services listed on the Cosc website (www.cosc.ie). There is a **national helpline for all adults who have experienced sexual violence/assault: 1800 77 88 88**.This national helpline is run by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and is open 24 hours, 7 days a week.

It is up to the person who has/is being assaulted to decide if they want to report the incident(s) of sexual violence/assault to the Gardaí. Washing themselves or their clothes they were wearing at the time of the assault could possibly destroy valuable forensic evidence if later the victim decides they do want to report the incident to the Gardaí. While their first thoughts might be to clean themselves up you must realise that until they decide what they want to do, it is best to leave their

options open. For that reason it is also best to avoid drinking anything after an assault that involved oral penetration so that a swab can be taken. However, it's important to realise that the gathering of forensic evidence needs to be done within a very short time period for the best results to be obtained. Good quality forensic evidence obtained can greatly strengthen the possibility of successfully prosecuting the offender.

When a person has been raped or sexually assaulted, they need to consider seeing a doctor as soon as possible. They should consider doing this regardless of whether or not they want to report the assault to the Gardaí. The idea of a physical examination may be distressing, but seeking medical help may be of benefit from the view of personal health, and for forensic evidence, if later the person decides to report the crime. This way they can get any injuries treated, get tested and treated for possible STIs and be advised of the availability of counselling.

Without committing themselves to anything, people who need help can also ring their nearest Rape Crisis Centre for information on the best place to seek medical and other attention in their local area. The Rape Crisis Centre can also offer support and information about what to do in the immediate, short and long-term future. Some Rape Crisis Centres have trained volunteers to accompany victims to the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit, the Garda Station and/or to court – if victims wish. The Centre is a useful port of call at any stage, whatever they decide to do. Their services are for men and women.

8. Helping someone who tells you they have been sexually assaulted

If someone tells you that they have experienced sexual assault of some description, here is some advice about how to respond to that person. You could also call your local Rape Crisis Centre or the Rape Crisis Helpline (1800 77 88 88) for advice.

It is important to remember that you can't make decisions for the person, only they can decide what action they wish to take. What you can do is:

- Tell the person you are glad they told you about what happened, and that you want to help
- Tell them you believe them
- Tell them that you can find out about support agencies for them and if they want, you can ring a support agency for them or will even go with them to the support agency for the first time, if they want
- Tell them that they do not have to be alone with this
- Tell them that they have time to think about what they want to do, and that you will continue to help them
- Give them time to think. If this is the first time they have told anyone, they might "pull back" a little and need to get used to the idea that someone else knows
- If it is a very recent assault, tell them that you will find out about medical and legal supports

- Tell them that the decision is really up to them, and that you will support their decision.

You can also get support from a Rape Crisis Centre if you are supporting someone who has been raped or abused. You may at times find it difficult to give your support, and you can ring your local Rape Crisis Centre to get help about this.

There is more detailed practical advice on what people can do if they have been sexually assaulted in section 7.

If you suspect that an adult you know has experienced sexual assault, you could raise the topic of sexual abuse in their company. For example you could talk about something you saw in the paper or on TV, and you can say that if anyone ever told you, you would help them get help. This could be a way to let them know that you are comfortable talking about abuse, and that you would be supportive if they told you.

9. Help for older people experiencing abuse in the home

If you are an older person and are experiencing abuse or violence at home from a partner or other carer, or if you suspect an older person you know may be a victim of abuse, you can contact the HSE Elder Abuse Services.

The HSE has Senior Case Workers in Elder Abuse now working in most Local Health Office Areas. Contact your GP, Public Health Nurse, local Health Centre or An Garda Siochana for details of your local Case Worker or call the **HSE Infoline at: 1850 24 1850 (Monday to Saturday, 8am-8pm)**
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All reported cases of Elder Abuse are treated very seriously. All cases will be treated with confidentiality and, in so far as is practical, will be handled in a way that respects the wishes of the older person. The prime focus is on ensuring the safety and well-being of the older person while providing supports to stop the unwanted behaviour and facilitate the continuation of care.

Another source of support for older people is the Senior Helpline, which provides opportunities for older people to talk to someone of their own age group for the price of a local call from anywhere in Ireland. Callers can talk to one of the older volunteers and all calls are taken in the strictest of confidence. **Senior Helpline: 1850 440 444 (7 days a week, 10am–4pm and 7pm–10pm)**

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