

what can I do?

If you are in an abusive relationship, there are three important steps you can take.

- **Recognise that it is happening to you.**
- **Accept that you are not to blame.**
- **Get help and support.**

Recognising domestic violence

Domestic violence includes physical assault, sexual abuse, rape and threats. It may also include destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation and harassment. Some abusers offer 'rewards' if certain conditions are met, or to try to persuade their partners that the abuse won't happen again. But, however persuasive they seem, the violence usually gets worse over time.

Domestic violence may happen to anyone, and in all kinds of relationships – heterosexual relationships, lesbian or gay relationships or in relationships where a child is violent towards a parent. People suffer domestic violence regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality and lifestyle. The abuse can begin at any time – in new relationships or after many years spent together.

Accepting that you are not to blame.

It is not easy to accept that a loved one can behave so aggressively. Because you can't explain your partner's behaviour, you may assume that you are to blame. You are not. No-one deserves to be assaulted, abused or humiliated, least of all by a partner in a supposedly caring relationship. It is your abuser's behaviour which needs to change – there is no excuse.

Getting help

The most important thing you can do is tell someone. You may decide quickly and easily to ask for help. Or you may find the process is long and painful as you try to make the relationship work and stop the violence, and struggle against the practical and emotional reasons for staying in an abusive relationship. Most people try to find help a number of times before getting what they need, and even after leaving the relationship there may still be a risk. Never be afraid to ask for help again and remember, in an emergency, always call the police by dialling 999 (minicom 0800 112 999).

Remember that domestic violence is a crime and all agencies should work together to wipe out and prevent that crime, and to protect women, children and men who are suffering because of domestic violence. It is not simply the responsibility of a victim of domestic violence to end the abuse.

