

What is family violence?

Family violence, or domestic violence, is a pattern of behaviour where one person tries to dominate and control the other. It can include a range of behaviours, including those below.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse isn't only an act that causes physical harm. Threatening to harm someone is also a form of physical abuse.

All the following are forms of physical abuse, even if the violence is threatened but not carried out.

- Hitting, punching, pulling by the hair, choking, pinching, pushing, stabbing or restraining you in any way. Physical injuries are often directed at parts of the body that other people will not see.
- Using weapons to frighten you or causing damage to property.
- Not letting you sleep, eat, or take your medication.
- Harming your pets.

Verbal abuse

- Harassing or threatening you.
- Saying things to frighten you. For example, telling you that the children will live with them if you leave.
- Calling you insulting names.
- Undermining you as a parent in front of the children.

Social abuse

- Putting you down in front of others.
- Lying about you to other people.
- Isolating you from people who do support you.
- Not letting you visit a doctor on your own.
- Controlling your life; not letting you have a life outside the home.

Sexual abuse

- Forcing you to have sex when you don't want to or making you engage in sexual practices you are not comfortable with.
- Making you wear clothes you are not comfortable with.
- Making you look at, or pose for, pornographic photos or videos.

Financial abuse

- Controlling the money so you are dependent.
- Forcing you to sign for loans you might not agree with.
- Questioning you about every purchase you make.
- Using joint finances for personal use.
- Incurring debts for which you are also responsible.

Spiritual abuse

- Preventing you from practising your own religious beliefs or cultural practices.
- Forcing you to follow a religion you don't want to.

Emotional abuse

- Withdrawing from you and not giving you support.
- Controlling you through anger or not speaking to you.
- Expressing extreme jealousy.
- Not letting you use the phone or transport.
- Not giving you an opportunity to choose for yourself.

Family violence is a deliberate act and is rarely an isolated event. Over time, the violence tends to increase in frequency and severity.

Stalking

- Constantly making phone calls to you or sending text messages, emails, faxes, letters or unwanted gifts to you.
- Loitering near your home or workplace.
- Spying on you or following you, including through the use of electronic means.

Family violence and children

Children are affected by family violence, even if the violence is not directed at them. For example, if they hear, witness or are exposed to the behaviour or its effects, such as a distressed adult, an injured person or damaged property.

Sometimes, violent and controlling behaviour falls into more than one type of abuse, or it might not seem to fit into any of the categories listed here.

What matters is whether someone is controlled or is fearful as a result of the behaviour. Any behaviour or action that constitutes family violence is unacceptable, even if it is not a criminal offence.

What is family violence?

Family Violence Protection Act

Section 5 of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines 'family violence' as:

- Behaviour by a person towards a family member that:
 - Is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive
 - Is threatening or coercive
 - In any way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for their safety or wellbeing or that of another person
- Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or see or otherwise be exposed to the effects of behaviour referred to above.

Family violence also includes:

- Assaulting or causing personal injury to a family member or threatening to do so
- Sexually assaulting a family member or engaging in another form of sexually coercive behaviour or threatening to engage in such behaviour
- Intentionally damaging a family member's property, or threatening to do so
- Unlawfully depriving a family member of their liberty, or threatening to do so
- Causing or threatening to cause the death of, or injury to, an animal, whether or not the animal belongs to the family member to whom the behaviour is directed, so as to control, dominate or coerce the family member.

Behaviour may constitute family violence even if the behaviour would not constitute a criminal offence.

Support services

1800Respect

A 24-hour, national, confidential information, counselling and support service for people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sexual assault, domestic or family violence. Call 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800respect.org.au for more information.

MensLine Australia

A 24-hour national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Call 1300 78 99 78 or visit www.mensline.org.au for more information.

Relationships Australia Victoria

A provider of family violence prevention, support and recovery services, including Men's Behaviour Change Programs, and counselling and support groups for those affected by family violence. Call 1300 364 277 or visit www.rav.org.au for more information.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and free from abuse and violence in their relationships.

Safe from violence

This flyer has been developed based on the content in Relationships Australia's booklet, *Safe from violence*.

You can order a printed copy or download the booklet free of charge by visiting www.rav.org.au/booklets/#SFV

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria is a valued provider of specialist relationship and family services.

A community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

We provide services from 15 centres across Victoria and additional outreach locations.

Our services include counselling, family dispute resolution, relationship education courses, family violence services and professional training.