

Charmed and Dangerous

A woman's guide to reclaiming
a healthy relationship



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Introduction

This booklet, *Charmed and Dangerous: A Woman's Guide to Reclaiming a Healthy Relationship*, has been developed for women by women. This booklet was the initiative of the Tweed Shire Women's Services Inc.

We hope this sharing of information may assist you in your journey to achieving and maintaining a healthy relationship; a relationship based on trust, respect, positive communication, honesty and balanced power.

Domestic and Family violence is not just about the family; it is a social concern. As a result of inherent cultural and social beliefs millions of women globally from all socio-economic groups are abused and treated violently by men everyday. Family violence is not about a male partner being angry or losing it, it is a way for the abuser to have control over and dominate their partner and/or children. Statistically women and children are the most likely victims of domestic and family violence. This book is written for women, as a tool to break free of controlling, abusive or violent relationships and reclaim a healthy relationship.

Domestic and family violence is a crime, and we are working locally and nationally to increase the inherent right of women and children to be safe from abuse and violence and to build a network of resources for women to access in times of need to ensure women feel informed of their options when making decisions about their own and their children's safety

Many women have contributed their experience and knowledge into the development of this booklet. To all those women who have contributed —thank you.

The journey of reclaiming a healthy relationship differs for each woman; there is no right way or wrong way – only your way. Take what information you need from this book, give yourself time, ask for help when needed and remember to congratulate yourself on your achievements—which have been many.

It may not be the right time for you to read this book right now, if not put it aside in a safe place. You will know when you are ready to take this journey.

Tracy Asby, *Manager*

This edition of *Charmed and Dangerous* has been updated and developed by the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program (WDVCAP) at Legal Aid NSW. June 2020



How did I get here?

Do you deserve to be abused? The answer is ‘NO’.

Did you ask for it? The answer is ‘NO’ .

Are you alone? The answer is ‘NO’.

Violence against women and children is not acceptable for any reason. You are not responsible for any form of abuse and are not alone with the pain and suffering you are experiencing. Unfortunately, domestic and family violence is everywhere in our community, especially behind closed doors.

You may ask ‘how did I allow myself to get into this situation and what did I do?’ You did nothing; it has been a gradual process for you to be where you are today. It starts with subtle put downs until it comes to a point where you begin to feel unsafe for yourself and your children. You begin to feel isolated and alone; reinforcing the fact that you are to blame, which is untrue.

There is always the hope that the situation will improve and this keeps us locked into the abusive situation with our dreams of a happy and harmonious family life. To hold on to this hope and dream we will keep peace at all cost. This is where we start ‘walking on egg shells’ waiting for the next cycle of abusive behaviour.

Our hope is sustained by the promises the abuser and the disappointments when the behaviour reappears. We begin to feel trapped and alone with no-one to talk to, there is a sense of shame as we believe it is our fault and that no-one will believe what we say. So we often suffer the abuse in silence.

How you may feel

“If this is love, why do I feel so sad?”

Often the first indication that there is something wrong with the way you are being treated is how you feel. You may feel uneasy, tense, confused, like something isn’t right. Trust your feelings/gut instinct —they are important. Think about how you feel when you are with your partner.

If you are experiencing domestic or family violence you may feel:

- Constantly fearful and 'on edge'
- Like you have lost belief in yourself
- Isolated and alone
- Like you are going mad
- Pain/suffering from physical injuries
- Shamed or embarrassed
- Guilty or depressed
- Exhausted and without energy
- Anxious
- Confused about what is real and what's not
- Sad, angry, tearful and fearful
- Pressured and uncomfortable
- Humiliated and confused
- Restricted and controlled
- Full of self blame and self loathing
- Confused about what to do

The effects of violence on women can include:

- Feeling trapped
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol
- Sleeping problems
- Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety
- Self harm or suicide
- Nausea or headaches
- Violence against children or partner
- Losing touch with who you are
- Feeling alone, confused and afraid
- Not feeling like you can trust anyone
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Emotional distress

You **DON'T** deserve to be treated this way! Domestic and family violence is a crime. There are many excuses that can be used to justify violence but it is important to remember that people **CHOOSE** to be violent.

Understanding domestic and family violence

To determine if your relationship is you need to look at what the other person is doing, how it affects your life, how it makes you feel and where the balance of power lies in the relationship. Trust your intuition: If something does not feel right to you then it is not okay.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Duluth, Minnesota.

Forms of domestic violence

Fear can be the most powerful means of control. Fear can be created through any behaviour which is used to intimidate you and which takes away your power.

Intimidation includes breaking your possessions, intimidating body language, hostile and aggressive questioning, constant calls, emails, text messages and stalking.

Abuse and violence can present differently in different types of relationships

Physical Abuse includes physical harm to you, your children, your property, family, friends and pets. It may also involve the threat of weapons.

Sexual Abuse includes any forced or unwanted sexual interaction. This may include: forced sexual acts, harassment, or sexual harm.

Verbal Abuse includes constant putdowns, insults and verbal threats. Verbal abuse is a humiliating experience and over time can destroy your self-esteem and self- belief.

Emotional/Psychological Abuse includes behaviour/actions and comments to undermine your sense of self and destroy your self confidence/worth.

Spiritual Abuse includes ridiculing your spiritual beliefs and or excluding you from taking part in cultural or spiritual activities.

Financial Abuse occurs when the abuser takes control over your financial resources. This may include not allowing you to work or controlling the money you earn or spend.

Social Abuse is when the abuser criticises, jokes about or puts you down in front of family, friends, work friends etc and/ or controls where you go and who you see.

Technology Abuse is the use of technology, such as the internet, phones, computers, social media and surveillance devices, to stalk, harass, intimidate or humiliate you. This also includes recording or sharing intimate images of you without your consent.

Reproductive Abuse includes forcing you to fall pregnant, to terminate a pregnancy or to use or not use birth control.

Abuse in LGBTIQ relationships can involve unique tactics of abuse, including identity-based abuse such as threatening to 'out' you to others where you have chosen not to come out or feel it is unsafe to do so.

Strangulation or suffocation

Strangulation is a serious crime. It is an indicator that violence is escalating and is the most lethal form of domestic violence.

Strangulation occurs when any pressure is placed around the neck area with enough force that breathing becomes difficult or impossible. The pressure around the neck can take many forms, either one or both hands, rope, clothing or anything else. Suffocation occurs by covering of the mouth or nose, preventing air from entering your lungs.

When strangulation or suffocation occurs, your brain is deprived of oxygen, the blood flow has been stopped from exiting your brain and your airway is closed off making breathing impossible or increasingly difficult.

The time frame that this occurs can be minimal, each time that blood and air flow is disrupted to and from your brain, your brain cells will die. Brain cells do not regenerate once this occurs, this can result in long term health issues.

Often there will be no visible injuries, however; there may be serious internal injuries. It is important to see a doctor for medical advice as soon as possible. You need to tell the doctor you have been strangled, so they know what to look for. Ask the doctor to document any injuries for future reference and as evidence if needed.

Important

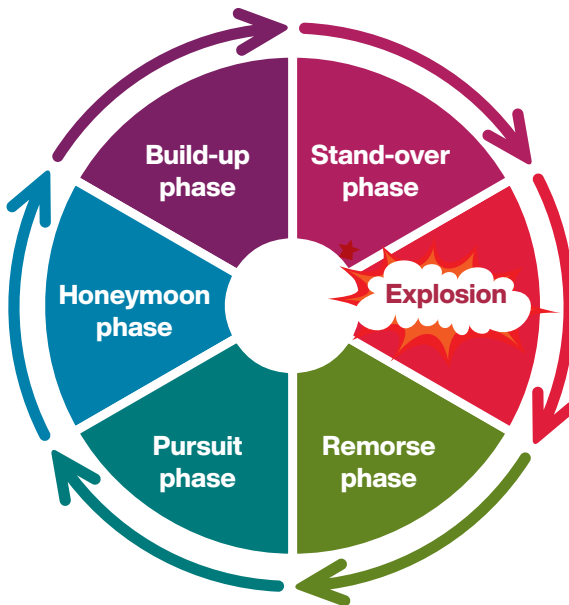
- Seek medical attention as soon as possible
- Tell someone e.g. a support worker or the police
- Document signs and symptoms. Some things may develop over days or weeks.
- In the minutes, hours, days or even weeks after being strangled, take note of any signs and symptoms you may be experiencing such as:
- Difficulty breathing, talking or swallowing

- › Any neck or throat pain; including coughing
- › Vomiting or nausea
- › Any loss of bladder or bowel control
- › Ringing in your ears, dizziness or headaches
- › Any memory loss
- › Confusion, feeling disoriented, restless or tired.


Immediately after an act of violence like this is committed on you, you may be relieved that you survived. Over time, you may start to minimise the experience. This level of violence places you at high risk of losing your life. There may not be a next time if you do not seek help.

The cycle of violence

In a healthy relationship there are periods of happiness as well as times of tension between partners. This tension is generally followed by a phase of problem solving that signifies an equality and respect between these partners. In an unhealthy relationship, times of tension often lead to periods of abuse and violence. These explosions are followed by a time of apologies and return to the honeymoon phase, where things appear on the surface to be normal.



Source: Dr Lenore Walker, 1979, USA



It is important to remember that the abuser controls this cycle. They may skip some stages or they may travel through it over and over quickly.

The build-up phase

This phase involves escalating tension marked by increased verbal, physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse; the behaviour is often volatile and unpredictable.

The stand-over phase

This is an extremely frightening period for you and your family. The behaviour of the abuser escalates and becomes increasingly unpredictable. You may feel that you are ‘walking on egg shells’ and fear that anything you do will cause the situation to deteriorate further.

Explosion

The explosion stage marks the peak of violence in the relationship. The abuser experiences a release of tension during an explosion phase, which may become addictive.

The remorse phase

At the remorse stage, the abuser feels ashamed of their behaviour. They retreat and become withdrawn from the relationship; justifying their actions to themselves and to others.

The pursuit phase

The abuser may promise to never be violent again. They may try to make up for their past behaviour during this period and say that other factors have caused them to be violent, for example, work stress, drugs, or alcohol. The abuser becomes attentive, purchasing gifts, and promising that the violence will never happen again.

The honeymoon phase

During the honeymoon phase of the cycle of violence, both people in the relationship may be in denial as to how bad the abuse and violence was. Both people do not want the relationship to end, so are happy to ignore the possibility that the violence could occur again. After some time, this stage will fade and the cycle may begin again.

The effects of domestic violence on children

The effects of domestic and family violence are experienced by all family members. Living with violence can have as much of an impact on children as the victims themselves. Children who witness abuse or live in a violent household experience the same fear, intimidation and threat to safety that you experience. This wheel shows how domestic violence affects children.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Duluth, Minnesota.

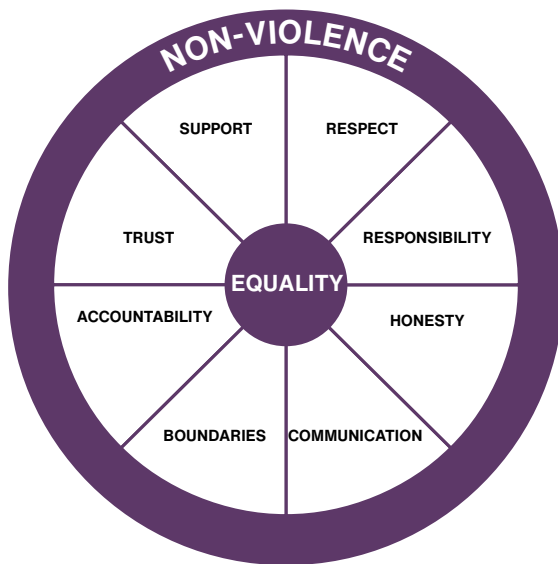
Children need a safe and supportive environment to develop their emotional, social, intellectual and physical wellbeing and to grow up to be healthy and well-adjusted. Children learn by what they see and are influenced by what they experience in the home. Often children will take on the role of protector and peace-keeper; this places the child at considerable emotional and physical risk and can result in long term emotionally damaging behaviours.

Studies show that children who have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to:

- display aggressive and/or socially inappropriate behaviours
- adopt unhealthy relationship dynamics
- have diminished self-esteem and self-worth
- have poor academic performance, problem solving skills and concentration
- show emotional distress, phobias, anxiety or depression
- have physical health impacts

What is a healthy relationship?

A healthy relationship is what we all strive to achieve.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Duluth, Minnesota.

A healthy relationship is identified through the presence of equality. The elements of a healthy relationship are applicable to all forms of relationships; with friends, dating partners, intimate partners, life partners, or family members. Each component of the wheel supports and reinforces the others, with equality always at the centre.

Respect: Respect other people's boundaries. Learn other people's boundaries and do not infringe upon them.

Responsibility: A shared responsibility for maintaining the relationship. Both people in a relationship should be included in making decisions.

Communication: Communicate effectively. Effective communication involves clearly expressing your thoughts and feelings and listening to those of others.

Boundaries: Maintain healthy boundaries. Create a safe and comfortable space to experience relationships by defining and communicating your boundaries to others.

Honesty: Be open and honest. It is important for both people in a relationship to be honest about their intentions, feelings or desires.

Accountability: Be responsible for your own actions. Talk to others to understand how your actions affect them.

Trust: Trust lies at the heart of a strong relationship and is the foundation that love and respect are built on.

Support: Support and encouragement of each other to achieve their goals and dreams, and personal growth.

There is no place in a healthy relationship for controlling, abusive and violent behaviour.

Relationship warning signs

Before an abuser starts physically assaulting his victim, he typically demonstrates his abusive tactics through certain behaviours. The following are five major warning signs:

Charm

Abusive men are often very charming. At the start of a relationship abusers may seem like Prince Charming, charming you, your friends and family. Abusers have times in which they can be very engaging, thoughtful, considerate and charismatic. Abusers may use their charm to gain very personal information about you which he may later use against you. Charm can be used to deceive you, your family and friends.

Control

Abusers are obsessed with control. Over time the abuser may control every aspect of your life, who you talk to, what you wear, where and when you go out and your access to money. Whilst at times abusers may appear to lose control when they go into a rage, it is important to remember that they are actually very much in control of their behaviour.

We know the abuser's behaviour is not about anger but is a controlled action because:

- The abuser is often not violent towards other people.
- The abuse often occurs when there are no witnesses. The abuser is able to stop their violence when the police arrive or when the phone rings.
- The abuser is able to direct where they punch or kick so any bruising or marks can be hidden from other people.

Emotional abuse

The abuser may use emotional abuse to destroy your self-esteem. You may experience being falsely blamed for the violence; you may be put down, called names or be threatened. Over time you may find you are blaming yourself for the violence and forgetting that you deserve to be treated with respect. Some women find emotional abuse is more difficult to heal from than physical abuse, the bruises and broken bones mend, yet the emotional scars remain.

Isolation

Abusers isolate their victims geographically and socially. Geographic isolation involves moving you (often long distances) away from your friends, family and other support networks; over time isolating you from everyone. It often begins with the abuser wanting you to spend more and more time with him; and can often be misinterpreted as him caring about you.

Jealousy

Jealousy can be used by the abuser as a means of controlling you. Abusers may accuse you of having affairs and seeing other men. Jealousy can escalate from name calling to jealous rage.

Information for individuals from the LGBTIQ community

Domestic violence in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning or asexual (LGBTIQ) community is a real and serious issue. The rate of domestic violence in LGBTIQ relationships is roughly the same as domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. As in heterosexual relationships, the problem is likely underreported. Facing a system which is often oppressive and hostile towards those who identify as anything other than “straight”, individuals experiencing abuse in LGBTIQ relationships frequently report being afraid of revealing their sexual orientation or the nature of their relationship.

Additionally, even those who attempt to report violence in their relationship face further challenges seeking support and may already be struggling with mental and physical health issues and limited access to health services. Not only might personal attitudes towards the LGBTIQ community come into play, but these providers, such as social services and police, may have inadequate levels of experience and training to work with victims and ineffective laws to enforce to support victims.

Sometimes police and services may misidentify the victim and perpetrator. It is always important to seek legal advice and speak to a support service.

Although advances have been made in the provision of services, the enforcement of the law, and the equality of protections available to those in LGBTIQ relationships over the last decade, it is important for you to be aware of your rights and options as they relate to your safety and your decisions to leave an abusive relationship.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Duluth, Minnesota.

Unique aspects of abuse in LGBTIQ relationships

Abuse in relationships share many similarities to all abusive relationships, the key feature being using power and control and the impact on the abused partner. However, a number of aspects are unique to abusive LGBTIQ relationships These include:

‘Outing’ as a method of control

If the abused partner isn’t out to their family, friends, and workmates or within their cultural community, the abusive partner may use ‘outing’ or the threat of ‘outing’ as a method of control.

Controlling someone’s identity and/or access to medications

A partner may pressure you to conform to sex or gender “norms”. They may pressure you to have surgery to “normalise” your body, sex organs or physical appearance, or they may control your access to gender transition related healthcare.

Domestic violence in the LGBTIQ community is not as well understood due to the “heterosexual face” of domestic violence. There needs to be more discussion among community members and mainstream services to improve awareness of abusive behaviours in LGBTIQ relationships. Most information on domestic violence relates to heterosexual relationships with the man partner usually as the perpetrator.

This lack of understanding means some people may not:

- believe it happens in same sex relationships;
 - recognise abuse as domestic violence if it does happen to them;
- or
- know how to respond if they see domestic violence in their friend’s or family member’s relationship.

Confidentiality and isolation within the LGBTIQ community

The relatively small size of the LGBTIQ community, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, can make it difficult for the abused partner to seek help. They may feel embarrassed about the abuse or their partner may have tried to turn others in the community against them. An abusive partner may isolate the other from contact with the LGBTIQ community by preventing them from reading the community media, attending events or seeing their friends.

This is especially true for people in their first same-sex, gender or sexual diverse relationship who may not have had much contact with the community before the relationship began.

Services may not be well developed

Although women can access most general domestic violence services, like refuges, court assistance schemes, and counselling services, these services may have little experience in working with people with diverse genders and sexualities and have a limited understanding of abuse in LGBTIQ relationships and therefore, may not offer the most appropriate service.

However, there are LGBTIQ specific services available that offer assistance and support.

A list of support services is provided in the contact numbers section.

Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Privacy and confidentiality can be complex issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families when seeking to separate from abusive partners or family members.

“The interconnected nature of Aboriginal communities can mean a woman’s ability to maintain anonymity is compromised and this undermines her ability to establish a safe space for herself and her children away from violence.” (Elizabeth Hoffman House)

“The blackfella grapevine is deadly when you want to find family, but not so great when you’re having problems and everyone knows.” (Northern Rivers worker)

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and specialist workers within mainstream or white services understand these issues and can assist with maintaining confidentiality and establishing safety.

Safety planning

Think of ideas that will help keep you safe and put them in to action. Here are some things you can do now to make it safer for you and your children.

Safety during an abusive incident

- Be aware of all exit routes and safety spots for you and your children
- Seek support from neighbours to call the police if they hear a disturbance
- Develop a safety plan for your children; how to call 000, how to safely exit the house and how to get help
- Important documents/medications kept in an accessible place to take with you
- Phone police as soon as you can
- Seek medical support for any injuries
- Keep a diary of violent incidents, including dates.

Safety at work

- Inform someone at your workplace about your current situation
- Avoid taking the same route to work each day
- Develop a safety plan for arriving and leaving work

If you decide to leave, refer to page 23 for more safety tips.

Where to from here

A few things to remember when seeking support are:

- Violence is **NEVER** acceptable and violence is a **CRIME**
- You are not to blame for the abuse. Abusers make decisions about their behaviour
- Domestic violence has a damaging effect on children, extended families and communities

Domestic Violence Crisis Support Provides 24/7 counselling, information and referrals to women's refuges and services that offer support, guidance and legal advice.

NSW Domestic Violence Line: **1800 656 463**

Lifeline & Kids Helpline

National 24/7 crisis telephone counselling, information and referral services.

Lifeline: **131 114**

Kids Helpline: **1800 551 800**

Doctor

Your GP can offer a wide range of emotional and medical support services, as well as access to Medicare-funded counselling.

Safe Beds for Pets

Provides temporary housing for pets of women and children seeking refuge from domestic violence, allowing them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future. **(02) 9782 4408**

Women's Domestic Violence Advocacy Services and Safer Pathway

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs) are locally based, independent services for women and their children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. WDVCASs can provide you with information, support and referrals and help you get legal protection through the court, such as supporting you with an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO). You can find your nearest WDVCAS by calling **1800 938 227**.

When police attend a domestic violence incident, or you go to the police station to report an incident, they will assess the level of threat to your safety. A specialist domestic violence worker from the local WDVCAS will then contact you to talk about your safety and discuss your needs and the services that are available to support you in your area.

If you are assessed as at serious threat (or high risk) due to domestic violence, the worker may talk with you about referral to a Safety Action Meeting. These meetings are attended by local government and non-government agencies who will consider the risks to your safety and develop actions aimed at reducing the threat to you and your children's safety. After your matter is discussed at the meeting, the specialist worker will call you to discuss whether you wish to accept any of the services offered.

What if your partner starts a men's behaviour change program?

Is he likely to change?

Men's use of violent and controlling behaviour rarely just stops. Your partner or family member might be quite sincere when he promises it will never happen again. Unfortunately, most men find that they cannot keep such promises without support and assistance from others.

Participating in a men's behaviour change program is no guarantee of change. Some men do give up controlling their partner and stop their use of violence. Others might stop their use of physical violence but continue other forms of abuse or control. Men who attend, but do not really make an effort might not change their ways at all. Others might take a long time to change, or change for a while but slip back into their old ways.

You are the best judge of whether your partner or family member is changing, or changing enough for you. You should make that judgement based on his actions, not your hopes.

What might his participation be like for me?

You should not base your decisions about whether to stay or go, or about safety, on whether your partner or male family member is participating in a behaviour change group.

What about 'anger management'?

Men's behaviour change programs are for men who are using violent and controlling behaviour towards their partner and/or children. Some of these men might have a problem with expressing angry feelings. Others might be experiencing difficulties expressing other feelings, such as fear, anxiety or frustration. Most people experience anger, but this doesn't mean they use violence or control. Men make choices every day about how they express their feelings.

Stopping violent and controlling actions is about more than managing anger. One of the facts that best highlights this is that men who use violent and controlling behaviour towards their partner often don't use it towards anyone else. They can control their anger, but in certain settings, with certain people, they choose not to.

This is why we encourage men who use violence to participate in a men's behaviour change program – not an anger management group.

What about relationship counselling or mediation?

Men's use of violent and controlling behaviour is about their choices. Choosing to be non-violent and then really making it happen requires very specialised support. Relationship counselling is based on both parties having a reasonably equal distribution of power. If your partner or family member is using violent and controlling behaviour, you probably won't be able to make fully free decisions or act on your own needs.

If your relationship is in trouble, this is likely to be because of your partner's actions. There might be other reasons for conflict (all couples disagree!), but these are secondary. Until you feel safe enough to talk about your own needs, feelings and perspectives, relationship counselling isn't going to work for either of you. If your partner or male family member is using or threatening physical violence against you, we strongly recommend you do not suggest relationship counselling to him. If you are being required to participate in mediation, we encourage you to seek information and legal advice about how that can be safe for you.

Your legal rights

Every woman has a right to live in a safe and peaceful home with her children. Police can make an application on their behalf for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) to protect them from future threats and/or violence. An ADVO is an order made by the court to protect people from future harm. The ADVO restricts the behaviour of the person they fear.

This order can prohibit the abuser from returning to the home, going to your work, or to your child's school. An ADVO is not a criminal charge unless the violent person breaches the order.

Things to remember about ADVOs

- An ADVO can be amended to ensure your safety if you want to maintain contact or continue to live with the abusive person.
- An ADVO is not a criminal conviction. However the police may feel that criminal charges should be laid to maintain you and your children's safety.
- When the ADVO is broken or breached, the abuser can be charged with a criminal offence. For this to occur you must report all breaches to the police

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS)

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services are locally based independent services for women and children seeking help and information about how to get protection through the Local Court from domestic violence.

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services are funded by Legal Aid NSW.

For more information about ADVOs or your nearest Women's Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, call **1800 938 227**.

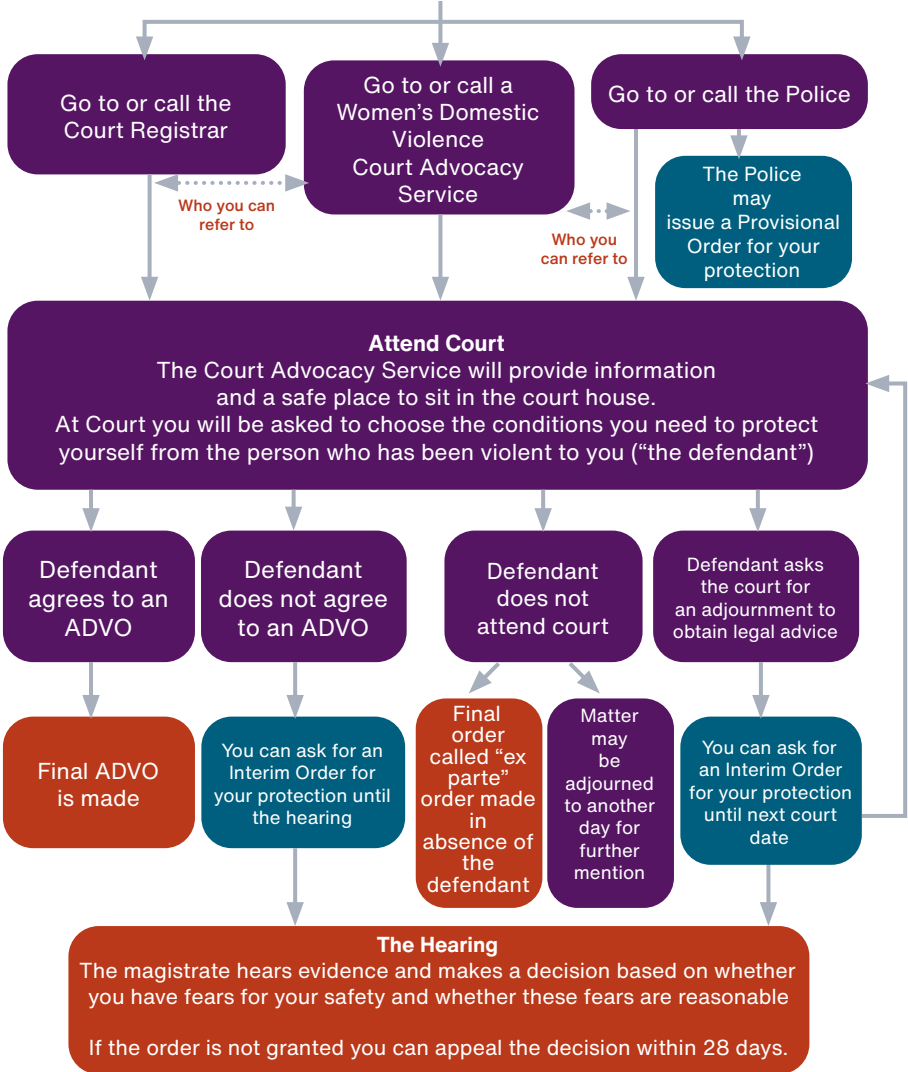
LawAccess NSW

LawAccess NSW is a free information service run by Legal Aid NSW. Click on the Chat with us button at www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au or call **1300 888 529** between 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit

A dedicated statewide service of Legal Aid NSW bringing together specialist domestic violence lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors. Call **1800 979 529**.

Abuse/Violence



Don't forget to ask about financial help from victims services

From Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program 2004

Deciding to leave

It is a common misunderstanding that it is easy for a woman to leave a violent, controlling and abusive relationship. Many women do leave and many try to leave; however leaving an abusive relationship can be a very difficult, lonely and often a very dangerous time. For some women, leaving can mean they risk losing their family and community support networks, financial security, homes, hopes and dreams.

Leaving a violent relationship permanently can take on average six attempts; each time women find they become stronger, clearer and more confident. The number of barriers faced by women leaving violence may seem overwhelming but it is important to remember that many women leave violent relationships and find safe and fulfilling lives for themselves and their children.

What should I do before I leave?

Women leave a violent relationship to become safe however; it is important to remember that this safety may not occur immediately. Separation can be the time of greatest danger. It is important to have a clear safety plan for you and your children before you leave.

These are some things you can do to prepare:

- Contact the Domestic Violence Hotline and arrange safe accommodation for you and your children
- Contact RSPCA to arrange safe accommodation for your pets
- Seek support from a domestic violence worker to discuss your options and consider ways to keep yourself safe such as getting an ADVO
- Arrange your transportation in advance
- Practice travelling to your intended safe spot
- Prepare and safely store a leaving package with money, documents, clothes, spare keys
- Seek legal advice
- Program emergency services contacts and support services into your phone
- Ask your doctor to document any injuries
- Only tell trusted people of your intended new location

What should I take when I leave?

This is a useful list to help you prepare to leave. Take the items below only if it is safe to do so. The safety of you and your children is most important.

You may be able to return with police support at a later time to collect your possessions.

Checklist (Box)

- Driver's licence, bank details, credit cards
- Birth/marriage/divorce certificate/s for you and your children
- Centrelink, immigration documents
- Car and house keys
- Passports for you and your children
- Car registration papers
- Medical records, medication and Medicare details
- Taxation and employment documents
- Court papers including protection and family law papers
- Rental, mortgage, legal papers, copy of ADVO
- Clothing
- Personal address book
- Your children's favourite toys and other items of comfort
- Personal items which have value or you fear may be destroyed such as jewellery and photographs

Staying safe after separation

Leaving an abusive relationship does not always result in immediate safety. Here are some tips you and your children can use to maintain safety after separation.

- Seek legal advice; be informed of your rights
- Program emergency services/contacts into your phone
- Inform your children's school/day care of collection arrangements for your children

- Keep your ADVO with you at all times. Store a copy with someone you trust. If your circumstances change, apply to the local court for a variation to change the conditions
- Request police support if you need to return to the house to retrieve your possessions
- Consider changing your bank, postal and phone contacts
- Consider using a silent number and using caller ID
- Consider asking the Australian Electoral Commission to exclude your name and contact details on the electoral roll
- Avoid using your usual shopping centre—change your routines
- Increase home security (changing locks, security chains, sensor lights)
- Seek support from neighbours to call the police if they hear a disturbance
- If your partner breaches an ADVO, inform the police immediately
- Seek support from a domestic violence support worker or counsellor
- Contact Centrelink to ensure any joint correspondence to you and your partner is changed immediately.


Online safety

Abusers often misuse technology to control or monitor their victim's actions. However, technology also has an important role in keeping you safe and connected to information, resources and support. Switching off from technology is not the answer. Sometimes it is difficult to know if someone is monitoring you through your technology, and it may be a good idea to get help from a support worker or trusted friend to make your technology safer.

If you have experienced domestic and family violence and are worried about your phone being monitored, you can access a free safe phone through WESNET. Call **1800 WESNET (1800 937 638)**.

To make your technology safer, there are some precautions you can take:

Protect or change your passwords/PINs. Choose passwords for your email and other online accounts (such as online banking, social media, App/Cloud accounts, PayPal and Opal) that would be difficult for your abuser to guess, particularly by avoiding personal details such as birthdays, nicknames or family details. It's especially important to change your log in details for App accounts like iCloud and Google that enable built-in Apps like "Find My Phone" to track you remotely using GPS. You should change



your passwords on a safe device. Saved passwords can be accessed and viewed on most browsers. Do not to click “save my password” to ensure your passwords are not viewable or use private browsing so your search history and passwords are not logged. You can learn how to delete saved passwords by Googling your browser name (e.g., Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer) and “delete saved passwords”.

Use private browsing. Every website you visit on your device (phone, computer or tablet) is usually recorded on that device and can be seen through the web browser’s settings. When you use private browsing, your browsing history is not recorded, and your passwords and auto-filled information are not saved. For example, Incognito (Chrome), InPrivate (Internet Explorer) and Private browsing (Firefox and Safari). Make sure you close the private browsing window when you are done to end the session. If you are using a phone or tablet, you will need to close each private tab.

Use a safe computer. If you need to use the internet, but are still living with your abuser, try to use a computer at work, a public library, community centre, a trustworthy friend’s house, an Internet café, or a women’s refuge. This is particularly important if you are looking at sensitive websites. It is safer to use a computer that is less accessible to your abuser.

Clear your internet history. If you are worried about someone finding out what websites you’ve visited, you can delete them from your browsing history. You may want to think about only deleting some websites as your abuser may become suspicious if you delete your entire browsing history. To see or change your browsing history on a computer, open a web browser and press Ctrl+H (Windows) or Command+H (Mac). How you delete your browsing history on a phone depends on whether you use an iPhone or Android. See www.esafety.gov.au/women for videos on how delete your browsing history on a phone.

Create an alternative email account. Do not create or use an alternative account on any computer that your abuser may have access to. Create an anonymous user name and account you can use on a safer computer, but do not provide detailed information about yourself. Don’t use any identifying features in this email address (e.g., your name, year of birth). Consider deleting in-built mail Apps on your device if another person has access to that device. You can also check if “mail forwarding” has been activated on your old account. See www.esafety.gov.au/women for videos on how to check “mail forwarding” settings.

Social media settings. Check and update your privacy settings on any social media accounts. You may want to minimise the amount of information you share about yourself online.

Consider two-step authentication. Many accounts allow you to sign up for two-step authentication. This is an extra security setting that contacts you by email, text or call each time someone tries to sign into one of your accounts.

Image-based abuse. It is a crime to record, share or threaten to share intimate images of you without your consent. However, image-based abuse is common, affecting 1 in 3 people. If safe to do so, you should report it to police. If an intimate image is shared online, the eSafety Commissioner can help you remove the images, and sometimes take action against the person who posted the them.

You can make a report online on www.esafety.gov.au/report/image-based-abuse.

Spyware. Spyware is malware that can be installed on devices such as computers, tablets and smart phones to secretly monitor a person's private information. Spyware may access keystroke logging (all typed information), photos/videos, social media accounts, Apps, contacts, notes, browsing history, call logs, text messages, email, location, activate your camera, microphone or record calls. It may be used to delete things off your device, block certain websites or numbers and may be remotely deleted. For a person to install spyware on your device, they generally need physical access to it. A PIN or password protecting your device is the best defence. It is also important to keep your software updated on your device. Changing a SIM card on a device won't remove spyware. Spyware needs access to the internet to operate. Turning off location settings, cellular data, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth when you don't need them can increase your immediate safety. You may also want to consider doing a factory reset, however – you will need to be careful of what Apps you redownload.

For videos on how to do this, visit eSafety Women www.esafety.gov.au/women

Resisting the urge to return

After leaving a controlling, abusive and violent relationship there may be moments of regret and thoughts of reuniting. These feelings are a natural part of the grief process when dealing with the loss of a relationship. It is important to acknowledge these feelings.

There are many strategies which may be used by the abuser to encourage you to return. They may include:

- Purchase of gifts with promises of continued generosity and a better future.
- Promises of change—saying they are sorry and that the abuse will never happen again.
- Emotional blackmail—attempts to make you feel guilty, or unable to survive without them.
- Threats to self-harm, harm you, your children, or property.
- Harassing and intimidating visits, phone calls and text messages.

The strategies used will vary for each relationship and there are ways in which you can deal with them including:

- Acknowledging that the abuser's behaviours are an extension of his need to control and abuse you.
- Seek support through professional counselling.
- Attend a domestic violence support group.
- Build strong social networks.
- Get legal advice and/or take out an ADVO.

This is an important time to stay connected to local support services.

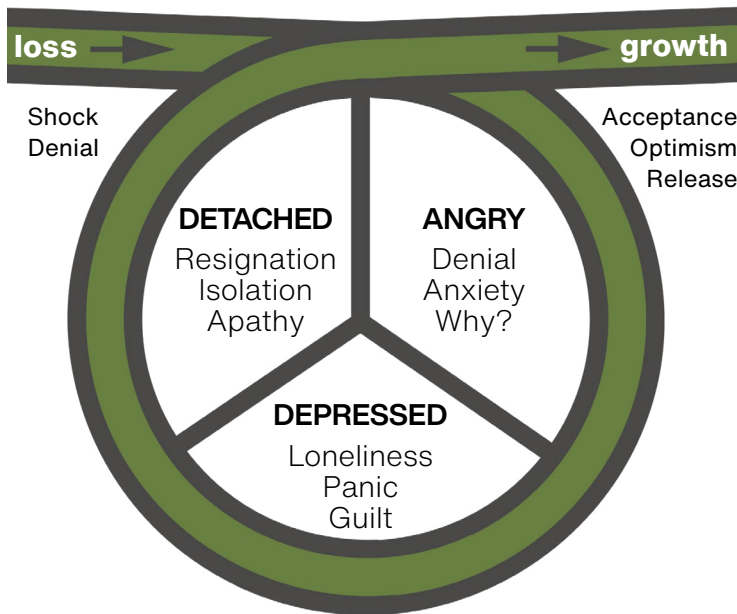
How you may feel after leaving an abusive relationship


Leaving an abusive relationship is a positive choice for you and your children. The process however, can still be difficult. It can also be difficult to make the transition alone. It is helpful to have the support of people who are experienced with helping women in abusive relationships. Your personal safety and your legal rights become more difficult to ensure when an abusive partner is involved.

Separation—how will it feel?

Separation is not easy. It may take some time to work through the steps and become re-established. It is common to identify yourself with your relationship. Your role as a wife/partner and/or mother may be the way you see yourself. When you leave the relationship you may experience a real sense of loss of your identity. The process of moving from your role of wife/partner to a single person is painful and not always as fast as you might want it to be.

5 stages of grief and loss





The transition involves getting to know yourself in a new way. Now you can become your own person. Being on your own is a wonderful feeling as well as a scary one. It may be the first time you have had the freedom to experience this responsibility. It sometimes takes many trials to discover who you are and what you want in life. This is normal. It is OK to learn from your mistakes and learn from what you do well. You will probably feel all your emotions more strongly than ever. You may feel betrayal, grief, anger, joy and freedom, weakness and strength, often at the same time. You may feel that you are going crazy because of all the emotions you have, which are sometimes overwhelming, contradictory, and unexpected.

You are not crazy. Remember that your emotions are just a part of you, a changing part. This is a normal process. It is helpful to let yourself feel your emotions fully and not judge yourself for having them. You will pass through each one in time.

Grief

Grief is a large part of the process of letting go of a relationship. When you feel grief, feel free to let yourself cry. It may feel like you will never stop. Remember, you are facing a death – the death of your relationship and you will stop crying when the mourning is over. You may not understand why you are sad, especially if you were badly abused. There were probably some good things that you will miss. This is the reality.

Remember—you did have to pay a price for the good things—a very high price.

Euphoria

You may experience a great euphoria when you leave the relationship. This may last for weeks or months. This is usually felt if you have made a clear decision. This euphoria can help give you energy to get yourself on your feet again. Don't be surprised, if a month or a year later, you feel grief or anger or depression. This is normal and part of the process of change or separation. You will have to work through the grief stages at some time. The timing may vary with each individual and the process is usually finished after you have let yourself feel fully at each stage.

Anger

You may feel more anger after separation than you have ever felt before. You may suddenly experience all the anger that was stockpiled and denied during your relationship, along with the built-up frustration of not getting your needs met, and the powerlessness of the position you were in. It is safe to feel angry now. Try to accept that your anger is normal. Anger can give you power and motivation. Use it to your advantage. The goal of letting yourself feel anger is to express it constructively so that you become free of it. Do not turn it on those around you and don't use it for revenge. Acting in revenge may destroy your self-respect in the long run; although it is okay to fantasise about it.

Grieving symptoms

While you are going through the separation, it is normal for you to experience both physical and emotional stress reactions. Physical symptoms you may experience include: sleep disturbances; diarrhoea or constipation; nausea; changes in heart rate; menstrual changes; weight gain or loss. Psychological symptoms may include: sadness, hopelessness or feelings of futility; edginess and being easily irritated; crying often; poor concentration; great difficulty making decisions; and, poor memory. Good physical exercise (i.e. walking, jogging, cycling, etc.) can help you cope.

Anxiety and loss of control

You are probably accustomed to judging your safety by predicting your partner's mood and picking up the signals from him/her, so you could anticipate and react. When you leave, the absence of your partner may feel frightening. You may feel you have lost control. Your feelings of safety are gone when you lose those signals. The feelings of loss of control are normal in transition. You are moving the centre of control from your partner to yourself. It can be as frightening as it is freeing and it just takes time.

Disorientation

Because your perspective on your relationship has changed, you may see your past, yourself, and your partner differently. This can make you feel disoriented and you may doubt your memories and the decisions you have made. You may selectively remember only the good or only the bad times. This is normal. Your situation has changed and you now have additional information so your view of the past will change too.



Loneliness

Your friends may change over time, as well as your interests and concerns. Friends may feel threatened by your new position. They may take sides with your partner. It may hurt you a great deal if your former in-laws reject you. Family blood is often thicker than you want to believe. It may take you a while to trust, or to have energy for anyone else. This is normal and self-protective. You may want to isolate yourself, but friendships are very important. Friends are especially important at this time, especially those who don't judge us. You don't have to wait for an invitation. Reach out, even though it may seem less painful to isolate yourself, in the long run it is not.

Temptation to reconcile

Many women who leave go back a number of times before leaving permanently. What some call the "honeymoon" period, is in actuality a tactic of manipulation used by the abuser to continue to maintain power and control. When you have been away for a while and your partner is pleading with you to return, promising you that he has changed and will not hurt you again, the temptation to reconcile may seem overwhelming. You have heard promises before. If you think your relationship is worth saving, take the time that is necessary to be sure there is now a strong foundation of mutual respect for you to build your lives on. Generally, as time passes, indicators of whether or not your partner is following through on his promise to change may become clear.

New relationships

New relationships may trigger memories of your old relationship. It takes hard work, a great deal of commitment, and communication to be in a relationship. Be sure you feel strong enough to live independently before you make the choice of living inter-dependently again. It is important to remember that life is up and down. You will have good days, when you are feeling strong and capable, and bad days, when you are feeling depressed and vulnerable. Know that feeling bad will not last forever and there are things you can do to help yourself through the down times. Many women find that the first anniversary of their leaving is particularly painful. It may be important for you to be aware of that and plan for it. You may arrange to spend that time with close friends. You may also wish to get in touch with a worker to get reinforcement and support.

Ways you can help yourself

- **Let yourself feel your emotions fully.** Do not judge yourself for having them. You will pass through each one.
- **Take time out for you.** Do what feels nurturing for yourself, i.e. take a hot bath, go for a walk, curl up in bed and read a book. You have a right to pamper yourself.
- **Eat small, nutritious meals regularly and exercise to release tension.** Look after yourself.
- **To regain a feeling of control in your new environment:** develop a daily routine; set and accomplish small goals each day; control where you go and who you are with so that you are safe.
- **Find out about and use community resources for support:** support groups; single parent support services; free community counselling services; recreation centres and educational resources. If you don't know what these services are, check the numbers at the back of this book.
- **Holidays and special occasions such as anniversaries can be especially hard times.** It is important to establish new customs for yourself and your children. You can spend these times with close friends who are experiencing the same feelings and difficulties. Do something different. For example, organise a dinner or barbeque with friends or neighbours, or spend the holiday out of town.

When you need more help

When leaving an abusive relationship, it is normal to feel any or all of the emotions outlined and it is normal to feel that your life is in a state of upheaval. However, it would be wise to seek more help if you feel any of the following: suicidal; depressed to the point of not looking after yourself or your children; euphoria to the point of threatening your own safety by drinking too much; spending excessive amounts of money or being promiscuous; rage that expresses itself by hurting people or destroying property. A counsellor can help you work through the emotions that are overwhelming you.



Parenting after domestic violence

Your parenting may have changed over time as a result of the abuse. In difficult and traumatic situations our behaviour and the way we connect with people can change without us realising. Spend this time to think about what is important to you as a parent and develop some steps to assist you in being the woman and the parent you would like to be.

Some parenting tips that may be useful for you at this time

- Talk to your children about the situation: what is happening and will happen
- Be honest about your feelings and let them know you love them. Let them know they are safe
- Maintain consistency in your parenting
- Establish a normal routine
- Develop and maintain support networks such as grandparents, teachers, youth workers, professional counselling
- Take time to do fun things as a family

What you can do:

- Teach children that abuse is unacceptable
- Role model non-violent problem solving techniques
- Talk to your children about their experiences and listen to their concerns
- Promote independence and acknowledge children's right to have their own feelings, friends, activities and opinions.
- Provide a safe environment with a stable routine
- Design safety plan with your child.
- Be present, listen to their concerns, keep the communication channels open.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Duluth, Minnesota.

More information and help

Emergency Services

Call 000

Hotlines

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

Information, court advocacy and referral for women in domestic violence situations and assistance with getting an ADVO

1800 WDV CAS or 1800 938 227

1800 RESPECT (24 hours) **1800 737 732**

Child Protection Helpline **132 111**

Domestic Violence Hotline NSW **1800 656 463**

Rape Crisis Helpline **1800 424 017**

Family Relationship Advice Line **1800 050 321**

Lifeline **131 114**

NSW Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline **1800 628 221**

National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline **1800 880 052**

Disability Rights Information Service **1800 422 015**

Family Law National Enquiry Line (help with family law court procedures) **1300 352 000**

Mensline **1300 789 978**

Men's Referral Service **1300 766 491**

NSW Rape Crisis Line **1800 424 017**

Parentline **1300 130 052**

Victims Services Access Line **1800 633 063**

Relationships Australia **1300 364 277**

Legal Services

LawAccess NSW **1300 888 529**

Women's Legal Service NSW **1800 801 501**

Seniors Rights Service **1800 424 079**

Domestic Violence Unit, Legal Aid NSW **1800 979 529**

Community Legal Centres NSW **02 9212 7333**

Legal Aid NSW Child Support Service **1800 451 784**

Tenant's Advice Line **1800 251 101**

Indigenous Services

WLS Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line	1800 639 784
Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT family law and child protection service	1800 733 233
Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre (Freecall)	1800 136 380
Victims Services (Aboriginal Contact Line)	1800 019 123
Wiringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre	1800 686 587 (02) 9569 3847
Aboriginal Legal Service	1800 765 767

LGBTIQ services

ACON	(02) 9206 2000
Inner City Legal Centre, Safe Relationships Project	(02) 9332 1966
QLIFE (3.00 pm – 12.00 am every day)	1800 184 527
Twenty10	
Provide a wide range of support services supporting people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities, their families and communities, including specialised services for young people (12 – 26)	(02) 8594 9555 rural free call: 1800 65 2010
The Gender Centre	(02) 9569 2366

Emergency Accommodation Services

Link2Home	1800 152 152
Housing NSW Contact Centre	1300 468 746
Domestic Violence Line (24hours)	1800 65 64 63

Financial Services

Financial Rights Legal Centre	1800 007 007
Centrelink Crisis Payments	132 850
Child Support (Dept Human Services)	131 272
Centrelink Multilingual Phone Service	131 202
Welfare Rights	1800 226 028
Salvos Emergency Relief	1300 371 288

Counselling and Mental Health Services

Mental Health Line	1800 011 511
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
QLIFE	1800 184 527
Suicide Call Back Service	1300659 467
Alcohol and Drug Information Service	1800 422 599
Gambling Helpline 1800 858 858	

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities

Immigrant Women's Speakout Association	02 9635 8022
Immigration Advice & Rights Centre	Telephone advice: (02) 8234 0799 or by appointment: (02) 8234 0700
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)	131 450

Children and Young People

Child Protection Helpline	132 111
Kids Help Line	1800 551 800
Youth Emergency Accommodation Line	(02) 9318 1531 or 1800 42 48 30

More information: websites

1800 Respect	www.1800respect.org.au
ACON	www.acon.org.au
Ask Lois	www.asklois.org.au
Domestic Violence NSW	www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au
Best for Kids	www.bestforkids.org.au
LGBTIQ relationships violence	www.anothercloset.com.au
Family Relationships Online (they are an access point to all FRCs across Australia, not just interrelate)	www.familyrelationships.gov.au
LawAccess NSW	www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au
Family Violence Law Help	www.familyviolencelaw.gov.au
Tech Safety	www.techsafety.org.au
eSafety Women	www.esafety.gov.au/women
Tenants Advice & Advocacy Service	www.tenants.org.au
Legal Aid NSW	www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au
Rape and Domestic Violence Service Australia	www.rape-dvservices.org.au
Safe Beds for Pets Program	www.rspcansw.org.au/what-we-do/ working-incommunities/ communitydomestic-violence-program
Victims Services	www.victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au
Women's Legal Service	www.wlsnsw.org.au
LGBTIQ	www.acon.org.au
Inner City Legal Centre, Safe Relationships Project	www.iclc.org.au/srp
QLIFE	www.qlife.org.au
Twenty10	www.twenty10.org.au
The Gender Centre	www.gendercentre.org.au



Local community contacts

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This publication is a general guide to the law. You should not rely on it as legal advice, and we recommend that you talk to a lawyer about your situation.

The information is correct at the time of printing, however it may change. For more information contact LawAccess NSW on **1300 888 529**.

This publication is available in Arabic, Dari/Farsi, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese.



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Order brochures online at: www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/ways-to-get-help/publications-and-resources

For more information, visit: www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Do you need help to contact us?



If you need an interpreter, call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on **131 450** (9am–5pm) and ask for LawAccess NSW.

Do you find it hard to hear or speak?



If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the [National Relay Service NRS](#). Ask for LawAccess NSW on **1300 888 529**.

