What is domestic and family violence?

**Domestic and family violence**

Domestic and family violence occurs when one person in a relationship uses violence or abuse to control the other person. Domestic and family violence usually constitutes an ongoing pattern of behaviour but can be an isolated instance of abuse or violence, aimed at controlling a partner or family member through fear.

Domestic and family violence occurs within all cultures, demographics, socio-economic groups and age groups, in all geographic locations.

**What is domestic violence?**

Domestic violence can exist within a range of intimate, or previously intimate personal relationships, including relationships between de-facto, married, previously married/separated, same-sex partners, engaged and couple relationships and between custodial and non-custodial parents of a child.

It is acknowledged that while men can be subject to domestic and family violence; statistically women and children most commonly experience this form of abuse and violence.

Research informs us that domestic and family violence is commonly a product of learned behaviour. Therefore an opportunity to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence by changing attitudes towards violence against women and children through education and by both men and women stating clearly this form of violence will not be tolerated.

**What is family violence?**

Family violence refers to abuse and violence that occurs between family members and can at times be used interchangeably with the term domestic violence when it occurs within intimate relationships or after separation. Family violence can however also include violence and abuse between other family members, including sibling violence, elder abuse/violence and parent-child violence.

The term “family violence” can also be used when there is violence or abuse within extended family blood or marriage relationships and other relationships where there are ties of mutual obligation and support; and can include violence between an individual and someone not related by blood or marriage but who is regarded as a family member.

Domestic and family violence also includes violence or abuse within informal care relationships**,** where one person is dependent on another for help in their daily living activities (including dressing, preparing meals or shopping) and where the volunteer carer controls, abuses and instils fear in the person they are caring for. Informal care relationships do not exist between a child and a parent of a child; or where there is a fee paid for care.

**Forms of domestic and family violence**

Domestic and family violence can take many forms, including intimidation, coercion, isolation, emotional, physical, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse. The impacts upon individuals, children, families and the wider community are significant. Domestic and family violence can include a wide range of behaviours.

**Physical abuse** - includes direct assaults on the body, use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking individuals out of the house and sleep deprivation.

**Sexual abuse** - Sexual abuse and assault (or sexual violence) is any unwanted sexual behaviour towards another person which occurs without the person’s informed consent. Sexual abuse includes intimate partner sexual violence, which can include coercion into sexual intimacy, often using a range of threats to control and instil fear, including threats of physical violence. Sexual violence includes rape, date rape, incest and a range of other acts of sexual violence. All acts of sexual violence are serious crimes.

**Verbal abuse** – includes continually using ‘put downs’, behaviours and words intended to humiliate, either privately or publicly, with attacks generally following clear themes, that may focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and spouse or partner.

**Emotional/Psychological abuse** – includes blaming the partner or family member for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing that person with others to undermine their self-esteem and self-worth, withdrawing all interest and engagement (e.g. weeks of silence or sporadic sulking) to assert control and elicit fear.

**Social abuse** – involves systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the partner knows nobody, and forbidding or physically preventing a partner or family member from going out and meeting people.

**Financial abuse** – involvescontrol of money and finances, including refusing access to money and withholding access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate ‘allowance’, controlling or using all wages earned or legally owed to the other person, through welfare entitlements for their own purpose, or by preventing the person affected from seeking or holding down a job.

**Damage to personal property** - involves using physical strength or violence to intimidate the person affected, by causing or threatening to cause damage to the partner or family member’s property or valuables, e.g. kicking walls, throwing things, pulling a door off  hinges or damaging the person’s furniture, car or personal belongings.

**Spiritual/Cultural Abuse** – involves not allowing a person in a relationship the freedom to practise their chosen religion or cultural beliefs, or misusing religious or spiritual traditions to justify physical or other abuse towards a person. Spiritual or cultural abuse can also include one party not allowing the other to equally share their religious belief with others.

**Stalking** – involves constantly worrying or frightening a partner or ex-partner by following them, watching them, phoning or messaging them and waiting outside the home or their workplace.