A photograph of a man and a woman in a room. The man, on the right, is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and has a beard. He is holding the woman's arm. The woman, on the left, has long dark hair and is wearing a light-colored, ribbed sweater. She is looking away from the man. The background is a bright window with white curtains.

What is Physical Abuse?

A comprehensive guide to understanding physical abuse.

Physical abuse in a relationship is any type of intentional violence done by a partner, spouse or family member with the intent to assert power and control over someone else.

Physical abuse is an unmistakable red flag of domestic violence that often escalates in severity over time and can lead to homicide.

This toolkit will provide you with these insights and more. Inside you'll find:

- Helpful Articles
- Recommended Books
- Lists
- Danger Assessments
- In-Depth Videos
- Survey Results
- Support Communities
- How to Find Help



There are hundreds of articles on [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org) covering the many facets of domestic violence. Here are links to those that will help you answer the question, “What Are the Power and Control Wheels?”

[What is Physical Abuse?](#)

This comprehensive guide breaks down what's involved in physical abuse.

[Leaving Without Dying](#)

One security expert says abusers are more dangerous than any other type of attacker, especially when a survivor leaves.

[Will An Abuser Kill You?](#)

Signs that mean violence could turn deadly.

[When Abuse Goes from Shouting to Striking](#)

Verbal abuse often turns to physical abuse. Here's how to see the signs.

Abuse Almost Always Escalates

If you're trapped in a cycle of abuse, it's most likely going to only get worse.

Will It Happen Again?

Do past behaviors predict future abuse?

This Is What Abuse Looks Like

Spotting the signs, red flags and warning signals of abuse could save your life.

How Domestic Violence Can Injure the Brain

Physical violence, stress and mental health issues can take a toll on brain health.

Why You Should Document Abuse

Your records may be allowed as evidence in court.

When Abuse Turns Deadly

Having a gun at home increases your risk of being killed by your abuser.

Why We Can't Blame Abuse on Alcohol

Dispelling the common myth that batterers abuse because they're drunk and will stop when sober.

Profile of an Abuser

Is it possible to spot an abusive partner before you get involved?

[Why Some Survivors Minimize Their Abuse](#)

When this coping mechanism can be a good thing.

[Am I Being Abused?](#)

A comprehensive guide to help you identify domestic violence and abuse.

[After Four Strangulations, I Googled 'Domestic Abuse'](#)

She thought she was being a good wife by ignoring her husband's abuse.

[Will My Partner Be Violent After I Leave?](#)

How to predict violence after leaving an abuser.

[When an Abuser Controls the Story](#)

Abusers lie about incidents before you have a chance to tell your side.

[A Deadly Cycle](#)

Abusers will repeat four stages of abuse over and over, trapping survivors.

[Abusive Red Flags Everyone Should Know](#)

The signs that your partner could turn violent.

[How Strangulation Affects the Brain](#)

Six things to know about healing after a traumatic brain injury.

[What Is Domestic Violence?](#)

A comprehensive guide to helping you understand domestic violence and abuse.

[14 Misconceptions About Domestic Violence](#)

Intimate partner abuse is incredibly common, but very misunderstood.

[Abusers Use Suffocation as a Power Move](#)

The potentially deadly effects are the same as being strangled.

[Danger Assessment Could Predict if an Abuser Will Kill](#)

The potentially deadly effects are the same as being strangled.

[Strangulation Can Leave Long-Lasting Injuries](#)

One of the most lethal abuser tactics explained.

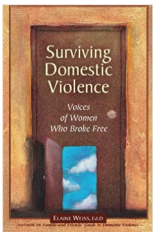
[Profiling an Abuser: 6 Signs You Should Pay Attention To](#)

Don't just look to the past—an abuser's current behavior may do more to indicate danger ahead.

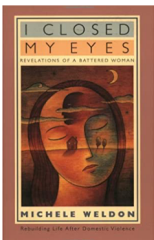


Reading books can be a helpful way to understand if you're a victim of abuse and understand the abuser's behavior.

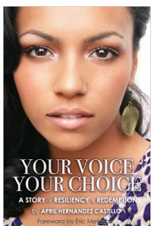
Here are our recommended reads:



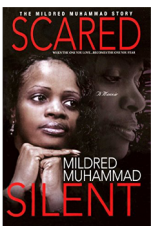
Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free. SURVIVING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE tells the stories of twelve women. Each was a victim of domestic violence, escaped from her abuser, reclaimed her dignity, reconstructed her life, and rediscovered peace. Domestic violence doesn't just happen "out there" somewhere. It happens in our town, in our neighborhood, on our street. It happens to women we see at work, the supermarket, the movie theater, the ballet and the PTA board meeting. Every woman who has left an abusive man—every woman who has yet to leave—will find encouragement and hope in the voices of these women who broke free.



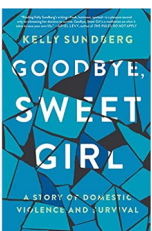
I Closed My Eyes: Revelations of a Battered Woman. *In No Visible Bruises*, journalist Rachel Louise Snyder gives context for what we don't know we're seeing. She frames this urgent and immersive account of the scale of domestic violence in our country around key stories that explode the common myths—that if things were bad enough, victims would just leave; that a violent person cannot become nonviolent; that shelter is an adequate response; and most insidiously that violence inside the home is a private matter, sealed from the public sphere and disconnected from other forms of violence.



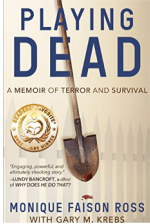
Your Voice, Your Choice: A Story of Resiliency & Redemption. Your Voice, Your Choice is her candid first-person experience with Intimate Partner Violence. She opens up and shares her story in the hope of empowering others to speak up (or to leave) before it's too late. Your Voice, Your Choice goes back to the beginning and leads the reader through April's life, tells about her positive upbringing in a Puerto Rican household nestled in the heart of the Bronx, and emphasizes the reliability of that inner voice everyone has. As the reader learns what defined April's voice, they are also asked to dive deep into themselves and decide what it is that is defining their own. It's their choice.



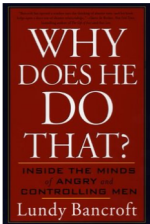
Scared Silent. Mildred witnessed firsthand John's bizarre behavior after he returned from the Gulf War, but no one—including her family, friends, and local police—took her warnings seriously. Even when John kidnapped their three children for eighteen months, changed their identities and lived with them on the run in Antigua, or when he threatened to kill Mildred, her pleas for help went unfounded and she was forced to live undercover for eight months in a women's shelter.



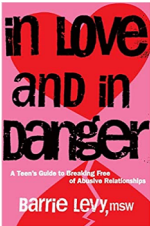
Goodbye, Sweet Girl: A Story of Domestic Violence and Survival. One of the most important books ever written on domestic violence, Coercive Control breaks through entrenched views of physical abuse that have ultimately failed to protect women. Evan Stark, founder of one of America's first battered women's shelters, shows how "domestic violence" is neither primarily domestic nor necessarily violent, but a pattern of controlling behaviors more akin to terrorism and hostage-taking



Playing Dead: A Memoir of Terror and Survival. Monique Faison, the daughter of San Diego Charger's football great Earl Faison, married her high school sweetheart soon after she discovered she was pregnant with his child. Her relationship with Chris had always been shaky, but his verbal abuse only increased—and then gave way to physical attacks. Eventually, Monique took their children and left. That was when the stalking and serious threats began.



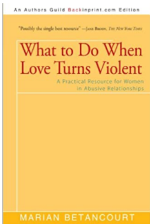
The Safety Trap: A Security Expert's Secrets for Staying Safe in a Dangerous World. Threat management expert Spencer Coursen offers proactive strategies to protect yourself and your loved ones in the event of hostile encounters and emergency situations in *The Safety Trap: A Security Expert's Secrets for Staying Safe in a Dangerous World.*



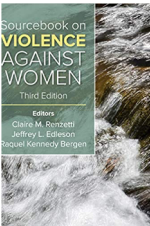
In Love and In Danger: A Teen's Guide to Breaking Free of Abusive Relationships. With one out of eleven high school students in the past year experiencing some form of physical abuse — being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend — young adults need to know where they can turn for help. Even more teens (as high as ninety-six percent) reported emotional and psychological abuse in their relationships.



Scared To Leave, Afraid To Stay: Paths From Family Violence To Safety. What is it like for a woman to leave the man who is abusing her? This book presents the stories of ten women as they fought the courts and their abusers to gain safety for themselves and their children. The author demonstrates how courts handle divorce, custody, visitation, support, child abuse, marital property, orders of protection and crimes when domestic violence erupts. He also discusses the common tactics abusers use to maintain control over their partners.



What to Do When Love Turns Violent: A Practical Resource for Women in Abusive Relationships. Consulting this sourcebook is the crucial first step to breaking the cycle of domestic violence. What to Do When Love Turns Violent empowers you to find help and take back your life. Here is everything you need to know to make the right choices. The first part spells out an action plan to get out of danger and find immediate help: making a protective order work; calling the police; finding safe shelter; seeking medical attention; getting financial assistance. Part 2 details how to stay safe and regain control over your life: preparing for safety at home and on the job; protecting your children; rebuilding your life.



Sourcebook on Violence Against Women. The book's 15 chapters are divided into three parts: theoretical and methodological issues in researching violence against women; types of violence against women and programs that work..



Sometimes lists are easier on the mind because they are uncluttered and to-the-point. If you'd rather read a few items versus articles or books, these lists are for you.

To view all list items at once, click the SEE ALL button located below the list text.

- [23 Ways Survivors Can Collect Evidence of Abuse](#)
- [19 Myths About Domestic Violence](#)
- [20 Things Abusers Say](#)
- [23 Warning Signs of a Concussion](#)
- [15 Obstacles Emergency Rooms Face in Identifying Abuse](#)
- [25 Risk Factors for Domestic Violence](#)
- [25 Relationship Red Flags](#)
- [27 Characteristics of Unsafe People](#)
- [50 Barriers to Leaving](#)



There are three well-known, free, online assessment tools available that can help you understand the level of danger that may be present, but not always obvious.

The Danger Assessment

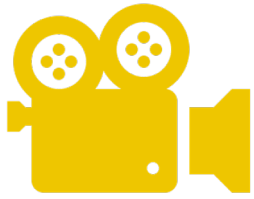
The free tool helps determine the level of danger an abused person has of being killed by an intimate partner.

MOSAIC

Using a series of questions, this tool assesses how similar a situation is to other situations that have gotten worse.

Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment

A risk assessment designed to be used by professionals that calculates how a man who has assaulted his female partner ranks among similar perpetrators with respect to the likelihood that he will assault a female partner again in the future.



Click video thumbnail to watch



WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?



AM I BEING ABUSED?





A lot of lessons can be taken away from people who have been through it before. Check out the following survey results to learn from the experiences of others.

- [What was your last straw with an abusive partner?](#)
- [Were you asked about abuse at your last Dr. appointment?](#)
- [Which abuser\(s\) have you encountered?](#)
- [Survivors: Did you feel like you had power to stop abuse?](#)
- [Did you collect evidence against your abuser before court?](#)
- [How do you feel the system is failing DV survivors?](#)
- [What did your instincts tell you when you met your abuser the first time?](#)
- [Did you delay/are you delaying leaving your abuser due to concerns of escalated violence?](#)
- [How did you document the abuse you experienced?](#)
- [Did your batterer use strangulation as an abuse tactic?](#)
- [Which type of abuse did you experience first?](#)



Online forums and chats can help you connect with others who are in or have faced similar situations and find support and ideas from the survivor community.

[AfterSilence.org](https://www.AfterSilence.org) aims to help victims become survivors and to communicate in the recovery of domestic and sexual violence. It offers an active message board and chat room for rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, incest and molestation survivors. There are over 31,000 members and about 1,000,000 posts, including recent posts and many useful posts from days and months past.

[Pathways to Safety International](https://www.PathwaysToSafety.org) If you're an American overseas, your situation is different than 99% of your fellow countryman, and this site will be a wonderful resource for you. Among the services is a 24-hour response to emails, as well as international phone options.

DomesticShelters.org Facebook Page offers one of the most active places where domestic violence survivors connect. You'll find conversation, past experiences and unvarnished stories, and occasionally advice from professionals who have joined in on a topic.

DomesticShelters.org Facebook Group is a private group designed to be a safe space for domestic abuse victims, survivors, advocates and others affected by abuse to support one another through meaningful dialogue and helpful insight.

Fort Refuge is a clever grassroots site run by survivors for fellow survivors as a safe place to come together and discuss their struggles and victories in healing from various types of abuse. Though the forum and chat do not boast the same numbers as some of the larger organizations, they are one of the more active conversation places on the internet currently. They also add new content to their site regularly.

Love is Respect - National Teen Dating Helpline focuses on teen relationships and can be accessed by phone, text or live chat. It offers real-time, one-on-one support by trained peer advocates who offer information and advocacy to those involved in dating abuse. They also offer support to parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement, and service providers.

National Domestic Violence Hotline offers confidential, private, one-on-one chats with advocates every day 24/7.

OnYourMind.net is a safe and anonymous place for teens to get information and support from other teens in an online chat room, covering topics such as relationships, school, depression, stress, suicide, parents, cutting, identity and health.

Pandora's Aquarium is an online forum with around 2 million posts and over 70,000 members, and is run by Pandora's Project, which provides information, support and resources to rape and sexual abuse survivors and their friends and family.

When accessing hotlines, chats or forums from a computer, tablet, or smartphone, please remember to take the necessary precautions to keep your activities confidential from your abuser. Learn more about how to stay safe online [here](#).

Also, keep in mind that local shelters may offer in-person or virtual support groups. You can find shelters in your area at [DomesticShelters.org](#).



Another way to determine if you're experiencing abuse is to contact a trained domestic violence advocate near you or through a national service.

To search for domestic violence program staffed with trained advocates, visit [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org) and type either your city and state, or ZIP code, into the search bar at the top of the page. A list of organizations and contact numbers near you will be displayed. To reach an advocate, reach out directly by calling the phone number listed. Most are open 24/7.

To speak to an advocate at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, also 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call 800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org) to chat online.

It's important to know that your call is confidential and you can choose to remain anonymous when speaking with an advocate. To know what to expect when calling, read [this article](#).