

An unhealthy relationship looks like this:

- Focus all your energy on your partner
- Drop friends, family, or activities you enjoy
- Feel pressured or controlled by this person
- Have more bad times than good in the relationship
- Often feel sad or scared when with this person
- Know that this person does not support you and what you want to do in life
- Do not feel comfortable being yourself or making your own decisions
- Cannot speak honestly to work out conflicts in the relationship
- Cannot talk about your needs or changes in your life that are important

You may be experiencing domestic violence if your partner:

- Controls what you're doing
- Checks your phone, email, or social networks without your permission
- Forces you to have sex when you don't want to
- Controls your birth control or insists that you get pregnant
- Decides what you wear or eat or how you spend money
- Prevents or discourages you from going to work or school or seeing your family or friends
- Humiliates you on purpose in front of others
- Unfairly accuses you of being unfaithful
- Destroys your things
- Threatens to hurt you, your children, other loved ones, or your pets
- Hurts you physically (e.g., hitting, beating, punching, pushing, kicking), including with a weapon
- Blames you for his or her violent outbursts
- Threatens to hurt herself or himself because of being upset with you
- Threatens to report you to the authorities for imagined crimes
- Says things like, "If I can't have you, then no one can"

For more information please visit the website: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/signs-domestic-violence>

What is the legal definition of domestic violence?

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/518B.01>

In the state of Minnesota Domestic Abuse means the following, if committed against a family or household member by a family or household member:

(1) physical harm, bodily injury, or assault;

(2) the infliction of fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, or assault; or

(3) terroristic threats, criminal sexual conduct, sexual extortion or interference with an emergency call.

Family or Household Members means:

(1) spouses and former spouses;

(2) parents and children;

(3) persons related by blood;

(4) persons who are presently residing together or who have resided together in the past;

(5) persons who have a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or have lived together at any time;

(6) a man and woman if the woman is pregnant and the man is alleged to be the father, regardless of whether they have been married or have lived together at any time; and

(7) persons involved in a significant romantic or sexual relationship.

Domestic violence, child abuse, and child neglect are a feature of family life for many in the United States. For some, these events are unique to the period leading up to and during the separation or divorce. For others, a long history of violence, abuse or neglect convinces one or both parents that a separation or divorce is necessary. Physical violence, threats of violence, sexual assault, and child abuse are illegal. Specific definitions of domestic violence vary from state to state. But federal laws say it is illegal to injure—or threaten to injure—anyone related by blood or marriage, or with whom you are living together or are in an intimate relationship. This is true regardless of your cultural or religious heritage, citizenship status, or personal beliefs about discipline or the proper relationship between husbands and wives.

Domestic violence constitutes the willful intimidation, assault, battery, sexual assault, or other abusive behavior perpetrated by one family member, household member, or intimate partner against another. In most state laws addressing domestic violence, the relationship necessary for a charge of domestic assault or abuse generally includes a spouse, former spouse, persons currently residing together, or those who have resided together within the previous year, or persons who share a common child. In addition, as of 1997, a significant number of states have included dating relationships in their statutory definitions of domestic relationships. Victims of violence should understand that ignoring abuse will not make it stop. Abuse becomes more serious with time, and victims must realize that an abusive relationship is unhealthy and unsafe. Also, remember that a victim of domestic violence may

be either male or female. Children can also be victims—physically, emotionally, or both (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2005).

The National Center for Victims of Crime (2005) describes the following behaviors as indicative of an abusive personality prone to domestic violence:

- **Intimidation:** certain looks, gestures, or actions; smashing things; destruction of property or hurting pets; brandishing weapons.
- **Emotional Abuse:** making the victim feel guilty; calling the victim names; embarrassing, humiliating, or demeaning the victim; playing mind games; telling the victim they are crazy; doing or saying things that make the victim feel that they are crazy.
- **Isolation:** keeping the victim from going places like visiting family or friends, attending social groups, etc.; listening to phone conversations or opening personal mail; following the victim around and/or questioning them about their whereabouts; using jealousy to justify actions.
- **Minimizing, denying, and blaming:** making light of the abuse, saying it wasn't that bad; denying the abuse happened; saying the abuse was the victim's fault.
- **Excessive domination:** acting like the master of the house; treating the victim like a servant; making all the big decisions; defining the victim's role/job; patronizing or in any other way treating the victim like a child, not as an equal adult.
- **Economic abuse:** preventing the other parent from working outside the home; making them ask for money; limiting money; making them account for all expenditures; not allowing them access to information about family finances.
- **Using children:** making the victim feel guilty about their parenting skills; making the victim responsible for all the children's misbehavior or mistakes; undermining the victim's authority and effectiveness with the children through criticism; telling the children that the victim is stupid or dumb—can't do anything right; threatening to take the children away or kill them; telling the victim that the Department of Child and Family Services will take the children away.
- **Coercion and threats:** threatening to take the children away; threatening to destroy property; threatening to harm family or friends; making physical threats and/or actions toward the victim; threatening to leave the victim; threatening to commit suicide.

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

Spousal abuse can have lasting emotional effects on children living in the same household. They often develop coping skills and strategies to intercede and protect the parent who is the victim of abuse. A parental victim may develop strategies to redirect the abuser away from the children, and as a result may be abused while trying to protect the children. Children who grow up in a household where a parent has been abused may imitate that abuse in relationships later in life.

Options for victims of domestic violence

- Contact a local domestic-violence program. These programs are in many communities around the country and can provide counseling and support groups; information about legal options, the criminal justice system, and social services; shelter; attorney referrals;

vocational counseling; safety planning; and case advocacy. Programs will assist victims regardless of their decision to stay in the relationship or leave it..

- Create a comprehensive safety plan. With assistance from a victim-service professional, victims should create an individualized plan for safety in all situations, including a checklist of necessary items to take when leaving an abusive situation.
- Consider legal options. In most states, domestic violence is a crime. For information on criminal penalties for abusers, and protections for victims through the criminal justice system, victims should contact their local law enforcement or prosecutor's office. Reporting domestic-violence incidents may raise safety concerns, so this option should be discussed with a victim-service professional. Whether victims choose to report, it may be helpful to document evidence of abuse (e.g., pictures, witness statements, tape recordings), to be used in criminal proceedings, or in custody or divorce hearings. The State Attorney's office usually handles criminal proceedings and restraining orders (check with your local courts for the court services that handle restraining orders).

How to get a court Order for Protection

If you want to ask the court for an Order for Protection (OFP) from domestic abuse, we suggest that you try to get help from a domestic abuse advocate who knows the process and can support you through all of the steps. [Violence Free Minnesota](#) has a statewide online directory of advocacy agencies.

Fill Out OFP Forms Packet

You do not have to use an advocate. If you choose to ask for an OFP on your own, the MN Judicial Branch does publish [OFP Forms Packets](#). If you are the person asking for an OFP, you are called the "Petitioner" in the case, and the other party is called the "Respondent." There are instructions with the OFP Forms Packets that explain how to fill out the forms. An OFP can be requested "on behalf of" minor children as well.

Use [Minnesota Guide & File](#) to create the forms you need to *Ask for a MN Restraining Order* – either an Order for Protection or Harassment Restraining Order. You can file the forms electronically (eFile) through Guide & File, or print your completed forms. For more information, visit our [Guide & File Help Topic](#).

Privacy of Information

Generally, court files are open to the public, with some exceptions for safety or other confidential issues. When you fill out your forms, if you do not want the Respondent to know your address, or if you do not want your address to be part of the public court file, *you do not have to write your address in the Petition form*. You may give it to the Court separately on a different form in the OFP Forms Packet. However, you are responsible for telling the Court that you do not want your address to be part of the public file if that is what you want.

How can I get help in an emergency? ***Immediately dial 911 and request help from the police***

National domestic-violence centers usually provide:

- A 24-hour crisis line
- Temporary shelter
- Advocacy and counseling for victims
- Advocacy and counseling for the children of victims
- Legal information, court accompaniment, and assistance with restraining orders
- Welfare/economic support
- Support groups for battered women and their children
- Information and referral
- Community education
- Outreach to schools, including education on teen dating violence and support for victims
- Batterers treatment
- Sexual-assault services

Important Phone Numbers

National Domestic Violence Hotline..... (800) 799-SAFE (7233)
 National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 787-3224 (TTY)
 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence..... (303) 839-1852
 National Resource Center on Domestic Violence..... (800) 537-2238
 National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence..... (800) 222-2000
 Women in Distress: 24-hour crisis line in English and Spanish..... 1-800-500-1119

YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY YOUR CO-PARENT IF YOU KNOW THAT A SEX OFFENDER OR A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A DANGEROUS CRIME AGAINST CHILDREN WILL BE AROUND YOUR CHILD.

Child Abuse

Abuse means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child. The legal definition of a child is any person under the age of eighteen.

Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, abandonment, or neglect by a person responsible for a child's welfare is required to report that information to the state's toll-free hotline, an appropriate law-enforcement agency, or (in the case of a child's death), the medical examiner responsible for the city, town, county, or other area where the death occurred.

Other Kinds of Child Maltreatment

Abandonment is a situation where the parent, legal custodian, or the caregiver responsible for a child's welfare, although able to care for the child, doesn't provide for the child's support and makes no effort to communicate with the child—legally, this is a willful rejection of parental obligations. Token or inadequate efforts to support or communicate with the child may result in a court declaring the child to be abandoned.

Mental injury means substantially decreased ability to function intellectually or psychologically within the normal range of performance and behavior.

Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment, or when a child is permitted to live in an environment where such deprivation or environment significantly impairs or threatens to impair the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.

Harm to a child's health or welfare can occur when any person inflicts upon the child (or allows to be inflicted) physical, mental, or emotional injury. In determining whether harm has occurred, the following factors are considered: the child's age; any prior history of injuries to the child; the location of the injury on the child's body; the number of injuries; and the type of trauma inflicted.

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms The following material is reproduced with permission of the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2003).

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring in a family; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child and get help for the family. Contact your local child-protective services agency or police department. For more information about where and how to file a report, call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-ACHILD).

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance;
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention;
- Has learning problems that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes;
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen;
- Lacks adult supervision;
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever, or too responsible; or
- Comes to school early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child, rarely responding to the school's requests for information, for conferences, or for home visits;
- Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home;
- Asks the classroom teacher to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves;
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome;
- Demands perfection or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot give; or
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other;
- Consider their relationship entirely negative; or
- State that they do not like each other.

None of these signs taken alone proves that child abuse is present in a family. But when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, there is the possibility of child abuse.

Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes;
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school;
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home from school;
- Shrinks at the approach of adults; or
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury;
- Describes the child as 'evil,' or in some other very negative way;
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child; or
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school;
- Begs or steals food or money from classmates;
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses;
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor;
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather;

- Abuses alcohol or other drugs; or
 - States there is no one at home to provide care.
- Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child;
- Seems apathetic or depressed;
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner;
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs; or
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting;
 - Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities;
 - Reports nightmares or bedwetting;
 - Experiences a sudden change in appetite;
 - Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior;
 - Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14;
 - Runs away; or
 - Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.
- Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex;
- Is secretive and isolated; or
- Is jealous or controlling with family members.

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression;
 - Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example);
 - Is delayed in physical or emotional development;
 - Has attempted suicide; or
 - Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.
- Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child;
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems; or
- Overtly rejects the child.

This fact sheet was adapted, with permission, from Recognizing Child Abuse: What Parents Should Know. Prevent Child Abuse America, © 2003.

Safety and Transition Plans:

What is it?

- A safety and transition plan should serve to provide strength within the family, a support network and leave each parent optimistic that they have a strategy to prevent prior negative outcomes. The plan helps those involved transition through different steps.
- It is a plan developed through parents' eyes, for their benefit, based on their own strengths, resources, and perceptions of what they think might work given the current situation.
- To benefit, the person or family must actually use the plan in the event of a crisis.
- The plan should be realistic and developed by all parties involved. The goal is to try to reach the best realistic scenario.

Why is it important?

- The greatest goal in safety planning is that the process and plans will help to reduce unsafe situations and the likelihood of harm.
- Skills develop over time, and Safety Plans evolves accordingly as each person learns what works and what doesn't work.
- By helping reduce or manage worsening symptoms, promote wanted behaviors, prevent or decrease the risk of harm or diffuse violent situations.
- Important to have a written plan to follow and refer to.

How do I develop a safety plan?

- Start by thinking where you are currently, and where you want to be. Where are you in your journey? Are you at the very beginning, or have you already taken some steps?
- Determine your priorities and what is important to focus on first.
- Consider your barriers: are culture, beliefs, prior experiences going to be a barrier to this plan.

Remember....

- It's important to understand that most Safety Plans will not work perfectly, especially the first time. Expect things to not go as planned.
- People often use what has worked in the past.
- It is a process, continue to observe what worked and didn't work are invaluable in improving the Safety Plan for next time. Safety is most important. No one should be placed in an unsafe situation.
- Sharing the Safety Plan promotes awareness of and ability to support the strategies being used by the person/family.

For more information please visit: <https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-a-safety-plan/>

1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

What are the consequences of filing a false child-abuse report? In some instances, a parent may be tempted to file a false child-abuse report against the child's mother or father. This is usually done to gain some kind of advantage over the other parent. You should never resort to this, and parents are strongly discouraged from this type of action. According to most state statutes, a person who knowingly and willfully makes a false report of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, or who advises another to make a false report, is guilty of a felony in the third degree. However, anyone making a report who is acting in good faith is immune from liability.

Important Phone Numbers*

Missing Children

Info..... 1-800-342-0821

Runaway

Helpline..... 1-800-621-4000

Child Abuse Hotline

..... 1-800-962-2873

Child Support

Hotline..... 1-800-622-KIDS

National Center for Missing

Children..... 1-800-843-5678

Choosing a Mental-Health Professional

One of the hurdles in finding a qualified therapist to help your family is wading through the various kinds of mental-health professionals. At a minimum, you will want to seek a professional who holds a license in marriage and family therapy, mental-health counseling, or social work. These professionals will have either a master's degree or a doctorate. Keep in mind, however, that the individual therapist is always more important than their degree, certification, licensure, or other qualification. Most of the professional's expertise will come as they specialize in their work. You will want to make sure that a professional you choose has experience with divorce issues and helping families in transition.

Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example: experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with: substance misuse,

mental health problems, instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison.

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities. However, ACEs can be prevented.

How big is the problem?

ACEs are common. About 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported that they had experienced at least one type of ACE, and nearly 1 in 6 reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.

Preventing ACEs could potentially reduce a large number of health conditions. For example, up to 1.9 million cases of heart disease and 21 million cases of depression could have been potentially avoided by preventing ACEs.

Some children are at greater risk than others. Women and several racial/ethnic minority groups were at greater risk for having experienced 4 or more types of ACEs.

ACEs are costly. The economic and social costs to families, communities, and society totals hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

What are the consequences?

ACEs can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and opportunity. These experiences can increase the risks of injury, sexually transmitted infections, maternal and child health problems, teen pregnancy, involvement in sex trafficking, and a wide range of chronic diseases and leading causes of death such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and suicide.

ACEs and associated conditions, such as living in under-resourced or racially segregated neighborhoods, frequently moving, and experiencing food insecurity, can cause toxic stress (extended or prolonged stress). Toxic stress from ACEs can change brain development and affect such things as attention, decision-making, learning, and response to stress.

Children growing up with toxic stress may have difficulty forming healthy and stable relationships. They may also have unstable work histories as adults and struggle with finances, jobs, and depression throughout life. These effects can also be passed on to their own children. Some children may face further exposure to toxic stress from historical and ongoing traumas due to systemic racism or the impacts of poverty resulting from limited educational and economic opportunities.

How can we prevent adverse childhood experiences?

ACEs are preventable. Creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and families can prevent ACEs and help all children reach their full potential.

CDC has produced a resource, Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence, to help states and communities take advantage of the best available evidence to prevent ACEs. It features six strategies from the CDC Technical Packages to Prevent Violence.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES.pdf>

Raising awareness of ACEs can help:

Change how people think about the causes of ACEs and who could help prevent them.

Shift the focus from individual responsibility to community solutions.

Reduce stigma around seeking help with parenting challenges or for substance misuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments where children live, learn, and play.

Let's help all children reach their full potential and create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive.