



SERVE & SAVE
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE INITIATIVE

What to know about
PHYSICAL
ABUSE



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WHAT IS IT?

Physical abuse is any physical force that injures you or puts your health in danger. Physical abuse can include shaking, burning, choking, hair-pulling, hitting, slapping, kicking, and any type of harm with a weapon like a knife or a gun. It can also include threats to hurt you, your children, your pets, or family members. Physical abuse can also include restraining you against your will, by tying you up or locking you in a space.

FORMS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

These may include, but are not limited to :

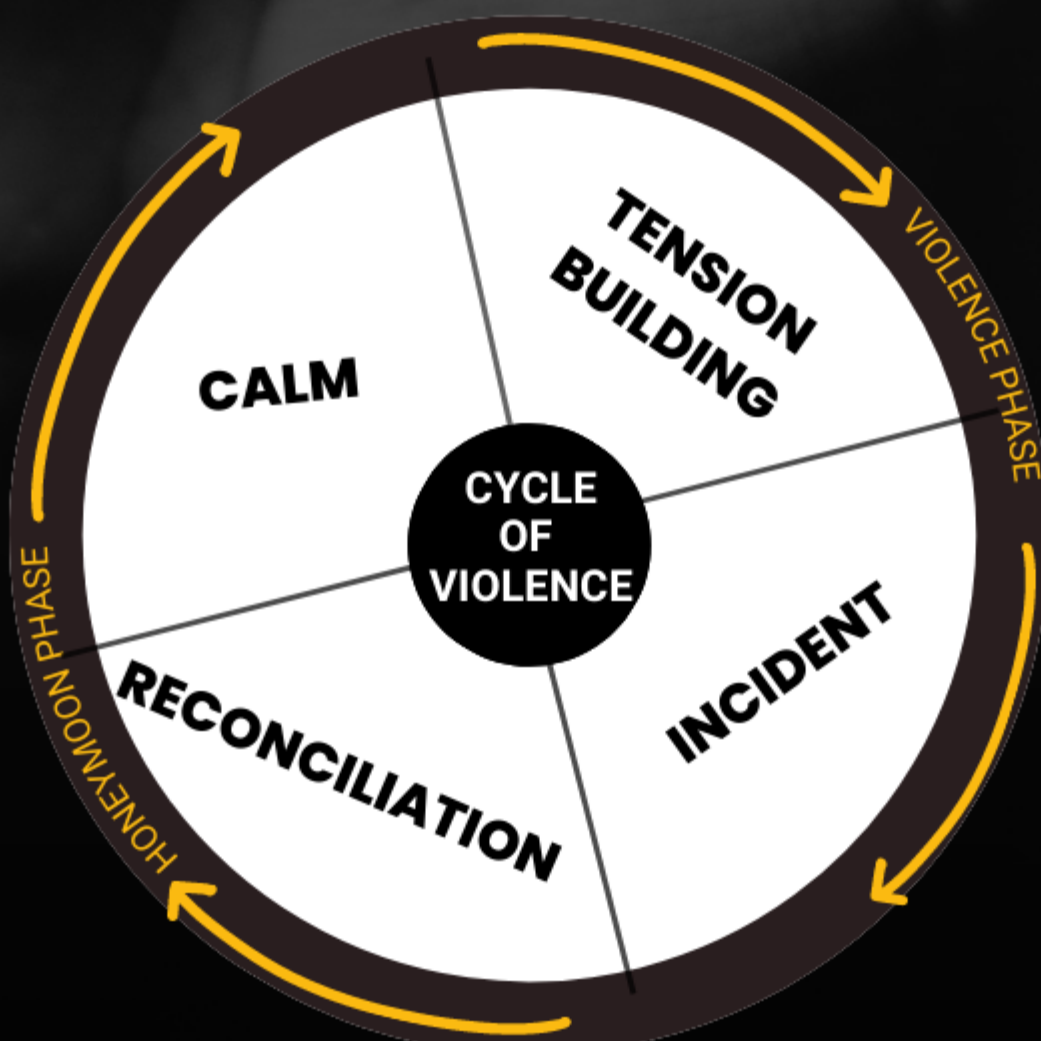
- **Scratching or biting**
- **Pushing or shoving**
- **Slapping**
- **Kicking**
- **Choking or strangling**
- **Force feeding**
- **Using weapons or objects that could hurt you**
- **Physically restraining you (such as pinning you against a wall, floor, bed, etc.)**

SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

There are several warning signs associated with abuse. The outward, visible signs are usually the first indication that someone is experiencing physical abuse. The most obvious signs include:

- **Bruises** (especially if the individual seems vague about how the bruising occurred). The most obvious bruises are black eyes or bruised cheek bones. However, bruising may occur on any part of the body.
- **Broken bones** - Survivors of physical abuse who experience broken bones may have a history of more than one broken bone. X-rays will likely show fractures or breaks in various stages of healing.
- **Burns** - Most of the time, when people think of a burn associated with physical abuse, they think of cigarette burns. This is a common type of physical abuse. However, other types of burns may indicate abuse as well. For instance, an infant or young child may experience severe burns or blisters from being submerged in scalding bath water. Grease burns that cover a large area of the body, especially on a person who is too young or unable to cook, are also common.
- **Head injuries** - A common sign of physical abuse is a concussion. Not all concussions are related to abuse. But if a survivor is evasive about the way a head injury occurred or must be treated more than once for a similar injury, this could be a warning sign.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



The cycle of abuse, also sometimes called the cycle of violence, helps illustrate common patterns of abusive behavior in relationships. It also helps provide clues toward a deeper understanding of why people experiencing abuse often find it difficult to break free.

- **Tension building** - Abusive partners often lash out in response to external stressors. Anything can fuel tension: family issues, trouble at work, physical illness, fatigue. Frustration and dissatisfaction intensify over time, often prompting feelings of powerlessness, injustice, anger, and paranoia. Sensing the simmering tension, you might try to find ways to placate the abusive partner and prevent abuse from happening. You may feel anxious, on your guard, and hyperalert to their potential needs. You might alternate between tiptoeing around them, trying not to set them off, and making an extra effort to provide physical and emotional support.

Incident of abuse or violence - The abuser eventually releases this tension on others, attempting to regain power by establishing control.

Abuse might involve: insults or name-calling threats of harm or property destruction attempts to control your behavior sexual or physical violence emotional manipulation. They might accuse you of making them mad or blame you for your “relationship problems.” Keep in mind that people choose to abuse others. Any tension they experience may help explain the abuse, but it never excuses it.

- **Reconciliation** - After the incident of abuse, tension gradually begins to fade. In an attempt to move past the abuse, the abuser often uses kindness, gifts, and loving gestures to usher in a “honeymoon” stage. This devoted behavior can trigger the release of dopamine and oxytocin, helping you feel even more closely bonded and leading you to believe you have your “real” relationship back.

- **Calm** - To maintain peace and harmony, both parties generally have to come up with some sort of explanation or justification for the abuse. The abusive partner might:

1. apologize while blaming others
2. point to outside factors to justify their behavior
3. minimize the abuse or deny it happened
4. accuse you of provoking them

They might show plenty of remorse, assure you it won't happen again, and seem more attuned to your needs than usual. You might begin to accept their excuses, even doubt your memory of the abuse. Maybe it really was nothing, like they said. This reprieve offers relief from the physical and emotional tension and pain. You might feel certain that whatever upset them and triggered the abuse has passed. You can't believe they'd do anything like that again.

- **Repeat** - This cycle then repeats over time. This "cycle" happens over and over within abusive relationships, though. The length of time between each repetition can vary. It often shortens over time as the abuse escalates. As time goes on, the calm period may become very short or even disappear from the cycle entirely.

HOW TO ADDRESS IT?

If you are thinking about leaving an abusive relationship, even if you don't leave right away, creating a safety plan can help you know what to do if your partner abuses you again. It can help you be more independent when you leave. Your safety plan will help you be prepared:

- **Identify a safe friend or friends and safe places to go** - Create a code word to use with friends, family, or neighbors to let them know you are in danger without the abuser finding out. If possible, agree on a secret location where they can pick you up.
- **If possible keep an alternate cellphone nearby** - Try not to call for help on your home phone or on a shared phone.

HOW TO ADDRESS IT?

Your partner might be able to trace the numbers. If you don't have a cellphone, you can get a prepaid phone. Some domestic violence shelters offer free phones.

- **Try to memorize the phone numbers of friends, family, or shelters** - If your partner takes your phone, you will still be able to contact loved ones or shelters for a safe place to stay.
- **Make a list of things to take if you have to leave quickly** - Important identity documents and money are probably the top priority. See the Safety Packing List for a detailed list of items to pack. Get these items together, and keep them in a safe place where your partner will not find them. If you are in immediate danger, leave without them.
- **Try to take with you any evidence of abuse or violence if you leave your partner** - This might include threatening notes from your partner. It might be copies of police and medical reports. It might include pictures of your injuries or damage to your property.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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