

# IS THIS ABUSE?

Below is a checklist that can be helpful for reflecting on your relationship. *This check list is adapted from materials written by Ginny NiCarthy, The National Domestic Violence Hotline, and the Domestic Violence Intervention Program.*

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes unwanted physical contact, which may or may not cause an injury. Physical abuse can be directed at you, your children, household pets or others. Has your partner ever:

- pushed, shoved or kicked you
- held you down to keep you from leaving
- slapped, hit or punched you
- bit, stabbed, burned or choked you
- thrown objects at you
- locked you out of the house
- abandoned you in dangerous places
- refused to help when you were sick, injured or pregnant
- tried to hit or force you off the road with a car
- threatened or hurt you with a weapon

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual assault is any activity committed by force or against the will of another person. Sexual abuse/assault can also include degrading treatment based on your sexuality or sexual orientation; using force or coercion in pregnancy.. Has your partner ever:

- made jokes or crude remarks about you or others
- treated women as sex objects
- been excessively jealous; accusing you of affairs
- forced you to dress a particular way
- put down your feelings about sex
- criticized you sexually
- insisted on sexual contact or touching
- withheld sex and affection
- called you sexual names, like “whore” or “frigid”
- forced you to strip
- shown sexual interest in others
- had affairs with others while agreeing to monogamy
- demands monogamy from you, while insisting on freedom for self
- forced sex with him/her or others
- forced sex after beating or threatening beating

## **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is mistreating and controlling another person. The emotional abuser makes their partner feel afraid, helpless and/or worthless. Has or does your partner ever:

- ignore your feelings
- ridicule or insult your valued beliefs, religion, race etc.
- withhold appreciation, approval or affection as punishment
- continually criticize, calling you names or shouting at you
- insult or drive away friends/family
- humiliate you in public or private
- lied or withheld important information
- always checks up on you
- treat you like a child or servant
- threaten to leave you continually
- abused pets to hurt or scare you
- made you feel worthless, never good enough
- dislike your friends/family or how you do just about anything

## **Economic Abuse**

Controlling a battered person's access to financial resources can directly affect their ability to be independent of the batterer. Has or does your partner:

- control access to household money, you don't
- know how much or where it is
- make all the financial decisions
- if you are responsible for the household budget you have to account for every dime and are punished if there isn't "enough"
- take your paycheck or sell your belongings to get extra money
- prevent you from getting or keeping a job

## **Spiritual and Political Abuse**

Spiritual and political abuse is not limited to a certain religion, denomination, or political affiliation. Any person, of any belief system, is capable of perpetrating spiritual or political abuse, just as anyone can be the victim of it. Signs of spiritual and political abuse between intimate partners include when an abusive partner:

- ridicules or insults the other person's religious, spiritual, or political beliefs
- prevents the other partner from practicing their religious, spiritual, or political beliefs
- uses their partner's religious, spiritual, or political beliefs to manipulate or shame them
- forces the children to be raised in a faith that the other partner has not agreed to

Spiritual abuse is no less harmful or difficult to endure than any other kind of abuse, as a person's spiritual and political beliefs are highly personal. However, it can be very difficult to identify, as many victims may not recognize they are being abused. In addition, the abusive partner may claim that any challenge to the abuse is an assault on their own religious or political freedom.

## **Isolation**

Isolation can be devastating. It prevents someone who is battered/abused from accessing support or resources. In addition, batterers through abusive tactics will turn family and friends against their partner.

Has your partner ever:

- started fights whenever you want to go out or spend time with friends
- put your family/friends down
- made you feel guilty when you spend time away from him/her
- although it is not said directly, you always feel like you must ask before going out
- refused to care for the children as you are preparing to leave
- made you account for every moment of the time you are gone — who you are with, where you went, who you saw, what you did, etc.
- made you late for work so many times, you lose your job
- accused you of having affairs
- monitor your use of the car
- taken the phone or car keys when he/she leaves
- locked you in a room when he/she leaves

## **Intimidation and Threats**

The primary function of intimidation and threats is to instill fear and insure compliance. Has or does your partner:

- put you in fear through looks, gestures or actions
- smashed things
- destroyed things of value to you
- injured or killed pets to frighten you
- threatened to hurt/kill someone you love
- displayed weapons in a threatening way
- cleaned weapons immediately after or during a threatening argument
- threatened to leave you or commit suicide
- made you commit illegal acts
- threatened to report illegal acts or report you to welfare or child abuse investigators

## **Minimization, Denial and Blame**

Minimization, denial and blame undermines the credibility and reality of battered/abused individuals. By making light of, denying responsibility for, or blaming the victim for their actions, the batterer creates an environment in which the victim's feelings, thoughts or needs are ignored and devalued. Has or does your partner:

- say they wouldn't hit you if you hadn't made them angry
- say the abuse never happened or that it was no big deal
- say you deserve it

## **Control through Overprotection and “Caring”**

Some batterers will use concepts like caring for or protecting as a means to control another. The emphasis here is on the intention of the action – will there be consequences if you don’t go along with their “kindness.” Do you or have you recognized the following:

- they don't like it if you are away from home
- they say they worry and want to know where you are all the time
- they phone or unexpectedly show up where you work to see if you’re “ok”
- they shop or run errands so you don’t have to go out
- they drive you to and from places so no one will get “ideas”

## **Using Societal Privilege**

In our society, many of us carry value based on our status. Some examples include being male, wealthy, heterosexual or white-skinned. Has your partner ever:

- - treated you like a servant
- made all the “big” decisions, telling you what to do
- acted like the “master of the castle” using that to justify abusive behaviors
- used heterosexism or homophobia to put you in fear
- threatened to “out” you to family or coworkers
- said you aren’t a “real” LGBTQIA
- threatened to tell your children or former partner that you are in a relationship with a an individual of the same gender.

## **Using the Children**

Threatening or hurting someone we love is a tactic to insure compliance. Batterers know that many victims are willing to suffer almost anything to protect their loved ones. Has or does your partner:

- threaten to kidnap or kill the children
- punish or deprive the children when mad at you
- call you a bad parent
- use visitation to harass you
- tell the children things to affect their opinion of you or demean you in front of them
- refuse to participate in the care of the children
- use the children to make you feel guilty
- threaten to sexually abuse the children if you won’t have sex

## **Reproductive Coercion**

This is when your partner engages in threats or acts of violence against your reproductive health or reproductive decision-making. They may sabotage birth control or hormonal treatment (e.g., hiding pills or putting pin holes in condoms), lie about being on birth control, engage in stealthing (removing the condom without asking for consent), and forcing pregnancy or abortion. Partners may do these things by force or under the guise that if you love them, then you will comply with their wishes.