

## Tackling family violence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month – a time to shine a light on a topic that often stays in the shadows and occurs in all socioeconomic classes. Rather than using the term *domestic violence*, which is often equated with spousal abuse, we think of the problem as the broader one of *family violence*. This includes intimate partner violence, as well as other kinds of violence: child abuse, child-to-parent abuse, elderly abuse, and abuse by former family members, such as ex-spouses.

Like many difficult problems, family violence can be uncomfortable to talk about. As a MAP, it's an issue we are very familiar with. Many people who call us for help are debilitated from coping with family violence and issues that are so often intertwined: substance abuse, depression, or mental illness.

One myth about domestic violence is that it always involves physical or sexual assault. Not true. It might include threats, intimidation, humiliation, stalking, emotional abuse, exerting financial control, or isolation from friends and family. A common abusive technique is called *gaslighting* or manipulating someone by psychological means to a point where the victim questions their own sanity or worth.

Barriers to getting help can be varied and complex:

- Fear of the abuser finding out.
- Fear that an escape attempt will fail and make things worse.
- Feeling stuck. Having no resources. Not knowing how to get away or where to turn.
- Shame. Not wanting others to know.
- Feeling protective about the abuser, particularly when it is a child inflicting violence on a parent.
- Love or need. Believing promises that it won't happen again. Feeling the abuser "needs me."
- Denial. It's not that bad. It was an accident. It was my fault.



### **What to do if you need help yourself:**

Learn more about how to recognize abuse. Learn about local help resources in advance. Domestic violence agencies provide: Emotional support, safety planning, a safe place to stay in an emergency, legal help, and help with housing. If you feel in immediate danger, call 911. Otherwise, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY) or call your MAP.

### **How to help others:**

If a friend, relative or person you care about might be in an abusive situation, you can't rescue them, but you can throw a lifeline. Know common signs of abuse. Talk to the person to see if they feel safe. Listen and show the person that you care. Research domestic violence resources and shelters in your local area so you can offer the person alternatives. Help the person make a safety plan.

### **If you are worried you may become an abuser:**

If you experience rage, anger, or poor impulse control and you are either afraid you might hurt someone or have hurt someone, get professional help immediately to learn how to manage your anger and change your behavior.

Log in to your MAP online to learn more about family violence, or call us anytime day or night to talk to experienced counselors.