

What to do if someone tells you about the violence in their life?

- Most people who are affected by abusive and violent behaviour turn first to family and friends for support. What you say or do therefore can be vitally important. Your support and encouragement can assist them to feel stronger and more able to make decisions. The most important thing you can do is to listen without judging, respect their decisions, and help them find ways to become stronger and feel safer.
- Check how the person is feeling and where they are at in their thinking about what to do. Help them explore their choices such as calling ODVSS, developing a safety plan and/or leaving the situation.
- Also support them to carefully consider the consequences of each option. Avoid saying negative things about the person who is using abusive and violent behaviour. Many people still feel love and commitment to the relationship and may feel loyalty and protective of the person using violence, and may take your criticism personally.
- In thinking about the sort of help you may be able to give, it is important to know that your support may be required over a long period of time. It is important to "stick with" the person but at the same time, be clear and honest about your limits.
- Think carefully before "having a word" with the person using violence. Think about the possible angry reaction directed at either you or the person subjected to abusive and violent behaviours that may follow from your good intention.
- Keep clear in your mind and your conversations that abusive and violent behaviour is unacceptable and there is no excuse for it.

What does ODVSS offer?

Information, advocacy and support

- One to one confidential support
- Information Line: telephone support
- Accompaniment to Court and other services
- Outreach services: Birr, Edenderry, Fermoy, Banagher, Shannonbridge and Clara

Office hours:

Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm

Outreach hours:

By appointment available Monday to Friday 9am–5pm

Information line hours:

Monday to Friday, 10am–12pm and 2pm–4pm

Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service ODVSS

Contact details

Information Line **057 93 51886**

Office **057 93 51796**

Fax **057 93 51796**

Web **www.odvss.ie**

Design and print: **Brosna Press** 050 6454327

Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service ODVSS

Have you been affected
by domestic violence?

What is domestic violence and abuse?

Domestic Violence occurs when a family member uses violent and/or abusive behaviour to control another family member or members. Domestic Violence can include physical, verbal, emotional, economic or sexual abuse. For example: hitting, kicking, punching, choking, damaging property, shouting, insults, threats, bullying, withholding and controlling finances, unwanted sexual acts, forced sex, withdrawal of affection.

Women and children are the majority of those who are subjected to abusive and violent behaviours in the home from their male partners, or fathers and stepfathers. However, men can also experience abuse and violence from their partner.

Domestic violence cuts across all sections of the community. It doesn't matter what your ethnic or religious background is. It doesn't matter if you have a disability or are young or old, and it doesn't matter if you're gay or straight.

What about love?

The feelings we have for our partners and families are powerful. Love, passion, trust, responsibility and attachment can bind us as much as fear. Other commitments such as children or shared possessions and history are strong forces in our lives. You may want the relationship to continue, but the abusive behaviours to stop.

When thinking about what you can do it is important to know that people who use abusive and violent behaviours are responsible for their own behaviour. Many people

think that people who use abusive and violent behaviours can't control what they do, but it is the responsibility of each of us to control ourselves.

Some people who use abusive and violent behaviour do change and stop the violence. Many do not and may use promises of change to further manipulate and control. Often it is left to the people who live with the abuse to try and improve their safety and that of their children.

When people do speak about the abusive behaviour they are experiencing, it is often the emotional harm that they say is the most long-lasting. Everyone's experience of abuse is unique but it is often a combination of emotional, physical and sexual abuse with other controlling behaviours such as isolation and financial deprivation.

Recognising that you don't like what is happening to you, that it is in fact abusive, can be the first step on a road to positive change. It is a journey that can give you back your self-respect, your health, a sense that you are a worthwhile person, your safety and your hopes for the future.

What next?

The first step is to see the abusive and violent behaviours for what they are – behaviour that hurts you. It isn't an expression of love or caring.

The person who uses abusive and violent behaviour does so to get their own way and to control you. These are behaviours that are often only used against you and possibly your children - not at work, not at the sporting club and often not in public. It is important you realise that you are not responsible for the behaviour of others, only your own. Another person's violence and abuse is not your fault. You have the right to live without fear and abuse.

The next step is to seek the help, information and support which will enable you and your children to achieve the goal of living safe, well and free of abusive and violent behaviour.

What can I do?

Below are some ideas that may help. Look at your situation and decide what may or may not be helpful. The length of time you have been experiencing the abuse and the level of violence being used against you may also influence what you chose to do. Many people use a combination of all sorts of things before finding something that works for them and is safe for them:

- **Think about who you could trust to talk with safely.** Just talking it through with someone else can give you a bit of distance to see the situation more clearly.
- **Call a telephone service such as ODVSS** to talk over your situation. You don't have to give your name or personal details.
- **Find ways to be less controlled and isolated,** for example seeing your friends and/or family, taking up a course, or getting a job.
- **Join a support group or find a counsellor** for yourself. This can help break down your sense of isolation and assist you to think through what is best for you and your kids.
- **Call the Gardaí.** The Garda Domestic Violence Policy directs the Gardaí to treat domestic violence seriously. They are trained to respond professionally and promptly to your call.
- **Apply for a Domestic Violence Order.** This is an order of the court directing a person not to do certain things. You can get more information about these from ODVSS
- **Actually leaving, planning to leave or telling the other person about your intention to leave can be a dangerous time.** If the ideas of leaving will mean increased threats, violence and watching over you, then consider it carefully. **Work out a safety plan.** ODVSS can help you to explore your options.