



Family Violence and Boundary Setting

What is Family Violence?

Family violence happens when one person in a relationship hurts another or makes them feel unsafe, and it is a repeated pattern of behaviour. Family violence occurs when there is a familial relationship, including parents, guardians, or other family members.

Violence that occurs between intimate partners (husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends, etc) is referred to as intimidating partner violence and is the most common form of family violence.

Types of Violence:

Family Violence is repeated behaviours by a family member that can leave you feeling scared, threatened or controlled and stop you from making your own choices about your life. This can include:

- Emotional/Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Coercive Control
- Systems Abuse

The violence can take many forms and is not always direct. Coercive control is a form of violence used by perpetrators to exert power and dominance. It is a very common form of violence that creates fear and denies the autonomy of the person experiencing it. Examples of family violence include:

- Telling you they will hurt themselves if you leave.
- Monitoring your phone, social media, and emails without your consent.
- Causing you to question your memory and reality – this is known as gaslighting.
- Tell you they will hurt you, your children or pets, or others you care about if you leave them or don't behave the way they want you to.
- Damage to your home or property, such as your phone, clothes, or personal belongings.
- Prevent you from seeing family and friends or attending work, school, or spiritual places of worship.
- Follow you, harass you, and insist on being in continual contact with you.
- Hitting, kicking, or other acts to cause physical pain
- Touching you in places you don't want to be touched.
- Using the legal system or other government agencies to bully or intimidate you.

Who is at risk of experiencing family violence?

Family violence occurs across all cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds and can affect both women and men. However, women are statistically far more likely to experience this type of violence. Some groups are considered to be vulnerable and, therefore, more susceptible to family violence, including:

- Women who have recently separated from an abusive partner
- Pregnant women
- People with a disability
- Older people
- People who identify as LGBTQIA+
- People living in remote areas
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women and risk of FDV

People from migrant, refugee, or other CALD backgrounds can experience family violence similarly to people from other groups and backgrounds. Some types of violence may be unique to this vulnerable group. This can include:

- Being forced to marry or enter a relationship against your will.
- Having personal documents such as passports and birth certificates withheld or destroyed.
- Being isolated from friends, family, and others who share your culture or language.
- Being prevented from learning English.
- Being provided with information about immigration, child protection, or other agencies is not true and causes you to be fearful and allows the perpetrator to control and dominate you.
- Being prevented from accessing information.
- Being prevented from participating in your cultural practices and beliefs.

Where to get help?

If you are experiencing violence, there are many places to get help and support.

If you are in immediate danger, call 000

- 1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732 - 24/7 national family violence counselling, information, and support service.
- Crisis Care- 1800 199 008 - Provides essential support for individuals facing emergencies or crises.
- DV Helpline – 1800 007 339 - Provides support for women experiencing family violence.
- Sexual Abuse Resource Centre – 1800 199 888 - Offers free counselling to people who have experienced historical or recent sexual abuse.
- Police non-emergency – 131 444 - Non-emergency number for seeking support from Police
- Entrypoint – 1800 124 684 - A free and voluntary assessment and referral service for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Healthy Relationships

Identifying behaviours in relationships that are 'safe' or 'toxic' is an essential component in assessing the health and safety of our relationships. This can apply to all relationships in our lives. However, the information below pertains specifically to intimate relationships. This can sometimes be challenging, especially when we are in a toxic relationship where there are coercive controlling behaviours working against us that make us doubt our concerns and fears about what we are experiencing.

This doubt can lead us to minimise or even dismiss behaviours that put us at significant risk of harm. A good way to identify if the behaviours we are subject to from another person are safe is to establish whether they fall into the categories of 'green flags' or 'red flags'.

Green flags are behaviours by the other person that are safe and healthy. Some examples of 'green flag' behaviours are included below:

- Open communication – you feel safe to share how you are feeling.
- You trust your partner and are honest with them.
- You continue to spend time with your friends and family apart from your relationship.
- You both practice self-care and seek support when required.
- Your partner supports your dreams and aspirations.
- You continue to spend time doing activities that you enjoy.
- You have fun together and share interests.

Red Flags may include:

- They insist on moving quickly into the relationship.
- They insist that you stop participating in activities you have always enjoyed.
- They make it difficult for you to spend time with other important people in your life.
- They can present as extremely charming and present as though they have all the same likes and dislikes as you.
- This can change quickly, and they may become extremely jealous or controlling.
- They criticise your appearance, challenge your self-worth, and make you begin to doubt yourself.
- They do not take responsibility for their actions and often blame others when things go wrong – including to blame you.

The cycle of violence

The cycle of violence refers to a repeating pattern of behaviours in a relationship that are abusive and can include physical, verbal, emotional, and coercive controlling elements. This cycle is typically understood to have four stages, which are set out below:

1. Tension Building - Stress begins to accumulate from daily life's stress or other sources of conflict. The abuser will likely exhibit behaviours such as increased irritability, which often leaves the victim trying to appease the abuser to reduce the tension.
2. Abusive Incident – Also known as the 'explosive phase,' this is where the abuse will occur. This can include physical, emotional, and psychological violence and is the most dangerous phase. The abuser will exert control by use of aggressive behaviours, threats, and manipulations.
3. Reconciliation – Sometimes referred to as the 'honeymoon phase,' this phase is characterised by the abuser apologising, showing remorse, and often seeking forgiveness. There are usually promises and reassurances that the abuser will seek help so this will never happen again, and this time will be 'the last time.'
4. Calm – This phase is characterised by a period of calm. The abuser may continue to express remorse or make positive gestures of love and affection; however, these tend to reduce in authenticity over time. This calm is deceptive, and as underlying issues will remain unsolved, the cycle will begin again.

The cycle of violence tends to become shorter and shorter over time, with the period between phase one and phase four sometimes decreasing from months to weeks to days and ultimately to within a day. When the cycle decreases in this manner, the danger increases significantly, and anyone experiencing this situation should seek support to leave safely.

Boundary Setting

Boundary setting is an essential aspect of all relationships. A good indicator of whether a relationship is healthy is recognising whether the boundaries that are set are respected. This applies to all our relationships and interactions with other people in our lives, including family, friends, colleagues, and intimate partners.

Boundaries are essential for maintaining a healthy and safe relationship. They help to ensure physical wellbeing and good mental health. Additionally, they facilitate the maintenance and protection of an individual's own identity, values, and morals.

Why are boundaries important?

1. Boundaries provide a set of expectations when interacting with others.
2. Boundaries separate our needs, wants, ideas, and emotions from those of other people.
3. Boundaries clarify roles and responsibilities within a relationship.
4. Boundaries create a set of expectations when interacting with others.
5. Boundaries reduce co-dependency and promote autonomy in a relationship.
6. Boundaries encourage physical and emotional safety.
7. Boundaries promote a sense of empowerment and self-respect.

How do I establish healthy boundaries in a relationship?

An effective way to set clear boundaries in a relationship is to reflect on our values, morals, and beliefs. Asking ourselves reflective questions about what we find acceptable in a relationship and what we believe is essential to us is an effective way to start.

Some examples of reflective questions are included below:

- What qualities do I admire in others?
- What types of behaviours do I find upsetting or inappropriate?
- What character traits are essential to me?
- What are the best ways I enjoy spending my time?
- What is important to me in terms of my life goals?
- What do I value the most about close relationships?
- What parts of my character and personality do I value the most about myself?

Types of Healthy Boundaries

Physical – Physical boundaries are integral for our physical wellbeing and help us to feel safe and comfortable in our environment. Setting physical boundaries means setting physical limitations around our personal space.

Emotional – Emotional boundaries are essential for our internal wellbeing and ensure that others respect our emotional limits. Setting emotional boundaries means setting limitations on the types of behaviours we accept from other people.

Financial – Financial boundaries apply to our finances, ensuring we are in control of how they are used. Setting financial boundaries means that we put limitations on our resources and ensure their use is in our best interest.

Sexual – Sexual boundaries are incorporated into our physical boundaries and ensure we feel safe and comfortable when engaging in physical intimacy with other people. Consent is an essential part of ensuring sexual boundaries are respected.

Time – Time boundaries are also an important boundary that needs to be respected. Setting time boundaries means that we can prioritise our own time needs without feeling pressured by other people.

Is my relationship safe?

It is not uncommon to have questions about whether the relationships we are in are safe and healthy. An effective way to help us understand this is by reflecting on our values, morals, and beliefs and asking ourselves if these are present in our relationship.

These are some essential questions we can ask ourselves if we are questioning our safety in our relationships:

- When do I feel safest in my relationship?
- When do I feel the least safe in my relationship?
- What actions do I already take to keep me safe?

After reflecting on the above, you may need to create a safety plan.



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