

Intimate Partner Violence:

A guide to recognizing signs, prioritizing safety, and providing support

What is intimate partner violence?

Intimate partner violence (or IPV) is a term used to describe the violence perpetrated in a relationship with a known, trusted, familiar individual. This violence can take the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse/manipulation, stalking and more.

Why is it important to know about IPV?

According to the Center for Disease Control, IPV is one of the most [prevalent yet preventable](#) public health issues Americans face. The [consequences](#) of this health problem are widespread, impacting the physical, psychological, and financial health and well-being of millions of American children and adults. What's more, increasing awareness and education about IPV can prevent unnecessary trauma and even save a life.

Intimate Partner Violence: Fact vs. Fiction

Fiction	Fact
"It is only considered IPV when a man abuses a woman within a relationship."	While the rates between groups may vary, people of all genders, cultures, races, and ethnicities can both experience and perpetrate IPV. Women, as well as individuals living with a disability, tend to experience IPV at higher rates. As many as 1 in 7 men have reported experiencing physical violence as a result of IPV.
"IPV doesn't happen that often."	Millions of Americans (and as many as 15% of women) have reported experiencing some sort of intimate partner violence at some point in their lifetime. IPV also exists at notable rates in countries all around the world .

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Fiction	Fact
"That's just how men are, it's not that big of a deal."	Even though intimate partner violence is most commonly perpetrated by males, it should not be considered "normal" male behavior and is certainly never acceptable. More importantly, most individuals (even men) do not exhibit violent behavior toward their partner, and it should not be considered natural or unavoidable behavior.
"People who experience IPV must be okay with it or they'd leave."	There are several complex and difficult factors involved in separating from a partner who is perpetrating IPV. These include a lack of resources, fear, shame, hope for changed behavior, and more.
"IPV is the same thing as domestic violence."	While IPV is sometimes referred to as domestic violence, IPV is a more inclusive term to include people who do not reside in the same home or are not currently married. Additional differences between the terms are outlined here .
"If someone experiences IPV, there was something they must've done to provoke their partner or there was something they could've done to prevent them from getting that upset."	There is no justification for IPV. Even if an individual is angered, irritated, or someone around them makes a mistake, that is no excuse for violent behavior to occur. Individuals should be expected to regulate their own emotional distress without harming other people in the process. Ideas about provocation or prevention are inaccurate and should be dismissed, as they create shame and blame in those who experience IPV.
"There's nothing I can do to stop IPV, so what's the point of talking about this?"	There are plenty of actions to take to help prevent the occurrence of IPV. These include teaching and parenting youth about emotional regulation and healthy relationship patterns and bystander education. Additionally, there are helpful steps to take to support or intervene for those experiencing IPV (see below).

Risk Factors for IPV

This table provides an overview of some of the most common risk factors for someone to experience intimate partner violence. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and more detailed information can be found in resources such as the [World Health Organization](#). These factors in no way guarantee that someone who identifies with these factors will perpetuate IPV, but research indicates that these factors are associated with increased risk of IPV.

Risk Factors for Perpetrating IPV:

Lower education level

Witnessing or experiencing IPV during childhood

Substance Use Disorder (diagnosed or undiagnosed)

Economic / financial stress

Patterns of insecurity and jealousy within a relationship

Patterns of being territorial or possessive about a romantic partner

Angry and/or hostile personality type

Difficulty managing tough emotional states, such as sadness, stress or feeling overwhelmed

Patterns of threats (including ones said in a joking manner) that involve violence toward others

Difficulty handling rejection or hearing "no"

Intentionally injuring animals

Poor impulse control

Endorsing beliefs about:

- the need to control or exert power over women or romantic partners
- the inferiority of women, children, or other populations
- the necessity of violence to resolve interpersonal conflict

Signs of IPV to recognize among friends, family and coworkers

The following behaviors are indicators that intimate partner violence may be occurring:

- Observing evidence of physical injuries (e.g. bruises, broken bones, cuts) that appear unexpectedly and at times do not have a reasonable explanation for their existence
- Isolation from friends, family members and/or coworkers
- Witnessing a pattern of tense, volatile arguments between those in an intimate relationship, particularly that which results in damaged property and/or physical aggression
- Detecting a persistent need to ask permission or hear the opinion of a significant other before making personal decisions, including (but not limited to): socializing with friends or family, spending money, and in things such as hair choice or wardrobe
- Observing degrading, harsh, commanding and/or insulting comments said from one partner to another
- Excessive privacy, guardedness, or defensiveness about the relationship itself

It is also important to note that oftentimes, relationship violence can start in adolescence (known as [teen dating violence](#)) and continue into adulthood, so these signs should be monitored in both teenagers and adults.

Ways to support someone who's experiencing IPV

If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing IPV, there are several ways to help them. For example:

- Offer emotional support in a nonjudgmental, confidential, and safe way. Maintain discretion and privacy for the sake of the health and well-being of them and their family.
- Understand that people experiencing IPV may be fearful, ashamed, traumatized or even in denial about the gravity of their situation. Exercise patience and empathy when interacting with them (e.g. listen attentively and reflect the difficulty of their situation with your words and posture; allow them to come to their own conclusions about the relationship/their partner in their own time).
- If someone does decide to leave a relationship, prioritize their feelings of safety and agency and offer suggestions for next steps accordingly. For example, offer to accompany them to find alternative housing, lawyer visits, changing phone numbers, etc. Offer evidence that they are not alone and they have not made a mistake.
- Encourage them to create a [safety plan](#) for the future.
- Document every instance of IPV that you observe (e.g. time, date, context, etc.) so that you can assist with reporting and documentation if and/or when someone decides to make an official report.
- Remind them that they are more than their IPV experience by engaging them in activities and conversations that do not center around this.
- Support them for the long haul—if someone chooses to leave a relationship due to IPV, there are many long term impacts and consequences of this decision and they will benefit from your support once the relationship has ended. Show them they are not alone and are worthy of safety, love and care!
- Offer to assist in finding resources or supplying tangible needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, transportation, job opportunities, legal aid, etc.
- Call local protective services if someone involved is a child, elderly individual or someone living with a disability, particularly if you are a [mandated reporter](#). If making a report (which can be made anonymously), make sure to specify which caregiver you perceive to be unsafe.

**For more information or to receive additional support,
please use the following resources:**

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: www.ncadv.org