

How to spot a victim of domestic abuse and what you can do to help



I'm a 35-year-old woman. I have been in abusive relationships with men since I was 17. The most destructive of these relationships lasted for ten years – it was with the father of my child.

Who was he?

He was charming, charismatic and the life and soul of the party. Being a well-paid manager, he could lavish me with gifts and expensive nights out. After what I had already been through in my previous relationships, I felt special.

Until...

It started with a small argument a few months into the relationship, which ended with him abusing me for the first time. Since that day I've been hit with objects, strangled, spat on, pushed, grabbed, and punched.

I have been called fat, ugly, useless, a rubbish mother, and a disgusting animal. He cheated on numerous occasions... with colleagues... and customers.

He said that I was too fat to touch and if I weren't so useless he wouldn't stray. I still believe him now. The burning question on everyone's lips is...

Why did you stay?

I stayed because I was frightened. I stayed because I felt worthless. After years of emotional abuse, I thought that I deserved what I got. I was scared of losing everything I'd worked so hard for. I wanted to maintain a stable family environment for our child. The list is endless.

However, three years ago, something changed. I forced him to leave.

So, what changed?

There was a specific incident that led to me calling the police. I had a number of visits from female officers to record the crimes committed against me. I also informed the police of every incident thereafter and started to record in detail everything that happened... I had never done that before.

Who supported you?

The police notified Social Services of the abuse, which concerned me at first, but Social Services were kind, and caring. They made sure that our child was safe and secure. I had the support of some amazing agencies that helped me so much along the way. Once I'd opened up about the decade of my life that had previously been a secret, I found that my friends had suspected something was wrong but didn't want to say anything, but also that the help that I received was invaluable. I needed people to hold my hand when things became too much.

Both me and my child received support from Arch North Staffs. They taught my child what a 'healthy relationship' looked like. Unwittingly, she had become so used to how daddy treated her mum, that violence and name calling was considered normal.

I also received counselling through Dove, and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy through my GP. I attended parenting classes, which were organised by the family liaison service at my local children's centre. They didn't tell me what I was doing wrong. They didn't criticise or judge me. They helped me to work on my confidence as a person so that I could be a better role model to my child.

Did things get better?

Not right away. Due to stress, I left my job and took a much lower paid role. I soon fell behind with bills and struggled to maintain my home. I also suffered extreme anxiety and no longer felt safe in my home, as he would often turn up late at night with friends to frighten me and try and take our child. I was isolated and frightened.

But help was available

I approached my local council and was able to show them the proof I had gathered. My local council helped me move to a new area within a small community that have helped to keep me safe.

The Citizens Advice Bureau also put me in touch with the Domestic Violence helpline, who can help towards the cost of legal fees and offered me support to obtain an injunction against my former partner.

I could easily say that things for me got worse before they got better following our split. The abuse did not stop just because we split up. In fact it was worse. More violent and more prolonged, but I had support in place to help. I stopped being a victim. I became a survivor.

So... who am I?

I am just like you. You might know me. You may have seen me or spoken to me. You probably had no idea that I've been raped, strangled, knocked out, burnt. You're unaware that I have scars you can't see.

My point is that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. There may be someone sat next to you right now, wherever you are, who goes to their home each night in fear. There may be no visible bruises – there weren't many for me. But there were warning signs.

Signs of domestic violence

- Low self-esteem – issues with confidence and unexplained mood changes
- Anxiety towards the end of the working day/at specific points in the week – change in ability to manage workload towards the end of the working day
- Checking in unnecessarily with partner
- Heated and unreasonable phone calls during work time
- Overly apologetic towards partner
- Avoidance of social situations/not attending social situations without notice and without explanation
- Bruises and wearing inappropriate clothing to cover bruises
- Unexplained aches and pains



How to support someone who might be experiencing domestic violence

Be direct and talk to them. Listen to what they have to say without passing judgement or opinion. Be aware of where they can go for help, and don't get frustrated if they choose not to accept help. Anxiety and fear are overwhelming and there are huge obstacles people will face when leaving an abusive relationship. Research has shown that victims are most at risk upon leaving a violent relationship, or immediately after.

Start to learn about different support agencies and signpost them to the agencies for advice and support. Encourage them to keep a log of incidents, along with evidence of their abuse, so that when they are ready to accept help they will be in a better position to move forward in a positive way.

Seeking help and advice

You can seek support from agencies across our region, including:

Arch North Staffs – call **01782 205500** or visit www.archnorthstaffs.org.uk – for domestic abuse support

Dove – call **01782 683155** or visit www.thedoveservice.org.uk – for information on counselling and group support activities

Local council or housing provider – call for help finding a new safe place to live

Citizens Advice Bureau – call **03444 111 444** or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk – for free, confidential and impartial advice across a range of issues

National 24-hour Domestic Violence helpline – call **0808 2000 247**

GP – call your doctor to seek a referral for counselling or cognitive behaviour therapy

Police – call **999** to record any incidents of domestic violence