

# Think Tank:

## Understanding domestic violence

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Everyone deserves to live free from violence. Everyone. No exceptions. Watching someone deal with abuse is hard, especially if that's someone you know and care about. Today, I'm going to talk about domestic violence. It's time to have the conversation. Welcome to the Think Tank podcast.

Hi everyone. It's Amy Hopkins. I'm a licensed clinical social worker with over 20 years of experience in the mental health field. And today is a bit different than what you're used to. I want to talk to you about domestic violence. It's not an easy subject, right? But we need to talk about it. So what is domestic violence? It's a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power over another. It can happen to anyone. Any gender, race, if you're rich or poor, any sexual orientation, literally, anyone.

When we think of domestic violence, we think of someone being physically assaulted: hit, kicked, battered. But it also includes things like intimidation or humiliation. Isolating a person from friends and family and loved ones. It can be threatening or terrorizing someone. It's also forcing sex or manipulating someone emotionally with sex.

It's controlling the money or creating dependency on the abuser. It can be using criticism, name calling, or other emotionally manipulative behavior. Now it can and does include hitting, kicking, punching, or throwing things and damaging property. But the point here is that domestic violence can impact a person emotionally, mentally, sexually, financially, and physically.

I want you to be aware of the early warning signs that abusive partners often show. They tend to try and isolate you or want to be with you all the time and may say it's because they love you so much and they don't want to share you. They tend to, at least initially, hide the control with expressions of love. They can be hypersensitive and take things, even minor things, very personally. They tend to have unrealistic expectations of you and your time. And when they do lose their mask, when they lose control, they are quick to blame the partner for their behavior.

So let's talk about what to watch for. If you think a friend, family member or anyone is being abused, they will show fear when their partner is angry or be worried about their partner being jealous or suspicious. They may make very few decisions in the relationship. They may have to ask permission to do small things because remember, the partner in control.

You may notice that they get criticized frequently by their partner. And the abused person will apologize for the behavior or justify the behavior. They may even take blame for what the abuser did. And again, they do withdraw from family and friends and loved ones. So maybe listening to this, you may know someone who's in an abusive relationship and maybe you've had the thought like, why don't they just leave or pack up? Just get out. Or maybe you think I'd never put up with that.

So let's talk about why victims don't just leave because it's never that simple or easy. Abusers don't come right out and show their violent sides upfront. They keep those masks on. They initially shower affection and attention to get control. And everyone responds to attention and affection. So it's not uncommon for someone to get sucked in before they see the person behind the mask. So victims hope that the person they initially met, that sweet, kind, attentive, loving person will return. They often feel responsible for the abuse because the abuser has already skillfully shifted the blame and doesn't take responsibility for their own behaviors.

The victim may have nowhere else to go and no money. Remember they've been isolated from friends and family members and typically access to the finances are very controlled. And more importantly, no one walks into a relationship thinking they'll end up abused. When they realize they are, they're alone, they're afraid, they're controlled. They can't just leave.

Now, I want to talk to you. If you are currently in an abusive situation and don't know what to do, I'm talking to you. If you're listening and you're not in abusive situation, listen to the things I say and keep them in mind so you know how to help someone who is being abused. So first, let's talk about how you can stay safer at home. If there is an area in your home where you can escape to, use it. If you're being assaulted, make yourself as small as possible, protecting your body and your head. If possible, keep weapons out of the home or locked away or hard to get to. Teach others who live in your home how to call 911. And think about having a code word that signals to someone that you need help. If you use the code word, they know to call 911. If you are abused, take pictures of your injuries or damages in the home. Have someone else hold on to these images. Keep a record of the violence, including dates, threats, and injuries.

So now let's talk about what you can do to stay more safe at work. It's important that you talk to your employer and make them aware of your situation. They can alert security staff if needed. They can provide you an escort when leaving work or possibly even provide you with a flexible schedule should you need that. The important thing here is to get the support you need at work and make them aware of your situation.

The next thing I want to talk to you about is a safety plan. You need to have in your phone's contacts, a list of hotlines, shelters, and the police. You need to know where you can go to be safe. If that is with a family member, a friend, or a shelter. Practice, multiple ways of getting out of your home and keep a

bag packed and ready. You can leave this bag with a trusted friend or neighbor. Your bag should have cash, an extra set of keys to your car and your home, clothes, medications, any important paperwork like insurance document, divorce or custody papers and anything that you value. And again, if at all possible, remove weapons from your home.

If you need to research resources available in your area and are concerned about the abuser looking at your search history, use a computer at work or at the library. When you're ready to leave, you need to get a protective order and include your work location. Let your friends, family and coworkers know to call the police if they see your abuser. Change the locks if you remain in a joint living space and whenever possible, mix up your daily routine, including the businesses you frequent and most importantly, get as much support as possible. Find a support group. It's time to build out your support network and regain what was taken away from you.

In closing, if you or someone you know is dealing with violence at home, please outreach these resources for support. Talk to an expert at the National Domestic Violence Hotline. That number is: 800-799-7233. Again, the number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline is: 800-799-7233. You can call 211 or 311 for local information. Or you can contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and receive guidance and support.

If you or someone you know is in imminent danger, always call 911. There's also online resources available, including [nomore.org](https://www.nomore.org), [loveisrespect.org](https://www.loveisrespect.org), [domesticshelters.org](https://www.domesticshelters.org), and [womenslaw.org](https://www.womenslaw.org). Please reach out and get help if you need it. There is support available. We're here for you.

Remember that walking away from something that is unsafe and unhealthy is brave, even if you struggle making the decision to walk out that door. I want to encourage you to get the help that you need. Reach out, get support. And I want to thank you for joining me today for this special event on the Think Tank podcast. Please stay safe. Thanks. And I'll see you next time.

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