

Briefing on the nature and impact of domestic abuse perpetrators

Through years of research, domestic abuse is believed to be the result of someone having a sense of entitlement to power and control over their partner / family member. Together with physical abuse, abusers are likely to use coercion, threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation and economic abuse to maintain power and control over their victims.

A victim will often not see themselves as being one, and will minimise their abuse by downplaying the severity of their abuse or its impact, by blaming others or denying that they have done anything wrong. They are also likely to use any children or pets as a method of preventing their victim from leaving them by threatening to harm them or separating them from them.



Can Anger Management or Couples Counselling Help?

A common yet dangerous misconception is that abusers should attend anger management classes. But domestic abuse is not about an abuser not being able to manage their anger, instead it's the deliberate use of anger to control their victim. By enrolling an abuser onto an anger management course they are simply given additional controlling skills. Instead, abusers should be referred to specific domestic abuse perpetrator programmes ([the Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service currently offers two such programmes – Lifeline and Becoming Respectful](#)) which in contrast will address an abusers misplaced sense of entitlement to power and control, whilst working independently with the victim to ensure that they are safe and supported.

Another common misconception is that abusers and their victims should attend couples counselling. This is very dangerous, and also ineffective because typically a victim would not be safe to talk openly about the extent of the abuse in front of their perpetrator. Finally, it implies that the victim is responsible in part for the abuse- which is in itself victim blaming.

In recent years, there has been suggestion in some quarters that Restorative Justice may be a way to resolve domestic abuse and abuse issues. However, this must be treated with caution as the issue of risk is always present in such cases and as with couples counselling could be extremely dangerous.



Potential Behaviour Traits of a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator

The following is not an exhaustive list of perpetrator behaviours, and not everyone who displays one of these is a domestic abuse perpetrator. However, they provide an indication of some common signs:

Jealousy

At the start of the relationship, an abuser will equate jealousy with love. The abuser will question the victim about who the victim talks to, accuse the victim of flirting, or become jealous of time spent with others. The abuser may either call the victim frequently or expect them to do so throughout the day, drop by unexpectedly, refuse to let the victim work, check the car mileage, or ask friends to watch the victim.

Controlling behaviour

In the beginning an abuser will be saying their controlling behaviour is actually a concern for the victim (for example, making sure the victim is safe or “helping” them make decisions). As this behaviour progresses the situation will worsen, and the abuser may assume all control of what the victim can or cannot do.

Unrealistic expectations

An abuser expects the victim to meet all of the abuser's needs and their "required standards" for day-to-day-life.

Isolation

An abuser will often gradually isolate the victim by severing their victim's links to outside support and resources. They will often accuse the victim's friends and family of being "trouble makers." The abuser may block the victim's access to use of a vehicle, work, or telephone service in the home – or use tracking and listening devices to keep tabs on what the victim is doing and what they are saying.

Blames others for problems

An abuser will blame others for all problems or for the abuser's own shortcomings. Someone is always out to get the abuser or is an obstacle to the abuser's achievements. The victim or potential victim will be blamed for almost anything.

Cruelty to animals or children

This is a person who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain – either physical or emotionally. The abuser may expect children to perform beyond their capability (for example teasing children or siblings until they cry).

Forcing sex

The abuser may show little concern for his (or her) partner's wishes and will use sulking and anger to manipulate compliance.

Verbal abuse

This behaviour involves saying things that are intended to be cruel and hurtful, cursing or degrading the victim, or putting down the victim's accomplishments.

Rigid gender roles

The victim, almost always a woman, will be expected to do what they are told. For instance, a male abuser will see women as inferior to men, responsible for menial tasks, stupid, and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.

Dual personality "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"

Nice one moment and nasty the next. Moodiness, which can shift quickly to congeniality, are typical of people who are abusive to their partners. They may appear charming and polite in company and fool others into thinking they are 'nice', when in fact their mood switches in private to 'groom' and 'abuse' their victim

Threats of violence

This consists of any threat of physical force meant to control the partner.

Breaking or striking objects

This behaviour is used as punishment (breaking sentimental possessions) or to terrorize the victim into submission.



Get more advice on services to support people who want to change their abusive behaviour in Somerset

- **Lifeline programme** - <http://www.somersetssurvivors.org.uk/stopthecycle/>
- **Becoming Respectful programme** - <http://www.somersetssurvivors.org.uk/mychange/>



For More Information On Somerset's Domestic Abuse Services, Information Briefings and Awareness Raising Materials please visit
www.somersetssurvivors.org.uk