



TIP SHEET 6

Are you experiencing Domestic or Family Violence?

“It’s confusing. You second guess yourself. You say – maybe it will get better, maybe he is right and I am ‘messed up’. Perhaps if I just do what he says it will all be OK? He did promise it wouldn’t happen again... and work has been so stressful... I just don’t know what to do. I’m scared.”

Have you had any of these thoughts? Do you wonder what is true anymore? Are you confused about the way ahead? It may be difficult to admit that you (and / or your family) are facing domestic and family violence. It’s confronting. But there is a way ahead. There is support. Recognising and admitting what is going on is the first step to accessing appropriate support.

Domestic and Family Violence is any behaviour (either physical or non-physical) in an intimate or family relationship, that is intended to coerce or control another person, or that causes another person to be intimidated or live in fear. This includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, verbal, financial or stalking behaviour. If you are concerned that you may be experiencing domestic and family violence, please read Tip Sheet 1 and 2 of this series on the [DFV Resource page](#), and then refer back here for further information on recognising domestic and family violence.

Men account for 95% of persons who use violence.¹ However, women can also use violence. When a person’s violence is in response to experiencing violence, this is referred to as ‘resistance’. Resistance behaviours may be used by the person experiencing violence to show they are not passive or helpless. One of these behaviours may be hitting back. Such resistance behaviours can lead to an escalation of violence.²

The Cycle of Violence

The cycle of violence³ theory explains how and why the behaviour of a person who uses violence may change so dramatically over time. In an unhealthy relationship, such as an abusive relationship, there is a pattern of tension leading to violence. After the violence, there are attempts to restore the relationship, often called the honeymoon stage. Domestic violence is pattern of controlling behaviour.

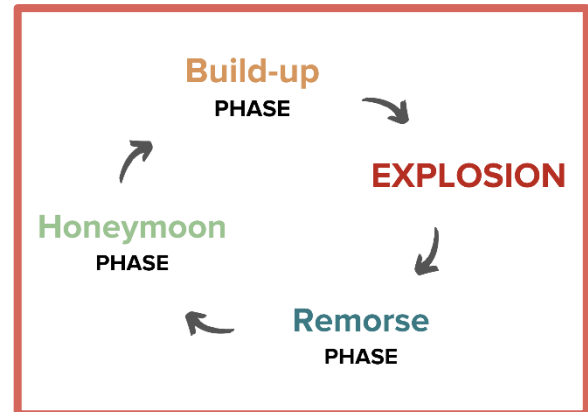
¹ Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, ‘Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia’, *Our Watch*, Melbourne, 2015, p. 20.

² Hayes, B.E., *Women’s Resistance Strategies in Abusive Relationships: An Alternative Framework*, Sage OPEN, Jul-Sep 2013, pp.1-10.

³ Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program (WDVCAP) at Legal Aid NSW. *Charmed and Dangerous: A woman’s guide to reclaiming a healthy relationship*. June 2020.



The pattern can go through several stages. However, it is not the same for everyone – some people who use violence skip stages or repeat stages quickly. The Bible may also be misquoted throughout any of the following stages to justify actions and abusive behaviour. (For more information about what the Bible says on Domestic and Family Violence, see Tip Sheet 1 on the [DFV Resource page](#)). It is important to remember that abuse is happening at every stage of the cycle. A ‘lull’ in the overt abuse doesn’t necessarily mean the abuse has stopped.



THE BUILD-UP PHASE

This phase involves escalating tension marked by increased verbal, physical, sexual, spiritual, emotional or financial abuse. The person using violence may feel their power and control is under threat. The person experiencing violence may feel they are ‘walking on eggshells’.

EXPLOSION

The person using violence will find ways to blame their partner for triggering their abusive behaviours. The explosive behaviour may be physical, verbal, sexual, financial, emotional or spiritual. It is an attempt to gain or maintain control.

THE REMORSE PHASE

This phase is often labelled the “ashamed” stage. The person using violence often feels remorse, guilt or sorrow. They retreat and become withdrawn from the relationship, but will continue to try and blame the partner experiencing violence, and justify their actions. The person using violence often makes promises never to repeat their violent behaviour. They may try to make up for their past behaviour during this period and blame other factors for their behaviour (e.g. work stress, drugs, or alcohol). The personality of the person using violence often changes in this phase, and they become charming and attentive, and may start to buy gifts for the partner.

THE HONEYMOON PHASE

The tension is gone in this phase, and both parties may enter denial about the presence of violence in the relationship. All parties do not want the relationship to end, so are happy to ignore the possibility that the violence could occur again. After some time, this stage will wane, and the cycle may repeat.

The publication ***Charmed and Dangerous: A Woman’s Guide to Reclaiming a Healthy Relationship*** is a helpful resource about the cycle of abuse, understanding domestic and family violence and its possible effects on children, legal rights, deciding to leave, safety planning and parenting after a domestically violent relationship. Access it online: <https://publications.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/Website/Publications/Details/399>



Don't be pressured to stay if you are unsafe

Some people believe that it is better to stay in an abusive relationship than to “break up” a family. But children in families with persistent family violence are at greater risk of worse outcomes than those without parental conflict – See Tip Sheet 9 on the [DFV Resource page](#).⁴ Nor does God want you to stay in a relationship that is unsafe (see Tip Sheet 1 on the [DFV Resource page](#) for more on what the Bible says about domestic and family violence). Restoration of relationships in these kinds of situations may not be possible or safe.

No one experiencing domestic and family violence should be pressured to reconcile with or remain in a relationship with a person using violence. Although the Church values marriage extremely highly, you and your children's emotional and physical safety is always paramount. Any consideration of reconciliation needs to be done with you and your children's safety as the highest priority.

Professional support is available

You are not to blame for the violence of your partner. People who use violence do so because of their own choices. It is not your fault.⁵

Experiencing domestic and family violence is complex and you can benefit from support and counselling. When and how you seek this support is your choice. There are specialist services that can provide information and support.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know is experiencing or at risk of Domestic and Family Violence, please contact the **Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU)** and inform the *Breaking the Silence* Representative or leadership of your church. The CPU can provide support and advice, as well as assist you in finding the services that will be most helpful in your circumstances. Further support can be accessed through the Jericho Road Counselling Service – see jerichoroad.org.au/counselling-service. There are counselling services that can be of assistance and the Presbyterian Church wants to support you.

Conduct Protocol Unit, Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW, ACT, WA, TAS)

Phone: [02 9690 9325](tel:0296909325) | Email: cpu@pcnsw.org.au | Website: breakingthesilence.org.au

See next page for details of support services that may be useful.

⁴ ANROWS. 'Research summary: The impacts of domestic and family violence on children, 2nd edition', *ANROWS Insights*, November 2018. Sydney. ANROWS Online: https://dh2wpaq0gtxwe.cloudfront.net/ANROWS_Impacts-on-DFV-on-Children.2ed.pdf

⁵ J. S. Holcomb, Lindsey. A. Holcomb. *Is it my fault? Hope and healing for those suffering domestic violence*. Chicago. Moody Publishers. 2014.



SUPPORT SERVICES

1800 RESPECT - National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service

24/7 support and advice for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence or abuse.

Ph: [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732) Web: 1800respect.org.au

NSW Domestic Violence Line

24/7 information, support and referrals for women experiencing violence.

Ph: [1800 656 463](tel:1800656463)

Web: domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help

NSW Child Protection Helpline

24/7 helpline for reporting concerns for the safety of children and young people.

Ph: [132 111](tel:132111) Web: reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s

No to Violence: Men's Referral Service

National service providing advice and support for men using violence.

Ph: [1300 766 491](tel:1300766491) Web: ntv.org.au

MensLine

National service supporting men experiencing violence in a relationship.

Ph: [1300 789 978](tel:1300789978) Web: mensline.org.au

FURTHER RESOURCES

Conduct Protocol Unit. ***Breaking the Silence: Foundations Training Workbook***. Presbyterian Church NSW, 2020. Online: breakingthesilence.org.au/resources.

Renew Book: Australian Guide for Christian Women Survivors of Domestic Abuse, Anglicare Sydney, 2022.

Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims, Darby A Strickland, P&R Publishing, 2020.