

# **Domestic Violence Help Guide: Information for People Affected by Abuse in Maine**

By Kate Faragher Houghton, JD, Consultant  
©Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence  
Updated November 2013

**MCEDV.**

Maine Coalition to  
End Domestic Violence

## Introduction

Are you in an intimate relationship with someone who makes you feel like nothing you do is right? Is there a pattern of behavior that leaves you emotionally or physically hurting? Is there confusion in the relationship about who causes the hurting?

While healthy intimate relationships experience ups and downs, when behavior by one person consistently tears down the other person, whether emotionally, physically, sexually, mentally, spiritually, or economically, this is abuse. Abuse describes behaviors by people who use coercive control to limit the freedoms, thoughts, feelings, and actions of the people they say they love most.

Most domestic abuse is perpetrated by men who abuse their current or former female intimate partners. People with other gender identities and sexual orientations also commit abuse, in much smaller numbers. Current research indicates that:

- One in 4 women has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while 1 in 7 men has experienced the same (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, NISVS: An Overview of 2010 Summary Report Findings available at [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc\\_nisvs\\_overview\\_insert\\_final-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_overview_insert_final-a.pdf)).
- In 2012, 13,115 survivors of domestic abuse received services from the domestic abuse resource centers of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence; 96% were women and children (Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence).
- Domestic abuse homicides continue to account for approximately 50% of all homicides in Maine over time; the large majority of these homicides are committed by men against women (Maine Department of Public Safety).

Domestic abuse is not something that only happens in individual relationships. Abuse happens in a large number of intimate partnerships and families across the United States and the world. Abusive behavior by individuals reflects both their own mindset of entitlement, and also a historical culture and tradition that reinforce abuse and violence, particularly through male power and privilege.

Abuse happens in all kinds of intimate partnerships and families, including those who are wealthy and poor, those of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, those who are formally educated and those who are not. It happens in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, to people in urban and rural settings, to younger and older individuals, and to those who are spiritual or religious and those who are not.

People who abuse use many different tactics against their intimate partners. Whether your partner's behavior includes verbal put downs, financial control, isolation from friends and family members, physical attacks, use of computers or telephones or other technology to monitor where you are and whom you communicate with, threats and intimidation, or other behaviors, it all creates pain and hurt and is all considered abuse. You have the right to live a safe and peaceful life, without experiencing abuse in any of its forms. Hopefully, this resource will help you find that safety and peace.

## What Is Abuse?

Whatever behaviors you are experiencing from the person hurting you, it may be hard to identify as abuse. Many people think of abuse as physical violence or sexual assault and do not assume that harsh words such as name-calling, accusations, threats, or constant degrading and criticizing constitute abuse. Part of abuse is also that the person hurting you may deny it is happening, or may tell you that you are responsible for the behavior, and if you would change your behavior, the abuse would stop. It may feel more like you are failing your partner over and over again, rather than that you are experiencing abuse. The questions below help describe in more detail what an abusive relationship looks and feels like. You may not be experiencing everything described here, and may have additional hurtful experiences that these questions do not touch upon.

Does your intimate partner:

- Call you disrespectful names, or criticize your choices and decisions?
- Monitor where you go, what you do, and who you spend time with?
- Regularly act irritated or angry with you, even though you didn't mean to upset your partner?
- Physically attack, punish, or "discipline" you by slapping, pinching, biting, hitting, kicking, pushing, strangling, burning, or punching you?
- Threaten to harm you or those you care about?
- Follow you or show up when you are at work, school, or with others?
- Make it difficult for you to work?
- Insist that you engage in sexual activity when you don't want to?
- Misuse technology such as phones, computers, and apps to track your whereabouts and monitor your contacts with other people or your own technology use?
- Ever confine you or not allow you to leave your home or other place?
- At times apologize, promise to make changes, be a better partner, and affirm that he/she loves you and would never hurt you?
- Make all the money-related decisions, deny you access to money, or make you account for all the money you have or earn?
- Joke or threaten about using a weapon against you or someone you care about?
- Frequently accuse you of having affairs?
- Act disrespectfully or violently towards your children, property or animals?

- Speak or act harshly and then later say that it never happened, or that it wasn't as bad as you are making it out to be?

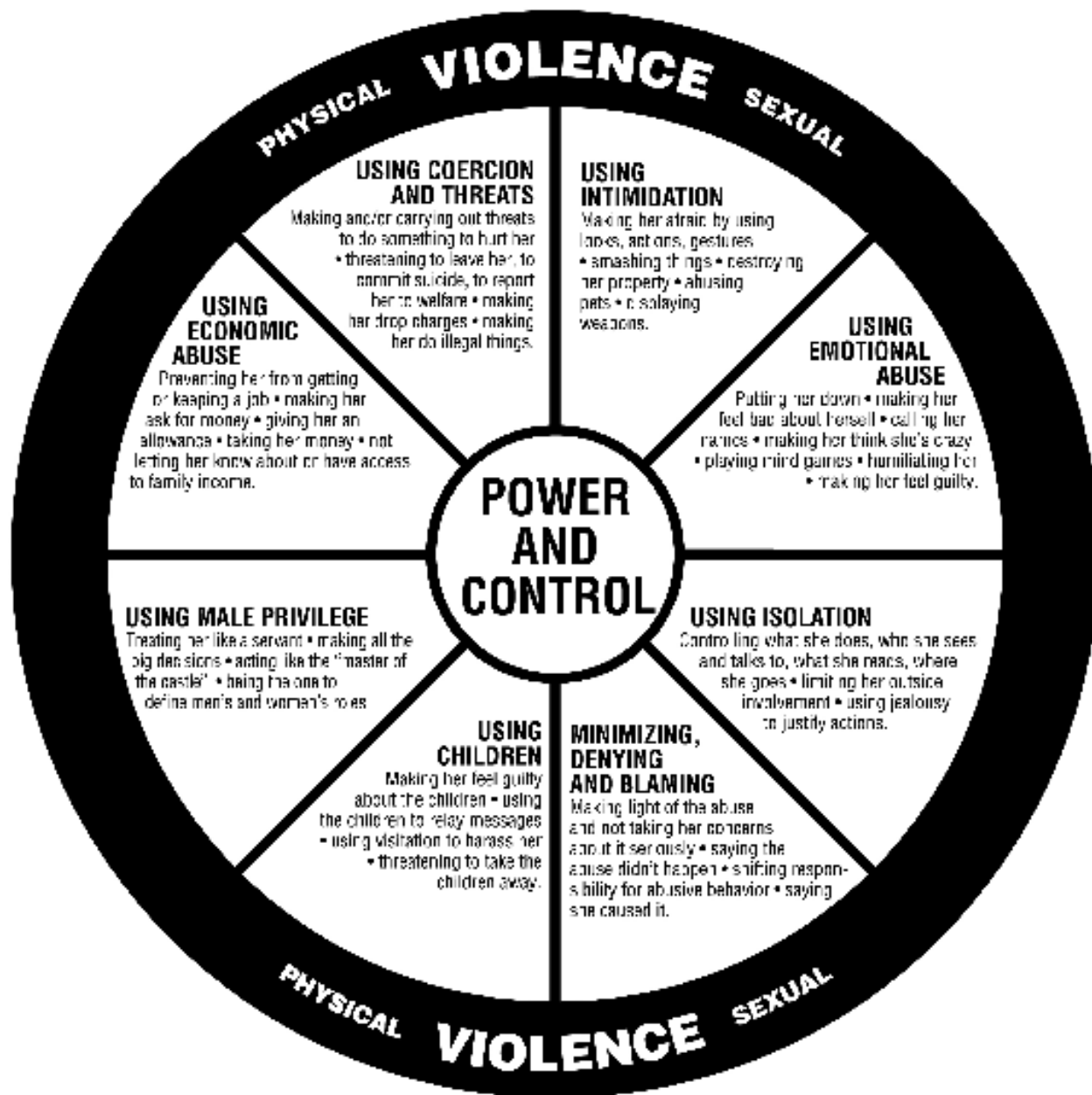
Do you feel:

- That you “walk on eggshells” in your relationship, so as not to upset your partner?
- Humiliated by your partner in front of others or in private?
- Lonely in your relationship?
- That your partner will not approve if you make your own decisions, have your own opinions, and come and go as you wish?
- Frustrated because you can't seem to get your partner to understand your intentions?
- That there is something wrong with you that makes your partner do these things?
- Like your partner doesn't want you and that no one else would either?
- Trapped and frightened?
- Love for your partner and appreciation for the good times you have together?
- Ashamed because you believe the abuse is your fault?
- Like you can't tell the truth to your friends, family, your doctor, law enforcement, or others, about what your partner says and does to you?
- That you can handle your partner's mood swings, outbursts, accusations, or threats?
- That alcohol, drugs, or food help you deal with what is going on in your relationship?
- Confused by the fact that your relationship has extreme highs and lows?

Abuse involves a pattern of coercive behavior that is used by a person against family or household members to control another's actions and feelings. Coercive behavior can include physical violence, sexual assault, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse and threats, stalking, isolation, harm to children, economic control, destruction of personal property, and animal cruelty. It matters less which behaviors your partner is using, and more that your partner is using them to coerce and control you.

## **The Power and Control Wheel**

The Power and Control Wheel provides an illustration of the many tactics an abusive partner may use to gain and maintain power and control in a relationship.



**DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT**

202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218-722-2707  
www.duluth-model.org

All of the tactics on the Power and Control Wheel are harmful and effective ways of controlling someone. Physical and sexual abuse may or may not be present in your relationship. Physical and sexual abuse may occur regularly, occasionally, once, or not at all if threats or other tactics are effective in coercing you. If your partner has used physical violence against you, it increases the impacts of the other tactics. If your partner used physical violence once, or used physical violence a long time ago, it does not mean that you are free from abuse now if other tactics are still happening.

If you have never experienced physical or sexual violence, but other tactics are happening such as threats, isolation, and intimidation, this also “counts” as abuse. Again, all of the tactics on the Power and Control Wheel are harmful and effective ways of controlling someone. Different people are effectively coerced by different behaviors. Screaming and yelling, name-calling, or calmly blaming and degrading may also be effective ways to make someone comply with a partner’s demands.

Generally, people use whatever abusive behaviors will work in a given moment to maintain control and make the other person comply with their demands, and then sometimes, will continue to use them to enforce their domination and inflict harm. Abusive behaviors do not unfold in a predictable way. For example, a partner who threatens or uses physical violence may never need to use that tactic again, because the other partner may be effectively coerced by a reminder about “What happened last time.”

It may be that you struggle with questions or confusion about your responsibility for what is happening in the relationship. Reviewing the Power and Control Wheel can be helpful to separate out your intentions and behaviors from your partner’s. Domestic violence involves a pattern of behavior designed to coerce and control another person. Non-abusive people might look at a particular behavior in the Wheel and say “I’ve done that before,” or might recognize a type of control within themselves. It is important to distinguish the type of coercive control used by abusive people from the type of control that would not be considered domestic abuse. Enjoying having a spotless house, loving to win an argument, being the boss at work, being a “Type A,” or acting assertively or even aggressively in an effort to stand up for yourself in the face of abuse, all involve elements of control, but the type of coercive control that happens with domestic abuse involves established, consistent patterns of tactics used by one person on another in an intimate partnership, with the goal of limiting and defining the partner’s freedom, thoughts, feelings, and actions.

## **Consider the role of technology**

The way that abusive individuals carry out tactics of coercive control has been dramatically changed by the extensive availability of technology, some of which is marketed specifically for misuse. Particularly in situations when a person is following and harassing an intimate partner, but not limited to that type of stalking behavior, abusive individuals are increasingly misusing technology in order to track their partners, to monitor their partners’ actions and contacts with others, and to enhance tactics of power and control.

If this is happening in your relationship, it may feel like your partner always has access to what you are doing, where you are, and whom you are in contact with. If your partner seems to have a secret source of information about your life, or appears suddenly in locations where you are, there is a strong possibility that technology misuse is involved. You may also be receiving telephone messages, false caller ID numbers, e-mails that later disappear, or text messages that are threatening or intimidating. In addition,

you may notice that your phone, computer, or other electronic devices contain remote access options that you did not set up.

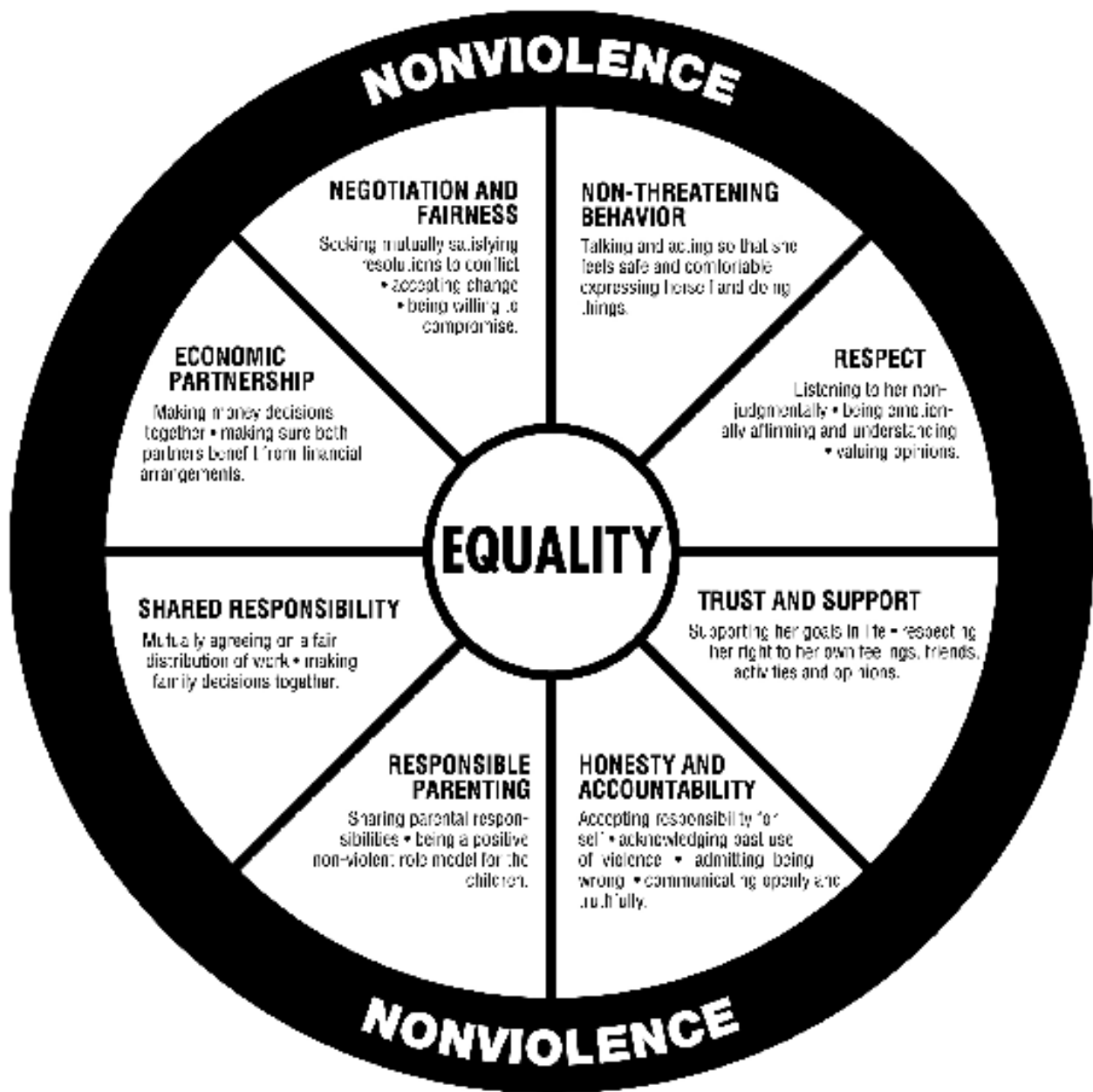
Technology evolves rapidly and new technologies continue to emerge. In recent years, technological advances have dramatically increased the options available for communication between people. An increasing number of options can be purchased online and downloaded quickly. Some options require technological expertise, but many are easy to use. Some technology options may be accessed by anyone from any location. Others may require a shared account or brief initial physical access to the other person's computer, cell phone, or vehicle. Often, if a person is misusing one form of technology, other forms are in play as well, as technologies are often connected.

### **What is the alternative?**

Contrast the tactics in the Power and Control Wheel with the Equality Wheel, which describes a healthy, abuse-free relationship. In a respectful relationship, your partner focuses on the good of the partnership, rather than on establishing and maintaining dominance. Intimacy, rather than control, is the goal of the relationship. The Equality Wheel recognizes the importance of a foundation of goodwill and kindness rather than coercive control and hostility.

### **More helpful reading**

- ✓ The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize It and How to Respond by Patricia Evans (Adams Media, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 2010)
- ✓ Dating Violence: Young Women In Danger by Barrie Levy (Seal Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1998)
- ✓ When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right by Ann Jones and Susan Schechter (Harper Perennial, 1993)



**DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT**

202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218-722-2781  
www.duluth-model.org