

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse that occurs between two people in a close relationship, including same-sex partners. Intimate partner can mean current and former spouses and dating partners. IPV exists along a continuum from a single episode of violence to ongoing battering.

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Types of Behavior

- Physical abuse is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, burning or using other physical force.
- Sexual abuse is forcing a partner to take part in a sex act when the partner does not consent.
- Threats of physical or sexual abuse include the use of words, gestures, weapons or other means to communicate the intent to cause harm.
- Emotional abuse is threatening a partner or his or her possessions or loved ones, or harming a partner's sense of self-worth. Examples are stalking, name-calling, intimidation or not letting a partner see friends and family.

Often, IPV starts with emotional abuse. This behavior can progress to physical or sexual assault. Several types of IPV may occur together.

How IPV Affects Health

IPV can affect health in many ways. The longer the abuse goes on, the more serious the effects on the victim.

Many victims suffer physical injuries. Some are minor like cuts, scratches, bruises and welts. Others are more serious and can cause lasting disabilities. These include broken bones, internal bleeding and head trauma.

Not all injuries are physical. IPV can also cause emotional harm. Victims often have low self-esteem. They may have a hard time trusting others and being in relationships. The anger and stress that victims feel may lead to eating disorders and depression. Some victims even think about or commit suicide.

IPV is linked to harmful health behaviors as well. Victims are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol, use drugs and engage in risky sexual activity.

Who is at risk for IPV?

Several factors can increase the risk that someone will hurt his or her partner. However, having these risk factors does not always mean that IPV will occur.

Some risk factors for hurting a partner:

- Using drugs or alcohol, especially drinking heavily
- Seeing or being a victim of violence as a child
- Not having a job, which can cause feelings of stress

Preventing IPV

The goal is to stop IPV before it begins. Strategies that promote healthy dating relationships are important. These strategies should focus on young people when they are learning skills for dating. This approach can help those at risk from becoming victims or offenders of IPV.

Traditionally, women's groups have addressed IPV by setting up crisis hotlines and shelters for battered women. Both men and women can work with young people to prevent IPV.

Adults can help change social norms, be role models, mentor youth and work with others to end this violence. For example, by modeling nonviolent relationships, men and women can send the message to young boys and girls that violence is not okay.

Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: www.ndvh.org
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: www.ncadv.org
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center: www.nsvrc.org

Content on this page was gathered from documents found on the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The website is located at www.cdc.gov.

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