

## About Domestic Abuse

If you (or someone you know) is being abused by a partner or ex-partner, you may need help and support. This information pack gives basic information about domestic abuse, your rights and how to get help in East Lothian. It has been written with help from women who have themselves been abused.

### Keep safe

Keep this pack in a place where the person abusing you will not find it. If there's nowhere safe at home, then it may be better to leave it with a friend. You can also see it online at [www.endabuseineastlothian.com](http://www.endabuseineastlothian.com). If it's not safe to use your home computer because your partner checks the sites you visit, you can use the internet free in your local library.

*"After I left, I revelled in the small freedoms everyone else takes for granted – making eye contact with people, being able to shut the loo door, tidying up later, or even not at all if I felt like it!"*

### What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse happens in all kinds of intimate relationships. Usually women are abused by their male partners. But domestic abuse can occur in same sex relationships and sometimes, men are abused by women.

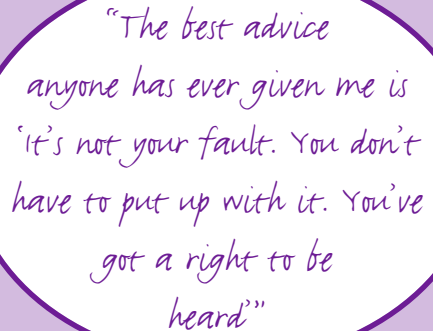
The abuse can begin at any time – in new relationships or after many years. Sometimes it starts during pregnancy but can be triggered by other circumstances.

Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident. It tends to get more frequent and worse over time.

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The abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological or emotional and often includes keeping women short of money and not letting them work or see family or friends. The abuse can be actual or threatened and can happen occasionally or often.

Children are affected by domestic abuse, through witnessing the abuse or because they are also hurt by the abuser.



*"The best advice anyone has ever given me is 'it's not your fault. You don't have to put up with it. You've got a right to be heard'"*

### What it involves

Many women do not want to label themselves as 'abused'. But if your partner makes you feel frightened, insecure, degraded, unable to make basic decisions or trapped, then that is abusive behaviour. The abuse might involve:

- Hitting, kicking, pushing or punching you
- Threatening you or your children
- Humiliating you in front of your children and others
- Forcing you to have sex
- Destroying your possessions
- Keeping you short of money
- Telling you that you are useless or ugly
- Accusing you of being unfaithful
- Ridiculing what you say or believe
- Isolating you from friends or family

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### You are not alone

Women often think that it is only happening to them. But domestic abuse is very common. Research shows that it affects one in five women in Scotland.

It can happen to anyone, in any walk of life. It doesn't matter what age you are, how much money you have, where you live, what your ethnic background is, or whether you have children or not.

### You are not to blame

Many women feel ashamed about the abuse and do not tell anyone what is happening. But, if you are abused, it is not your fault. No matter what you say or do, no one deserves to be abused. The person responsible is the abuser. He has a choice.

### What you can do

You may feel isolated, confused and not know where to turn to for help. There are many agencies which can help and they are listed in this pack. They know about domestic abuse and they will listen to what you say and believe you.

Confiding in a friend often helps too. But make sure that this is someone you trust.

It can be very hard to decide what to do if you are being abused. You may not want to end your relationship with your partner. You may love him and hope that he will change. He may promise that it will never happen again. You may be concerned about disrupting the children. And you may be worried about where you would go, how you would manage for money, or whether you would ever be safe.

These are complicated decisions and you may need help to work out what to do so that you and your children can be safe whether or not

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you stay with your partner. It is OK to change your mind, and agencies understand that you may do so.

To talk about how you feel and to discuss your options, you can phone the Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 027 1234 (24 hours) and East Lothian Women's Aid on 0131 665 9552. You do not have to give your name. They will not put any pressure on you to leave your partner.

You have a right to live your life free of fear and abuse. Many women get away from the abuse and make new lives for themselves and their children although it may take many attempts.

### If you have been assaulted

Phone your local police station or 999. Assault is a criminal offence. For ongoing help and support phone the Police Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer on 0131 561 6124.

Get medical attention even if the injuries are slight. Tell the doctor how you were injured. The doctor will respect your confidence but your medical records may be used as evidence if you decide to take legal action.

Contact a support organisation (see leaflet 12).

### If you are in danger

If you or your children are in danger phone the police on 999.

**Phone the Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline in confidence on 0800 027 1234 any time, day or night.**

Domestic abuse: there's no excuse

**2nd edition December 2009**