

**Are you hurting
the one you
LOVE?
Choose to STOP!**

**Information for men who have
intimate relationships with men**

Introduction

This booklet is for men who have intimate relationships with men and may include gay men, bisexual men, trans men or straight men who have occasional sex with other men. We recognise that abuse may be directed towards your past and present partners of either gender. If there is violence and abuse in your relationship and you think you are responsible for it then we hope you find this helpful. In this booklet we will be using the term gay to include all men who have intimate relationships with men for ease of reading.

First of all, we know it can be tough facing up to difficult problems. We want to support you to make the changes you need, so that you are safe around your partner. More gay men are having children these days – either from previous heterosexual relationships or in arrangements with women friends. If you or your partner have children, your behaviour in your relationship with your partner will be having an effect on them too.

This booklet has information about domestic violence and abuse. We encourage you to think hard and face up honestly to the things you have done. You might have done some things once or twice, but in many cases you'll notice that there is a pattern to the violent, abusive or controlling things you do. By making yourself more aware of these behaviours it will become easier to make changes and stop.

It will take a lot of hard work to stop being violent, controlling or abusive. This booklet can go as far as making you aware of some aspects of the problem. If you want to talk things through you can ring the Respect Phoneline on 0845 122 8609.

Choose to STOP!

Remember:

- ! No matter how angry you feel, it is never ok to scare your current or former partner
- ! No matter how he behaves, it is never ok to hurt him
- ! You can change your behaviour if you choose to do so
- ! Some abusive behaviours are criminal offences. The Police and the Criminal Justice System are taking domestic violence more seriously than ever before. Where they have the power to prosecute you, they can do so, even if your partner drops the charges. Do you want it to come to that?

Choose to STOP!

Is there abuse and violence in your relationship?

Abuse is something that is said or done that hurts your partner physically, emotionally, sexually or psychologically. Domestic violence is a number of abusive behaviours, both physical and non-physical, that may occur frequently or infrequently. You don't have to use all of these behaviours to be abusive; some people use a wider range of behaviours than others and with varying frequency.

People use abusive behaviours as a way to exercise power and control over their partners; to stop them from doing something they want to do or to make them do something they don't want to do. In situations when you use these abusive behaviours, you may not consciously think about these outcomes. But looking at your relationship over time can help you identify patterns of abusive behaviours. You may also use abusive behaviours to punish your partner because he chose to do (or not do) something that you didn't like.

Choose to STOP!

Examples of different types of abuse

Physical abuse

Slapping, punching, hitting, pushing, kicking, grabbing, using a weapon, strangling, choking and any other forms of physical violence.

Psychological/emotional abuse

Calling him names, shouting at him, smashing things, putting him down, threatening to harm him or his friends/family/pets, threatening to harm yourself, checking up on him, making all the decisions, opening his emails or going through his phone, threatening to out him, controlling who he sees and making him account for his time when he's not with you, not letting him use the car or go out, driving recklessly to scare him, making homophobic comments and any other behaviour designed to belittle him, frighten him or make him feel bad about himself.

Sexual abuse

Pressuring him to have sex when he's not in the mood, touching him against his will, forcing sex on him, sulking or punishing him for not having sex, raping him, humiliating him, having unsafe sex without his consent, disrespecting boundaries or safe words and pressuring him to have sex with other people



S&M and abuse

S&M is a sexual activity that counts on all participants being clear about their roles and limits, promoting their individual safety and trust, and giving consent without fear. If you and your partner have chosen to practice S&M sex, but you are breaking any rules you have negotiated, or you expect your partner to take part in S&M sex without consent or negotiating rules, then you are being abusive.

Financial abuse

Controlling how much he spends, making him account for his spending, making him ask for money, making him depend on you for money, not sharing important financial decisions.

Using chronic illnesses to abuse your partner

Suffering from a chronic illness (HIV/AIDS, Cancer, MS etc) can be very stressful and can affect your relationship. However, this is not an excuse for violent, controlling or abusive behaviour.

There are different ways you can be abusive:

If you are the one with a chronic illness you are being abusive by treating your partner as your nurse, rather than your partner; by making him feel guilty if he doesn't meet your demands; by threatening to infect him; by pretending that you are too sick to be abusive and, therefore, he's the abusive one; or by making him feel like you won't cope if he left you, even if the relationship has reached its end.

Choose to STOP!

If your partner suffers from a chronic illness you can be abusive by threatening to tell other people about his condition (for example disclosing his HIV status); by withholding medication or blocking his access to medical support; by putting him down because he's not healthy; by threatening to leave him and stop supporting him

Identity abuse

Calling someone names because of their sexuality or threatening to out him because he's gay, bisexual or trans is abusive.

If you have used any of these behaviours towards your partner or ex-partner, you are being abusive. These behaviours used in front of children cause emotional abuse to them.

Also, remember what your partner has said about your behaviour, make a note of it and try to understand how he felt.

How would you feel if someone treated you like that?

What's it like for him?

How does your abuse affect your partner?

It's important to face up to how your behaviour affects your partner. If you can understand what it's like for him being on the receiving end of violence and abuse, it might make it less likely for you to do it again.

Health and physical effects:

Your behaviour is likely to be having a serious effect on your partner's health. If you've used physical violence, you've probably caused injuries. These might include:

- Stiffness, soreness, aching, throbbing, numbness
- Headaches
- Cuts and other wounds
- Black eyes and bruising
- Burst ear drums
- Broken bones

Even if you haven't been physically violent, your partner may have developed physical problems as a result of your abuse, such as:

- Feeling physically tense
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Feeling exhausted
- Having panic attacks, palpitations

Choose to STOP!

- Being infected by you with a sexually transmitted infection

Some people develop ways of coping with abuse that can have a negative impact on them over time:

- Using alcohol/drugs/cigarettes
- Self-harming
- Developing eating disorders

Some people have tried to kill themselves. Some people have succeeded.

Do you want this to happen to your partner?

How abuse makes people feel

As well as the physical effects, abuse also has an impact on his emotional well-being. He may feel more and more:

Stressed, vulnerable, depressed, ashamed,
drained, terrified, confused, nervous, hurt,
unloved, worthless, destroyed, scared,
humiliated

Choose to STOP!

Abuse destroys trust and wrecks relationships

You've probably noticed that your relationship is suffering as a result of your behaviour. It sounds obvious, but it's impossible for anyone to feel the same about their partner when they're being abused, however hard they might try to pretend things are ok.

Although all relationships are different, what tends to happen is that the person who is being abused ends up:

- Walking on egg shells, terrified of when the abuse might start up again
- Trying to pacify you or agree with you to try and stop you getting abusive again
- Being quiet and not sharing things with you
- Bottling things up
- Lying to protect himself
- Losing all sexual feelings

Do you want your relationship looking like that?

Choose to STOP!

If you have children, how are they affected by your abuse to your partner?

Although many gay men don't have children, more and more do. You or your partner may have children through a previous heterosexual relationship, or through arrangements with women friends. Think about all of the children who might be affected by your abuse.

A lot of people try to pretend that children aren't really aware of the domestic violence that is going on. But studies show that in households with children where there is domestic violence, in 9 out of 10 cases the children are in the same or next room. Even if the children don't live with you they can still feel the tension between you and your partner and they can hear the negative comments and put-downs. Violence and abuse has devastating effects on children. Imagine what it feels like not knowing how a row will end and not being able to stop it. Increasingly studies have shown that children suffer long-term harm if they are exposed to domestic violence, even if the abuse isn't directed at them.

Choose to STOP!

Some things to think about:

- ! In the eyes of the victim, you only need to abuse once to become an abuser
- ! The impact of abuse doesn't stop when you do
- ! You may be telling yourself 'it's not that bad'. How bad will it need to get before you do something about it?

Choose to STOP!

Choose to STOP!

Facing up to what you've done

Most people get into relationships because they care for their partner. You may not intend to hurt him, but you do. You may be feeling bad about how you've behaved – ashamed or guilty. It can be hard to face up to what you've done and how it has affected him.

You might find yourself minimising things, pretending things aren't that bad. When you do this, you're not taking responsibility for your actions.

Why do people not take responsibility?

- It makes you feel better in the short term – if you think you're not responsible for your violence, then you don't have to feel bad about it
- It means that you don't have to do anything about it – if you think you're not the one responsible for the violence, then there's no point looking at your own behaviour and attitudes or trying to change them
- It means you can't stop your violence – if you think you aren't responsible for it, then there's nothing you can do to prevent it happening again

Blaming your partner

Have you ever found yourself saying:

- “ He makes me angry ”
- “ He knows how to upset me,
and he does it on purpose ”
- “ He knows what I’m like ”
- “ He never believes me ”
- “ He never listens to me ”
- “ He’s abusive to me ”
- “ I was trying to get away but he
wouldn’t let me leave ”
- “ He gets hysterical ”
- “ ”

It’s very tempting to try and deny responsibility for your behaviour by blaming your partner.

It’s easy to spot when you are blaming your partner:

- You want to talk about your partner’s behaviour rather than about what *you* did
- You think, “If only he would do/not do something, I wouldn’t be hitting him”
- You feel that *he* needs to change in order for *you* to stop your violence and abuse

Choose to STOP!

For example:

‘But we’re as bad as each other’, ‘It’s just fighting’, ‘He hit me first’

If your partner becomes violent to you and you respond with more serious violence then you are not defending yourself – you are abusive. You could choose to walk away and avoid escalating the situation. Violence and abuse is always unacceptable and if he is abusive to you then he should assume responsibility for his behaviour. When you respond with more severe violence, though, you are not as bad as each other, you are the abuser.

Some people think that when two men hit each other is just fighting between equals. Violence has no place in a healthy relationship, it will not help resolve arguments.

One of the first steps to ending abuse is to take full responsibility for your behaviour. You need to recognise that it’s up to you what you do and how you behave, and you need to stop blaming your partner.

Next time you notice yourself blaming your partner try this:

- Focus on *your* behaviour
- Think about your partner’s feelings
- Remind yourself that *you* are in control of what *you* do

Blaming other things

There are many other ways in which you can wriggle out of responsibility for your behaviour by saying that the reason for it was some kind of outside influence. For example:

- Anger: most people who are abusive and violent towards their partners say that they have a problem controlling their anger. They say that if they didn't get angry (or if their partner didn't make them angry) they wouldn't be abusive. However, they also tell us that when they get angry in other situations with other people they don't become aggressive or violent because they understand the consequences if they do. Therefore, you can always choose to diffuse your anger without being abusive or violent towards your partner. You need to think about why you're getting angry in the first place.
- Work problems
- Money worries
- Stress
- Things that happened to you when you were a child

None of these things actually cause you to be violent. Plenty of people experience these problems without using violence. Think of a time that you've been stressed about work or money or you were very angry but you didn't become abusive. These things don't *cause* violence or abuse, but they may be something you argue about a lot and feel are linked to your abuse. See the section on warning signs to help you cope better with difficult arguments.

Choose to STOP!

Drink/drugs

Alcohol and drugs don't cause abuse, but they can make it worse. Many people use drugs and alcohol and never become violent or abusive – and many people are violent and abusive when sober. If you find that when you drink you become more abusive and you still do it – then you're making a choice to be abusive. You are still responsible for your behaviour even if you are drunk or high.

Studies have also shown that when people are drunk or high their violence might become worse; that is more severe or frequent. When you are drunk or high it can be more difficult to stop yourself or limit your behaviour- and you may cause more damage than you intended to your partner or family. Remember that :

- You may harm your partner more than you intended when you have been drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Most people can choose how much and where to use drugs or alcohol. If you must use, try cutting down gradually and drink or use away from your partner. This may mean staying at a mate's place after the pub or sobering up before going home.
- Being out of it is not an excuse. You are still responsible for your own behaviour, drunk, high or sober.

Further excuses

Momentary insanity

When you're struggling to understand your violence, you may be tempted to believe that some strange force came over you and that you had what we might call *momentary insanity*. Have you ever said to yourself:

- “ I lost control. ” This is an excuse
- “ I just flipped. ” This is an excuse
- “ I saw red. ” This is an excuse

The human pressure cooker

Often you may want to say that such pressure had built up inside you that it was too late to make any other choice than to be violent. You might then say something like:

- “ I just exploded. ”
- “ I just blew. ”

But think about it. Most of the time your violence isn't random, but specifically directed towards your partner. You don't necessarily 'explode' randomly at passers-by when you feel bad, nor do you 'see red' and hit anyone who happens to be near.

If you believe that you're overwhelmed by these strange forces that cause you to be violent, you won't be able to stop. It's one of the ways of avoiding understanding what your violence is about. In reality you could make different choices.

Choose to STOP!

If you're honest with yourself you can probably see that you choose to control lots of things:

- Who to hit
- Where to hit him
- How hard and how long for
- Who you do it in front of
- When to stop
- What kind of violence – why a slap and not a punch? Why punch him and not strangle or stab him?
- What hurtful comments to make and exactly when to make them

So, why does abuse happen?

Abuse doesn't just happen. Rather than being about loss of control, most of the time it's about you trying to be in control.

Think about the times when you abused your partner and if you are honest to yourself you will be able to work out what was really going on.

You might have wanted to:

- Stop him doing something
- Shut him up
- Punish him for doing something you didn't like

Choose to STOP!

- Punish him for hurting your feelings
- Show him who's boss
- Win the argument
- Get your own way

This is what we mean when we say that domestic violence is about power and control. Whenever you're trying to make him do something you're trying to control him.

Remember:

- ! Your violence and abuse is a decision. It's a choice that *you* have made from the many different options open to you and you can choose differently
- ! If you want to move away from a relationship based on power, fear and control to one based on intimacy and respect, you must stop blaming your partner for your behaviour and make changes
- ! Just because you've been violent and abusive in the past doesn't mean you have to be again

Choose to STOP!

Choose to STOP!

What can you do?

Spot the warning signs!

This section will help you to be more aware of when things are heating up and you're getting into a situation where you may be abusive towards your partner. The more you are aware of your 'warning signs', the more you will be able to stop yourself from being abusive.

When you notice the following 'warning signs' in yourself, do something about it: take a time-out (we explain how further down).

Sore points

Sore points are typical situations in which you've been abusive in the past. Examples might include conflicts over money, relatives, friends, sex, or who is right about something that happened in the past. You may be particularly touchy when tired, at a particular time of day, or when you've not eaten recently.

You may want to make a note of your typical sore points

Physical warning signs

Think about what is happening for you physically as you begin to build towards violence and abuse:

Choose to STOP!

What do you feel in your body? For example, tension in your stomach/shoulders/neck/jaw, heat, changes in breathing and heart rate

Think about what you begin to do. For example, point a finger, close your fist, flail your arms, pace up and down the room, raise your voice or shout, glare at him, interrupt, go quiet, issue orders.

You may want to make a note of your physical warning signs.

Emotional warning signs

You may be aware of different feelings that come just before you become abusive or violent. For example, feeling resentful, angry, trapped, confused, persecuted, got at, challenged, guilty, embarrassed, upset, hurt. These are your emotional warning signs. If you know that you have been abusive in the past when you have felt embarrassed or guilty, then it's important that you are able to recognise these emotional warning signs in the future. Anger and hurt and all these other feelings are unpleasant and can be difficult to manage, but they do not have to lead to violence. There will be times in your life when you have dealt with difficult feelings without being violent or abusive.

You may want to make a note of your emotional warning signs.

Mental warning signs

What are you thinking just before you are abusive? Often you will be winding yourself up, thinking negative things about your partner or trying to justify yourself. This is negative self-talk. It can be

Choose to STOP!

phrases like ‘He’s doing this deliberately to wind me up’, ‘He’s so stupid’, ‘He never gets anything right’, ‘He never listens to me’, ‘He’s such a bitchy queen’

You may want to make a note of the negative self-talk/typical thoughts you have as you get closer to being abusive.

Note also the things you *don’t* think about, such as how he’s feeling, trying to understand him, any of his good sides, or listening to what he says.

Remember, it’s never too late to make a different choice. A positive choice: you can walk away. Right up to the very moment you are violent, you can choose to do otherwise.

Take a ‘Time-out’!

What is a time-out?

A time-out is the most basic alternative to being violent – if you’re not near your partner, you can’t hurt him physically. A time-out gives you breathing space – one hour to reflect on your abusive behaviour, away from your partner.

Taking a time-out means that you notice your warning signs and decide to get away before things build up and you are violent. As soon as you recognise any of these signs in yourself, *don’t wait until you get worse*. Tell your partner “I need to take a time-out” – *and leave*.

Choose to STOP!

You should *calmly* leave your home or wherever you may be for exactly *one hour* – not 50 minutes, nor 3 hours. There are two important reasons why you need to stick to the hour:

- Your partner is more likely to trust you if you stick to a standard format.
- One hour is a realistic length of time in which to calm down and review what was happening. If you start to shorten this time, you increase the risk of returning and being abusive.

During that period, do the following:

Calm yourself down

Don't drink alcohol or take drugs. Don't drive. During this first part of the hour (*about 20 minutes*), calm yourself down. Think of how you can control your own behaviour, rather than controlling his. You might want to do something physical, such as going for a walk or a jog, which may reduce the physical build-up of tension. You might want to do something else such as pray, meditate, or ring up a friend who is supporting you in being non-abusive. Whatever you decide to do, make sure it's something that helps you to calm down.

Examine your behaviour

During the second part of the hour (*about 40 minutes*) think about **your** behaviour and any negative thoughts you were having about your partner. You may want to write some of these down if that helps you. What did you want to change about your partner? If you're going to be non-abusive, you will need to be able to return to the situation and be different rather than try to make your partner different.

Choose to STOP!

Think about alternatives to your abusive behaviour and about what you're going to do or say when you go back to discuss the issue with him.

Return home

Before you return, it's a good idea to ring your partner to let him know you've calmed down and will be back at the end of the hour. When you return, let him know you're back. If he wants to discuss the situation with you, do so in a non-abusive and non-blaming way. This is the occasion for you to let him know what your thoughts about ***your behaviour*** have been during your time-out. If during the discussion you find yourself building up towards abuse again, tell him so and take another time-out.

If he doesn't want to talk when you return, propose a time when you could both be available. If he is not prepared to talk to you at all yet, ***leave him alone*** until he's ready to do so. If you try to force him to talk about things, you are being abusive.

Talk to your partner about time-outs

It's very important to talk about time-outs with your partner well ahead of when you will need to use one. Do this at a time when you're calm and he has agreed to discuss it with you. Show him this information and give him time to read it.

He may not want to talk about it with you. If this is the case, leave this information with him, when he can read it at another time if he chooses to. A time-out is a tool for ***you***, not for your partner – you don't need his support to use it. However, it's essential that you let him read this information if he so chooses.

Don't abuse the time-out

It's important that you don't abuse the time-out. Some ways of abusing the time-out process are:

- Using it against him by storming out in the middle of an argument and pretending you are taking a time-out
- Using it as an excuse to go to the pub or to stay out late
- Telling him that **he** needs to take a time-out
- Returning from a time-out without having calmed down/still wanting to argue
- Using it to control your partner in any way

If you abuse the time-out or don't use it properly and respectfully, it will become another form of abuse.

Choose to STOP!

Ongoing help and support

Join a programme

There are a few specialist domestic violence organisations in the country that run behaviour-change programmes and they work with gay men. Call the Respect Phonenumber on 0845 122 8609 to find out more.

Ring the Respect Phonenumber – 0845 122 8609

We can talk to you about your situation and help you think about how to change. We can point you in the direction of a specialist organisation in your area, if one is available.

Get support from friends or family who can help you change

It's good to talk about things, but not to people who will collude with your violence/abuse and make excuses for it. Talk to friends or family who will challenge you and support you at the same time.

If you are finding it hard to change

If you are frequently violent to your partner, you should think about not seeing him for a while or not living together if you currently are. It's the only way to keep him safe

Choose to STOP!

**Believe in yourself –
you can change if you really want to.**

Choose to STOP!

Your notes

Are you worried about your behaviour towards your partner? Have you been violent or abusive?

For information and advice to help you stop call the Respect Phonenumber.

0845 122 8609

Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm

info@respectphoneline.org.uk

www.respectphoneline.org.uk

respect
Phonenumber

RNID typetalk



If English is not your first language, please call and ask for an interpreter



The Respect Phonenumber has been accredited by the Telephone Helplines Association



We would like to thank everyone who gave us feedback in developing this booklet.

We want to acknowledge the support from the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum.

Respect
1st Floor
Downstream Building
1 London Bridge
London
SE1 9BG

Respect is a registered charity number 1083968