



SHALVA AND SHALOM TASK  
FORCE PRESENT:



# INTRO GUIDE

What To Know About  
Domestic Abuse

# DOMESTIC ABUSE 101

- **What is Domestic Abuse?**

- A pattern of behaviors is used by one partner to maintain power and control over another in an intimate partner relationship. The other partner often feels unable to express their thoughts or feelings for fear of what their partner might do. This is also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, relationship violence, or domestic abuse

- **How common is abuse in general? In the Jewish community?**

- Studies suggest that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will experience some form of an abusive relationship over the course of their lifetime (CDC).
- Since its inception in 1993, Shalom Task Force's anonymous domestic violence support line has received over 26,000 calls from victims, professionals, and individuals concerned about their friends and family members. Approximately 85% of callers are female.
- Since beginning our chatline in July of 2020, more than 600 people have reached out for support through text, WhatsApp, or via the chatline's online portal. 80% of those that shared their gender over the platform were female.

- **Who is at risk? What do abusers and victims look like?**

- Neither victim nor abuser can be typified by gender, race, ethnicity, regional group, economic class, or educational background. Religiosity or community involvement is likewise not a benchmark to determine whether a person is or is not abusive or being abused.
- Victims and abusers often present a public facade of having a strong marriage. In spite of what our impressions may be, victims' allegations of abuse must be taken seriously in order to support them in moving forward and ensure the safety of everyone involved.

- **Understanding people who abuse**

- There is no one reason why people who abuse do what they do.
- Abusive behavior is not the result of poor impulse control, anger management, substance abuse, stress or social skills. It's an intentional effort to control an intimate partner.
- Abusers can be anyone, even charismatic people who present well in a community setting. Though allegations of abuse may shock you, they need to be taken seriously.
- Although it is possible for abusers to learn and practice safe relationship skills, it takes a tremendous amount of personal insight, accountability, time, support, and effort. The focus should remain on establishing and maintaining the safety of the partner..
- It is natural to want to assume the best about someone who is reported as being an abuser, and to give the benefit of the doubt. At the same time, the main goal is to keep everyone involved safe and provide them with as much appropriate support as possible. This means taking allegations seriously, and giving them the attention they need.

# WHAT DOES ABUSE LOOK LIKE?

## Physical

- Actual violence or threats of violence used to control the other person.
- One of the most commonly reported form of abuse due to its visibility.

## Emotional

- Constant manipulation of the other person's emotions to maintain control.
- Presents as blaming, shaming, putting down or insulting.
- This can cause the victim to concur with the message the abuser presents; "It is my fault".

## Psychological

- Playing mind games, gaslighting, or rewriting the narrative, causing the victim to question their perception and role in their experiences. This may lead the victim to question their own mental stability and doubt their perceptions.
  - Such thoughts can be inadvertently confirmed if a victim reaches out to someone seeking support, and the person either expresses doubt or does not make it clear that their story is being taken seriously.

## Sexual

- Using the sexual aspect of the relationship, whether by forcing unwanted acts or denying healthy aspects of a sexual relationship, as a means of controlling the spouse
- Observational (anecdotal) data collected suggest that the reality of inadvertent sexual abuse is not uncommon. This is often based on the idea that a sexual relationship is a must, regardless of whether one spouse wants it or not, and may be rooted in a perception of a halachic imperative. This dynamic can be addressed successfully through education and therapy.
- If one partner doesn't feel like they can exert self-direction over their own sexual relationship, there is potential for trauma similar to that of intentional rape.
- Couples experiencing this dynamic require sensitive care and treatment on both sides to properly address this dynamic.

**CALL, TEXT, OR WHATSAPP THE SHALOM TASK FORCE HOTLINE  
(888-883-2323) FOR GUIDANCE ON SUPPORTING THE VICTIM AND NEXT STEPS**

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# WHAT DOES ABUSE LOOK LIKE?

## Religious

- Religious communities function by following a pre-determined set of specific behavioral guidelines. This can create the opportunity for a person with abusive tendencies to take advantage of those structures and use them to impose a controlling environment. Halacha can be used as a tool of abuse by forcing a victim to adopt a stricter interpretation than they might ordinarily take, or to impose guidelines beyond the Halachic mandate under the guise of halachic stringency.
- Abuse can be forcing a person to act in a way that goes against their religious standards or the actual halacha.

## Spiritual

- Using an individual's relationship with Hashem as a tool to make them feel worthless; "Hashem hates you" for specific reasons or in general.
- Repeated attacks on a person's sense of worth and value can detract from their ability to have a healthy relationship with Hashem. Recovery can be hard even after the active abuse has stopped.

## Technological

- Use of technology to control, monitor, or harass a spouse.
- Examples include GPS monitoring, non-consensual image sharing, and cyber-surveillance, insistence on a spouse sharing passwords, control of internet use, and monitoring internet activity.

## Financial

- Controlling access to personal finances with no room for discussion
- Limiting or removing access to sufficient money to cover expenses
- Making financial decisions with harmful intent that may jeopardize the victim's ability to have a stable financial future, such as opening and overusing credit cards in the victim's name.
- Interfering with a person's ability to maintain employment.

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# BARRIERS TO COMING FORWARD

**Victims face many barriers that stop them from addressing an abusive situation.**

- **Denial**
  - Difficulty in accepting the extent of the abuse. Victims may subconsciously or consciously justify their situation in order to cope with their daily reality.
- **Guilt/shame**
  - feeling as if they had done something wrong to deserve the treatment they've endured.
- **Societal pressure**
  - There is significant stigma attached to having open marital problems. Abused individuals don't want to "air their dirty laundry."
- **Fear of Escalation**
  - Concern that coming forward and disrupting the status quo, that they may make a bad situation worse. This is a valid concern, and needs to be addressed sensitively.
- **Fear of Loneliness**
  - Although an abusive situation does not have to mean separation or the end of the marriage, that possibility can be scary. While abusive situations may be terrible, victims may worry about being on their own. This can prevent taking action.
- **Independence**
  - Making change can mean juggling a new set of responsibilities that a victim may feel completely unprepared logistically, such as finances, child care, housing, etc.
- **Financial Dependence**
  - Aside from the emotional adjustment faced by someone becoming independent, the reality is that many victims do not have the financial resources to manage on their own.
- **Get Refusal**
  - Some victims will not try to leave due to fear of not being able to receive a get from their abuser, thus precluding them from having any relationship besides the one they're currently in.
- **Minimization**
  - Both partners minimize how bad it is. Victims typically underestimate how serious their situation is and abusers often rely on rationalizing why they did what they did.

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