



Coping with Trauma:

Psychological Trauma from **RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE**

Violence that happens within a family or between a couple (married or dating) can be potentially traumatic.

What is domestic or dating violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour in an intimate or familial relationship (e.g., married partners, between siblings, towards adult children or elderly parents) that is used to gain or assert power and control over the other person. This can include any actions or threats that could hurt or intimidate someone, and may be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or financial in nature.

Dating violence refers to similar patterns of behaviour but within the context of a dating relationship, committed or casual relationships.



Some examples of actions of domestic or dating violence include:

- **Physically abusive actions:** grabs, shoves, hits, throws things, uses an item or weapon to hurt you
- **Sexually abusive actions:** pressures or forces you to do sexual things that you do not want to do or do not feel ready for
- **Emotionally abusive actions:** insults, embarrasses, or humiliates you directly, or in front of others
- **Psychologically abusive actions:** intimidates or threatens, constantly checking on your whereabouts, prevents you from spending time with other people or doing things you like, threatens to abandon you or stop you from leaving
- **Financially abusive actions:** prevents you from having access to money or a job, controls your finances to prevent you from leaving the relationship

Domestic or dating violence may escalate in frequency and severity, which may increase the likelihood of serious injury or even death.

What are some common traumatic stress reactions that may arise?



Psychological trauma, also known as traumatic stress, may occur directly after experiencing or witnessing domestic or dating violence. These reactions may also occur immediately after the violence or be delayed and occur only later in life. It is normal to experience these reactions. Some examples include:

- Repetitive or uncontrollable thoughts, or memories of the violence
- Flashbacks (as if reliving the violence again) or nightmares
- Avoiding places, people, situations, or things associated with the violence
- Feeling fearful, worried, sad or anxious
- Being easily irritable or aggressive
- Being easily startled or on edge
- Feeling helpless or blaming self for the violence that occurred
- Fear of physical touch
- Startled easily by loud noises and sudden movements
- Changes in eating or sleeping (e.g. significant increase or reduction)
- Complaining of headaches, stomach-aches or other physical ailments

These reactions may affect how you function at school or work and may impact your relationships with loved ones. These reactions may also affect your quality of life and how you feel about yourself, which can be challenging to manage.

Who may experience relationship violence?

Domestic or dating violence can affect anyone – regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, educational background, or financial means. Victims may also include children of the relationship, other relatives, or other household members (e.g., domestic helper).

What are some benefits of seeking professional support?

People who experience or witness relationship violence may feel unsure whether to seek help, as they may worry about getting the person engaging in the violence into trouble, or the person may promise not to be violent again.

Seeking support from a trained professional for yourself can not only improve your overall mental wellbeing, but it may also provide an opportunity for the person engaging in violence to receive professional support too (e.g., therapy). They can have a chance to experience what it feels like to have their own source of support, and learn healthier ways to express or manage difficult emotions without hurting others.



Psychological Therapy for Trauma

Some signs that you may need to seek psychological support after experiencing relationship violence can include:

- Traumatic stress reactions continuing for more than **one month** after the violence
- Reactions to the violence that make it hard for you to carry out your usual routines and tasks at home, work, school, or impacting relationships with family and friends
- Having thoughts of harming or killing yourself, or hurting other people
- Using alcohol, drugs, or engaging in risky sexual behaviours to cope
- Receiving repeated observations or concerns expressed by loved ones that you may not be coping well

Evidence-based psychological treatments are available to help survivors recover from traumatic events like relationship violence. Seeking early treatment for traumatic stress can help you get back to enjoying the things and relationships that are important to you, and improve your overall well-being.

Consider speaking with your polyclinic doctor or general practitioner (GP) for a referral to a psychiatrist and/or psychologist in restructured hospitals. You may also wish to consider seeking out private psychiatrists or psychologists, without needing a referral.

If you are currently seeing a psychiatrist or medical doctor at KKH, they can refer you to the **KKH Psychosocial Trauma Support Service (PTSS)**. Clinical psychologists in PTSS specialise in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children, which can help you to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

When and where can you seek professional support from?

Police & Emergency Services (24-hour)

Your safety is our number one priority. If you or someone you know is **currently in immediate danger** of experiencing physical and/or sexual violence, please call the **police** (Tel: **999**) or **emergency services** (Tel: **995**) immediately.

National Anti-Violence Helpline (24-hour)

If you are not in immediate danger, but you are experiencing **ongoing** physical and/or sexual violence, consider contacting the **National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment Helpline** (Tel: **1800 777 0000**; online reporting form: <https://go.gov.sg/navh>). Officers manning this helpline can help provide interim emotional support and link you up to the relevant agencies that can further support your concerns.

Concerned members of public who suspect potential physical and/or sexual violence occurring (e.g. in a neighbour's house) may also call in to seek advice from the helpline.

Other Social & Counselling Support

If you or your loved ones do not have any current traumatic stress symptoms, but still wish to receive support, please consider contacting one of the following agencies:

- **Family Violence Specialist Centres (FVSCs)**, such as **PAVE** (www.pave.org.sg, Tel: **6555 0390**) or **TRANS SAFE Centre** (www.trans.org.sg/services-safe, Tel: **6449 9088**) – offers support for individuals and families from violence
- **AWARE** (www.aware.org.sg, Tel: **1800 777 5555**) – offers support for women for domestic or dating violence