



# Psychological Trauma from Relationship Violence

This contains information pertaining to a type of potentially traumatic event – violence within relationships. Domestic and dating violence are two major types of relationship violence, with similar presentations.

## 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, including either committed or casual relationships.





Some examples of actions of domestic or dating violence include:

- **Physically abusive actions:** grabs, shoves, hits, throws things at you, 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 you, 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 is usually not once-off, and may escalate in frequency and severity, which may increase the likelihood of serious injury or even death.

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

These reactions may sometimes affect how you function at school or work, and may impact your relationships with your family members, friends, and partners. These reactions may also affect your quality of life and how you feel about yourself, and they can feel challenging to manage.





## ■ **What are some benefits of seeking professional support?**

Some people who experience or witness violence within relationships may be unsure whether to seek help, as they 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. family/couple/individual therapy). They can have a chance to experience what it feels like to have their own source of support, and learn alternative and healthier ways to express or manage difficult emotions without hurting others.

## ■ **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.

More information on family violence can also be found on the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)'s website.

<https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Family-Violence/Pages/default.aspx>

Alternatively, visit the webpage by scanning the QR code:



### **Psychological Therapy for Trauma**

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

- Continuing to experience traumatic stress reactions listed above more than **one month** after the violence
- Having severe reactions to the violence that make it hard for you to carry out your usual routines and tasks at home, work, school, or impacting your 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





There are evidence-based psychological treatments 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, in addition to improving 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)**. PTSS consists of a team of clinical psychologists who specialises in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children. These forms of support can help you to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

### **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](http://www.pave.org.sg), Tel: **6555 0390**) or **TRANS SAFE Centre** ([www.trans.org.sg/services-safe](http://www.trans.org.sg/services-safe), Tel: **6449 9088**) – offers support for individuals and families from violence

**AWARE** ([www.aware.org.sg](http://www.aware.org.sg), Tel: **1800 777 5555**) – offers support for women for domestic or dating violence