

# Standing by her side

Information and assistance for supporters, friends  
and relatives of victims of domestic violence



**bff:**

Bundesverband  
Frauenberatungsstellen  
und Frauennotrufe

Frauen gegen Gewalt e. V.

**FOR WOMEN – AGAINST VIOLENCE**

*Do you know anybody who has experienced violence?  
Do you want to support a friend but feel unsure about  
what you can actually do?*

*Here you will find some initial information and guidance.*


## Did you know ...

*that one in four women has already experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, over her lifetime, at the hands of current or former partners?*

It is far more common for women to experience violence within their own four walls perpetrated by a person they know, than it is for them to experience violence from a stranger in the street. Violence in relationships, or committed by ex-partners, can affect any woman: women with a high income and higher education, as well as women with lower incomes who have achieved lower education levels.

Most women experience violence more than once in their relationship; approximately one third even reports regular abuse. Many women accordingly suffer injuries, some of which are so serious that they need medical treatment.

### **Violence has many manifestations:**

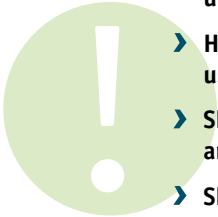
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- › **Battering, kicking, shaking, strangling, throwing and hurting with objects;**
  - › **Sexual harassment, coercion and rape;**
  - › **Excessive jealousy, social control and isolation of women;**
  - › **Stalking and following, also via telephone, text messages and the Internet;**
  - › **Insults, humiliation and threats;**
  - › **Slander, paternalism and economic control.**

Many women suffer not just one but indeed many forms of violence at the hands of their partners or ex-partners. A vast majority of the perpetrators are male.

# How do I recognise violence in partnerships?

Perhaps you have been under the impression for some time that there is something not quite right with your relative, friend or acquaintance. Violence by partners is not always visible through obvious injuries. Bruises can be covered with make-up or hidden beneath clothing. It might also be that the violence being experienced is mainly psychological terror.

## Possible indicators can be:

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- She often cancels on you, has become more reclusive and has generally withdrawn.
  - She appears to be absent-minded, introverted, depressed, unconfident, nervous, anxious or irritable.
  - Her weight has changed significantly or she increasingly uses addictive drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, possibly pills).
  - She increasingly complains about physical discomfort, and often appears to be very exhausted.
  - She always gives priority to the wishes of the partner and puts her opinion in second place to her partner's.
  - She has injuries and gives evasive answers when further questions are asked.

Many violent partners show a remarkably friendly face to the outside world. Sometimes, though, it is also the partner who might display odd behaviour in that s/he

- corrects her frequently, ridicules her in front of others and is disrespectful;
- orders her to be quiet, shows dominant behaviour and is bossy;
- infiltrates friendships and drives away relatives with impolite and aggressive behaviour.

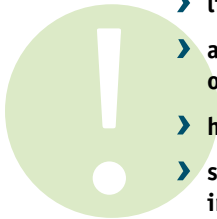
# What can I do?

In most cases, one can only be absolutely certain when the person involved confirms what is going on. If you are worried about a woman in your environment, it is best to simply ask. It might well be that the person involved will, at first, react defensively to your concern, yet the signs persist. Be attentive nonetheless and show your support.

Usually women affected first approach people who are close to them and whom they trust.

Anybody can be a supporter, be it as a friend, acquaintance, neighbour, family member, colleague at work, flatmate or club mate etc.

**You can provide support in different ways by**

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- › **listening and comforting;**
  - › **accompanying the woman to the police, lawyer, doctor or specialised centre for abused women;**
  - › **helping to organise everyday life and childcare;**
  - › **standing by the woman during challenges at school, in training or apprenticeship, university or her job;**
  - › **helping to find a new flat or job;**
  - › **calling the police in case of imminent danger;**
  - › **getting information, approaching specialised centres for abused women.**

You might be confused by the behaviour of the woman you want to help. Many women want to remain in their relationship on condition that the man stops the violence. For others, breaking away from the violent relationship involves a long process.

**It is helpful and important**

- › to believe the victim: don't doubt and judge;
- › to respect the needs and wishes of the victim;
- › not to take action under your own initiative, or without consulting the victim beforehand;
- › to be patient, remain in touch and continue offering your support.



# Where do I find support?

As a supporter, friend or relative, it is sensible to seek additional professional help from the women's counselling centres and rape crisis centres in your area. They are located all over Germany.

Do not hesitate to contact a specialised centre for abused women if you do have questions or need help.

You will find the addresses of these counselling centres as well as further information on our homepage:

## www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de





# Protection by law

Domestic violence is not a private matter. **The German Protection Against Violence Act**, which came into force on January 1st, 2002, establishes clear legal rules for protection against physical violence, threats and stalking by current or former spouses and intimate partners or partners, acquaintances and strangers, and provides for rapid assistance.

*Important measures include:*

**Restraining orders in the form of injunctions to stay away from the victim:** The perpetrator is forbidden to come closer to the victim herself, her flat, her workplace or other places which she regularly frequents, than the minimum distance ordered by court.

**Restraining orders in the form of a no-contact provision:**

The perpetrator must not get in touch with the victim, whether by telecommunications or through third parties.

**Orders temporarily granting the victim sole occupation of the joint home.** This applies to common households irrespective of marital status or sexual orientation.

Persons concerned can apply for a protective order at the competent Family Court to prevent further attacks and harassment. In case of imminent danger, the court may decide in an urgent preliminary ruling procedure. Infractions of the Protection Against Violence Act are liable to result in both civil as well as criminal proceedings. Detailed information is provided by the specialised centres for abused women in your vicinity.

*The federal association of women's counselling centres and rape crisis centres (bff) is the umbrella organisation of specialised centres for abused women. Our main focus lies on sexual, physical and psychological as well as domestic violence. The bff currently represents more than 170 specialised centres all over Germany.*

This flyer was given to you by:

The nationwide Violence against Women support helpline offers initial counselling for people affected over the phone. Free of charge, confidential and round-the-clock.



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und Frauennotrufe**

Women against Violence e.V.

Phone: +49 (0)30 322 99 500

Fax: +49 (0)30 322 99 501

E-Mail: [info@bv-bff.de](mailto:info@bv-bff.de)

[www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de](http://www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de)



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