

HOW ABUSE MIGHT AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Safety and Well-Being Tipsheet Series

Experiencing abuse can affect how we feel and how we respond to other people and the world around us. Our responses to abuse help us to survive and cope with the abuse and its traumatic effects, but these same responses can sometimes create obstacles to our safety, well-being, and life goals. Understanding how abuse has affected us can help us to access safety, heal from the traumatic effects of abuse, and support others to do the same.

If someone is abusing you, you might...

- Feel scared, hurt, sad, confused, angry, embarrassed, or hopeless
- Feel numb or like you can't feel anything at all
- Feel flooded or overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, or panic
- Feel like you are losing your mind
- Want to run away from or avoid something because it makes you feel scared or reminds you of past abuse
- Use alcohol or other drugs as a way of surviving and coping with the abuse and its traumatic effects
- Feel like you are spacing out when someone is talking to you
- Feel like it's hard to make decisions or get things done
- Notice that the abuse makes your mental health symptoms worse
- Feel tired all the time
- Find it difficult just to get out of bed in the morning
- Feel like you don't want to live anymore

You are not alone. Many people have feelings like these when they are being abused or after leaving an abusive relationship.

Your abuser may blame you for feeling or acting these ways by...

- Telling you that you are "crazy"
- Telling you that you are stupid, lazy, or a bad parent
- Telling you that no one will believe what you say
- Telling you that *you* are the one with the problem

The abuse is not your fault. You deserve to be treated with kindness and respect.

Your abuser may also try to prevent you from feeling well by...

- Depriving you of sleep and other basic needs
- Controlling when or how you receive mental health treatment
- Speaking for you or preventing you from talking to doctors or mental health professionals
- Controlling your prescription medications (e.g., by giving you too much or

too little)

- Forcing or coercing you to use alcohol or other drugs, controlling your access to alcohol or other drugs, or interfering with substance abuse treatment

You have a right to control your own mental health treatment and medications.

Your partner may try to use information about your mental health to convince friends, family, the police, prosecutors, or judges that...

- You are lying
- You are "crazy"
- You are a bad parent
- You should not have custody of the children
- You were "out of control" and needed to be "restrained"

You deserve to be listened to and believed.

If you are being abused, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 (TTY).

For more information on the intersection of domestic violence, trauma, mental health, and substance abuse, contact the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health at (312) 726-7020, 312-726-4110 (TTY), or info@nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org.