

# UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC ABUSE

– a resource for  
Galway professionals  
in the support of  
women and children  
experiencing  
intimate partner  
abuse





# CONTENTS

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE	1
Physical abuse	1
Emotional abuse	1
Financial abuse	1
Sexual abuse	1
Digital abuse	1
Coercive control	1
Targeting and grooming	2
EFFECTS OF ABUSE	4
RURAL & URBAN EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE	5
RECOGNISE, RESPOND & REFER	8
DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILDREN	9
LGBTQI+ AND DOMESTIC ABUSE	10
ARE MEN EVER VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE?	11
TRAVELLER WOMEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE	12
ETHNIC MINORITY /MIGRANT WOMEN & DOMESTIC ABUSE	14
DISABILITY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE	15
RAPE & SEXUAL ASSAULT WITHIN INTIMATE PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS	15
ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH IN DOMESTIC ABUSE	16
GARDA RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE	17
ROLE OF THE REFUGE	19
VOICE OF THE WOMAN	20
RESOURCES	22
OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE LOCALLY	24



A resource for Galway professionals in the support of women and children experiencing intimate partner abuse.

As a place to grow-up, Galway can be very special. Alongside a vibrant, youthful and multicultural city, the county is home to some of Ireland's most peripheral and remote communities. As a university city, Galway is a centre of learning and innovation and the county supports a strong local economy. Opportunities to engage with the arts, culture and sports are plentiful.

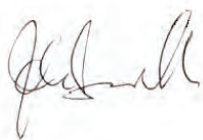
However, there are children and young people in Galway who do not feel safe in their own homes. The impact of domestic abuse on their cognitive, behavioural and emotional development of children can be devastating.

Responding to domestic abuse is not something that can be left to domestic abuse services or to An Garda Síochána. To illustrate this point, in its Guide for General Practice (2008), the Irish College of General Practitioners tells us that victims of domestic abuse and coercive control are more likely to report abuse to a healthcare practitioner than to the gardaí or to a domestic abuse service. To be effective, all those delivering services to children, young people and families must play an essential role in responding to domestic abuse.

Galway Children and Young People Service's Committee (CYPSC) brings together statutory, community and voluntary organisations operating across Galway City and County to promote and support joint planning and delivery of services for children and young people. Galway CYPSC sees this resource pack as an important tool to help services understand, respond and refer appropriately.

The committee would like to thank members of the Working Group that compiled this resource: Carol Baumann from COPE Galway, Áine Deeley from Loughrea FRC and Marie Gibbons from Galway CYPSC. This resource pack is informed by work undertaken in other areas of the country, notably by Roscommon CYPSC.

It is the committee's hope and expectation that this Resource Pack will play a vital role in giving all our children and young people the chance to make the most of growing up in Galway.



John Donnellan Chair,

**Galway Children and Young People's Services Committee**

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE

**Domestic abuse is about power and control within a relationship. It is deliberate and prolonged abuse disguised in many different forms, but always with the same aim: to control.**

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any act of physical violence that causes harm to another person in a relationship, such as hitting, slapping, kicking, punching, spitting, hair pulling, shoving, burning, choking.

### EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Any act of abuse that is designed to undermine or belittle another's self-worth and self-esteem.

This can include name calling, undermining another's parenting, not allowing contact with family or friends, 'giving the silent treatment', unjustified jealousy, threatening suicide / self-harm, threatening to kill the woman and / or the children, threatening to harm a pet.

### FINANCIAL ABUSE

Controlling finances within the family home.

This can include not being allowed information on income or outgoings, not knowing the household debt situation or mortgage arrangements, controlling access to money, forcing the woman to ask for money and to submit receipts for spending.

### SEXUAL ABUSE

Any act of a sexual nature that the other person is not fully and knowingly consent to.

This can include rape, being forced to watch pornography, being forced to engage in sexual acts the woman is not comfortable with, withholding / controlling contraception, forced to have sex in return for something e.g. money for groceries.

### DIGITAL ABUSE

Digital abuse is abuse which takes place through a device and / or on a social media platform. It can include stalking, using fake profiles to stalk, monitoring and / or tracking phone use, using technology to track the woman's movements, having access to the woman's online accounts. It can also include the distribution of intimate photographs, which may have been shared within the context of the relationship, now released without the woman's permission, and can include creating a fake profile of the woman, using such images, so as to destroy her reputation.

### COERCIVE CONTROL

Coercive control is a pattern of behaviours that are designed to create and exploit a power imbalance in a relationship. Coercive control is the underpinning of an abusive relationship and ultimately results in the woman's world being made smaller. She may report having to abide by quite specific rules, which will carry consequences where those rules may be breached. Coercive control is a feature of almost all cases of abuse.

Some typical coercive control behaviours will include monitoring and controlling contact with others, controlling access to food and medication, controlling what the woman wears, how she behaves, how she spends her time. It can lead to greater dependency on the abuser, making it harder again to seek help.



## TARGETING AND GROOMING:

### **Domestic abuse affects 1 in 5 women in Ireland. It is in every community, irrespective of class, race or creed.**

The perpetrator of domestic abuse has full knowledge, control and understanding of what he is doing. He may choose his partner on the basis that he believes he can get her to submit to his control. He will be keenly aware of any vulnerabilities and preys on them. His attention to detail is incomparable, he is a great listener and confidante. He is not only targeting and grooming her, he may also be doing the same to her family, friends and others, including professionals - being the person they all want him to be. However, within the latter he is also slowly creating a distance and disconnect between his partner and those supports.



*"[He]...will target a partner who will meet his needs without burden of negotiation... This skill will allow him to regulate the emotional distance between them and let him draw the woman emotionally closer or push her emotionally away which ever suits him."*  
(Hennessy, 2012)

## OUR DUTY:

- As professionals we have a duty to believe her if she discloses or shows any signs of abuse or concern within her relationship.
- As professionals we have a duty to respond to her with kindness and not judgement.
- As professionals we have a duty to let her know help is available, through a specialised service.
- As professionals, we have a duty to be aware of the possibility of also being manipulated by the abuser, and so remain vigilant to the signs we see.
- As professionals, we must remember that there is no perfect victim – any woman can be a victim of intimate partner abuse – she will not always have bruises, she will not always appear subdued, fearful or docile, she may be belligerent, aggressive and challenging. She can be all and none of these things and still be a victim.

*In 2021 COPE Galway Domestic Abuse Service provided 1,431 one to one appointments to women throughout Galway City and County, we accompanied 120 women to court and our children's services provided 639 appointments to children.*





## EFFECTS OF ABUSE

A woman who has lived with an abusive partner will often not trust her own judgement, she will have been made to doubt herself, doubt her abilities, question her capacity. Self-esteem will have been eroded, and she may be isolated from family and friends. Many women report that their world has been made smaller – they will speak a lot of things they ‘used to do’. She will be frightened – he is a powerful, towering force in her life – in her eyes, she cannot imagine anything with greater power than him, yet she may often still love him, and feel obligated to help and protect him. The prospect of life without him may be daunting, yet the prospect of life with him may be intolerable – the rock and the hard place. Mothers will very often experience parental alienation – this will have been deliberate, and her power to make decisions about routines, rearing or basic care will have been taken away. She may have been forbidden to nurse or breast-feed, and she will often be consumed with guilt for not protecting them, for not being better. Her life is a spiral of trying to appease him, and trying to protect them. He may see the child as competition for her attention, or as a way of hurting and controlling her. Almost all women who leave an abusive partner report that the abuse has continued after the separation, only now it is done through the children.

## “THERE IS A JOURNEY BEFORE TELLING AND ANOTHER JOURNEY AFTER TELLING...”

### MAJOR ISSUES:

1. Partners employed in a power-based area, i.e. Gardai
2. Isolation, particularly where the partner holds a position of power in the community
3. Living surrounded by the abuser’s family
4. Being prevented from driving
5. Fear of leaving the family home and making the children homeless
6. Lack of recognition of what Domestic Abuse is
7. Isolation / access
8. Language -Non-Irish - husband / partner or children being used as her interpreter; society’s mis-perceptions of ‘cultural norms’
9. Poverty - for example, not being able to access medical services
10. Immigration status - for example, being undocumented, or dependent on the abusive spouse for status in this country

## RURAL & URBAN EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE



Galway is a large county, with a large city, as well as a number of towns and villages, all thriving communities. As is the case with many issues, services are not equitably available—some services can only be accessed in a city for example, and those living more remotely, may find it harder to access supports they need. It is also a trait in Domestic Abuse to find that an abusive partner will suggest a move to a more remote location, possibly where there are no friends or family, and where the physical remove makes it harder to develop bonds within the community.

**Domestic Abuse may look a little different in each setting, and the supports available for it will also be different.**



### **Abuse in a rural setting**

One of the great appeals of life in a small community is that it is a place of closeness, familiarity and where everyone knows everyone – if you are an abuse victim, this can work against you.

### **Can I trust the Gardaí?**

Yes, the Gardaí are committed to pro-active policing in cases of Domestic Abuse, however, with many rural stations closed, or with limited opening and fewer Gardaí, response times to calls can be slower in some parts of the county.

Gardaí in rural areas are often part of the community, and this is a great asset. However, an abuser may on the surface appear to his victim as being well-connected to the Gardaí – perhaps they play on the same team, belong to the same club – it is easy for him to make his partner feel that the Gardaí are on his side, even though this is unlikely to be the case. Many women in rural communities can be made to have little trust in the Gardaí because their partner will have convinced them that the Gardaí will not believe them. It is important that a woman is encouraged and supported to trust the Gardaí, and professionals should be mindful of why she may be reluctant.

### **What will people think?**

Feelings of shame are a dilemma for a woman in any setting, in a rural community it can be aggravated – the feeling that it is not possible to be anonymous. The drive for anonymity stems from a wish to protect the children, to protect the perpetrator, and of course because the woman will feel shame.

This sense of shame, and the fear arising through isolation, will make it harder for a woman to reach out to people who can help her, such as the GP, the Gardaí, and other services – this is because these providers of professional services are also neighbours and may know both victim and perpetrator socially. Not trusting confidentiality is a reason most often cited by women in rural settings for not seeking support.

### **How will neighbours react?**

Hiding abuse or violence can be easier when neighbours are not close by – nothing is heard or seen, so the abuse can carry on unhindered. Sometimes where it is noticed, unhelpful perspectives can prevail - "...I'd say he's difficult to live with"; or "...there's a pair of them in it". A misplaced respect for privacy can also be unhelpful – the neighbours feel it is none of their business, so do not want to get involved. Experience shows however that once aware, neighbours in rural areas can often be more effectively supportive than in an urban area – they are inclined to know their neighbours and want to help. Doing so safely is the challenge, and no neighbour should take it upon themselves to intervene – finding a very private time to let a woman know that you know things are not good, and that you are there if she needs you, is a good start. Being prepared to be rebuffed, without being offended, may be necessary.

### **What about the Court?**

The laws exist in respect of Domestic Abuse, however accessing them is not always easy. Firstly, accessing a solicitor in confidence in a rural setting can be problematic, particularly when dependent on legal aid; sittings of family court in the county are less frequent and a woman can be told to go to a court many miles away to see a judge.

Once at court, access to orders can be a challenge – for example, securing a barring order where the family are farming will be a challenge as access to sheds and yards will be required.

Although some of this can be difficult, it is not impossible, and support and encouragement will be required so that the woman can access the protections of the law.

The benefits of going to court for a woman are significant – the law can protect, she can have her voice heard and be believed. As professionals, we need to be prepared to walk the journey with her.

### **Getting help and leaving in a rural setting**

Support services in a rural setting can be less accessible and often less visible – people often have to travel. This is compounded by transport and financial issues, as well as childcare and so on. In cases of coercive control, it is not uncommon for the use of a car to be controlled: through tracking devices, through the monitoring of the odometer, through controlling access to fuel – this ensures a woman sticks to a very tight radius around the home, and lessens her opportunity to seek help.

A woman who tries to leave a rural home will face challenges in finding an alternative property to rent that will allow her children stay at the same school or maintain contact with friends and community, meaning very large changes will be necessary.

### **Is the abuse any different in a rural area?**

Ultimately, the abuse is not different though it can be the case that access to weapons and dangerous equipment is more prevalent in a rural setting – women in abusive relationships in rural settings will feel a heightened sense of fear from physical attack. The challenges named above are ones particular to a rural setting, and support will be required in tackling these.

### **And what about women living in an urban area?**

Services are closer to hand in an urban area, as is access to public transport – this can make it easier for a woman seeking help. Similarly, family law courts sit more regularly, and access to a solicitor is generally far easier. Support from the Gardaí can be more responsive, and there is a stronger likelihood of anonymity. Living in the middle of a town however is no guarantee of safety – neighbours in an urban setting are just as likely to not get involved, isolation can be just as acute.



## RECOGNISE, RESPOND & REFER

When you meet a woman in your professional life, it is always important to hold in your mind the possibility, however improbable it seems to you, that she could be a victim of abuse. Domestic Abuse does not confine itself to any class, culture, creed or career: one in five women – of all women – will experience it in their lifetimes. Ensure you know how to adequately respond to your suspicions, being aware of the signs to look for.

*When a woman has found the opportunity and strength to disclose what is happening, it must be handled properly – this may be the one and only time she says it out loud – if you are the person hearing this from her, what you say and do may be life-changing for her. Your response, and how and when you refer, should be carefully thought through and sensitively executed.*





# Domestic Abuse and Children

For many children who experience violence and abuse between their parents, home can be a stressful, unpredictable place, the family is a source of conflict and many children live in fear of the next abusive episode. This results in children living in continual states of high alert and arousal. They may therefore be over – sensitive to perceived threat, for example, shouting or criticism from adults or other children. These abusive acts are often committed by someone who should be caring for and protecting them as they grow.

Research has shown that the length of time that a child has been living with the abuse has more impact on the child's stress levels than the degree or severity of violence (Rossman et al 1994).

The violence and abuse can impact on children's lives growing up. For example, it can impact on school performance where a child is distracted in school. Children may have limited access to food, clothing, money and health care if the abuser is controlling the finances. Some children have to take on a parental role

and become the protector to their siblings. Out of fear or shame many children make great efforts to hide from the outside world what their world is really like.

Children are aware of what is going on in their home and between parents even if they have not witnessed direct abuse. Many children display anxiety, confusion and worry about what is going to happen.

Young people growing up can have skewed ideas of what a healthy relationship is, have difficulties forming relationships with others or learn to cope with their home life in unhealthy ways.

It is important to understand that a child is never unaffected by the abuse between the parenting couple, and it is imperative that support is given to such a child. The aim of this support is to help that child validate their experience, work through their feelings, and establish healthy and safe relationships with both parents.

## LGBTQ + AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

When working with a member of the LGBT+ community, and offering support as a professional, it is important to build trust. Much of this will be dependent on how well this person believes he / she / they are understood by you – terminology is therefore important. Here is a quick guide to some terms / phrases you may encounter:



**Lesbian:** A female who is predominantly attracted to females. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

**Gay:** Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender.

**Bi | Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to someone who is either male or female - this can be inclusive of transgender and non-binary people also.

**Trans | Transgender:** A person who has a gender identity different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transition:** A process where a person is shifting gender role that differs from their biological sex. This can include socially transitioning (i.e. changing name) and / or medical transitioning (hormone replacement therapy, surgical procedures etc.).

**Preferred pronouns/name:** A name or pronoun that a person chooses to identify as dependent on their gender identity.

**Non-binary:** An umbrella term for gender identities that identify as neither male or female.

**Genderfluid:** A person who does not identify as having a fixed gender, and may use various pronouns.

Of greatest importance is being sensitive and respectful of this person.

## Factors to consider regarding supports

### How will the victim feel?

Any victim of Domestic Abuse will feel isolation, loneliness and feelings of powerlessness; for those in the LGBTQ + community, these feelings are magnified:

- Family members may not be aware that their partner exists, as the victim may not be 'out' to their family or friends (unaware of their identity or orientation).
- Approaching their family in these instances could be a potentially dangerous situation for them, due to differing opinions on LGBTQ + issues. This could also be inclusive of the community they currently reside in.
- The victim may be reluctant to engage with other services, due to a fear of further stigma being pressed on them. These services include anything that ranges from counselling to homeless services.
- The victim might completely disregard the option of reporting an incident of abuse to the authorities. This includes that fear of being further discriminated or judged due to their orientation or identity. There is currently no existing hate crime legislation in the Republic of Ireland.

### Are there additional barriers for someone from the LGBTQ + community?

- There is a significant lack of awareness and understanding surrounding this issue within the LGBTQ + community.
- While Domestic Abuse is quite common within the community, there can be a belief that those outside the community will not understand or have empathy.
- There is a perception within the community that because they may be in a relationship with someone of the same gender, it would not be taken as seriously as compared with someone in a heterosexual relationship.
- Being an LGBTQ + person can have an unspoken pressure to act as a representative of your community, particularly around those who are closest to you, or where you reside. People fear disclosing abuse might result in people having a more tainted view of the community, as they are already subject to unfavourable opinions.

- Depending on what stage of their transition they are in, a victim may be reluctant to approach any services, as there is a further fear of violence i.e. gendered hostels / refuges
- The victim may be financially dependent on their partner surrounding their health-care. Medically transitioning can be very expensive and someone may not have the means to support themselves through it
- A transgender and / or non-binary person may be fearful of professionals lacking awareness and sensitivity regarding the community, and may worry about not being taken seriously
- There is a fear within the community approaching services also regarding paper work. If a transgender or non-binary person does not have their name legally changed or other documentation changed i.e. passport, this can be a deterrent to disclosing and or reporting any abuse.

### **As a professional how do I approach this situation?**

- If the person has previously said they are a member of the LGBTQ + community, ask them their preferred names and pronouns. This will provide some ease to the victim, as it tells them that you are somewhat aware of the community.
- If possible, ask them who they are out to, and does anyone know of their current situation
- Be mindful of violence they may be experiencing due to their identity or orientation
- Ask if their partner has ever threatened to 'out them' (Reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent)
- When appropriate inform them of services such as Amen, Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Centre. Also keep reassuring them that these services will not judge them and are great supports.

## **ARE MEN EVER VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE?**

Yes, men certainly are also victimised in intimate partner relationships, whether in hetero-sexual relationships or same-sex relationships. Violence against men is different in its root causes, however its impact is severe. In common with female victims, men find it difficult to report, and so it is likely under-reported. There is at present no refuge for men in Ireland, so seeking safety from an abusive partner can be very difficult. The laws in respect of domestic violence are however gender-blind, so the protections of the courts apply equally here. There is specialist support available through Men's Aid and other such organisations. Professionals need to be open to disclosures from men who have been victimised in this way, and be ready to guide and support sensitively and appropriately.

## TRAVELLER WOMEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

With regard to women in the Traveller community Pavee Point highlights that 'domestic and sexual violence are often hidden crimes and much goes unreported'. While this is true also for the majority settled population, for Travellers, Roma and other minority ethnic groups, there are additional barriers to disclosure and to seeking support.

Discrimination, actual and feared, is a major barrier for Traveller women who may need to seek protection. It has resulted in a mistrust of, and reluctance to disclose and seek support from authorities and services, including the Gardai and healthcare, social work and specialised gender-based violence services. In particular, Traveller women have reported that they may be reluctant to seek the protection of the Gardaí as they fear that reporting will result in discriminatory attitudes and treatment, including particularly harsh treatment of their husbands. Furthermore, they may fear a negative reaction from their own community, because of the level of distrust of the Gardaí that still exists within the Traveller community.

They also fear that reporting abuse will further stigmatise their community, resulting in a reinforcement of negative prejudices and discriminatory attitudes, widely perpetuated by media reports. A Traveller woman may feel the need to protect her community against further racist stereotyping by remaining silent about her own experiences.

*Fear of children being taken was cited as the main reason for non-reporting by Traveller women to services, including Domestic Violence services, with the perceived threat of this permeating through all interactions a Traveller woman may have with authorities. In other words, her fear of losing her children may result in her staying in an unsafe environment.*



Accommodation pressures for Traveller families and generalised societal discrimination limit the possibilities for a Traveller woman seeking to escape – where can she go? She is potentially already living in over-crowded accommodation, very likely within the circle of her husband's family – some Traveller women find that the abuse perpetrated by their partner may also be perpetrated by his family members.

It is often asserted that abuse is 'part of that culture' – this is not the case: violence is a behaviour, and not a cultural characteristic. Whilst stereotypical views of the roles of men and women are very prevalent in this culture, it is not true to say that every Traveller woman is abused by her partner, nor is it true to say that every Traveller man is violent. Patriarchy, and the concept that men are inherently superior to women, with women often reduced to possessions, is at the root of an abusive relationship, irrespective of the culture in which it arises.



*Traveller organisation representatives highlighted the importance of cultural competency in providing services to Travellers. Because Traveller women may experience Domestic Violence in culturally specific ways, they note that service providers should consider the cultural background and the unique issues faced by the Traveller women and their children in order to tailor services to meet their needs.*

## ETHNIC MINORITY AND MIGRANT WOMEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

A woman belonging to an ethnic minority group, for whom Ireland is not her birth place, or who is separated from her family of origin, abuse from her partner will be particularly difficult to manage. There can be issues with her status – perhaps she is in Ireland on a spousal visa; perhaps she came to Ireland and overstayed her visa; maybe she has been trafficked. When immigration status is in question, the woman will fear making contact with anyone in authority.

**Women who are undocumented are far less likely to come forward and can be extremely anxious and nervous in giving any details. The involvement of social workers and Gardaí in these instances where, for example a child protection issue is raised, or also causes serious concern and fear.**

The partner in these circumstances will be seen by the woman as being all-powerful. He may establish himself as the voice of authority in her head – he will remind her that her status makes it impossible for her to seek help, he may threaten her with reporting her to authorities. Some of these issues can be exacerbated by language barriers, with many women reporting being actively hindered or discouraged in learning to speak English. Economically she may be dependent on him for her basic needs – food, shelter. Her isolation can be quite complete.

Some women pointed out that their husbands were in a position to build contacts and connections having come to the country before them and used this to their advantage, keeping the women under control, leading to feelings on the part of women that no one will believe them.

Service providers also noted that for migrant women, placing trust in the system is very difficult: *“Women are coming from countries where they don’t trust the system – it is very hard for them to trust the system here”.*

The woman will also feel responsible for her husband’s well-being: being the cause of her husband’s deportation, or him potentially being killed or harmed if sent back to his own country, is noted by many women as a significant reason not to report.

The abuse experience of a woman from an ethnic minority group will be exacerbated by these factors – help will be harder to negotiate, but not impossible.

Recognising the relationship as being abusive will be a challenge, quickly followed by the enormity of all of the questions she will have about how she can get help, how she can get out, how she can manage. The answer is – one step at a time. Make contact with a specialist service, and take it step by step.

Disclosing an abusive relationship requires trust, continuity, safety – these things must be available before women will tell so any professional working with such a woman in this context needs to be aware of taking time to establish trust and then involving the specialist service. If you need to have this conversation with a woman, please engage the support of a trusted and reputable interpreter - do not allow the partner to speak for her, do not rely on a family member, particularly a minor.

Community-based services such as Family Resource Centres play an important role in offering an opportunity to grow relationships locally, in a trusted setting, which can then lead to the seeking of help for an abusive relationship.

*Remember that abuse loves isolation – women are safer when they are connected.*

## DISABILITY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

One in two women with disabilities in the UK experience intimate partner abuse, most often at the hands of the person who also provides their care. In the case of a woman who relies on her partner for her support, the potential for abuse and control is real, and the options for escape can be limited. Few refuges in Ireland offer space that is accessible (Modh Eile House in Galway is one of these), and for many women, the prospect of leaving their abusive partner, is monumental. Such a woman is navigating and reflecting on not only the ending of the relationship, but also possibly fearful of who will help her now? It is important when supporting such a woman to link in with the range of professionals in her life, both in respect of her disability, as well as the abuse she has experienced.

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## RAPE & SEXUAL ASSAULT WITHIN INTIMATE PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

Sexual assault and rape exist within intimate partner relationships. At every point in a relationship someone has the right to say no, and to be listened to. Many women who have experienced sexual assault/rape within intimate partner relationships may find it difficult firstly to recognise it as such, and then to disclose this experience to professionals. Understanding that what they have experienced is rape or sexual assault can very often be difficult and in our experience, women can often blame themselves, feel they colluded with the sexual activity or out of a place of fear/shame, feel they cannot refuse to participate in sexual activity.

Disclosures of such experiences can be clouded in vague language and professionals are encouraged to give time and space gently and sympathetically to any person disclosing violence/coercive control in relationships.

Support is available for any person to discuss their experiences in confidence in Galway Rape Crisis Centre. Clients are supported to attend the Sexual Assault Treatment Centre (SATU) should they so wish as well as having access to Gardaí Protective Services. The Centre also has a legal clinic. Primarily, people are supported from a counselling/psychological perspective offering appointments to people who have experienced sexual assault and rape as well as childhood sexual abuse. Professionals are invited to encourage anyone they are supporting to contact the Centre's Helpline on (1800 355 355) where they will get a chance to discuss what their needs are and when and if they would like to avail of counselling support.

## ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH IN DOMESTIC ABUSE

Women battling with addiction issues face additional layers of difficulty in accessing help in respect of intimate partner abuse. It is important to offer support to such a woman on both – the addiction as well as the abuse – although in doing so, of greatest importance is to start at the place the woman wishes to start.

The use of alcohol and drugs as a form of abuse is well-recognised. An abusive partner can instigate, supply, encourage, coerce and force the imbibing of addictive substances as part of the control which he exerts. A woman in such circumstances can quickly find herself with an addiction she did not knowingly begin. In this manner, the abuser can make his target more compliant. He can also point to her as an addict, and therefore someone whose word cannot be trusted, or whose behaviour is selfish, or who is an unfit parent. He can also create a scenario whereby she is 'at her worst' when the Gardaí are called making her appear as a less sympathetic, or less credible, victim.



The use of alcohol or other substances as a form of handling physical pain following a violent attack, or to cope with the effects of the emotional abuse, is also recognised, and can lead to addiction.

The concept of **gas-lighting** is now widely recognised. We know it to mean the undermining of a woman's sense of reality through deception, through casting doubt, through making her question herself continually. This can be escalated to a woman being made to believe she is depressed, that she is mentally unwell, that she needs medication. It is not uncommon for an abusive partner to encourage other people in the woman's circle to also believe she is mentally unwell or suffering from paranoia and depression. This is done to make her less credible in the event she was to seek help.

Women who are engaged with mental health services and who may be on medication, often report interference by their partner in their taking of these prescription medications – either withholding the drugs, forcing more than the prescribed amount, or otherwise controlling access. This is often done in the context of 'supporting' her as she is 'too sick' to do it herself.

It is critical to remember there is no right kind of victim – there is no expected presentation, no expected behaviour. Acknowledging that the woman may well have addiction issues, yet still be subjected to abuse, is important in providing effective support. A woman with mental health difficulties needs great care in respect of her reliance on a potentially abusive partner.

## GARDA RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

### DOMESTIC ABUSE IS A POLICING PRIORITY

Domestic Abuse continues to form part of An Garda Síochána's Policing Plan as we strive to make a real difference in the communities we serve. An Garda Síochána has a pro-active policy on Domestic Abuse Intervention. An Garda Síochána is working to make Galway city and county a safer place for victims of Domestic Abuse, their families and children.

How we do this is through full investigation; providing call backs to victims of Domestic Abuse and by collaborating and linking in with other agencies and stakeholders working to support victims and raise awareness of Domestic Abuse. We would encourage victims of Domestic Abuse to come forward and they will be fully supported throughout the process.

Domestic Abuse can take a variety of forms. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. Domestic abuse can occur within a family, between family members, can involve current or ex-partners, regardless of gender or sexuality and is not particular to one type of victim or profession.

We put victims at the heart of our service. An Garda Síochána provides victims of Domestic abuse with a call-back within 7 days. In doing so we ensure they are kept updated in respect of prompt investigations, prosecutions and court dates in line with our Garda Victims Policy and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act, 2017. This call back is paramount because of the vulnerable circumstances which may surround the victim.



We at An Garda Síochána are your local Police Service. We know that if you are experiencing Domestic Abuse you can feel alone and isolated. We are here to help. We want you to know we are there to listen. If you are in danger or need help in respect of Domestic Abuse please contact us at 999/112. A Garda will come to your assistance and listen to you and ensure you are not in immediate danger. You will be given advice and assistance from your local Garda.

You too can call into your local Garda station and speak to your local Garda in confidence and in private. An Garda Síochána will ensure your safety and advise you accordingly. An Garda Síochána can advise you of a variety of Domestic Abuse orders that are available through the Family Law Courts and advise you how you obtain an order. We can advise you of the extra levels of protection these orders provide and how they work. These court orders include Safety Orders, Emergency Barring Orders, Barring Orders and Protection Orders. The orders remain in force for a particular period of time. Victims are encouraged to report any breaches of these orders to a member of An Garda Síochána immediately.



We are able to link you in with local Domestic Abuse services in your area. In Galway City and County there are a number of services available including outreach, emergency accommodation and court accompaniment services.

The Domestic Violence Act, 2018 is a welcome development and has improved legal protections available to victims of Domestic Abuse. This Act details new offences including offences of forced marriage and coercive control. It continues to provide for the Domestic Abuse orders and extends to the setting up of Special Courts to obtain these orders.

Under this act An Garda Síochána have a power of arrest in certain circumstances under Section 35 of the Act. Section 34 allows for a restriction on people present in the courtroom for proceedings. The reality is that Domestic Abuse crimes are repeated, systematic and dangerous crimes, often perpetrated against the same victim. The act gives more scope to An Garda Síochána to investigate acts of physical abuse, but not only that, it also extends to the investigation of financial, emotional and psychological abuse within families or intimate relationships.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU REPORT DOMESTIC ABUSE?

- If you report a case of domestic abuse to An Garda Síochána an investigator will be assigned your case.
  - The Garda will come and introduce themselves and commence an investigation based on the allegations made.
  - The Garda will obtain details of those involved. If there is a breach of a Domestic Abuse order the Gardaí will arrest the respondent if sufficient evidence exists and a process will commence through the Criminal Justice System.
  - If there is no Domestic Abuse order in place you will be provided with the procedures to be followed in applying for such order under the Domestic Violence Act 2018.
  - If there is no order in place but another offence is suspected to have been committed the Garda will carry out an investigation and effect an arrest if sufficient evidence and a power of arrest exists.
  - The victim will be invited to make a statement of complaint which is taken down in writing by the Investigating Garda.
  - The Garda will follow through with the investigation which may include interviewing other people and/or retaining items of evidential value. Support service details will be supplied. The Victim will be kept up to date in respect of court, the criminal justice system and may be required to give evidence in court.
  - You may be advised to keep notes of incidents.
  - You may be advised to liaise with advocacy agencies to discuss the preparation of a safety plan and particularly to ensure you have relevant emergency services pre-programmed into your phone.
- Research has shown that a complainant is more likely to remain committed to the investigation and subsequent prosecution when:-**
- Supported by a victims group
  - Substantial investigative effort, early statement and reassurance
  - Dealt with in a supportive and compassionate manner
  - Kept fully and regularly informed of progress of investigation and prosecution

We strive to achieve successful investigations and prosecutions with this in mind. We again encourage victims of Domestic Abuse to come forward and they will be fully supported. Our key role is to protect victims, prevent crimes occurring and to prosecute those responsible.

A Divisional Protective Services Unit has been set up for Galway Garda Division covering Galway city and county. This unit provides additional specialised support to investigators of Domestic Abuse.

Please be reminded that it is the duty of An Garda Síochána to investigate all incidents of Domestic Abuse, including reports of Domestic Abuse received from a third party.

Further advice and assistance can be sought from your local Garda Station.

Further information can be obtained at <https://www.garda.ie/en/crime/domestic-abuse/>.

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## ROLE OF THE REFUGE

A refuge is a safe place for a woman who is at imminent risk from her partner. The prime focus here is on her safety and well-being, dealing with the immediate crisis, and supporting her in steadying her life and considering her options. Many women coming to refuge are exhausted – often emotionally drained, very often sleep deprived. Refuge gives an opportunity to rest, reflect and consider.

Internationally, only one in ten women who are abused use refuge - most women never need this kind of service. It is a short-term, crisis service, and not a long-term housing solution. It forms just one part of the total support package a woman may need, supporting her while she moves through the stages of pre-contemplating, contemplating, ambivalence, and decision-making.

The refuge in Galway city at Modh Eile House provides emergency access with stay on a week-to-week basis. Once the safety issue is stabilised, a woman is supported to move home, or elsewhere, depending on what is most appropriate for her.

It is important to note that many women will leave an abusive relationship six or seven times – many will leave the refuge and return to her partner. As providers of this specialised support, we know this and so we place an emphasis on building a trusting relationship with a woman, and safety planning with her, in the event of a return to the partner.

The refuge is not homeless accommodation, nor is it a place where a woman and her children will be monitored or where issues other than domestic abuse will be addressed. It is there to support her through the crisis, and then to tailor supports to her evolving needs.



## VOICE OF THE WOMAN

I'll never forget how nervous I was the first time that I picked up the phone to call the COPE Galway domestic abuse service. My friends had been begging me for ages to make the call, one of them had already used the service and said that she had gotten a lot of support from them. She even had made some friends from attending a support group that was set up for women who had left their abusive relationships.

I suppose the problem I had was calling it an abusive relationship. My friend's relationship seemed so much worse than mine but she kept telling me that you don't have to be beaten to be abused. Then she showed me a relationship checklist and I found that I was able to tick off quite a few items off the list that I began to think that maybe she was right. Even so, before I made the phone call that evening I began to doubt again if my relationship really was abusive. I wondered how I would explain to whoever answered the phone what it was like to live with my husband and if they would believe me. Some of the things seemed so trivial I worried it would sound like I was making a big thing out of nothing – this is what my husband was always saying – perhaps he was right.

I took a few breaths and dialled the number. I was met with a friendly voice and when I told her I didn't know where to start she just simply said why don't you begin by telling me a little about your relationship? Then I don't know what happened, perhaps it was the friendly voice, but it just all came spilling out. The years of him putting me down, controlling what I wear, what I eat, who I see, where I go, how bad a mother I am and how scared I was all of the time of doing the wrong thing, of never getting it right. I can remember feeling a huge sense of relief, this was the first time that I had really told the full truth about what I had been experiencing and when she told me that I wasn't alone in experiencing this kind of abuse, that women regularly phone their service to talk about such things I began to think that perhaps it wasn't me after all, maybe I wasn't going crazy.

After that first phone call I was given an appointment with an outreach worker from the service. Once I was linked in with her we began to meet regularly in a location close to where I lived. This was a godsend really, it meant that I was able to meet with her before I collected the kids from school without having to worry about rushing back. I worried that I was taking up too much of her time in the beginning but I was constantly reassured by her that I wasn't time wasting and that what I was experiencing was abuse even though I didn't have any bruises or visible scars.

It's hard to believe that it's been five years now since I made that first phone call. So much has happened since then - I moved into rented accommodation and separated from my husband but it has not been an easy road. There were times when I thought that it would have been so much easier if I had stayed but then I would remember what I was like back then, how scared I was all of the time, how much of my personality had disappeared and how worried I was about how it was affecting the kids. The hardest part of separating was worries about the children, feeling ashamed and constantly doubting how my decision would affect them. I felt that nobody believed me because my husband was so charming, he attended all of the parent teacher meetings and was even a coach on the kids' football team. He was lively and outgoing and I was quiet and introvert. There was so much to negotiate after I left and I had to tell my story

over and over again to so many different people - there was the housing department who wanted to know why I was leaving the family home especially since there was no violence and who didn't understand why I couldn't stay in the same house as someone who was controlling my every move, constantly undermining me and putting me down in front of the kids. There was Intreo who wanted proof that I was in an abusive relationship and wondered why I needed a payment when my husband had a perfectly good job and should be paying me maintenance, then there was the solicitor who told me that I would have to do family mediation and sit in the same room as the man who had abused and intimidated me for years! I was constantly made to feel like I was a nuisance and that I should be more reasonable. But how can you reason with an abuser?

When the mediation didn't work I applied for a safety order to stop him from coming over to my new home whenever he felt like it upsetting me and the kids. At the hearing for the safety order his solicitor kept going on about his rights to see his children like I was stopping him from doing so. I would never stop him from seeing the children and I always went out of my way to make sure that he could see them. He was the one who wouldn't turn up to collect them when he had promised and they would be devastated and I would be left picking up the pieces. Or on the rare occasion he did take them he would bring them back really late and I would be up the walls with worry because he wouldn't answer the phone. But in the court he would make out that I was stopping him from seeing them and his solicitor would say that's why he keeps calling up to the house and looking through the window!

I think that the hardest part was trying to keep it together for the kids. I don't know what I would have done without the help of my outreach worker who was with me every step of the way. She helped me to negotiate with housing and Intreo by writing letters, she helped me to find the words to describe coercive control and what was happening to me. She wrote to my solicitor and came with me to court on numerous occasions. When I felt a failure as a mother and didn't know what to say to the kids about the separation or the abuse or how their father was behaving, she spoke to me about the difficulties of parenting after an abusive relationship. I had tried a parenting while separated course but that only works when you can negotiate safely and reasonably with your ex-partner- that was never going to be the case with mine.

Slowly over the years I have begun to gain back some confidence and trust that the decisions that I have made are the right ones. Don't get me wrong it's still difficult and I'm still linked in with my outreach worker from time to time whenever my ex decides to have a blow up or to take me to court claiming yet again that I am stopping him from seeing his children. I have had a lot of support in learning how to manage contact with my ex-partner. I suppose someone who is so controlling was never going to let go of that control easily. It took me months to plan how to get away from him, I don't think people are aware of how charming and manipulative abusive partners can be even after you have left them. I would urge any woman who is experiencing control or abuse in their relationship or trying to manage things like access on your own, to reach out to your local domestic abuse service and get the help you deserve from people who believe you and understand what you are going through - **remember you do not have to go through this alone.**



## RESOURCES

### Support to Women

In Galway, specialised support to women is available through COPE Galway Domestic Abuse Service and through Domestic Violence Response. The engagement of this specialist expertise is important in securing better outcomes for women.

### Group Work

COPE Galway Domestic Abuse Service provides group support to women, both formal programmes as well as informal support groups. These are available throughout the county, and online.

### Support to Children



#### Solas Óg Children and Young people's service:

Young people who accompany their mother to refuge have their own individual needs within their family so it is important that their individual needs are met. Children need their

own space and time to understand and process what is going on and someone to support them along their journey. The emotional damage that the abuse can cause can take a long time to repair and children need many tools to support them to cope.

At Modh Eile House, COPE Galway's domestic abuse refuge, there is a playroom for children under 12 where children can engage in activities and supports such as therapeutic play, art, sensory work etc. The playroom offers a space to explore and a space for the children to call their own. They can work with a support worker on a one to one basis or in a group. For many children they learn that they are not alone, that there are other children with similar experiences and it is ok to talk about it. We work at the child's pace and ability as it is very important that we build up a trusting relationship with the child and this can take time.

#### Parenting Support:

At Modh Eile House we work closely with the child's mother in relation to the child's needs. Their relationship may have been strained as she struggled to meet the child's emotional needs while trying to be steps ahead of the perpetrator's actions. Modh Eile House gives them that safe space to rebuild their relationship with the help from the Solas Óg team.

Mothers can explore parenting in the context of domestic abuse and can engage in group work with other mothers. There is a parenting group and parenting book that has been developed by Modh Eile house and women who have used the service

#### 'Parenting After Domestic Violence' - book

"Parenting After Domestic Violence & Abuse" is a booklet for mothers who are parenting in the context of domestic abuse or having left an abusive home. This resource was created with mothers who have made this journey and is filled with learning taken from their experience, as they highlighted the unique parenting struggles and challenges they face. This is a valuable resource in supporting mothers, and is effective where generic parenting programmes simply cannot meet the needs of the emotional dynamic at play.

It covers topics including effects of domestic abuse on children, talking to your child, how to help your child and strategies for mothers whose parenting has been undermined through abuse.





### **Solas Óg Youth Space**

For young people 13 years +, we have a dedicated Youth Space. Young people especially struggle with making sense of what is going on at home at a time when they are already wading through the teenage years and dating relationships. This space is a safe place that they feel safe to come to. The youth space can offer young people a space to think, make sense of what is happening in their family and connect with other young people who have similar experiences.

### **Solas Og Outreach**

A Solas Óg support worker can continue the support work that has been started with child / young person and mother staying at Modh Eile House after they have left in a safe place in their locality.

Referrals from other services in relation to children and young people (up to the age of 25) needing support can also be made to Solas Óg .

If a service is working with a child or young person that has experienced domestic abuse they can email [solasog@copegalway.ie](mailto:solasog@copegalway.ie) for more information and a referral form. An outreach Solas Óg worker can meet a child, young person and parent in the community in a safe location.

### **School Workshops:**

The workshops cover topics such as healthy and unhealthy dating relationships, warning signs of an abusive relationship, dating abuse relating to social media platforms and getting out of a relationship safely. *School workshops can also be booked and enquiries made to [solasog@copegalway.ie](mailto:solasog@copegalway.ie).*

These workshops are targeted at the junior cycle and Transition Year students, but can be tailored to other year groups.



## OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE LOCALLY

Service	Description of service	Contact Details	Supports provided
<b>Cope Galway</b>	Providing 24 hour services and refuge for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, and working within the community to end abuse.	COPE Galway Domestic Abuse Service & Refuge  091 565 985 (24 hours)  modheile@copegalway.ie www.copegalway.ie	Emergency Accommodation Support & Information Counselling Court Accompaniment Children's Services Outreach Aftercare Telephone Helpline Email and text support for Deaf / hard of hearing women
<b>Domestic Violence Response</b>	A community led organisation responding to the issue of domestic abuse in Galway County, responding to the needs of women and children who are subjected to violence and abuse in the home.	Phone 091-866740, 0877737957, 0871646454 info@domesticviolenceresponse.com www.domesticviolenceresponse.com  DVR Commerce House, Mountain Road, Moycullen, Co. Galway H91 D9H9	Telephone Support Counselling Support and Information Advocacy Accompaniment Educational Support Programmes Public Awareness and Information
<b>Family Resource Centres</b>	Galway has five Family Resource Centres that are part of a national programme of Family Resource Centres. Family Resource Centres develop services and supports that respond to the needs of individuals, families and communities.	1. ARD Family Resource Centre Ardaun, 55 Doughiska Rd, Galway City. Phone 091 768852  2. Clann Resource Centre Cregg Lodge Station Road Oughterard, Co Galway Phone 091 5576334  3. Gort Resource Centre Church Street, Gort Co Galway Phone 091 630902  4. Loughrea Family & Community Resource Centre, Pigott's Street, Loughrea, Co Galway Phone 091 871149  5. Solas Family Resource Centre Main St, Headford Co Galway Phone 093 36446	Highlighting social issues such as Domestic Abuse. Acting as an information and referral service to frontline services such as Cope. Support with accessing counselling and therapy services for women and children.

<b>TUSLA Social Work Offices</b>	Providing frontline child welfare and protection services in Galway City and County. There are 5 Social Work offices covering the city and county providing a duty/ intake service.	<p>For TUSLA Duty Social Workers: to report a concern about a child or discuss a concern contact any office and you will be directed to the contact number for your area.</p> <p>Social Work Offices, Galway City 25 Newcastle Road, Galway. Tel: (091) 546366 /370/ 325 /369</p> <p>Social Work Offices, Tuam Co Galway Tel: (093) 37234</p> <p>Social Work Offices Loughrea, Co. Galway. Tel: (091) 847820</p> <p>Social Work Offices Brackernagh, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. Tel: 09096 46200</p> <p>Social Work Offices Oughterard, Co. Galway, Tel: (091) 552200</p>	<p>The Duty Social Worker works to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child and young person living in the home.</p> <p>Social workers will also provide families with support in accessing necessary services, including counselling, domestic violence support services and legal services.</p>
<b>TUSLA Family Services</b>	Providing family support services to families experiencing difficulties in Galway City and County. There are 6 family services offices covering Galway City and County. Drop in clinics are available in most locations.	<p>West Galway Family Services Seamus Quirke Road, Galway 091-529390</p> <p>North Galway Family Services Tuam, Co. Galway Tel: 086-1713384</p> <p>Galway City East/ Athenry Family Services Tel: 091-773664</p> <p>Connemara Family Services Tel: 086-0431568</p> <p>Loughrea Gort Family Services 091-872747</p> <p>Ballinasloe -Portumna Family Services 090-9646200</p>	<p>Work directly with children and young people.</p> <p>Provide support to parents and guardians.</p> <p>Provide information and advice to children, young people and parents/ guardians.</p> <p>Act as an advocate for children, young people and parents / guardians when necessary</p> <p>Organise family led interagency meetings including Meitheal to develop an action plan and promote the best outcomes for children and young people.</p>
<b>Galway Rape Crisis Centre</b>	GRCC's vision is to lessen the impact and incidence of sexual violence and abuse and to achieve a society which no longer tolerates these crimes.	1800 35 53 55 helpline@grcc.ie www.grcc.ie	GRCC is dedicated to providing a professional, caring and confidential counselling and support service for those in our community affected by sexual abuse and sexual violence. GRCC also works towards ending cultural and societal tolerance of sexual violence through advocacy, awareness raising and education programmes.

<b>HSE Elder Abuse Helpline</b>		Contact the HSELive. Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm Saturday and Sunday: 9am to 5pm Freephone: 1800 700 700	
<b>Galway Traveller Movement</b>	Full equality, social justice and human rights realised for members of the Traveller community, and meaningful participation of Travellers in social, economic, political and cultural life.	091- 765390 Email: info@gtmtrav.ie	To challenge discrimination and racism experienced by the Traveller community in Galway city and county; to challenge the status quo and to empower members of the Traveller community to take action to realise Traveller rights.
<b>Sexual Health West</b>	Education, Support and Information Service offering the highest quality care and support to those affected by HIV/AIDS/STIs and to those worried about their sexual health.	Galway City Partnership, 3, The Plaza, Headford Road, Galway City.  091-773466 info@gcp.ie www.gcp.ie	Support for the Unemployed We offer training, employment and self employment.  Support for Communities We work to promote the social inclusion of the most marginalised in our society and do so through working in specific geographic communities and with identified communities of interest.  Support Through Education From Pre-school to Adult Education Galway City Partnership offers programmes and supports to young people and Adult learners.
<b>Galway Rural Development</b>	Galway Rural Development (GRD) is a local development company that administers the Social Inclusion Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP), LEADER, the Rural Social Scheme (RSS), and TÚS Programme.	Galway Rural Development Mellows Campus, Dublin Road, Athenry, County Galway 091-844335 info@grd.ie http://www.grd.ie/	GRD provides support for individuals, communities and businesses through one to one support, capacity building, education and training, funding for equipment and capital works.
<b>Forum Connemara</b>	FORUM Connemara is a local development company, supporting Community, Rural Development and the Local Environment.	FORUM Connemara CLG Ellis Hall, Letterfrack, Connemara, Co. Galway, Ireland, H91CD45. info@forumconnemara.ie +353 (0)95 41116 www.forumconnemara.ie	Agencies including the Rural Development Programme (LEADER 1420), the Adolescent Support Programme, the Rural Recreational Programme, the Rural Social Scheme and Labour activation programmes Tús, Job Initiative, and Community Employment, North Connemara Locally Led Agri-Environmental Scheme (EIP) and the Ability Programme.

## SERVICE AVAILABLE NATIONALLY

IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER: **GARDAI 1112/ 999**

**Women's Aid** National Freephone 24 hour helpline: 1800 341 900

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

Language Interpretation Service 24 hour helpline 1800 341 900

Women's Aid Online Chat Mon, Weds, Fri, 7-10pm

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

For deaf and hard of hearing women text 087 959 7980

**Safelreland:** Information about local domestic abuse support services and refuges

Ormond Building, 307, 31-36 Ormond Quay Upper, Dublin, D07 N5YH

090 6479078 [info@safelreland.ie](mailto:info@safelreland.ie)

### **Rape Crisis Network**

The National 24-Hour Freephone Rape Crisis Helpline 1800 77 88 88

### **Men's Aid**

(01) 5543811

<https://www.mensaid.ie>

[hello@mensaid.ie](mailto:hello@mensaid.ie)

National Confidential Helpline – 01 554 3811

### **Men's Development Network** - Male Advice Line

1800 816 588

[men@mens-network.net](mailto:men@mens-network.net)

### **MOVE (Men Overcoming Violence)**

GALWAY, SLIGO, MIDLANDS (ATHLONE) · (085) 8748108

<http://www.moveireland.ie/>

[move@moveireland.ie](mailto:move@moveireland.ie)

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## KINDLY FUNDED BY CYPSC





NOTES :

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One in four women in Ireland will be abused  
by their partner at some stage in their lives.

These women come from all walks of life –  
they are not a particular kind of woman,  
not a particular age or race,  
they are not from a particular place,  
with a particular income, they do not have  
a particular faith or career.

They are just women.

***When you're ready to talk, We're ready to listen.***

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