



## Categories and Examples of Abusive Behavior

### **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse describes any kind of unwanted physical contact or proximity. It includes getting into someone's physical comfort zone, even without touching them, and even if there is no injury or physical discomfort. Physical abuse can also describe being physically controlling. For example, you could pin your partner against the wall by their shoulders without causing physical harm or physical pain, but they could still be terrified and emotionally hurt. For those reasons, it would qualify as physical abuse. Note that this is much broader than the legal definition of physical abuse.

Examples:

Blocking someone (even without touching them)	Choking
Grabbing someone	Hitting
Holding someone when they do not want to be held	Kicking
Moving someone against their will	Pinching
Poking	Pulling hair
Punching	Restraining someone
Shaking someone	Slapping
Throwing things at someone	

### **Verbal abuse**

Verbal abuse involved hurtful or disrespectful words and tone of voice.

Examples:

Demeaning comments	Name-calling
Put-downs	Tearing a person apart with words
Swearing at them (unless both have agreed that this is an acceptable way to communicate)	
Yelling or screaming	

### **Psychological abuse**

Psychological abuse involves nonverbal and nonphysical ways of being hurtful toward another. This can be quite subtle and is often characterized by facial expressions, gestures, and other body language.

Examples:

Contempt	Intense looks
Facial expressions that are intimidating or disrespectful	
Gestures that are disrespectful (e.g., flipping someone off, shaking your fist at them)	
Radiating intensity	Stares
The silent treatment	

### **Property abuse**

Property abuse refers to mishandling property out of anger, regardless of whether it belongs to you or you do any damage to it.

Examples:

Banging on things  
Hitting things  
Punching walls  
Throwing things

Breaking things  
Kicking things  
Slamming doors

### **Financial abuse**

Financial abuse involves mishandling money, finances, or financial agreements. It is most common when there are shared finances or living arrangements.

Examples:

Being under-involved in financial decisions	Denying money for basic needs
Controlling the partner's use of the car	Dividing the financial responsibility unfairly
Destroying or damaging the partner's property	Failing to acknowledge the family's needs
Dismissing the partner's math or financial-management skills	
Imposing their financial values on their partner	Giving the partner an allowance
Keeping hidden accounts or hiding money	Limiting access to finances
Lying about finances	Making secret purchases
Making unilateral economic decisions	Not honoring their financial obligations
Not paying child or spousal support	Not sharing domestic expenses
Referring to "my" money versus "our" money	Refusing to get a job
Registering assets in one name	Requiring their partner to get a job
Scrutinizing their partner's spending	Setting the financial agenda alone
Spending excessively	Undervaluing domestic work
Undermining their partner's financial decisions	
Throwing out or giving away their partner's property	
Using higher income as leverage	Whining, complaining, badgering
Withholding financial information	

### **Examples of behaviors that interfere with your partner's ability to work outside the home:**

- Being dismissive about your partner's abilities
- Harassing your partner about being away from home
- Isolating your partner from a support network that could enable them to work
- Keeping your partner from getting a job
- Restricting your partner's access to transportation
- Restricting your partner's educational development
- Sabotaging their job or doing things that could get your partner fired
- Taking actions to prevent your partner from getting a job

## **Sexual abuse**

Any kind of unwanted sexual contact or interaction.

Key quality of non-sexually abusive behavior: **On-going uncoerced informed consent**

Examples:

Verbal sexual abuse

Unwanted sexual comments

    Being flirtatious

    Making seductive comments

    Offering sexual compliments

    Speculating out loud about their sexual ability

    Talking about ways you would like to be sexual

Sexual pressuring

Badgering the other for sex

Disrespecting sexual boundaries

Retribution for setting a sexual boundary

Infidelity

Violating sexual agreements

    Masturbation

    Pornography/erotica use

    Sexual fantasies

    Looking at/interacting with others sexually

Physically forcing sexual contact

Sexual contact with an intoxicated person

Sexual contact with an unconscious person

Taking advantage of their power

Using sex to manipulate their partner

## **Collateral abuse**

When people who are not the intended target of the abuse are exposed to it and negatively affected by it. Children in the family are the primary victims of collateral abuse.

Examples: Children and others who . . .

are physically present during the abuse

overhear the abuse

witness or overhear the effects of the abuse (like sobbing or physical injuries)

witness abusive outbursts (like yelling at the television or video game)

see destroyed or damaged property

are in the car during a road rage incident

Excerpted from *Becoming Allies . . . With Your Partner, Yourself, and Others: Addressing the Abuse and Control in Your Relationships* by Chris Huffine