

Tip Sheet:

Safety at Home

Important: If you are experiencing abuse from a partner or family member, be careful bringing this information home or reading about the topic online. You might see if a trusted friend can keep this material for you. Plan ahead and know whom you can call for help.

Safety at home means being safe from harm in your personal relationships. It can also mean being safe from violence in your neighborhood and community.

What is abuse?

Domestic abuse, also called domestic violence, is abuse that happens in a personal relationship. It is not the same as an occasional argument. It is a pattern of behavior in which a partner, relative, or someone else close to you tries to control your thoughts or actions. It may include emotional, physical, sexual, financial, or spiritual abuse.

What you may be feeling and experiencing

Does your partner/relative regularly...

- Embarrass you with put-downs?
- Blame you for everything that goes wrong?
- Make you feel afraid or worthless?
- Control what you do or where you go every day?
- Keep you from going to appointments?
- Prevent or make it difficult for you to talk to friends or family members?
- Hit, shove, kick, choke, restrain, or otherwise hurt you?
- Threaten to hurt you, your children, or your pets?
- Threaten to commit suicide?
- Force you to have sex against your will?
- Control your ability to spend money?

If any of these things are happening, you may be in an abusive relationship. It can be hard to ask for help, but help is available. Abuse is not your fault, and you are not alone. Everyone deserves to be safe.

We at Dana-Farber are here to support you. If you think you might be in an abusive relationship but aren't sure or think it is "not that bad," your care team can help you understand what is happening. Let your care team know if you don't feel safe at home. They can work with you on a plan to help protect you and other loved ones.

Some facts about domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a major problem in the United States. 1 in 4 women (24.3%) and 1 in 7 men (13.8%) age 18 and older in the U.S. has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in his/her lifetime, according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

- Domestic abuse affects people of any gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status, although women are most often affected.
- Living in an abusive relationship can cause long-lasting health problems, such as depression, headaches, chronic pain, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Domestic violence also affects children's health and safety.
- Once abuse starts, it usually gets worse unless steps are taken to stop it.
- There are many reasons why people stay in abusive relationships, including fear, shame, love, lack of resources, and believing that abuse is normal.

Domestic abuse does not stop when someone in the home has cancer. In fact, a person with cancer could be at greater risk for injury from an abuser. You may depend on your partner/relative for help with cancer medications, transportation, or childcare. Or you may be weak, sore, or tired as a result of cancer treatment and therefore more vulnerable to abuse. Your partner/relative may resent that you cannot keep up with daily tasks, or that you are getting more attention than usual from friends, family, and others.

What you can do

There are many resources and people you can talk to for information and support. You do not have to leave a relationship to use these services.

- If you are in immediate danger, call **911**. If you are at Dana-Farber, call Security at **617-632-3131**.
- **Passageway:** A free, confidential program offered at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) for individuals who have experienced abuse in a personal relationship. Passageway provides a safe place to talk, safety planning, counseling, medical and legal support, and referrals. The service is available weekdays, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Call the program 617-732-8753, or call BWH page operator at 617-732-6660 and ask for pager #31808** to speak with a staff member.
- **Social Work:** Licensed clinical social workers at Dana-Farber offer professional counseling and advocacy for patients and families facing cancer. Call **617-632-3301** or ask your medical team.
- **Spiritual Care:** Dana-Farber chaplains provide emotional and spiritual support to patients and families of many different faiths during the cancer journey. Call 617-632-3908 or ask your medical team.

These toll-free domestic violence hotlines have specially trained staff available 24/7:

- SafeLink in Massachusetts: **Call 877-785-2020 or 877-521-2601 TTY** (for hearing-impaired). **www.casamyrna.org**
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: Call **800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233)** or 800-787-3224 (TTY). Available in English, Spanish, and other languages. **www.thehotline.org**

Other things you can do:

- Talk with someone you trust (friend, relative, clergy, etc.) about the options you may have.
- Work with someone to develop a plan for staying safe in potentially dangerous situations.
- Memorize phone numbers to call in an emergency.
- Be aware of high-risk situations, like drinking, threats, and having a gun around.
- Teach children how to call for help in an emergency, and to not get in the middle of a fight.
- You can obtain a protective order (restraining order) through the courts that legally requires the abuser to stay away from you.
- Keep all important documents (passports, driver's licenses, IDs etc.) in a safe place that you can easily find. This might be with a trusted friend or relative. You can make copies of these documents if you don't want to move the originals.

Remember that your Dana-Farber care team is here to support you.

Domestic abuse versus caregiver stress

Caring for someone with cancer can be stressful for anyone. There is a difference between domestic abuse—a pattern of controlling behavior that can be emotionally damaging and violent—and normal caregiver stress when a loved one is dealing with a serious illness like cancer. But if stress is ongoing or getting worse, a caregiver may have more difficulty managing it. If you are concerned and notice changes in your caregiver's mood or behavior, please let someone on your health care team know.

What is community violence?

You may feel unsafe because of violence in your neighborhood and community. This might affect how you travel to and from your appointments at Dana-Farber, or your feeling of safety when you are home. Your care team can help with safety planning or refer you to experts on community violence. Sometimes talking about your safety concerns can be helpful.

One local resource is the Violence Recovery Program at BWH, which offers help to patients and families who have experienced community violence. This service works with organizations and programs in the community and provides crisis intervention, safety planning, counseling, and other support to help with physical, emotional, and spiritual healing after traumatic events. To reach a Violence Recovery Specialist, call 617-721-6034 and ask for pager #32063 to receive a call back. For more information, please email the program at violenceintervention@partners.org. A staff member will reach out to you within 24 hours.

Computer and Internet Access

To access the internet during your visits to Dana-Farber (Longwood), consider using one of the free computer workstations in the Blum Patient and Family Resource Center, or borrow an iPad from the Shapiro Center for Patients and Families. Both centers are on the first floor of the Yawkey Center.

This document is for informational purposes only. The content is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.