

DOMESTIC ABUSE RESOURCE

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is not limited to punching or visible injuries. Blocking an exit, restraining someone, throwing objects, dangerous driving and using physical force to make a person comply can all matter.

■ WHAT IT IS

Physical abuse is the intentional use of force, restraint or physical intimidation against a current or former partner. It may be a single assault, repeated violence, or one part of a wider pattern of power and control.

LOOK FOR THE PATTERN

Look beyond the single incident. Ask whether physical intimidation is becoming more frequent, more severe, easier to trigger, or connected to threats, stalking, sexual pressure, isolation or financial control.

■ THREE SIGNALS WORTH NOTICING

REPEATS

It keeps happening.

ESCALATES

The impact or consequences grow.

RESTRICTS

Freedom, safety or choice gets smaller.

A single incident can be confusing. Repetition, escalation and reduced freedom are often what make the wider pattern easier to see.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

One incident can be confusing. The pattern shows what life is becoming.

CONTINUE → WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

RECOGNIZE THE BEHAVIOR

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

These examples are not a checklist or a diagnosis. The context matters: frequency, fear, consequences, escalation and whether one person is losing ordinary freedom or choice.

- Hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, scratching or strangling.
- Driving dangerously, abandoning someone somewhere, or preventing them from leaving safely.
- Pushing, grabbing, pinning down, restraining or blocking a doorway or vehicle.
- Withholding sleep, food, medication, mobility aids or access to necessary medical care.
- Throwing objects, smashing property nearby, punching walls or using physical intimidation.
- Hurting pets, children or other people as a way to frighten or punish a partner.
- Using or displaying a weapon to frighten, injure or force compliance.
- Using size, strength or proximity to make disagreement feel physically unsafe.

■ READ THE BEHAVIOR IN CONTEXT

ONE EVENT

Ask what happened in that moment and whether there was fear, force, pressure or intimidation.

THE PATTERN

Then ask what has been happening across weeks or months, especially when the other person resists or says no.

The useful question is not only “Did this happen?” It is “What does this behavior do to the other person over time?”

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Context matters. Notice what happens when a boundary is set.

CONTINUE → PATTERNS TO NOTICE

SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE

PATTERNS TO NOTICE

Patterns are often easier to recognize when you stop judging each incident separately. Look at what repeats, what escalates, what creates fear and what choices are gradually disappearing.

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| ■ You change what you say or do because you are trying to prevent another physical incident. | ■ Physical force begins to appear during smaller disagreements or with less warning. |
| ■ Violence is followed by apologies, affection or promises, but the behavior later returns. | ■ You are afraid of what may happen if you leave, disagree, seek help or tell someone. |
| ■ Injuries or property damage are minimized, explained away or blamed on you. | ■ The person uses physical acts to reinforce a broader message: “I decide what happens here.” |

■ WHY IT MATTERS

Physical abuse can cause injury, chronic pain, disability, trauma and fear. Some serious injuries can occur with few obvious external marks. Strangulation, head injury, loss of consciousness, breathing problems and escalating weapon threats warrant particular concern and medical attention.

MYTH

“If there are no bruises, it was not serious.”

REALITY

Visible injury is not the test. Physical force, restraint and intimidation can be dangerous even when marks are limited or absent.

Healthy relationships can include conflict, mistakes and disagreement. The concern is a repeated pattern that creates fear, removes autonomy or changes behavior through pressure or control.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Look at the pattern: what repeats, escalates or changes behavior?

CONTINUE → CASE STUDY & PRACTICAL STEPS

ANONYMOUS COMPOSITE EXAMPLE

CASE STUDY

This composite combines common patterns and is written to protect privacy. It is not presented as one identifiable person or investigation.

A person described their partner as someone who had “never really hit” them. During arguments, their partner stood in doorways so they could not leave, grabbed their wrists, shoved them into furniture and threw objects close to them. The next day, their partner would apologize and say they had only lost control because they were pushed too far. Over time, the person stopped disagreeing in person, kept their keys close and avoided rooms with only one exit. They still hesitated to call it physical abuse because there were no regular bruises and they had never been punched.

■ WHAT TO NOTICE

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| ■
The behavior is doing more than expressing anger; it is changing the other partner’s freedom and choices. | ■
Blocking exits, grabbing, shoving and throwing objects are part of a physical pattern even without repeated punching. | ■
Apologies do not erase the pattern when intimidation and force continue. |
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■ IF THIS IS HAPPENING

- Prioritize immediate safety over confronting the person or proving what happened.
- Consider medical assessment after strangulation, head injury, loss of consciousness, breathing problems or significant pain.
- If it is safe, preserve photos, dates, messages, medical information or details you may want later.
- Tell a trusted person or a qualified domestic violence professional what has been happening, including escalation and threats.
- If leaving or setting a boundary may increase danger, consider safety planning before making a major change.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

**You do not need to explain away every incident before you are allowed to take a pattern seriously.
Notice what repeats, what changes your behavior, and what happens when you set a boundary.**