

Abuse is common and sometimes begins or increases during pregnancy and after delivery.

The facts about abuse & pregnancy:

- Abuse happens to women from all walks of life: from every race, culture, age group, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class.
- 1 in 3 women will experience abuse in her lifetime. Many women report that abuse began or got worse during pregnancy.
- Abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional, economic, psychological, and/or sexual.
- Abuse is four times more likely to occur if the pregnancy was unwanted.
- Women who are physically abused are more likely to experience premature birth.
- Women with a controlling or threatening partner are more likely to experience perinatal or postpartum depression.
- Pregnant and recently pregnant women in Maryland are more likely to be victims of homicide than to die of any other cause.



Your relationship can affect your pregnancy and the health of your baby. Help is available.

Talk with your health care provider. Medical visits are an opportunity to reach out for support. You might use your providers' phone to privately call a hotline for additional resources and support.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(24/7 toll-free support)
1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233)
TTY 1-800-787-3224

Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence
(Can connect you with local programs)
1-800-MD HELPS (1-800-634-3577)
www.mnadv.org

Call 911 if you are in immediate danger.

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For copies of this brochure:
call 410-539-0872 or email dvcoalition@medchi.org

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Safe and healthy babies...



start with safe & healthy moms!





The Myths

“I’m not abused – he’s never hit me.”

Abuse can be verbal, emotional, economic, psychological, and/or sexual. It’s important to know that emotional abuse alone can impact your health and often leads to physical abuse. Forcing you to get pregnant or withholding birth control is abuse.

“I’ll be safer while I’m pregnant.”

Many women report that the first domestic assault occurred during pregnancy. Abuse during pregnancy often focuses on the genitals, breasts, and abdominal area.

“He changed so much after I got pregnant. Am I doing something wrong?”

No. Many women feel as though they have done something to cause the abuse, but no one deserves to be mistreated. Your partner may be feeling under pressure or may feel threatened and/or jealous that your attention is going to your pregnancy or baby. Feelings like this can be dealt with in a healthy way, and are no excuse for abusive behavior.

“Things will settle down once the baby comes.”

It’s true that becoming a parent can be stressful, but stress does not make a person abusive. Abuse generally gets worse when baby arrives.

“My kids don’t know about the abuse, and it doesn’t seem to affect them.”

Children who grow up with domestic violence often develop physical and/or emotional problems, even if they never directly witness the violence or abuse. Parents who abuse their partners often hit their children too. Some also sexually abuse children.

“I’m not ready to leave my partner, so hotlines and domestic violence shelters can’t help me.”

Many domestic violence programs offer lots of different services besides shelter, including safety planning, supportive counseling, 24-hour crisis hotlines, referrals, support groups, legal advocacy, etc., all of which can help you be safer while you are still in the relationship.

Abuse during pregnancy can lead to many medical complications, and endangers the lives of both you and your growing baby.

If you experience physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse while you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of:

- Preterm labor
- Miscarriage or stillbirth
- Injury to your uterus
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), during pregnancy and postpartum
- Bleeding during pregnancy
- High blood pressure
- Anemia
- Difficulty eating a healthy diet or getting adequate sleep
- Tobacco, alcohol, and drug use
- Death



Abuse also increases your baby’s risk of:

- Low birth weight
- Preterm delivery
- Injuries, infections, and other health problems
- Difficulty sleeping and feeding
- Difficulty being calmed or comforted
- Difficulty learning to walk and talk
- Difficulty attaching to caregivers
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Depression, anxiety, and behavior problems
- Death

Abuse can affect you and your baby, and also your relationship with one another. To have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby, you need to be free of violence and fear.

Are you and your baby safe?

Has your partner ever:

- Hit, kicked, strangled (choked), or otherwise hurt or threatened you?
- Tried to harm your baby by hitting, kicking or pushing your stomach?
- Threatened to try to end your pregnancy? Blamed you for being pregnant? Demanded that you get an abortion?
- Forced you to have sex or get pregnant when you didn’t want to? Refused to use a condom when you wanted him to?
- Called you names? Insulted you?
- Threatened to kill you or your baby if you leave? Threatened to take your baby after birth? Threatened suicide?
- Tried to control how you care for yourself and your baby? Prevented you from going to prenatal or medical visits for your children?
- Tried to keep you from seeing your family and friends? Taken your phone? Constantly called or texted to see where you were?
- Blamed you for problems with the relationship? Accused you of cheating? Questioned the paternity of your baby?
- Destroyed your things? Hurt or killed your pets? Done other things that make you feel afraid?

If your answer is ‘yes’ to any of these questions, the safety of you and your child(ren) may be at risk.

No one deserves to be abused.
Talk to your health care provider.
Help is available.

Protect yourself and your baby.

Talk to your health care provider.

You and your baby deserve to be safe.