

how  
to deal  
with

# Domestic Abuse

A self-help book for men who want to change



**MEND**  
Men Ending Domestic Abuse



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## What's Happening In Your Life?

"I had a great job, great social life and a great family life... or so I thought.

Recently, right out of the blue my wife, Mary told me that if I didn't stop treating her badly that she'd leave.

I hadn't really been that honest with myself. I tried to convince myself it was all in Mary's mind and that this would all blow over. But then I could see how withdrawn Mary was and how it had started to effect my son, Matt.

The best thing I could do was to be more aware of how I was treating Mary. I may not be hitting her but I know that I have been trying to control her and I want to stop."

Adrian [40 years]

### If you're reading this booklet, it's probably because:

- you're worried about how your behaviour is effecting your children or you've seen your own behaviour in your kids;
- you're feeling pretty bad about some things you've said or done to your partner;
- you're worried she might leave you; or
- she's just left you and you're worried she won't come back.

Adrian got the help he needed. But before he went looking for help, he needed to recognise that he had to make a change. Perhaps you are going through something like what Adrian experienced.

Adrian realised that his behaviour towards Mary was abusive, despite the fact that he hadn't hit her it didn't mean he wouldn't in the future. He saw that Mary and Matt were becoming more withdrawn. Mary had said that if Adrian's behaviour did not change she would leave him and Adrian believed her.

All couples disagree and argue from time to time. Adrian and Mary were no exception. But when Adrian was prepared to abuse Mary in order to get what he wanted a major change had happened.

### What's happening in your life right now?

Perhaps you have recently hurt your partner? Maybe she has left you? You might be overwhelmed by feelings of anger, guilt, loss, fear of a future without her. Do you worry about the effect of your violence on your kids?

Perhaps you haven't hurt your partner but are worried that you will.

### If you are worried ask yourself these few important questions

1. Do you often call her names and constantly criticise her?
2. Have you tried to keep her from doing something that she wanted to do? Like going out with friends, having a job or doing some study.
3. Do you take charge with the finances - not allowing your partner money for her own personal use?
4. Have you ever thrown, or threatened to throw, something at her?
5. Have you unfairly accused your partner of paying too much attention to someone else?
6. Have you ever slapped, hit, pushed or shoved her?
7. Do you ever pressure her to have sex when she doesn't want to?

The stories outlined here represent real issues in the lives of those affected by domestic abuse. Real names have been changed.

“I work hard, usually 10 or 12 hour days. I look forward to catching up with my mates when I am not working. Maybe I enjoy catching up with them too much. Well that’s what my girlfriend Sinead tells me.

She also tells me I’m selfish, thoughtless and not interested in her or the kids. I find it difficult to handle the stress sometimes.

I know I get angry with her too easily, I know its time to sort things out, so that I can be sure Sinead won’t dump me for a better bloke. I owe it to her AND I owe it to myself.”

**Rory** [24 years]

## **If you want your relationship with your partner and children to be without fear of abuse, here are some ideas to start with:**

- There may be a whole range of things which you and your partner don’t agree on. None of those issues are as important as the need to remove fear from the relationship. You cannot resolve those other issues until your partner feels safe to discuss them with you.
- You may want to blame others for what is happening to you. This is not going to help you. Focus on what you can do differently, NOT what others should do differently.
- Lasting change takes time. If your partner and children are frightened of you it will take considerable time before they recognise the change in you and begin to feel safe. Accept that this cannot be rushed, or achieved overnight.

Above all else...

**If you’ve made a concrete decision to change your behaviour, you have taken an important step, you have just made it over the first difficult hurdle! It has taken a great deal of courage for you to get this far.**

This booklet will provide you with some information and ideas that could help you make the changes you need to make.

Other men, like Adrian and Rory have been down a similar path. We’ve included some of their experiences.

Many men who are abusive to their partners describe feeling angry and needing to stay in control, even when not around their partner. If this is happening to you then you know how uncomfortable, exhausting and terrible this feels.

In this booklet we use the term “domestic abuse” rather than “domestic violence” because we are dealing with a pattern of controlling behaviour that may include physical violence but can also include sexual, verbal, social, economic, psychological and emotional abuse.

More on this on page 9.

# 2

## How Are You Feeling?

“If someone knocked on the door when I was pushing Nicola around, I would instantly become Mr. Nice Guy, but the second they left, I would start exactly where I had left off.

Steve [37 years]

“Taking time to reflect, time out, is one of the best skills to become more aware of my own behaviour.

Sinead and I can now discuss our problems in a more open way.

She seems less frightened of me.

I have noticed that my relationship with my son has also improved.”

Rory [24 years]

Many men who are abusive report feeling helpless because they want to change but feel they can't do it by themselves. At times they feel overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, shame and remorse as they see the look of fear and hurt in the faces of their loved ones.

Partners of men who are abusive report that they feel like they are walking on eggshells, monitoring everything they say, living in fear of what sort of mood their partner comes home in.

Research is now showing the severe effects of domestic abuse on children. Children who witness domestic abuse may display nervous and withdrawn behaviour, poor school performance, adjustment problems, bed wetting and aggressive language and behaviour.

Some people think that men who have behaved in violent and abusive ways must be mentally ill or 'crazy'. Sometimes the men themselves think this. But the majority of men who are abusive to their partners are, in all other respects, leading normal lives. Most are not abusive or controlling outside the home. They choose when, where and how they are violent or abusive.

## We all have Choices



# 3

## How Does Your Behaviour Effect Others?

Children know how they feel inside but may find it hard to tell adults because they may be too frightened or, because they do not know how to put their feelings into words.

Children are powerless to stop the abuse happening and have little choice but to live with it until one of the adults makes a decision to leave or change. The home is usually the place where a child feels safest, but unfortunately sometimes it is the place where a child feels the most fear.

You may think domestic abuse involves only two people - you and your partner, but it impacts on everyone in the family, particularly your children. Some people think that children don't worry about people fighting at home - that they'll soon forget things they see, like mum being hit or parents screaming and yelling at each other. Children don't forget! They suffer considerable harm from living with violence and abuse. Some children, particularly older ones, will intervene and try to help their mother and may try to restrain the abusive partner. Others will be stunned into silence by what they see.

Children tend to see the world as revolving around them. They may feel the abuse is their fault - that they have caused it. They may feel guilty and confused about loving their father while at the same time not liking the abuse.

### Changes in your Child's Behaviour

Have you noticed that your child or children have begun to display any of the following behaviours?

- greater anxiety
- a nervous and withdrawn manner and attitude
- adjustment problems – like having few interests, few social activities and low school performance
- bed wetting
- restlessness
- illnesses including headaches, abdominal complaints, asthma and stuttering
- cruelty to animals
- using aggressive language and behaviour in their play
- running away from home.

# How Does Your Behaviour Effect Others?

“Then I was asked by Matt’s school teacher if everything was OK at home. Matt’s teacher was concerned about his behaviour over the past term at school. She explained that he was no longer interested in doing well in exams and she had noticed that he was quite disruptive in class. This got me thinking... just how much my behaviour affected my son?”  
Adrian [40 years]

Young children learn by observing how adults deal with their problems. If parents deal with disagreements and conflict by shouting and yelling, then that is what children learn. If children are punished by being beaten or hit, or see this happening to their mother, then that is what they learn, and believe is the right or “normal” thing to do.

Patterns of violence or abuse are learned early on and can become a pattern for life. As children grow up and enter relationships of their own, they behave in the way they have learned. In this way, abusive behaviour is passed on from one generation to the next.

Taking responsibility for your own behaviour and doing something about it means that you have a good chance of breaking this pattern.

**A whole new generation of children, including your own sons and daughters will benefit from the choices YOU make now.**





# 4

## Where Do You Fit In?

“Yeah, there have definitely been times when I knew Nicola was not interested in having sex. Oh I’d try to persuade her - if this didn’t work, I’d get angry and start yelling at her... sometimes I’d grab her by the neck and threaten her... I realise now I have no right to demand sex from my wife. No wonder she left me.

It was like I needed to own her. She was mine and everything seemed right when she was around doing things how I wanted them. I realise now that, that is not what being together is about.”

Steve [37 years]

“I never stopped to think how difficult I had made it for Mary to catch up with friends and have a life of her own. I now realise how much I would control her, which made Mary terribly lonely and isolated - for the past 5 years.”

Adrian [40 years]

**Domestic abuse is more than just about hitting. It is considered to be behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victims to live in fear.**

Domestic abuse takes many forms. These include:

### **Physical Abuse**

Punching, choking, hitting, pushing, shoving, throwing objects, smashing objects, damaging property, injuring pets and the threat of all of these.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Demands for sexual intercourse when one person does not wish to participate, threats of physical violence during sex, or forcing a person to participate in acts she/he does not wish to perform.

### **Verbal Abuse**

Continued verbal harassment, put downs, insults, name calling and swearing.

### **Social Abuse**

Not allowing your partner to have friends, isolating your partner from family, denying them access to the car or telephone.

### **Economic Abuse**

One person takes total control of the family income so that the other person is either allowed no money or money only for household expenses and nothing for personal use.

### **Psychological and Emotional Abuse**

This may include verbal abuse. It occurs most often in the form of humiliation, threats, insults, harassment or constant criticism.

**Think back to a situation where you were afraid of someone... Really frightened that you might have been hurt, perhaps both physically and emotionally. Now imagine having to go home and sleep with that person. Is this what it's like for your partner?**

# 5

## You're More In Control Than You Think

Men who have been abusive to their partners may describe themselves as being out of control when the abuse happens. Yet many men have described how they can turn off their behaviour when there are other people around.

You all have a lot more control over your behaviour than you perhaps give yourself credit for. In the heat of the moment you may not be aware of the choices you make, but you nevertheless make them. You choose the way you speak and act with other people. Even when you are very angry or distressed, the choice is still there as to whether to be abusive or to find another way to deal with the situation.

In this section we'll talk about how to control or manage anger. The techniques described will help you if you are prepared to use them. They won't cure an anger problem since the only way to do this is to get down to why you are angry in the first place (we do this deeper work in the MEND Programme). **For now you need to concentrate on: What can I do to control my angry behaviour? Recognising when tension is building.**

The key to preventing an explosion of anger is being able to see it coming. In doing so you have the chance to respond to it differently. You must know your signs.

Typically people experience:

- **Muscular tension** - particularly a tightening in the stomach, neck and face
- A surge of **adrenalin**
- Increased **heart rate**

Of course a raised voice or shouting is an obvious sign, but anger can be silent, intense and seething. Think about what happens to you when your anger is building.

### Self Talk

If you get in early enough you will be able to talk yourself down. Research and experience has shown that by keeping a simple self-talk message or messages in your head, ready to be pulled out at a moment's notice, you can prevent explosions of anger.

### Self Talk

Examples that people have used include:

I must control myself not her.

How is getting angry going to help here? (If it leads to violence it will make things worse)

Do I still want to be in this same situation in 10 years time.

I don't need to feel threatened here. I can relax and stay cool.

Time out is one of the best skills I have learnt to help control my temper. Sinead and I can now discuss our problems without me getting aggressive and the situation erupting. I have noticed that my relationship with my kids has also improved.  
Rory [24 years]

## Time Out

If self talk has not been successful in bringing you down you must then use time out. Time out must be taken every time you feel emotional and physical tension building to the point of a possible explosion of anger. By taking “time out” from potentially dangerous situations men show that they are able to defuse themselves or remove themselves before they allow situations to go too far.

Talk to your partner as soon as possible about using time out. Seek her agreement that she will accept your use of time out. However, time out must not be used as a means to avoid important issues in your relationship. You must undertake to come back when calm to discuss the issue, or make a time to discuss it (for example when you are sober, with a counsellor, etc.)

Do not return unless you are confident you can be calm. If you find you cannot be calm leave again.

**When you take time out do not drink, take drugs or drive. Sit quietly or go for a walk, or jog.**

## Feeling Overwhelmed and Scared of Losing Control?

If you’ve just separated from your partner or your relationship is close to separation, you will almost certainly be feeling highly distressed, maybe completely overwhelmed by your feelings. Now is a high-risk time for abuse.

### **The decisions you make now about how you will behave are very important for the future.**

Your abusive behaviour will have ongoing effects. If you are violent or abusive now, this will reduce your chances of working things out with your partner and will also impact on arrangements over contact with kids or property if things don’t work out with your partner.

“If you are feeling overwhelmed you must find immediate support from friends, family, professional counsellor or recognised intervention programme, e.g., MEND. Be honest with those you trust about how distressed you feel and don’t blame your partner. This first step to recovery is taking responsibility for your behaviour. This is not a sign of weakness. Needing support at times like this is natural and normal.

Consider taking extended time out from the situation. Going away to stay with a friend can help. You may feel like taking some time off work. Taking

# You're More In Control Than You Think

this time off may be hard to organise, but remember there is nothing more important right now than looking after yourself. This will give you time to reflect on your behaviour and how it is effecting your family.

It is important that Steve gives Nicola space and no matter how desperate he feels he accepts that their relationship may be over. Rory is in a different situation and has the opportunity to become more aware of the impact of his actions on Sinead and the kids. Adrian is still trying to get his head around the sorts of things that he has done for such a long time that he now knows are abusive behaviours. Mary is really willing to give Adrian a go but he must be genuine or she will leave.

## What Can I Do to be More Aware of How I am Treating my Partner?

Did you know that when you criticise and put your partner down, you attack those things that are important to her, that make her special? These are also the same things that you admire about her when you are not bullying her.

By being nasty, mean, cruel and vindictive or by using personal information to hurt your partner you are seriously damaging your relationship and undermining the trust. Trust is the most important ingredient for maintaining a close, intimate relationship.

Emotional abuse comes in many forms and is always destructive. Always think about what you are really trying to do. Be honest with yourself. Even if others can't tell that you are hurting your partner by what you are saying or how you are treating her, you know.

Be honest with yourself, are you really trying to make her feel bad, to feel less than you? The result of your abuse will be that your partner will most likely distance herself from you to protect herself from being hurt. Is this what you want?

When you find yourself wanting to hurt your partner, by using cruel and hurtful words or by criticising her in a way that you know will hurt...STOP!

Take five slow deep breaths.....  
.....THINK!

Do I want to hurt the person who matters most to me?  
.....FOCUS!

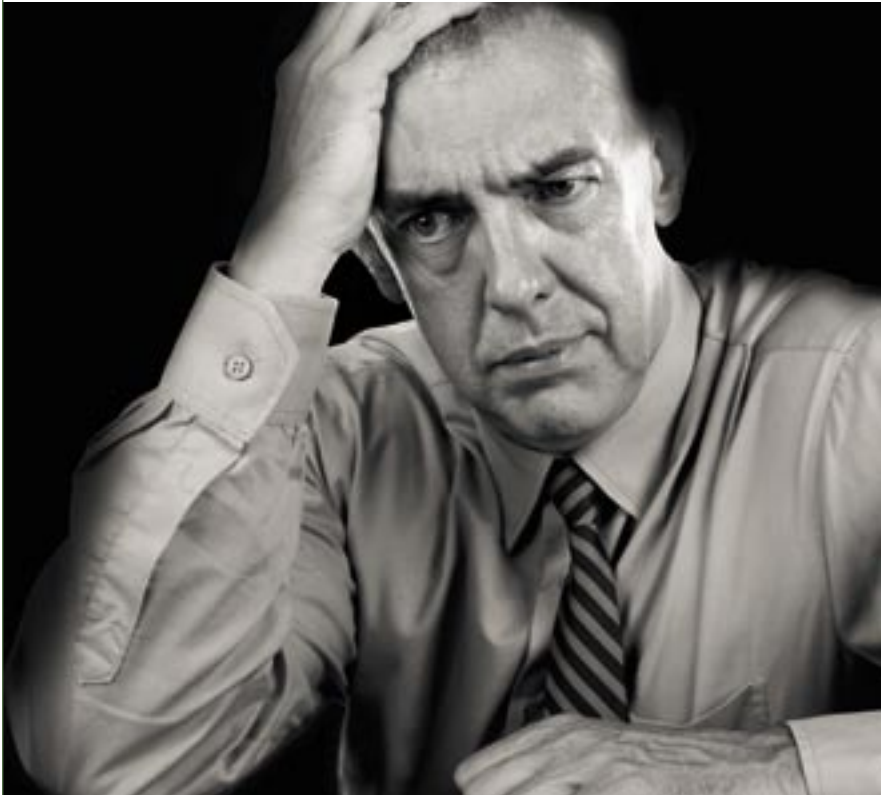
Control of myself, not control by hurting the people I love.

# 6

## Where Are You Heading?

**If abuse in relationships is ignored, things continue to get worse. Sooner or later it happens again... and again... and again...**

You may recognise that you go through cycles with your behaviour. Your partner may also be aware of these cycles. You may find yourself buying flowers or presents for your partner, writing letters, promising it won't happen again. Promising you will change. Then the abuse begins again and another cycle starts.



# 7

## Why Does Domestic Abuse Happen?

I'd get home from work - exhausted. Sinead would ask me why I was late and then ask me to spend some time with the kids before dinner so they wouldn't forget who their father was. To me she was nagging - if it wasn't one thing it was another.

Rory [24 years]

I really had never given it much thought before I started going to the MEND Programme. We talked about how abusive behaviour can be much more than hitting our partners. It isn't just physical violence that guys use to control their partners. I wouldn't give her money or even let her see her friends. I realised the way I was controlling Mary's life was making her feel like she was going crazy.

Adrian [40 years]

There is considerable pressure in society for men to be strong, to be the provider, to be powerful. When someone has grown up with these ideas of what 'men are like', it may be difficult for them to change. Historically women were viewed as subservient to men. In the early nineteenth century it was legal for a man to beat his wife, provided he did not use a stick broader than his thumb. Things have changed enormously. It is now a criminal offence to assault anyone, including your partner.

### The Power Imbalance

Many couples in intimate relationships disagree about things. Disagreements are a part of normal, healthy relationships. Problems arise if one partner feels too threatened or frightened to have their say. The balance of power is no longer equal.



I used to blame the drink but sometimes I would have a drink with the boys before I came home and smashed things up and sometimes I would be stone cold sober. It didn't really matter. The only difference was I tended to do more damage when I was drunk, but the effects on Sinead and the kids were always the same - it terrified them.

One day I realised I had to do more than just apologise and promise the abuse wouldn't happen again. I had to take responsibility for my abusive behaviour and work hard to change both my attitudes and behaviour. I am relieved that I have sorted things out. I would have been devastated to lose my family or have a criminal record.

Rory [24 years]

## Alcohol, Drugs and Domestic Abuse

Some men believe they become abusive only after drinking. However this does not mean that alcohol causes the abusive behaviour. It just makes it easier to avoid taking responsibility for the abuse. In other words, the drinking gives a convenient excuse to say "It wasn't me it was the alcohol". Some men who blame alcohol for the abuse are abusive even when they're not drinking. On the other hand, there are men who never drink or use drugs, who are abusive.

There are also many men that enjoy drinking and are never abusive. If you consider that you drink too much or you just have a problem with alcohol or other drugs, then you need to realise that this is a separate problem to your abusive behaviour. You need to get help for both problems.

### **Drunkenness is Never an Excuse for Abuse.**



# 8

## **Why Are Relationships So Important?**

**Think back to the last time you had a fight with your partner. How did you feel after it? How did it affect the rest of your day?**

Research shows that a healthy, supportive relationship is the single, most important factor to impact on our well being and happiness. It is more significant than financial wealth, social status or occupation.

Our ability to face daily challenges may be affected if our personal relationships are not strong and supportive. A strong and stable relationship will help you enjoy a good overall quality of life, so getting it right in your relationship is very important.





## Other Men, What Choices Did They Make?

**Throughout this guide you have heard the stories of Rory, Steve and Adrian. Let's find out what they did and how they got on.**

**Rory** participated in a MEND Programme for eighteen months. He has changed his life quite considerably. He now enjoys spending more time at home with Sinead. Sinead is confident that Rory has made a permanent change in his behaviour. She is amazed at how much better he is at communicating. They can now discuss problems without Rory flying off the handle. Rory knows he has some more work to do to make sure that he doesn't revert to his "old self". Sinead was contacted by the Partner Support Service as a condition of Rory's being taken onto the MEND Programme. Sinead agreed to take up the offer of one-to-one support and found it invaluable during the time Rory was attending the MEND Programme. She knows she can make contact with them again if she needs to.

**Steve** attended counselling with a private practitioner, once a week for three months. In the meantime Nicola had organised a Protection Order against Steve. So far he had managed to give Nicola space and not call or visit her with the help of his brothers. Steve's family found it hard to believe Steve's behaviour. Steve realised he had been doing one thing and telling his family the opposite. He had said it was Nicola's fault because of the way she had treated him and they believed him. The counsellor said that Steve might be able to see Nicola in the future but there was a lot of work to do in the meantime. It would need to be Nicola's decision about whether she felt safe enough to be in the same room as Steve and she would need to seek some changes to the Protection Order. Steve is considering joining a MEND Programme to support him making real changes.

**Adrian** did a lot of reading before joining the Group Programme for men. He found this helped prepare him for some of the issues they discussed at the group. He is no longer so jealous of Mary and encourages her to be involved with many activities outside the home. Their son is feeling much safer. Mary and Adrian have decided to have another child. The Partner Support Service was of great help to Mary and her son during the Group Programme.

# Other Men, What Choices Did They Make?

## What are your options?

Getting help to change the way you behave is not easy. It takes a lot of courage to face up to what you have done to your partner and children. There is nothing stopping you from changing your abusive behaviour. Is it time you took up the challenge?

There are no quick fixes to getting help. It takes a lot of hard work over a long time, if you are really serious about changing your behaviour for life. Many men say that they don't need help, and that they can work it out on their own or with their partner. With Domestic abuse "working it out with your partner" is not an option. It's about having the courage to face up to how you have been hurting loved ones, and doing something about it **yourself**.

If you want to take responsibility for your actions, you have several options for help. You can make an appointment with a trained person to talk on a one to one basis and when appropriate enrol in a programme that is designed for men who are trying to change their abusive behaviour. These programmes are usually carried out in **groups with other men** who are trying to deal with the same sorts of issues as yourself. Some men find group work daunting but for most people it is a more effective way of dealing with issues than one to one counselling.

You can call the **MEND Programme on 051 844 260** and ask for John or Michael, trained professionals, who will listen to your story and give you some options on what you can do.

## All Domestic Abuse is Unacceptable and Some Forms are a Crime.

All domestic abuse is wrong and some forms of domestic abuse are considered criminal offences. Examples of the forms of domestic abuse that are criminal offences include any threat to harm, shoving, slapping, choking, hitting or other assault, sex when the other person doesn't want to or stalking.

If there is a complaint about your behaviour, the Gardaí will conduct an investigation. An Garda Síochána have a pro-arrest policy in that "the injured party's attitude will not be the determining factor in respect of the exercise of" the power of arrest.



## Groups For Men, Key Agencies And Contacts

### What will I say?

What if I make a fool of myself?

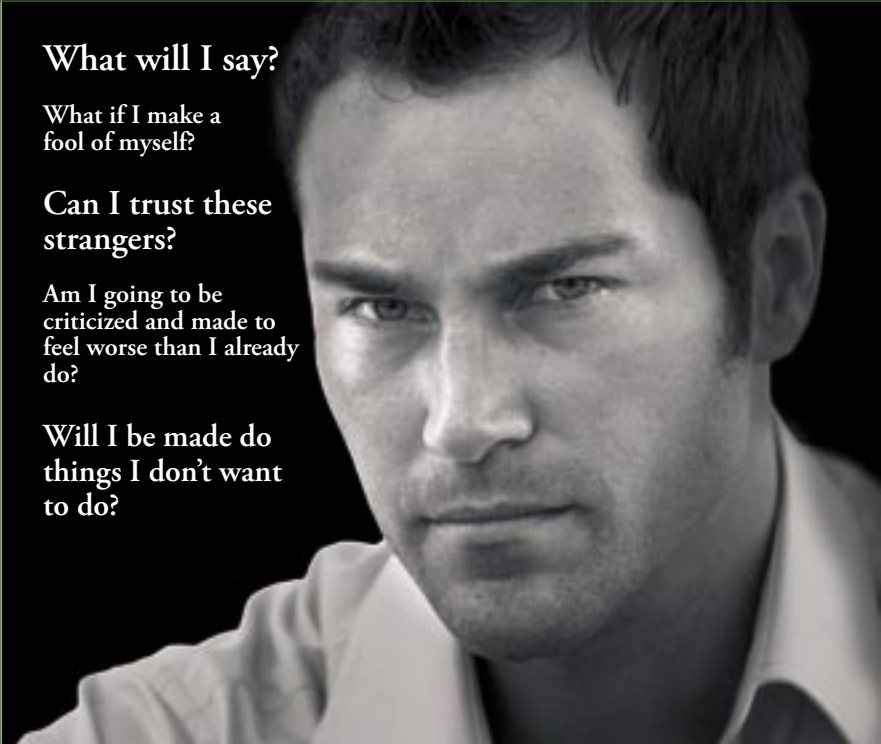
### Can I trust these strangers?

Am I going to be criticized and made to feel worse than I already do?

### Will I be made do things I don't want to do?

I thought maybe, I'll go to the group and just listen. I did listen, but also found it useful to talk about my situation. I feel that I am now slowly becoming more and more aware of the consequences of my behaviour. I am glad I made the decision to seek help - if I'd stayed as I was, I would've destroyed everything that's important to me. I've given Mary, my kids and myself the chance to be happy.

**Adrian** [40 years]



Most men who attend the MEND Programme have these kind of feelings and thoughts. For some it is too difficult and they don't even make it to the first session. Some come for a couple of weeks and that's it. Many men are able to complete the course and go away thankful that they made the decision to get help. It is important to remind yourself that this is long term work.

Many men who attend the Group Programme comment on the amount of support and encouragement they receive from the other men in the group. Men who are dealing with a problem of domestic abuse often feel alone, odd or even crazy. To know that you're not alone makes a world of a difference.

## Key Agencies and Contacts

### Where to Get Help

Getting help is a sign of strength and courage. Making the decision to get help shows that you are ready to take charge of your situation and do something positive towards sorting things out.

### The MEND Programme

**MEND [men ending domestic abuse] is a weekly group Programme in the South East for men who are/have been violent/abusive to their partners or ex-partners.**

- The MEND Programme provides a challenging but safe space for men to get support to change their abusive behaviour. There are no quick fixes but men will be given tools that will, with consistent practice, effect change in their lives. Skilled facilitators along with insight from other participants help men to recognize and take responsibility for what needs to change in their behaviour and how they can, in practical terms, make those changes.
- Each local Programme includes an integrated Partner Support Service offering one-to-one support for partners or ex-partners of the men attending the group.
- The Programmes run for thirty-two weeks approximately and the weekly meeting is normally two to two and a half hours long.
- Programmes are run in four areas of the South East: Carlow (Carlow/Killkenny MEND), Clonmel (South Tipperary MEND), Waterford City (Waterford MEND) and Wexford Town (Wexford MEND).
- The primary aim of the Programme is the safety of women and children.

The Programme is funded by Cosc, the National Office for the prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence through the National Development Plan and is managed by the Men's Development Network.

# Key Agencies And Contacts

## Contact

### The Four MEND Programmes

**Carlow/Kilkenny MEND** (086) 875 1131

**South Tipperary MEND** (087) 915 6632

**Waterford MEND** (086) 816 7798

**Wexford MEND** (086) 107 5449

Or Contact John or Michael at the Regional Office between 9.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday. Tel: 051 844260.

Website: [www.mend.ie](http://www.mend.ie)

Regional Office: c/o Men's Development Network  
30 O'Connell St.  
Waterford  
Tel: 051 844260  
[www.mens-network.net](http://www.mens-network.net)

### Intervention Programmes Outside the South East

**MOVE Ireland** Tel: 065 684 8689  
Website: [www.moveireland.ie](http://www.moveireland.ie)

**North East DVIP** Tel: 042 9332163  
Email: [nedvip@eircom.net](mailto:nedvip@eircom.net)

### Other Contacts

**Cosc** The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence  
Tel: 01 4768680  
Website: [www.cosc.ie](http://www.cosc.ie)



# MEND

Men Ending Domestic Abuse

**MEND is a group programme  
to help men stop being abusive  
towards their partners**

**[www.mend.ie](http://www.mend.ie)**

The MEND Programmes in the South East are Co-ordinated by  
the South East Domestic Violence Intervention Programme  
Under the Management of the Men's Development Network  
Funded by Cosc under the National Development Plan



**The Men's  
Development  
Network**

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