

# **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE & RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF ABUSE**

Safety & Wellness Guides for Queer Zimbabweans

If you're in a relationship, it's essential to recognize the signs of abuse, which can take many forms physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, digital, and verbal. Understanding these signs can help you make informed decisions about your safety and well-being. Abuse is never acceptable, and it's important to know that you deserve respect, love, and support in any relationship.

## PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse refers to when someone uses force to harm you. It can include:

- Unexplained injuries like bruises, cuts, or burns
- Aggressive behavior like hitting, slapping, or throwing objects at you
- Destruction of your personal belongings or harming pets
- Preventing you from leaving a room or home when you want to

If you experience physical abuse:

- Remember that no one has the right to hurt you physically.
- Reach out to a trusted friend or support network to share what's happening.

## EMOTIONAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse involves using words and actions to damage your self-esteem and make you feel worthless. Some common signs include:

- Constant criticism or belittling, especially regarding your identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression
- Threatening to out you to family, friends, or others, especially when you're not ready
- Gaslighting: When your partner denies facts, twists your words, or makes you feel like you're losing your sanity
- Isolation from your friends and family
- Excessive jealousy or control over who you interact with or where you go

If you're experiencing emotional abuse:

- Trust your feelings. If you feel manipulated, confused, or isolated, it's important to acknowledge that these feelings may be a sign of abuse.
- Seek emotional support from a counselor or someone you trust.

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse involves any form of sexual activity that is forced or coerced. Signs of sexual abuse include:

- Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities against your will
- Engaging in sexual acts because you're scared or feel threatened
- Withholding sexual protection (like condoms or birth control) or sexually transmitted disease (STD) protection to control or hurt you
- Being forced into sexual acts that you don't want or enjoy

## FINANCIAL ABUSE

Financial abuse happens when a partner tries to control your money or prevent you from being financially independent. Signs of financial abuse can include:

- Being prevented from accessing money or financial accounts
- Having to justify every purchase or expense to your partner
- Being forced to rely on your partner financially, even when you want to work or manage your finances
- Your partner taking out loans or credit cards in your name without your consent

## DIGITAL/TECH ASSISTED ABUSE

Digital abuse refers to using technology to control or harm you. Some signs include:

- Constantly monitoring your phone, social media, or messages
- Threatening to out you online or sharing your personal information without consent
- Sending harassing or threatening texts or social media messages
- Using spyware or tracking apps to monitor your location or conversations
- Demanding your passwords or access to your social media accounts

If you're experiencing digital abuse:

- Set boundaries around privacy. You don't have to share your passwords or location.
- Seek help from online safety experts or organizations that specialize in digital abuse.

## VERBAL ABUSE

Verbal abuse is when your partner uses words to hurt you emotionally. Examples include:

- Name-calling, belittling, or insulting you based on your identity or sexual orientation
- Using slurs or offensive language to attack your gender or sexual identity
- Shouting, threatening, or using language to intimidate you

If you're experiencing verbal abuse:

- Remember that no one should degrade or humiliate you. You deserve to be spoken to with kindness and respect.
- Keep a journal of what's being said and how it makes you feel, which can help you process the situation and seek support.

## CONTROL AND MANIPULATION

In an abusive relationship, one partner often tries to control aspects of the other's life. Signs of control can include:

- Monitoring your whereabouts, your activities, or who you talk to
- Pressuring you to behave in a certain way (e.g., being more "masculine" or "feminine")
- Demanding that you change your identity or how you express yourself to fit their expectations
- Using guilt or threats to force you to stay in the relationship or comply with their wishes

If you're experiencing control:

- Your identity and self-expression are valid and deserve to be respected. No one should try to force you into a mold that doesn't feel true to you.
- Set boundaries with your partner, and be firm about your needs and desires.

## SUBTLE SIGNS OF ABUSE

Not all abuse is obvious. Subtle signs include:

- Using guilt to manipulate or control your actions
- Making you feel responsible for your partner's happiness or well-being
- Pressuring you into staying in the relationship by saying things like "I can't live without you" or "If you leave me, I'll be lost"
- Threatening self-harm or suicide as a way of getting you to stay

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU RECOGNIZE ABUSE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you've identified abuse in your relationship, here are some steps you can take:

- Talk to someone you trust: This could be a friend, family member, or therapist. They can provide a safe space for you to express what's happening.
- Make a safety plan: If you're in danger, create a plan to get to safety. This might include knowing where to go, who to contact, and how to leave.
- Seek professional help: Find a counselor or therapist who specializes in intimate partner violence, especially within LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Consider your options: If you feel unsafe or unsupported, it may be necessary to leave the relationship. Reach out to support organizations for help with finding a safe place to stay.