

5 Minute Guide: Domestic Abuse

Why couples' or relationship counselling is not suitable where there is domestic abuse

1. Power and Control

Domestic abuse is about one person wanting to have power and control over another person – where this is in an intimate relationship, mutual goals cannot be attained because the abuser is not interested in equality.

2. The Problem is Not Mutual

Couples/relationship counselling can indicate that the problem is mutual and that somehow the partner is responsible (at least in part) for the abusers' behaviours. In general, couples/relationship counselling is an ineffective means of treatment where domestic abuse is an issue, and in fact, may increase the risk to the victim any children involved.



5. Correct Signposting

Perpetrator interventions for domestic abuse involve the abuser learning how to stop focusing on his/her own feelings, and instead focussing on his/her behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. The abuser must learn how to not focus on their own feelings, but rather to focus on changing their damaging thoughts because it is their own belief system that leads to their damaging actions (or omissions). Perpetrators of domestic abuse who wish to seek help to stop their abusive behaviours can contact the Respect Phoneline 0808 8024 040 Help For Domestic Violence Perpetrators | Respect Phoneline UK

3. What's Wrong With Signposting to Couples Therapy?

It is important to understand that abuse is not caused by bad relationship dynamics. The partner cannot ever change an abuser's behaviour by changing themselves. In couples/relationship counselling, both members of the partnership are taught to focus on their feelings. This approach is counterproductive in an abusive relationship because the abuser spends too much time already focusing on his or her feelings and not enough time focusing on other people's feelings (particularly their partners').

4. Coercion

The abuser can use the therapist as a coercive means of controlling their partner by compromising – ie 'If she agrees to stop seeing her family so much, then I'll agree to stop (yelling, giving the silent treatment, other emotionally coercive action used to exert control).