

HANDLING A BULLYING SPOUSE

Objective:

To identify bullying behavior and take steps to change the situation.

Bullying in marriages is much more common than most people realize. Though it is generally subtle, the effects can be far-reaching. Bullying wears down self-confidence and self-esteem and negatively impacts children who witness it.

Some examples of bullying by a spouse are:

- He or she knows your weaknesses and uses them against you.
- He or she is overly possessive, including making you feel guilty when you spend time with others.
- He or she blames you for bad moods, saying you provoked or hurt or disappointed him or her.
- He or she plays the martyr, acting as though he or she is long-suffering and you are selfish or incompetent.
- He or she can't handle having authority questioned and must be in control and beyond reproach.
- He or she lies to seem smarter or more accomplished.
- He or she always finds fault, pointing out your mistakes and never what you've done right.

If your spouse engages in controlling, undermining, or intimidating behavior, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and repair your marriage.

- Keep a written record of the bullying behavior. Make sure each incident is detailed and dated. (See chart on page 2.)
- Show your spouse the written record you have kept. This will serve as proof for a partner who is in denial.
- Talk with your spouse about the behavior. Explain why the behavior bothers you. Some bullies don't even realize their behavior is bullying until it is pointed out to them.
- Discuss with your spouse the reasons why he or she feels the need to be in control at all times. Both of you may need to make some changes to rectify the situation.
- When bullying occurs, stand up for yourself. This does not mean start an argument, but do let your spouse know you will consider his or her input and make your own decisions.
- Get counseling if the bullying continues. It may be that your efforts are not enough. A professional can help your spouse modify his or her negative behaviors and help you both with your marriage.

continued

Use the chart below to keep track of bullying behaviors.

Date	Incident	Details

It is important to note that if the bullying is severe or involves physical violence, you must remove yourself from the situation immediately. The National Domestic Violence Hotline can be contacted 24/7 for help by calling 1-800-799-7233.