

Clinical Tips: Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to acts of violence that occur between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship, and can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. The younger the person the more carefully these possibilities need to be considered. *“The situation of a young person under the age of 14 being sexually active should present a ‘red flag’ requiring careful assessment and documentation.”*

Questions and phrases that may help assess intimate partner violence include:

- Has your partner ever physically threatened or hurt you?
- Is there a lot of tension in your relationship? How do you resolve arguments?
- Sometimes partners react strongly in arguments and use physical force. Is this happening to you?
- Are you afraid of your partner? Have you ever been afraid of any partner?
- Have you ever felt unsafe in the past?
- Violence is very common in the home. I ask a lot of my patients about abuse because no-one should have to live in fear of their partners.

Mandatory reporting may be necessary if intimate partner violence is present or at risk of developing.

Consider the RACGP nine steps to intervention:

1. Role with patients who are experiencing abuse and violence. (GPs are likely to be the first professional contact for survivors of any abuse and violence. This role should be recognized and embraced.)
2. Readiness to be open.
3. Recognise symptoms of abuse and violence, ask directly and sensitively.
4. Respond to disclosures of violence with empathic listening and explore.
5. Risk and safety issues – is the patient safe to go home?
6. Review the patient for follow-up and support.
7. Refer appropriately – be aware of referral services.
8. Reflect on our own attitudes and management of abuse and violence.
9. Respect for our patients, our colleagues and ourselves is an overarching principle of this sensitive work.

IPV accounts for a very significant proportion of suicide burden and impacts substance use and mental health.