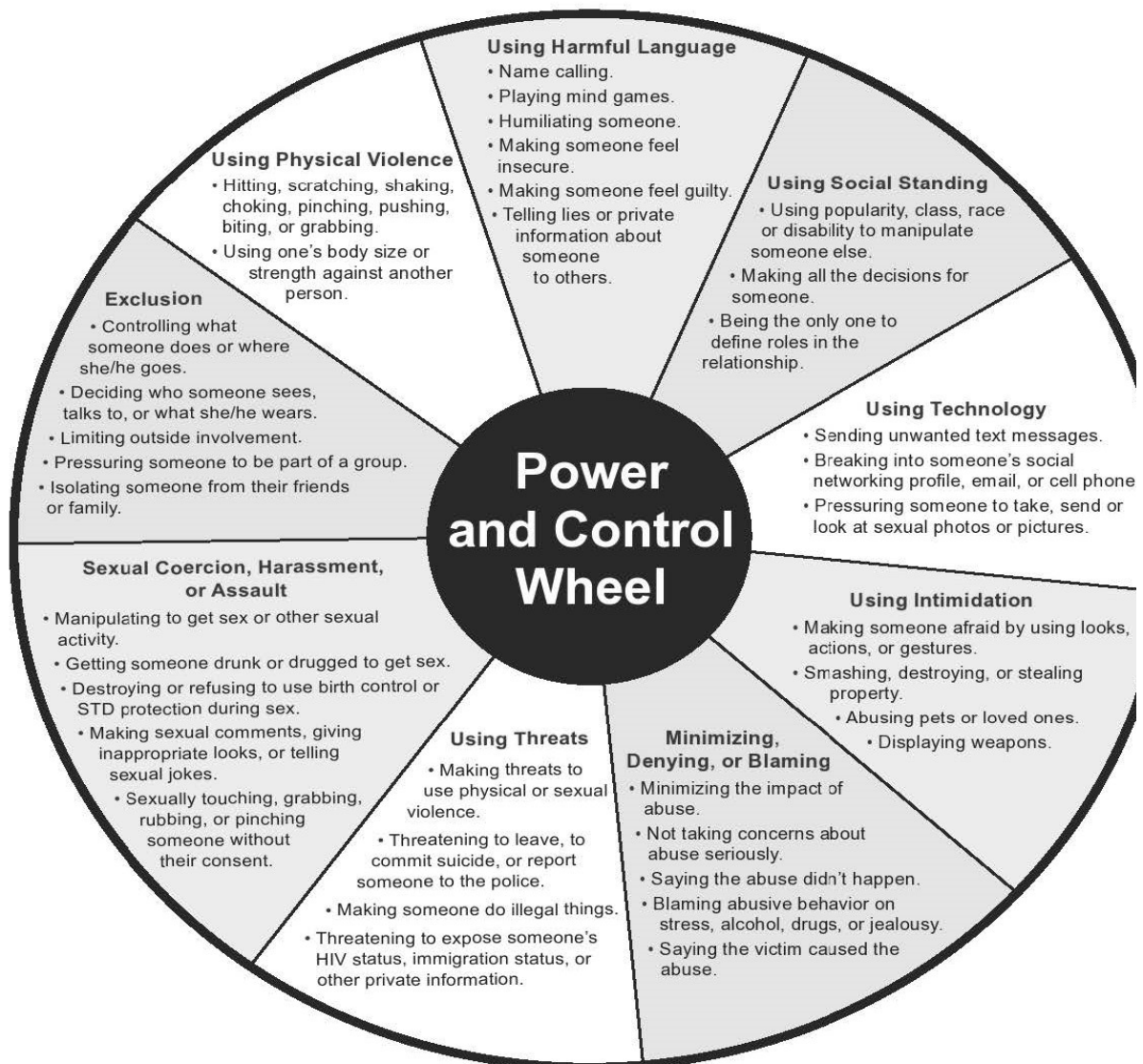


Resources for Domestic Violence Awareness Month

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content warning: domestic violence and sexual assault

October is dedicated to Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Intimate partner violence can happen to anyone, no matter their gender, sexuality, religion, or socioeconomic status. Jews believe *kol yisrael arevim ze baze*h - all of Israel is responsible for each other. Through raising awareness about domestic violence in our communities, we can show the survivors in our midst that we care, we believe them, and we are on their side.



The above graphic is a power and control wheel created by Michigan State University, but was originally developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN. The power and control wheel is an accessible way to understand the ways in which abuse manifests in intimate relationships. Familiarizing yourself with this wheel can help you to protect yourself and your loved ones from abusive relationships. If you are concerned about any of these signs in either your relationship or a loved one's, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline anonymously at 800-799-7233.

What does our tradition say?

Judaism, while pretty awesome, primarily speaks to and about heterosexual relationships, and also only paints men as the aggressors. We in our contemporary times know that queer relationships exist - and have always existed - and that anyone of any gender can use abusive tactics in their relationship. These sources are offered to inspire conversations within your community about the ways in which we have all internalized harmful ideas about relationships, and to offer comfort and solace to survivors.

Source 1: Iggeret Kodesh (13th century)

When you and your wife are engaged in sexual union do not behave lightheartedly and regard this act as vain, idle, improper. Therefore, first introduce her into the mood with gentle words that excite her emotion, appease her mind and delight her with joy. Thus you unite your mind and intention with hers. Say to her words which in part arouse in her passion, closeness, love, will, and erotic desire, and in part evoke in her reverence for God, piety and modesty...**Never impose yourself upon her nor force her. For any sexual union without an abundance of passion, love and will, is without the Divine Presence.** Do not quarrel with her nor act violently whenever coitus is involved. The Talmud says, "A lion ravishes and then eats and has no shame. So acts the brute: He hits and then cohabits and has no shame." Rather, court and attract her to you first with gracious and seductive, as well as refined and gentle words, so that both your intentions be for the sake of God...Do not hurry in arousing passion. Prolong till she is ready and in a passionate mood. Approach her lovingly and passionately, so that she reaches her orgasm first.

This text is found in an anonymous 13th century Kabbalistic (Jewish mystical) text. While not perfect and antiquated in some ways, it espouses the idea that consent is mandatory in a relationship. The text goes so far to claim that any type of union

without mutual respect is completely devoid of the presence of God. This text shows that Jewish relationship ethics must consider needs of both partners.

Source 2: Religious Action Center on Gender-Based Violence

Jewish texts explicitly prohibit a man from forcing his wife to have sexual relations. Rami b. Hama said in the name of R. Assi: "It is forbidden for a man to compel his wife to fulfill the mitzvah [to have sexual relations], as it is said 'and he that hastens with his feet sins' (Proverbs 19:2)." R. Joshua b. Levi said: "Any man who compels his wife to have intercourse will have unworthy (inferior) children" (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 100b). In the Mishneh Torah, (Sefer Nashim) Maimonides included several passages relevant to the topic of wife abuse. The text reads: "And thus the sages commanded that a man should honor his wife more than he honors himself, and love her as he loves himself. And if he has money, he should increase her benefits according to his wealth. He should not intimidate her too much; he should speak with her gently, and should be neither saddened nor angry" (MT, Sefer Nashim 15:19). While many of these references in our tradition refer to relations between heterosexual spouses, the message is applicable to the contemporary relationships and violent acts that we know to occur today.

Jewish tradition teaches all people were created b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of the divine, and that our health and our bodies are gifts from God that we are to protect and nurture (Genesis 1:27). "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?" With this quote, Rabbi Hillel teaches that not only must we care for ourselves, but we must care for others. This teaching enforces the value of helping survivors of gender-based violence as well as preventative measures for the future.

The myth that domestic abuse does not occur in Jewish households is also one that needs to be dispelled. Current statistical evidence reveals that violence within Jewish families occurs at a rate that correlates with our representation in the general population.

Our tradition teaches us that mental anguish and moral degradation are the equivalent of physical murder. We are commanded not to stand idly by while our neighbor bleeds. The sanctity of human life is one of the core values of our value system. In an increasingly impersonal and alienating society, the dehumanization of the human being and the carelessness with which human life is abused or even taken stand in direct violation of these affirmations of our traditions. Therefore, it is our responsibility to attempt to protect the safety of all citizens, a small part of which can

be accomplished with education and prevention of domestic abuse.

Source 3: Sefer HaTashbetz, Part II 8

<p>Question: Another question about a long suffering wife, whose husband is a difficult person whom she cannot stand.</p> <p>Response: You can write that he should divorce her and give her the ketubah for she was given for life, not for sorrow... and does not have to live in close quarters with a snake... and the rabbinic judge who forces a woman who rebelled to go back to her [abusive] husband... should be excommunicated..."</p>	<p>(א) שאלה ח: עוד שאלת אשה שבעלה מצער אותה הרבה עד שמרוב הצער היא מואסת אותו</p> <p>(ב) תשובה: קרוב הדבר בזה שיוציא ויתן כתובה דקיימא לן לחיים ניתנה ולא לצער... שאין אדם דר עם נחש בכפיפה והדיין הכופה לחזור לבעלה אם מרדה... מנדין אותו</p>
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This is a medieval "Ask Alice" regarding halakha (Jewish law). It states that a person who is in an abusive relationship should be allowed to leave, and validates the severity and intensity of how it must feel to be in such a relationship.

For people who are afraid they may have used abusive tactics in their relationships...

It is brave to acknowledge the harm that you have caused. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg writes in *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*:

Addressing harm is possible only when we bravely face the gap between the story we tell about ourselves — the one in which we're the hero, fighting the good fight, doing our best, behaving responsibly and appropriately in every context — and the reality of our actions. We need to summon the courage to cross the bridge over that cognitively dissonant gulf and face who we are, who we have been — even if it threatens our story of ourselves. It's the only way we can even begin to undertake any possible repair of the harm we've done and become the

kind of person who might do better next time. (And that, in my opinion, is what's truly heroic.)

If you are ready to begin the work of looking at "the gap," you can find resources at organizations like the Call to Change Helpline, an anonymous hotline that works with people who have used abusive tactics in relationships. You can call them at 877-898-3411.

What can we do?

Survivors are here. Survivors are us. Survivors are in our community. What can you do in your community?

- 1) Raise awareness -- host benefit events, partner with local organizations to raise money, and have a presentation from experts in your area.
- 2) Get educated! Do research online, especially about abuse that manifests specifically in the Jewish world, such as the agunah crisis.
- 3) Display information about hotlines for support in your houses/event spaces.
- 4) Publish something for Domestic Violence Awareness Month on your social media.