

# **COMMONLY USED TERMS IN CASES INVOLVING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**



DC COALITION AGAINST  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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# Glossary

The DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence has created this glossary of terms for use by foreign and American Sign Language interpreters and personnel working in the Domestic Violence Unit at Superior Court. It is a guide for working with victims of domestic violence, which we know include individuals regardless of their ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and age.

**Abuse:** to insult, hurt, injure, rape and/or molest another person. Such behaviors may include, but are not limited to: physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse and/or verbal abuse.

**Abuser:** a person who uses abusive tactics and behaviors to exert power and control over another person with whom the abuser is in an intimate, dating or family relationship.

**Advocate:** a trained professional or volunteer working for a non-profit or government-based domestic violence or victim-witness advocate program.

**Attorney:** a person legally appointed or hired by a respondent or petitioner to represent her/him in legal matters.

**Batterer:** a person who uses coercive and abusive tactics and behaviors to establish and maintain power and control over another person with whom the batterer is in an intimate, dating or family relationship. Such behaviors may include, but are not limited to: physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse and/or verbal abuse.

**Burnout:** a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.

**Case Management:** the coordination of services on behalf of an individual by an advocate.

**Civil Contempt:** judge finds the respondent violated a provision of the TPO/CPO that is civil in nature. Examples include, but are not limited to: failure to pay rent to petitioner and/or failure to attend or complete counseling.

**Civil Protection Order (CPO):** a court order that usually requires a respondent to stay away from and have no contact with the petitioner and directs the respondent not to commit any criminal offense against the petitioner. The order can also specify terms of custody, require the respondent to vacate the household and/or order the respondent to relinquish firearms or other property. CPOs are in effect for a period of one year and can be extended or modified by a judge. For more information please see the brochure "How Do I Get a Protection Order in the District of Columbia?"

**Coercion:** when one person forces or attempts to force another to think or act in a different way. Examples include, but are not limited to: threatening to report the victim to Child and Family Services or police, forcing a victim to drop charges against the batterer and/or forcing a victim to participate in or commit illegal activities.

**Common Partner:** a prior intimate/dating partner of your current intimate/dating partner, or current intimate/dating partner of your former intimate/dating partner (for example: the old boyfriend or girlfriend of your current boyfriend or girlfriend).

**Compassion Fatigue:** a state of exhaustion, where one feels depleted, helpless and hopeless about work, life and the state of the world.

**Contempt:** violation of one or more terms of a protection order (TPO/CPO) by the respondent.

**Contempt Hearing:** hearing to decide a petitioner's motion for civil or criminal contempt. Both sides have the opportunity to present evidence as to whether or not the respondent violated the TPO/CPO.

**Continuance:** judge can reschedule the case to a later hearing date; if there is a TPO it can usually be extended until that date. Even if a case is continued, the petitioner must appear at every court date so that the case is not dismissed.

**Crime Victims Compensation Program (CVC):** a government fund established to assist qualifying victims of violent crime and their families with crime-related expenses, including, but not limited to: costs related to counseling, funeral and burial, medical and mental health, emergency/temporary shelter and other costs as permitted by statute.

**Criminal Contempt:** judge finds the respondent violated a provision of the TPO/CPO that is criminal in nature. Examples include, but are not limited to: failing to stay away from the petitioner or another protected party named in the TPO/CPO, contacting the petitioner or another protected party, committing assault, sexual assault, malicious destruction of property or harassment.

**Cross-Petitions:** separate petitions filed by a petitioner and respondent against one another.

**Dating Violence:** domestic violence that occurs between people who are dating. This is the preferred term to use when describing teenage relationships that are abusive.

**Domestic Violence:** a pattern of coercive behaviors, used by a batterer to gain or maintain power and control over another person with whom the batterer is in an intimate, dating or family relationship. These behaviors may include, but are not limited to: physical and sexual abuse, direct or implied threats, emotional and psychological abuse, intimidation, verbal abuse, isolation, stalking, financial control, spiritual abuse, threatened or actual use of weapons, destruction of property and/or harm to the victim's family, pets or others.

**Domestic Violence Clerk's Office:** a walk-in location, Room 4400 of Superior Court where victims of domestic violence can file for a TPO/CPO or a motion for contempt.

**Domestic Violence Intake Center (DVIC):** a walk-in location, Room 4200 of Superior Court or Room 311 of United Medical Center where victims of domestic violence can file for a TPO/CPO, file a motion for contempt, or receive other domestic violence services and referrals.

**Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP):** a court-ordered 22-week Court Services & Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) class for batterers.

**Domestic Violence Service Provider:** a non-profit organization that provides support, counseling and assistance to victims of domestic violence.

**Dual Arrest:** when a police officer arrests both parties in a domestic violence situation because the officer is unable to determine the predominant aggressor or believes both parties have committed an Intrafamily offense.

**Economic/Financial Abuse:** when a batterer uses finances to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: controlling a partner's finances, taking the victim's money without permission, giving the victim an allowance, prohibiting/limiting a victim's access to bank accounts or credit card, denying the victim the right to work and/or sabotaging a victim's credit.

**Emergency Temporary Protection Order (ETPO):** an emergency court order granted when the court is closed (nights, holidays and weekends) and valid only until the next business day the court is open. ETPOs generally order a respondent to stay away from or have no contact with the petitioner and can also direct a person not to commit any criminal offenses against the petitioner. The only way a victim can get an ETPO is to call the police, who then can initiate the process.

**Emergency/Temporary Shelter:** immediate, confidential and safe housing for victims of domestic violence who are fleeing abuse; can be through a domestic violence program or at an undisclosed hotel.

**Emotional/Psychological Abuse:** when a batterer uses emotions, self esteem and/or a person's mental state to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: putting the victim down or making the victim feel bad about her/himself, calling the victim names, playing mind games, making the victim think s/he is crazy, making the victim feel guilty and/or humiliating the victim.

**Empathy:** when one person identifies with or experiences the feelings or thoughts of another.

**Guardian Ad Litem (GAL):** a person appointed by the Court in a case to represent the best interests of a child in legal proceedings.

**Hotline:** a free 24 hour / 7 day a week phone number answered by advocates who offer assistance to victims of domestic violence. Assistance may include shelter, legal services and/or safety planning.

**Intrafamily Offense:** the legal term in the District of Columbia for an act of domestic violence. See: D.C. ST § 16-1001 et. seq.

**Intimidation:** when one person uses threats to cause another person fear and/or coerce her/him into doing something. Examples include, but are not limited to: making someone afraid by using looks, actions, gestures and/or a loud voice, destroying property, abusing pets and/or displaying weapons.

**Isolation:** when one person uses friends, family and social networks to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: controlling where a victim goes, who s/he talks to, what s/he wears, and/or who s/he sees, limiting involvement in places of worship, PTA and other social networks.

**Lethality Assessment:** an analysis done by an advocate or law enforcement officer to determine the level of risk of homicide for a victim of domestic violence based on recent and changing behaviors of the batterer.

**Motion:** request for the court to take some specified action.

**OAG:** Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. When the petitioner comes to the DVIC, the OAG will decide whether it can take the CPO or contempt case. If the OAG does not take the case, the petitioner can represent her/himself, hire a private attorney or find pro bono counsel.

**Perpetrator:** a person carrying out domestic violence behaviors; see also "abuser" and "batterer".

**Petition:** an application asking the court to issue a protection order.

**Petitioner:** a person who has filed for a protection order (ETPO/TPO/CPO) seeking protection from a batterer.  
See also: "Victim"

**Physical Abuse:** when a batterer uses her/his body or other objects to cause harm or injury to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: hitting, kicking, biting, pushing, scratching, slapping, strangling, beating, using a weapon against another person, punching, throwing, burning, poisoning, stabbing and shooting.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** a psychological disorder that can occur in an individual after s/he has suffered a traumatic event (such as domestic violence) and is characterized by flashbacks, avoidance of things that may trigger a memory of the traumatic event and a significantly heightened state of alert.

**Power and Control Wheel:** a tool many advocates use to illustrate abusive tactics and behaviors used by batterers against victims.

**Predominant Aggressor:** the person who poses the most serious ongoing threat in a domestic violence situation.

**Pro Se:** a person representing her/himself in court without an attorney.

**Protection Order:** the general term for an order issued by the Court mandating a batterer to not contact, harass or come within a certain distance of the petitioner and/or other persons named in the order.

**Remedy:** the means by which a court grants relief to a person who has been harmed by another person. Remedies can be civil, such as an order of protection, financial compensation or enforcement of other rights, or criminal, such as incarceration or an order to pay a penalty.

**Respondent:** a person against whom a protection order (ETPO/TPO/CPO) has been filed; the person from whom a petitioner is seeking protection. See also: "Batterer", "Abuser", "Perpetrator"

**Safe Housing:** emergency, transitional or permanent shelter/housing that is confidentially located.

**Safety Plan:** a plan, verbal or written, a victim of domestic violence creates with an advocate. The plan consists of action steps a victim can take to keep her/his children safe when violence takes place or to stop violence from happening.

**Secondary Trauma:** a risk we incur when we engage compassionately or empathically with a traumatized adult or child.

**Service of process:** delivery of legal papers to a respondent notifying the respondent of legal action taken against her/him. Documents must be given either to the respondent personally or to someone living in the respondent's usual residence. Any person over age 18 can serve the documents as long as s/he is not a party to the case. The judge can also order the police to assist with service and a petitioner can ask the police to assist with service when s/he files for a protection order. Whoever serves the papers must complete and sign a Return of Service form indicating the time and place the respondent was served and file this form in the clerk's office.

**Sexual Abuse:** when a batterer uses sexual acts to establish and maintain power and control over a victim without her/his consent. Examples include, but are not limited to: making the victim do sexual things against her/his will, sexual assault, treating the victim like a sex object, forcing sex after violence and/or forcing the victim to watch pornography.

**Sexual Assault:** any unwanted sexual activity forced on one person by another.

**Spiritual/Religious Abuse:** when a batterer uses spirituality or religion to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: controlling the partner's ability to practice her/his own religion or attend services, forcing the partner to convert or practice another religion against her/his will and/or using the spiritual or religious environment, leader and/or congregation to influence a victim's behavior.

**Stalking:** when one person pursues, follows or harasses another person against her/his wishes. Examples include, but are not limited to: repeated, unwanted phone calls, following a victim, sending unwanted gifts, destroying or vandalizing a victim's property, repeated threats and/or tracking a victim's online activity.

**Status Hearing:** parties appear before a judge, who sets a timeline for how the case will proceed.

**Survivor:** a person who was or is being abused or harmed by another person.

**Temporary Protection Order (TPO):** a court order that usually requires a respondent to stay away from and have no contact with the petitioner and directs the respondent not to commit any criminal offenses against the petitioner; the order can also specify issues of custody, require the respondent to vacate the household; and/or relinquish firearms or other property. TPOs are in effect for a period of two weeks but a judge can extend them. To get a TPO you must show you fear immediate danger from your batterer.

**Threats:** an expression that demonstrates the intention of one person to inflict pain or injury on another person. Examples include, but are not limited to: verbal threats such as threats to leave, harm, commit suicide or physical threats, such as a raised hand, fist or gesture.

**Transitional Housing:** shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children that typically lasts up to two years, between receiving emergency services and finding permanent housing.

**Trauma:** experiencing an event that causes injury or stress to a person's physical or psychological well-being.

**USAO:** United States Attorney's Office (prosecutor). When a police report is filed for a criminal violation, the USAO decides whether to file criminal charges. In criminal contempt, if USAO does not file charges, the petitioner may move forward with the case by filing her/his own motion.

**Verbal Abuse:** when a batterer uses words to establish and maintain power and control over a victim. Examples include, but are not limited to: the use of language to manipulate, control, ridicule, insult, humiliate, belittle, vilify and/or show disrespect and disdain to another.

**Vicarious Trauma:** the impact of exposure to extreme events experienced by another person resulting in the listener feeling overwhelmed by the trauma or triggering the listener's own past trauma(s).

**Victim:** a person who is abused, harmed or killed by another person. See also: Survivor.