

**“UNCERTAINTY, WE ARE  
SUSPENDED AND DON’T SEE  
ANY FUTURE”**

senperfort  “Violence is an abuse of power, together we can prevent it!”

**1. SOCIAL NETWORK**

**What is it?**

Wherever you are in the world social contacts are important. Social contacts can help to build a happy life. Networks can include contact with neighbours, with classmates, colleagues, with teachers at your children’s school, with other children’s parents etc. They can have a great impact on your life. It is helpful to exchange thoughts now and again with someone else or to know that you are not alone in your situation. Sharing knowledge and collective experiences can sometimes help you to sort out a problem with someone. Or the person says: “I cannot help you, but I know someone else who can probably help you.” In this way you build up a network of people. Without contacts with other people, you run the risk of living in isolation. Feelings of anxiety and uncertainty might then take over. Even simple problems can become insoluble.

*Do you think you are alone with this problem? Or do you say, “it is not so bad?” Then it is good to know: 50% to nearly 75% of migrants who have no contact with people from the host country say that they do actually need this. This emerged from a research study in the Netherlands.*

Social contacts are easier if you have things in common – for example, between parents of children who go to the same school, between you and other people in the reception centre; there may also be activities in the centre where you can meet other people. It is important that you take up these contacts, as they are a first step towards a wider social network.




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**“GOOD BEHAVIOR  
MAKES PEOPLE BEAUTIFUL.  
THEY MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE”**

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**2. RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships are very important in human life. We build up relationships with family, friends, a partner, etc. Sometimes they are happy and it works well but other times it doesn’t work that well.

Many factors are involved in the success, breakdown and failure of relationships. There are personal characteristics that may play a role; there are also external factors that can make a relationship difficult – for example, financial problems, stress (because the asylum procedure is not going smoothly), frustration (because you cannot work), trauma (following experience of violence) or a lack of privacy (because you have to live in a shared space with others) etc.

In a healthy relationship both people should feel good on a psychological, physical and social level. To achieve this, they must have respect for each other’s rights, choices and needs. A good relationship involves give and take. Every person has the right to a healthy relationship free of mistreatment and abuse, coercion, dependence, forced sex or suffering.

*It is not always easy to clearly define what is allowed or what is not, what is possible or what is not in your relationship. Some people can put the other person under pressure to do things they do not want or which you yourself find highly distasteful. This can have serious mental and physical consequences.*




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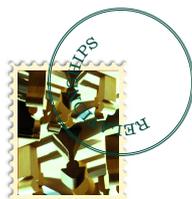
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Factors that can lead to breakdown of a relationship are: negative criticism, contempt, counter-attack or complete withdrawal. Offering negative criticism is to personally attack the other. This leads almost automatically to a counter-attack. For example: "You are late again. I always have to wait for you!" The counter-attack, for example: "As if you always arrive on time!", often leads to further violence. And it widens the emotional rift. Do you show contempt? Then you are often hitting the other person right where it hurts. You can do this physically or also with words. For example: "It is more important for me to see my friends than to see you. Don't you understand that?" If the other person does not react at all, it is called 'complete withdrawal'. That mostly leads to even louder shouting or to even more violence.

### Tips for a healthy relationship:

- *Communicate in a non-violent way: you make your point without offending the other person or turning them away.*
- *Replace any criticism and generalization with an objective observation of a specific behaviour or event.*
- *Try not to judge or interpret; concentrate on what you feel yourself, then try to put what you feel into words.*
- *Listen to what the other person is saying and feeling; if necessary, help them to put it into words, without judging or reinterpreting. For example: "It is eight o'clock, and we agreed on seven o'clock. I have been waiting an hour for you. I feel offended when I have to wait an hour."*

### An example

Sixteen years ago Suad came to Europe as a refugee. At that time Suad took her two children to school for the first time. At first the other parents did not want to talk to her; however, at a certain point, Sonja, a Belgian woman, spoke to her. The conversation was in broken English, for the Belgian woman also did not speak the language well. Suad had learnt that all Belgians were unreliable: "The status of undocumented migrants is dangerous: if you talk to someone they may betray you to the authorities." So she gave Sonja misleading answers. However, this first conversation was important. The next day and the day after that the Belgian mother, Sonja, made contact again; she said that a parents' meeting was scheduled for the following week, and if Suad did not feel at ease, she could ask Sonja for help.

Weeks later Suad attended the first school meeting. At first she still felt rather uncomfortable and thought that people were staring at her, but she was also very proud. The teacher said that her daughter had made friends with other children, and that her Dutch was progressing.

Meanwhile, Sonja introduced Suad to the community centre, a place where local residents met up. Sonja told Suad about an information leaflet she had seen at the school for a toddlers' gym club that her son had now joined. At Suad's request, Sonja translated the text, and Suad signed up her daughter. Suad was in luck: her daughter appeared to be good at gym, but more than that, the trainer and several parents from the gym club also made contact with her. One parent had studied law, and he offered to mediate free of charge in her quest for a legal residence permit. Now Suad is the mother of two adolescents. They are successfully pursuing secondary and higher education.

This is a success story; things are often more difficult when you arrive in Europe and you don't know anybody. It is natural to find it difficult to make the first contacts. This can be made more difficult when there are also differences in language and cultural practices.

*In your country of origin you had the skills to make contacts; they have not been lost during your flight. You can still do this, even here, but it can take more courage and guts.*

### Tip:

*Try to find out whether organizations are active in your neighbourhood (or that of the asylum seekers' centre) where you can make contact with others. Most importantly, you can talk there about your own life and personal concerns in a safe way. The local organization will also point you in the direction of other services – for example, to the district health centre where you can see a doctor, to the library where you can surf the Internet or to a local refugee organization that works with lawyers. Is there no local organization? Well, there are bound to be other associations or organizations.*

**“THERE THEY SAY YOU GET BLIND IF YOU MASTURBATE, HERE THEY SAY IT’S GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH”**

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**3. SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RISKS**

**What is it?**

Everyone has the right, at any given moment in his or her life, to the highest possible standard of sexual and reproductive health.

**Reproductive health - what does this involve?**

Sexual health means: you are experiencing complete physical, mental and social well-being in everything related to sexual relationships and sexuality. It is, therefore, not enough for sexual health to have no diseases or deficiencies. Sexual health requires a combination of the following two things: (1) a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, and (2) the possibility of having a safe and satisfying sex life. This must also occur free of coercion, discrimination or violence.

Reproductive health means: you are experiencing complete physical, mental and social well-being in everything related to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. It is,

therefore, not enough just to have no diseases or deficiencies. Each individual and each couple has the right to decide whether they want children and when and how many. This must occur free of coercion, discrimination or violence. You have the right to be informed about this and to have access to care.

There are many risks associated with sexual and reproductive health. It is important to be aware of them and to know how they can occur, or to know what to do if something goes wrong.

**What could be the consequences for your health?**

Unprotected sex can have negative consequences such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). STIs are infections that you can pass on through sexual contact, blood transfusion or breast-feeding or through sharing infected needles. Examples of STIs are syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) and HIV. The HIV virus is spread simply via semen, pre-ejaculatory fluid, vaginal discharge, blood and breast milk. HIV causes AIDS; although AIDS is a treatable disease, it




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**“I WAS FORCED TO LOOK AT PICTURES OF NAKED WOMEN, MEANWHILE THEY TOOK PICTURES OF ME”**

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**4. SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**What is it?**

Is a person or a group of individuals making sexual comments? Is someone behaving sexually in a way that you find hostile, humiliating or intimidating? Then we are talking about sexual intimidation, which takes on various forms – for example, ‘undressing with the eyes’, asking intimate questions about your private (sexual) life, proposing or blackmailing you to have sex.

**An example:** a boss, social assistant or teacher abuses his or her power. He or she suddenly stands behind you or makes sexual comments or ‘accidentally’ touches your buttocks or breasts. He or she then says: “If you do not tell anybody else, you will get better help, good grades or a pay rise.” This can be very threatening, certainly when you cannot escape the person – for example, in an asylum seekers’ centre.




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Sexual blackmail also occurs via chat rooms and MSN on the Internet. In front of a webcam you may be inclined to go further than when the person is sitting in front of you – for example, undressing, assuming sexy poses, masturbating. The person at the other side thus acquires images with which they can blackmail you: “I’ll show this to your father if you don’t sleep with me.” Having to watch sex and porn is also a form of sexual harassment.

It is unknown how many women (and men) are victims of sexual intimidation. Victims do not often go to the police. They think nothing can be done about it. Or they think that this will have a negative impact on their asylum procedure. This is not true. Sexual harassment is punishable. It is a criminal offence, and you can enjoy protection. Reporting it to the police is important and will have no negative impact on your asylum procedure.

Sexual harassment can hinder you in your freedom of movement, as you can feel watched and unsafe and might be fearful of returning to work or school; in some cases, people feel they have to resign from their job. In the reception centre perhaps you no longer feel you can walk around the site (alone) or you might lock yourself up in your room or ask to be transferred to another centre. If you do nothing, the aggressors will go on intimidating you or someone else.

### How do you prevent it?

**Tip:** *Is someone bothering you? Then say directly: “I find your conduct (or comment) very inappropriate!” This will probably have an effect. Often you feel stronger in a group or with a friend who is supporting you. You can also take self-defence training where you will learn to make clear where your limits are and how you can ensure that other people respect your limits by using body language and words.*

### And what if sexual harassment happens?

Everyone must be protected against sexual harassment. At the reception centre, at school or at work there should be special procedures for this. This mostly involves an ‘ombudsperson’ or ‘trusted person’ who will listen and support you. This person must keep the information confidential and will explain to you what steps can be taken. Will the aggressor be punished? That depends on his reaction and on the seriousness of his behaviour. You could also go to the police.

is still an incurable one, although in Europe everyone has the right to treatment. Most other STIs are not life-threatening and can be easily treated; however, they are very infectious and can be easily passed on and can lead to other complications such as infertility or cervical cancer if they are not treated.

### How do I know if I have a STI or HIV?

The following symptoms may indicate a STI:

- Pain when urinating or making love
- Pain in the lower stomach or in and around the genitals,
- Itching, sores, blisters or warts on the labia, arse, penis, vagina or mouth.
- Bleeding in between your monthly menstruation

If you notice one of these symptoms, consult your general practitioner or the medical service for asylum seekers immediately. There is only one way to find out whether you are infected with HIV: the HIV test. You can get yourself tested from six weeks after the last high-risk contact. This HIV test implies a blood sample.

### How can you take care of your sexual and reproductive health?

Sexually transmitted infections

You can prevent yourself getting HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhoea by:

- using a good-quality condom properly and consistently (a condom offers less protection against herpes, HPV, syphilis or pubic lice)
- having you & your partner regularly tested for STIs;
- minimizing your number of sexual partners;
- pursuing treatment for an STI;
- seeking vaccination for Hepatitis B and HPV;
- having regular pap smear tests (every two to three years) for women from the age of 25 years. This test detects possible consequences of the HPV infection in the cervix. The doctor can then treat you promptly.

You may also experience an unwanted pregnancy. In Europe you have access to very reliable contraceptives (condoms, the pill, coil, vaginal ring). These contraceptives are not damaging to your health and do not affect fertility. The moment you stop using them, you may get pregnant (again) almost immediately. The rhythm method (not having sexual intercourse at your most fertile moment of the month) is unreliable because you cannot know in advance when ovulation occurs and your cycle may not be consistent. Premature withdrawal before ejaculation is also unreliable!

Abortion is legal in Europe but not in Malta and Ireland. In the other European countries, even as an asylum seeker or an undocumented migrant you can have an abortion. It is crucial for your health that the abortion is conducted by a medical doctor who is trained for this. Unsafe abortions can lead to infertility, incurable damage to the uterus and vagina and even to death. In most European countries there are specialized abortion centres that also provide psychological counselling.

### How can you get medical care and treatment?

If you are an asylum seeker, you have the right to access health care. If you are an undocumented migrant, your right to health care differs from one country to another.

Sexual health problems can have life-threatening consequences. Therefore, even if you doubt, you should seek help when you need it. Medical staff are bound by a confidentiality vow, which means that they cannot speak about personal problems of their patients to others if it does not suit medical purposes and by the Hippocratic oath, which means that they cannot refuse to provide help.

**Tip:** *No one is born with a full knowledge of sexual and reproductive health. You need to be well informed, so that you can protect both yourself and your partner well. If you have any questions about sexual and reproductive health, STIs, protection, contraception and abortion, consult your general practitioner or the medical service for asylum seekers. They can also refer you to a specialist: a gynaecologist or urologist.*

**“I HAD NO MONEY AND NO PAPERS, SO I ONLY HAD ONE OPTION: TO BE HIS SLAVE”**

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**“IF YOU DON’T HAVE SEX WITH ME, YOU WILL NOT SURVIVE”**

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### 3. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

#### What is it?

Are you obliged to offer sexual services in exchange for money, services or goods? Then we are talking about sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is a fundamental violation of human rights. If someone is treating you as a sexual and commercial object, it is a form of forced labour and is, therefore, a modern form of slavery.

As an asylum seeker or undocumented migrant you might have gone through a difficult and traumatic situation or you may still be in one. There is then a greater risk of someone abusing you and forcing you into prostitution, in exchange for assistance, money, food or documents.

Prostitution is not always exploitation; some women or men choose freely to work as a sex worker. In some countries this has been legalized, and in most other European countries it is tolerated by the government. Exploitation, on the other hand, is not legal and is punishable.

You want to ensure your survival or that of your children, so you may think that there is no other option than prostitution. It could be that you see no other way out than to enter into a relationship against your will, and you may agree to sex in exchange for assistance, money, food or documents; this is called exploitative transactional sex.

### 5. SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE

#### What is it?

Is someone forcing you to be involved in sexual acts against your will? Are you not able to refuse sex if you don't want it? We describe 'abuse' as unwanted physical sexual contact without penetration – for example, someone touching your bosom or bottom. We call it 'rape' when a sexual organ is forced into any opening of the body (for example, your mouth, ear, vagina, anus) or when any body part or object is forced into a sexual organ (like the penis, vagina or anus). Women and girls as well as men and boys can become victims of sexual abuse and rape.

Sexual abuse and rape may have various consequences for a victim:

- Temporary or permanent physical consequences such as bruises, wounds, burns, amputations, genital injuries, even death.
- On a sexual level: genital pains and dysfunctions such as aggressive reactions to physical contact or erection problems, infection with STIs or unwanted pregnancy, (forced) abortion, infertility, and others.

- Psychological and behavioural consequences: confusion, shame, disturbed sensory perception, sleeping disturbances, eating disorders, anxiety, fatigue, powerlessness, low self-esteem, denial, obsession with cleanliness, mental replay of assault, self-harm, suicidal ideas or suicide, social phobia, gender role confusion, sexual risk behaviour, harmful substance abuse, and others.
- Socio-economic consequences: alienation from or stigmatization by community, isolation, unemployment, discrimination, dropping out of school, and others.

Sexual abuse and rape are a way to exert power. The perpetrator is often someone you know – for example, a partner, an acquaintance or someone supposed to be offering you protection or assistance. Sexual abuse and rape are a misuse of his or her position of power. Sexual abuse and rape are recognized worldwide as a public health problem and as a violation of human rights. Both forms are punishable in the European Union.




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Worldwide 40-60% of women between 15 and 49 years old have to deal with some form of sexual violence. Among men, the figures are 8-25%. Many of them already experienced this as a child.

### How do you prevent it?

Prevention of sexual abuse and rape requires actions by the state and government, by the community you live in, by the organization you work with or that offers you care, by groups of people and by each and every one of us. Generally speaking, this is some advice on what you as a person can do to help to prevent sexual violence.

However, it is important to remember that in the end, when confronted with force or coercion by an aggressor, the power of an individual to prevent sexual violence might be very limited!

- First, you need to know what sexual abuse and rape are, and how you can recognize risks. From a young age everybody can learn what 'desirable' and 'undesirable' contacts are, what 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexuality is, and what

abuse and violence are. Learn to say 'no' when you mean 'no'. You could also take part in physical defence or anger and conflict management trainings.

- Second, it is important to act according to this knowledge and to avoid situations in which alcohol and drug abuse occur frequently.
- Third, try to have friends and other people on whom you can rely, whom you trust and who also think sexual violence should be prevented and who behave in that way.
- However, when you feel at risk – for example, because the building you live in is in bad shape and showers cannot be locked, or you have to sleep in a place with lots of strangers – it is best if you talk to someone who can offer support and safety.

*Tip: Talk with social workers about how they can make a reception centre safer. Indicate where you see risks, and say how you think that they might reduce the risks.*

### And what if sexual violence happens?

Sexual violence is punishable in Europe. Are you filing a complaint as a victim? Then everything will be done to punish the perpetrator. You will not be blamed at all!

*Tip: If you are a victim of sexual violence, avoid showering and do not wash your clothes after you are abused. Even if it is the first thing you want to do, there may be important traces on your body and clothes, such as semen and hair, that can be used as proof. You can shower after you have filed a complaint.*

First, go to the police to make a statement, and ask there to be taken immediately to a doctor or gynaecologist for urgent admission with a 'Request from the Attorney'. The doctor will give you the necessary medical treatment. Then (s)he will carry

out a medical examination. (S)he collects any traces left by the perpetrator. In Belgium this is done with the help of a Sexual Aggression Set (SAS). This set comprises guidelines and recommendations and a box with materials for collecting and storing traces of sexual violence. This SAS serves as official evidence. Do you not wish to directly lodge a complaint? Then go to a doctor for a medical examination. Ask for a 'medical certificate for cases of violence' to fill in. Do you nevertheless want to lodge a complaint later on? The police can then add this 'medical certificate for cases of violence' to your file. You can also go to the local General Social Work Department, Mental Health Service or Victim Support Office. Sometimes there is group help or a person who will accompany you to the examination to provide support; there is also support for male victims.

### How do you prevent it?

Prevention of sexual exploitation needs action on several levels that go beyond the power of an individual alone. Refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than others – for example, to pay back the price of the flight or extra costs that smugglers and 'human traffickers' may invent. On arrival, they can hold back or confiscate your passport and force you to work in brothels or massage salons, in restaurants, horticulture, fruit growing, construction or as a servant – often for a pitiful wage and 80 hours' work a week. They may say that after you have done this, you will be able to move freely and have money.

You need to know that this is not true; you might need help to avoid or escape from such a situation.

Even without a legal residence permit, you still have the right to live without violence, exploitation, force and discrimination. You also have a right to safety and protection. There are organizations that can help you out (see below).

### And what if sexual exploitation happens?

Are you aware that you are being exploited? But you don't dare to do anything about it? You might be afraid of repercussions and death threats or of being sent back to your country of origin. In Europe, sexual exploitation is regarded as a modern form of slavery, thus is punishable. Europe created a protective status for victims of sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking.

### Are you a victim of sexual exploitation or human trafficking?

Then try to contact an organization who can help you out (see below). Or tell the police! It is the job of the police to protect you. They will refer you to a specialized centre that will help you with administrative matters, in looking for a flat and an honest job. Do you have evidence as a victim and can assist the police in tracking down the aggressors? Then you may get a residence permit.

## “WHAT HE SAID HURT ME MORE THAN BEING SLAPPED”

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### 7. PARTNER VIOLENCE

#### What is it ?

Partner violence is violence in a relationship between (intimate) partners. This includes any violent conduct towards the current or former partner or any threat from the partner aimed at controlling and dominating the other. For example, he or she may threaten that (s)he will be violent or hurt you if you do not follow what (s)he says.

Partner violence may occur in various ways:

- Physical: hitting each other, kicking, pulling hair, throwing down the stairs or out of the window, attacking with a knife, strangling, murdering, etc.
- Psychological: ignoring, name-calling, locking up, not being allowed to talk in your mother tongue, not being allowed to meet new people, threatening to end the relationship, threatening with murder, suicide or enforced return, not being allowed to continue seeing the children, etc.

- Sexual: being forced to have sex by your husband, wife or partner, being forced to engage in certain sexual acts, being compelled to watch pornography/masturbation, having to undress with others watching, rape etc.
- Economic: having to hand over your money, receiving no money to buy food, not being allowed to attend classes, not being allowed to work, not being allowed to have a bank account etc.

Partner violence is unacceptable and punishable by law in most European countries. You have the right to be treated with respect, to say no, to make mistakes, to change your mind or introduce changes, to protest against unreasonable treatment or criticism.




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## “I ALWAYS HAD TO TAKE CARE OF MY MOTHER WHILE I NEEDED A MOTHER MYSELF”

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### 8. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

#### What is it?

Violence against children is every form of threatening interaction of a physical, emotional, psychological or sexual nature directed at an under-aged person and inflicted by someone on whom the child is depending. There is active or passive coercion involved, and the violence will result in physical or psychological harm. It is a violation of the Rights of the Child as well as of human rights.

We differentiate five forms of violence against children: physical abuse, physical neglect, psychological abuse, psychological neglect, and sexual abuse.

The experience of the child:

- The child withdraws.
- The child doesn't say anything about the violence out of loyalty to the parents, helpers etc.
- Shame
- Fear of the abuser
- Fear of the future: where will they send me if I can't stay here any longer?
- Pressure from the abusers Pressure of the abusers
- The child assumes it is normal.

The child is often confused. The child feels desperate because of the misunderstanding of the violence afflicted upon him/her. The unpredictability of the violence makes him or her confused.




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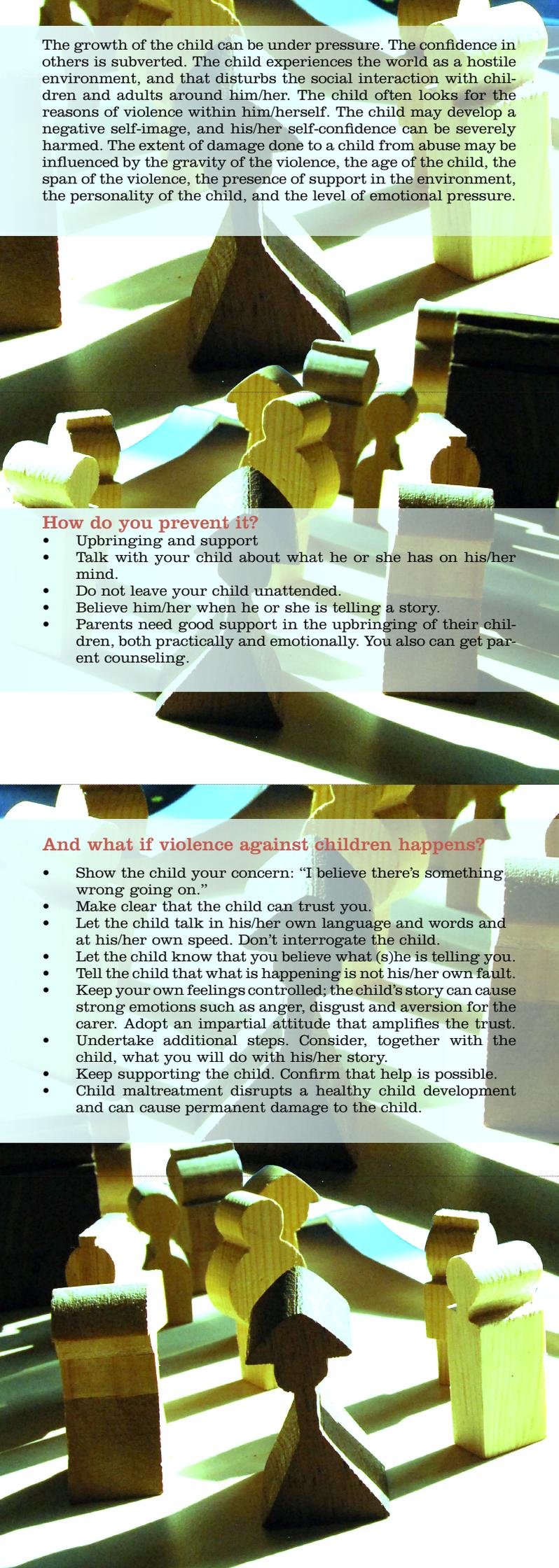
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The growth of the child can be under pressure. The confidence in others is subverted. The child experiences the world as a hostile environment, and that disturbs the social interaction with children and adults around him/her. The child often looks for the reasons of violence within him/herself. The child may develop a negative self-image, and his/her self-confidence can be severely harmed. The extent of damage done to a child from abuse may be influenced by the gravity of the violence, the age of the child, the span of the violence, the presence of support in the environment, the personality of the child, and the level of emotional pressure.

### How do you prevent it?

- Upbringing and support
- Talk with your child about what he or she has on his/her mind.
- Do not leave your child unattended.
- Believe him/her when he or she is telling a story.
- Parents need good support in the upbringing of their children, both practically and emotionally. You also can get parent counseling.

### And what if violence against children happens?

- Show the child your concern: "I believe there's something wrong going on."
- Make clear that the child can trust you.
- Let the child talk in his/her own language and words and at his/her own speed. Don't interrogate the child.
- Let the child know that you believe what (s)he is telling you.
- Tell the child that what is happening is not his/her own fault.
- Keep your own feelings controlled; the child's story can cause strong emotions such as anger, disgust and aversion for the carer. Adopt an impartial attitude that amplifies the trust.
- Undertake additional steps. Consider, together with the child, what you will do with his/her story.
- Keep supporting the child. Confirm that help is possible.
- Child maltreatment disrupts a healthy child development and can cause permanent damage to the child.

Partner violence may have serious consequences on a physical, sexual and psychological level.

- Physical consequences: scratches, bruises, fractures, concussions, burns, incapacity to work, a permanent disability, etc.
- On a sexual level: injury, disinclination to be caressed, aggressive reactions to physical contact, erectile dysfunction, sexual obsessive behaviour, .....
- Psychological consequences are, for example, shame, a sense of failure, lack of self-respect and self-confidence.
- Psychosomatic symptoms: sleeping or eating disorders, lack of concentration, hyperventilation, headache, stress, etc.
- Consequences for your interpersonal relationships: include a damaged reputation, being disowned by family or community, hating the host country, involuntary termination of the relationship, disrupted social functioning, isolation, etc.
- mental health Consequences: panic attacks, nightmares, self-loathing, reliving the violence, depression, addiction, self-mutilation, suicidal thoughts or suicide, .....

Partner violence does not only have consequences for the victim but also for other members of the family, especially the children, as witnessing violence can harm children as much as experiencing it themselves. There is also a greater chance of them committing violence or becoming a victim in their own relationship. .

### How do you prevent it?

Living conditions play a key role in partner violence. Partner violence is often associated with an increase in stress. In an asylum situation the following elements may cause stress: being detained, not being allowed to work, not being able to support the family, not having a social network, having to remain together due to residence permit requirements etc. Do you realize that these situations are affecting you, your partner or your relationship? Find help to deal with this stress before the situation escalates.

### And what if partner violence happens?

Protect yourself and your children. Talk to someone about partner violence, and seek help for you and your children. Do you feel threatened but still decide to stay at home? Then tell your children what they must do if there is violence between you and your partner: take refuge with neighbours, leave the house to telephone, call the police. Try to ensure that they can always reach a trusted person.

Keep believing in yourself, and try to get to know other people who can support you. Don't just depend on your partner. You are not alone in this difficult situation; help is always available. You can speak to a trusted member of staff in the centre where you live or contact one of the specialized agencies mentioned below. They might guide you in how to file a report with the police, provide legal advice, help to find alternative emergency accommodation or provide the assistance of professionals to help you work on your relationship.

Are you dependent on your partner for your residence permit? Or are you leaving him or her within three years? Then you lose the right to remain in Europe. But has your relationship broken down because of proven violence? Then you can obtain an independent right of residence. This also applies to women who were abused by their partner in their country of origin. Is the relationship breaking down during the asylum procedure? Then this mostly has no effect on your asylum procedure.

## “WHEN HER FATHER FOUND OUT SHE WAS RAPED, HE KILLED HER”

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### 9. HONOUR-RELATED VIOLENCE

#### What is it?

Honour-related violence occurs in societies where the concepts of ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ are important concepts in determining acceptable male and female behaviour.

Two forms of ‘honour’ are closely linked. The ‘family honour’ (sharaf, seref, izzat) is mainly associated with the prestige and reputation of men. The ‘moral honour’ (ird, namus) mainly relates to the sexual behaviour of women: they are expected to act decently, to preserve their virginity before marriage, and before and after their marriage to not give rise to gossip or doubts about their reputation. This ‘moral honour’ is a direct moral influence on the ‘family honour’: doubts about the reputation of a woman cause direct damage to the ‘family honour’. In particular, men are responsible for ensuring that female family members behave correctly, and they will ensure that the women behave decently and modestly (heshuma, namuslu) to ensure their sexual integrity.

For some people, safeguarding the ‘family honour’ is so important that they use violence to ensure it; this can happen to avoid a violation of the honour, but also to punish violations of the honour. In extreme cases this can lead to murder.

*The United Nations (UN) estimates that each year worldwide 5,000 women and girls are murdered due to family honour. This form of violence persists especially in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia but also occurs frequently in Eastern and Central Europe and other parts of Africa.*




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## “I CALLED THE POLICE BUT THEY SAID: NOTHING HAS HAPPENED, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, WE WILL COME!”

senperfort “Violence is an abuse of power, together we can prevent it!”

### 10. ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

Anyone may become victim of a crime – for example, a burglary, a traffic accident, abuse, theft, menace, assault and battery, stalking, rape or murder.

Violence does not just cause (you) physical injuries; it can also inflict mental scars, anxiety, rage, distress, feelings of guilt etc. These are just a few examples of feelings that may occur after a traumatic event. This is quite normal, and everyone deals with the conflicting feelings in their own way. Some victims have problems sleeping or eating or develop nightmares, they are no longer able to concentrate or have physical symptoms all the time. Others become agitated and aggressive or they cannot stop crying. Severe, long-term violence causes increased, more intense mental symptoms, and young victims are more susceptible. It is not your fault.

#### It is not your fault

It is important that you try to believe this and accept it, but it is not always easy. However, it happens bit by bit. The process is different for each person, and it may be easier for one person than for another. The healing process can take a long time. However, it is very important to continue believing in yourself. Sometimes it takes a while to get a traumatic event out of your mind: you remain preoccupied with it. That is also necessary to better understand the facts and to gain more control. At other times you do everything you can to forget the incident. This is also good to create breathing space.




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*Tip: Are you a victim of violence? Any kind of violence? It is important to talk about your experience. Talking helps in working through feelings, to shake off your anxiety, distress, shame or feelings of guilt. If you vent your emotions early on, they will be less of a burden (later on).*

Sometimes you will prefer to talk to someone you don't know. For example, you do not want the family to know. You can see your general practitioner or organizations for victim support. The organizations offer assistance free of charge. For example, if you or one of your family members or circle of acquaintances is confronted with violence. Help may range from a confidential discussion to administrative support.

What can they do for you?

- Talk about what has happened to you: what are your possible reactions, how can you work through everything, who or what might help you to do this?
- Offer information and advice: what are your rights, what happens with your complaint, how can you get support?
- Possibly accompany you to the police, a doctor or in court
- Mediate with a solicitor, the insurance company or the prosecution
- Refer you to other people or services – for example, if you need professional psychological or psychosocial support.

*Tip: In Europe you can always request an interpreter, over the telephone or present in person. Do you want an interpreter or translator? The support organization can request this free of charge!*

### Are you a victim of honour-related violence?

As a girl you may become a victim of honour-related violence if:

- you have a relationship with a boy who is not accepted by your family;
- you refuse to take part in an arranged marriage;
- your family or partner accuses you of dressing or behaving too provocatively;
- your family or partner prohibits you from participating in activities where foreign boys or men are present;
- there is gossip about you; or
- you are lesbian or bisexual;

As a boy you may become a victim of honour-related violence if:

- you have a relationship with a girl who is not accepted by your family;
- you refuse to take part in an arranged marriage;
- you refuse to control/check the behaviour of your sister(s); or
- you are gay or bisexual;

### Consequences of honour-related violence

- Your family or partner may prohibit you from participating in activities where men and boys are present.
- Your family can strictly control where you go and does not want you to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports or going out with your friends.
- Your family can put you under pressure to marry a partner that they propose to you. This could also include that you have to quit your studies or work.
- Your partner can lock you up at home, strictly control to whom you talk and can prohibit you from seeing a doctor.
- Your partner or your family may threaten abuse or threaten to murder you if you do not obey.

Psychological and physical violence can have serious conse-

quences for your mental and physical well-being. Confinement and restriction of your free movement not only prevent you from making friends, working and studying, but it even makes it impossible to seek help in case of strong need.

### What if honour-related violence happens?

If your parents, your partner or other family members put you under pressure or use violence, and if it becomes hard or it is impossible to talk with them or to find a solution, do not hesitate to speak to someone who can help you. If you fear that your life is in danger, please immediately contact an organization or the police.

**“YES, I AM VIOLENT MYSELF,  
BUT ONLY TO OTHER  
VIOLENT PEOPLE”**

senperfort  “Violence is an abuse of power, together we can prevent it!”

### 11. ASSISTANCE TO PERPETRATORS

Do you use physical or sexual violence in your relationship with a partner, family member, colleague at work or an acquaintance? Or do you commit incest or engage in sexual activities with children? Then you are probably not proud of it and you feel or see that it is harmful both for the victim and for yourself. But sometimes you cannot suppress the urge or stop the violence. You can get help with this.

Have you been involved with the law because of this? Have the courts identified you as committing violence? If yes, the court may assign you to take part in offender support. In some cases the judges will make this part of the court sentence.

*Perpetrators of sexual violence and partner violence are mostly men (80%) but sometimes also women. For 10% of men who were abused as a child, this was done by a woman or group of girls. Among men abused as an adult, in 30% of cases this was done by one or more women. A proportion of perpetrators take up offender support voluntarily or compulsorily – for example, 35% of those committing incest do so.*



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**“NOBODY DARES TO PRESS  
CHARGES, OUT OF FEAR OF  
BEING DEPORTED”**

senperfort  “Violence is an abuse of power, together we can prevent it!”

### 12. JUDICIAL AID AFTER VIOLENCE

Molesting, threatening, stalking, raping or abusing someone is a punishable offence. But violence between partners is not just punishable by law. In Europe it is even an aggravated circumstance. The penal code sets out what punishment a perpetrator can receive: community service, a fine or a prison sentence. Details such as the age of the victim or weapons used are taken into account. Motives are also examined. For example, was racism or homophobia involved?

A criminal case mostly begins when the victim or a witness reports an incident to the police. This is called 'giving a statement'. If the victim does not wish to give a statement or (s)he withdraws the statement, the police can still launch an investigation. The police can arrest the perpetrator and hold him/her at the police station for several hours. If the violence is severe or there is a chance of repetition, the police can detain the perpetrator for longer. This is called 'temporary custody'. The Public Prosecutor (from the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Office of Counsel for the Prosecution) then decides whether the perpetrator must appear in court. If this does not happen, the perpetrator is not prosecuted. If there is a lawsuit, the judge decides whether a criminal offence has been committed and what punishment the offender receives.



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*Not so long ago people often thought the victim must have provoked it. But nowadays the perpetrator is the one who is condemned by society. However, only a few victims make a statement to the police. In cases of violence by a partner only 12% go to the police. Among asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants the number is even lower. The following elements play a role in this: fear of the police, fear of negative consequences on the asylum procedure and status, and fear of deportation. But violence – even against undocumented migrants – is prohibited!*

If the police and law do not intervene, perpetrators may go unpunished – sometimes for years. It is not right that the perpetrator is running around free. There may then be more victims. For the perpetrators too it is important to intervene promptly. If someone gives a statement, the scope and type of violence is better identified than as just a 'societal' problem. More can then be done with regard to general prevention.

You can go to the police at any time to report an offence. You can also make an appointment with an officer who specializes in reports of violence. You can also request a female officer. The police have a duty to write down your account. In cases of physical or sexual violence a doctor will also have to complete a 'medical certificate for cases of violence'. This counts as evidence of abuse.

*Tip: Try to make a statement to the police as soon as possible while the signs of violence are still visible. By doing so, you prevent the need for further examinations. Expect the police officer to have to ask a number of embarrassing questions. This is unpleasant but necessary to gather evidence. It will be constantly explained to you why a certain question is being asked. You yourself can ask for an explanation at any time. Take photocopies of all pieces of evidence that you have: certificates, witness statements, letters, and photos. Keep the originals in a safe place. Read your statement through carefully before signing it. If you find a passage to be incorrect or unclear, then say so. And have it altered so that you think it is correct. Ask for a copy of your statement. And ask for the name of the person registering the complaint.*

*If someone sets up a police statement concerning a migrant, a copy is sent to the Immigration's Office. If they become a victim, there are no further consequences for their residence status. If they become a perpetrator, this may have negative consequences on their residence status.*

There are many ways of punishing the perpetrator and to increase your safety. Specialized lawyers can offer support and advice on this. For some legal proceedings it is compulsory to appoint a solicitor. The costs are kept down for people on limited means. Services such as Victim Aid offer information and advice. And they will help you with the process.

Many perpetrators deny their offence. Or they make it out to be less serious. They often have little desire for help. But will you take the step towards getting help? There are at least two options: psychosocial assistance and medical intervention. Both can be chosen voluntarily or imposed by the court.

In psychosocial offender support you learn what high-risk situations are, and how to avoid them. You learn to deal with stimulating factors in a different way – for example, with stress and setbacks. You also learn to identify with the victim, and learn how to take responsibility for your acts. That is very important for the victim, especially if it is a child or if you have to meet the victim later – for example, within the family, at work, at school, or in an asylum centre. Offender support is also important to you because it reduces the chance of you committing further acts of violence, with all the consequences this implies. The assistance occurs in the form of personal discussions or in a group with people in the same situation. You can also take various forms of training and courses.

You can also receive medical therapy or medication, with the support of a specialized doctor or psychiatrist. This therapy acts during processes in the brain or on the action of hormones, temporarily or permanently.