

The court has ordered a protective order against you. Your behaviors have made another person (the Petitioner) feel unsafe. If you do not think this is true, you can ask the court for a hearing. Even if you do ask for a hearing, we still encourage you to read this paper and think about why the Petitioner in your case feels scared of you or your behaviors.

When most people hear the phrase “domestic violence” they think of physical behaviors, like hitting, slapping, pushing, and choking. But there are often other things that can make someone scared of you: trying to control what your partner does or who they see, yelling, making them feel bad about themselves, insulting them, and interfering with their choices. It can include more subtle behaviors like facial expressions or harsh words or gestures. It can also include on-going patterns of control of the other including withholding information, lying, being intimidating, or manipulative. While anger may sometimes be present these behaviors can also be done when one is perfectly calm. Regardless of the particular behaviors you may or may not do, the concern is when these behaviors happen often enough that the other person feels regularly anxious, afraid, and/or “on eggshells” around you. Typically your partner has likely tried to tell you that they feel regularly uncomfortable or scared around you.

If you can relate to any of the above then we want to encourage you to consider getting specialized help for these issues. The best programs that deal with this issue are abuse intervention groups. Individual counseling is often not as helpful, especially if it is not with a therapist who specializes in working with abusive behavior. While, on the surface, it may look like or be called an “anger” problem, short term anger management work, whether done individually or in a group is also not very helpful. Anger is really more of a symptom than a cause and solely focusing on managing the emotion of anger is often not particularly helpful.

These programs are a starting place. It may be hard to admit, but these behaviors are a choice, so the good news is, you can change. You may also have substance abuse concerns, recovering from your own traumatic experiences (like being abused as a child), and depression but those are not the reason you are scaring or hurting your partner. It’s important to address these other issues as well, because they can escalate abusive behaviors, but treatment for those issues alone will not solve the problem.

You or your partner may want to attend couples counseling, but this is not appropriate for issues of abuse because one person is choosing to harm someone else. Couples counseling assumes both partners can go to therapy, say exactly what they want and solve problems collaboratively. Once you complete an abuse intervention program, couples counseling may be appropriate. You also may have heard that people are ordered to undergo anger management treatment. Anger management is for someone that is angry at everyone, not just their partner or family. You may be using anger as a tool to scare your partner or get them to do what you want, but that is still a choice you are making.

The list on the back of this sheet includes a number of local programs and important things to know when deciding on a program to attend. Abuse Intervention Programs are multi-week group programs and you begin by doing an intake with a group facilitator.

Whether or not you want to reunite with your partner or break up and date someone else in the future, addressing your actions now is important for any future relationship.