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Taupo & Turangi Weekender, Taupo Central

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# Abuse has many faces for women

When women come to Shine for help after a physical assault, it's often revealed that they've also been psychologically abused for years, says Jill Proudfoot.

Jill is client services manager at Shine, the charity which has made it its mission to stop domestic abuse in New Zealand. She says psychological abuse encompasses all the strategies used by a person who wants to control someone else, make sure they can't exert their own free will, and create fear and anxiety about what might happen next.

It can take the form of threats, intimidation, constant texting to see where the person is, monitoring email activity, checking finances and online presence. Isolating a person by cutting them off from their friends, or spreading rumours about them, such as saying they have mental health issues, is also common.

While psychological abuse can be hard to spot from outside, people might notice looks and gestures, dismissive comments or insults. Sometimes the behaviour only happens in private and the abuser acts like the perfect partner in public, Jill says.

"So [the victim] is scared to tell anyone because of the fear of not being believed. That two-faced thing is very confusing because people think you're so lucky, what a great couple, he's such a lovely

guy and all that sort of thing."

Jill says if a person thinks they are being abused, they can phone

various helplines, talk and get advice. They can get a protection order for psychological or financial abuse as well as physical abuse.

She says the usual advice to victims of psychological abuse is to make a note of every incident with time and date so that they have evidence to establish a pattern of abusive behaviour.

"The Domestic Violence Act defines a pattern of behaviour where each incident on its own may not be severe but it's the combined effect on a person. It's the ongoing nature of it rather than the severity of each episode."

Jill's advice to people wanting to leave abusive relationships is to talk to someone who knows what the options are and can help, including applying for a protection

order and moving to a refuge.

She says if friends and family know someone in an abusive relationship, they need to stay by their side and not judge them. It's easy to get frustrated but for victims, it can take an average of seven attempts to leave for good.

"Some people leave once and never go back, it's over. Others who are really entangled with the abusive person and have been convinced that no one else will

ever want them try to leave and it's really hard. They've might have no friends and no money and need help with the kids. The abuser promises to change, and so they go back. After leaving is when the most support is needed, but that's hard to maintain. So keep the support going even once they seem to be safe."

## Find help:

### For people experiencing abuse:

- Abuse is not acceptable.
- Everyone has a right to be safe.
- Talk to someone who can help you sift through the safety options (Helpline, specialist domestic violence agency.)

### For friends and family:

- As above, plus hang in there for the long haul.

### For people using abusive behaviour:

- Many agencies offer non-violence programmes to support behaviour change that will enhance your life and the lives of those around you.
- Shine Helpline 0508 744 633



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Jill Proudfoot of Shine.