

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is recurring behavior a person uses to control another's actions and feelings. It involves verbal criticism, verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, property destruction, economic abuse, physical assault, and even sexual assault. Domestic violence incidents can vary in how often they occur and how severe they are, but in typical abusive situations, the violent behaviors become more dangerous and more frequent. Domestic Violence is about power and control.

Common Traits of Abusers

Perpetrators of family violence come from all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic categories. Most abusers are needy. They use violence to get their way with their partners but often behave normally toward other relationships with their family or co-workers. They have difficulty establishing close friendships and tend to be critical and jealous of their partners. They minimize the impact of their abuse and blame their partners to justify their violent behaviors. The truth is, the abuse has nothing to do with the victim and it is never a result of anything to do with the relationship or any one situation. Abuse is a personal choice and a learned behavior used to give the abusive person the level of power and control that they desire.¹

What Is the Impact on Children?

In homes where domestic violence occurs, children face a higher risk of suffering abuse. However, even if they are only witnesses and not physically abused, they face emotional effects and psychological trauma as victims of child abuse. If they do not witness the violence, they are still affected by the family conflict. Children may develop serious emotional and behavioral problems.² With boys particularly, you often see an increase in aggressive behavior, with girls, we tend to see more of the internalizing behavior, that is they worry more, they're anxious, they get depressed.

Common reactions in children are:

- **Feeling responsible for the conflict**
- **Guilt for not being able to stop the abuse**
- **Anxiety, fear, worry, embarrassment, depression**
- **Anger, increased aggression, fighting at home or school**
- **Drug or alcohol abuse or skipping school**

Red Flags for Domestic Violence

It's not always easy to tell in the beginning if there is the potential for domestic violence. Possessive and controlling behaviors don't always appear right away, but rather emerge and intensify as the relationship grows.

- **Does your partner expect you to spend all of your time with them or to "check in" and let them know where you are?**
- **Does your partner act jealous and possessive of you?**
- **Do they isolate you by controlling where you go or who you see and talk to?**
- **Do you feel as if you are walking on eggshells to keep the peace?**
- **Has your partner made threats to hurt you or someone else if you don't do what is wanted?**
- **Does your partner play mind games or make you feel guilty?**
- **Do they refuse to take responsibility for their actions or blame someone or something else for their behavior?**

What Makes a Victim Stay?

Leaving can be an extremely dangerous time for a victim of abuse, because abuse is about power and control. When a victim leaves, they are taking back control and threatening the abusive partner's power, which could cause the abusive partner to retaliate in very destructive ways. Fear becomes a large reason for staying in the relationship. However, there are other reasons a victim might stay. Possible reasons include:

- **The victim's sense of self-worth is destroyed and victim does not know what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like.**
- **The victim genuinely loves their abuser and they believe their abuser can change.**
- **There may be children involved and the victim wants to maintain their family.**
- **The victim has lost hope and feels they have no other choice.**
- **The victim believes they need the financial resources of their abuser.**

Who Can Help?

If you're the person who's been the victim of violence, you need to take steps to protect yourself, and protect your family. An excellent place to start is by calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**. They offer confidential, 24-hour, 7 days a week, free-of-cost support and tools for victims of domestic violence. Whether you are deciding how to communicate better with your partner, planning on leaving the relationship, or finding things that you can do to feel safe, there is always more than one right answer and their highly trained advocates can help you sort through your options to determine the best one for you.

What Is a Safety Plan?

A safety plan is a unique, personalized plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, deciding to leave, or after you leave. Safety planning involves learning how to cope with emotions, tell friends and family about the abuse, take legal action, and more. In moments of crisis your brain doesn't function the same way as when you are calm, so having a safety plan laid out in advance can help you to protect yourself in those stressful moments.³

What You Should Do.

If you are in an abusive situation, a good place to start is to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or visit their website at www.thehotline.org. Make a safety plan and then leave the relationship. Use the resources through the hotline and local services to stay away and get help. Most professional counselors will not recommend returning to the relationship but if you feel a need to return, first ensure that the abusive partner has completed all the counseling and classes recommended by your counselor. Work with your local service providers to put in place all possible safe guards and follow their advice. Do not return before the abusive partner has shown true change (as seen by your counselor) through the completion of intensive counseling and classes.

Referenced works:

¹ Project for Victims of Family violence, "Signs to look for in a battering personality", Fayetteville, AR, Accessed on 25, August, 2020.

² Kelleher, K., Gardner, W., Coben, J., Barth, R., Edleson, J., & Hazen, A. (2006, March). Co-Occurring Intimate Partner Violence and Child Maltreatment: Local Policies/Practices and Relationships to Child Placement, Family Services and Residence . National Institute of Justice. 3 <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>, Accessed on 25, August, 2020.

³ Create a Safety Plan. The Hotline. (2021, June 29). <https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-a-safety-plan/>. Accessed on 25, August, 2020.

Additional Referenced works:

4 Domestic Violence Resources. Abuse Recovery Ministry & Services. (2021, April 10). <https://abuserecovery.org/resources/>. Accessed on 25, August, 2020.