

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Domestic violence may not be something that happens in your home, but it DOES affect you. Someone you love is a victim, or will become a victim. Violent offenders don't discriminate, and violence in the home is never contained within the home. It spreads, it damages everything in its path, and it is coming for you.

Take a stand now and help to make every house a safe house.



Domestic violence – why does she stay?

You'd think with all the stories in the news about intimate partners killing each other that we wouldn't need any more awareness. And yet....

A lot of people do know the problem exists, but there are so many myths and misunderstandings surrounding domestic violence that the real answers get lost. (Let me point out that both women and men are victims of domestic violence. The thing is, the great majority of victims are women and so we use the feminine pronoun. It's simpler, but it is certainly not intended to exclude men.)

Instead of asking *Why doesn't she leave?*, the question we should be asking is *Why doesn't HE leave?* As has been pointed out many times, until we hold the abuser responsible for his crime, no progress will be made.

But if you insist on knowing why she stays with him in spite of the injuries to her body, to her mind, to her soul, here's the short version:

- She has nowhere else to go
- She has no money, no job, and no way to support herself and her children
- She fears he will take her children
- She has no support from family, friends, or church
- She believes she is over reacting to the violence
- She can't believe that the man she loves would really hurt her

- She believes his apologies and his promises that it won't happen again
- She believes his excuse that drugs and/or alcohol make him violent
- She believes his excuse that he loves her so much he just can't help hitting her

All of these are very real and very good reasons in the mind of a victim of domestic violence for staying put. Her feelings and her situation are far more complicated than any outsider can understand or than she can explain.

There's one very simple and understandable reason that she stays: Victims of domestic violence are far more likely to be killed after leaving the situation.

Domestic violence is about power and control. When an abuser senses that he has lost control of his victim, that his power is waning — that is, when she takes charge of her own life and leaves the violence behind— the abuser gets scared, angry, desperate. That's when he presents the greatest danger to his victim.

It is pointless and heartless to ask why a victim doesn't stop being a victim. Instead, let's all ask How can I help?

Children are victims, too

Children exposed to domestic violence are inevitably affected by it. Sometimes the parents like to think that the children are not aware of what's going on, but children always know.

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Children traumatized by domestic violence may exhibit symptoms such as :

- serious problems with temper tantrums
- continual fighting at school or between siblings
- lashing out at objects, inside or outside of the home
- treating pets cruelly or abusively
- threatening younger sister or brother with violence For instance, "You get over here with my teddy bear or I'll kill you. I'll slice you into little pieces with a knife"
- attempting to get attention through hitting, kicking or choking

- modeling after the abuser—"Monkey see, monkey do"
- with girls, withdrawal, signs not so obvious
- occasional cringing if you raise your arm

The cycle of violence continues through the children who learn that abusive behavior is a way of controlling the people around them and of getting their way. Children do not "grow out of" violent behavior — they must be taught to take responsibility for their own behavior. Most importantly, they must be **shown** how to cope with life.

Children learn by example. What kind of role model are you?

I'm sorry, so sorry

It's another statistic: on average, a victim of domestic violence returns to the relationship **seven times** before it finally ends.

People find it hard to understand why anyone would return after having finally escaped from the torture, much less that they would return more than once. What is it about abusers that makes them so ... attractive?

More often than not, abusers are master manipulators. They are particularly adept at pushing the victim's buttons. Some of the tactics they use to persuade their victims to return include:

- Offering bribes ("I'll buy you a new car, get a job, etc")
- Promising to be a great parent if s/he returns. This works especially well if the abuser has neglected the kids in the past.
- Claiming to have had a religious awakening. This is not really a valid revival or salvation since s/he has probably only gone to church a few times. "I have been going to church every Sunday since you left." I have accepted Christ into my life." This puts the responsibility for battering on God.
- Promising to stop drinking and/or using drugs. Drinking and drug use do not cause domestic violence –if it did, then batterers would beat strangers on the street.

- Promising to get counseling. Long term counseling is needed, but less than 1% of batterers voluntarily go into counseling, or continue with counseling after the victim returns.

And the ever popular

- Declaration of love. Batterers lay the blame for their behavior on the victim, by insisting that “I love you so much it makes me crazy to think you might leave me.”

Ending a relationship is not easy for anyone. We all want to believe that we are loved and that the person we’ve dedicated our life to is worthy of being loved by us.

Victims return because they are human and want the same thing from an intimate relationship that we all want. It takes time to change our way of thinking and to open our eyes to the reality of what’s happening.

If you know someone who is a victim of domestic violence, you can help by being patient and supportive, and by directing your friend to a local domestic violence shelter program for counseling. Find the nearest program by contacting the National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**

Had I but known...

Batterers don’t advertise.

If someone slaps you around on the first date, you know to stop the relationship right there. People who abuse their intimate partners aren’t the brightest minds, but they are smart enough to know that victims must be trained. Most batterers have a very charming and charismatic personality — at least, in the beginning and in public.

Luckily they also exhibit behavior that can clue you in before the situation turns deadly. Every one of us would be wise to learn these warning signs:

Early Signs During Dating of a Potential Abuser or Batterer

- **Being overly needy** – always needing help or some type of emotional support from you. Potential abusers often start out with a poor sad puppy or bleeding heart type of behavior. They express feeling downtrodden, saying they always come up short or mistreated by others. Always wants your help to fix or overcome this “problem”.

- **Makes decisions for you without asking** – about social plans, dinner menus, etc. You are often not asked what you want or if commitments fit your schedule before they commit you and your time or make other choices for you.
- **Bragging or excessive boasting** - potential abusers often try to impress by bragging on accomplishments. Cocky, relaxed or arrogant in their own social circle, but may be uncomfortable in yours.
- **Insecure around others/General paranoia** – May seem “normal” in conversations with you, but uncomfortable around others you introduce him to such as your friends, family, co-workers, etc. Potential abusers are often paranoid in general – of other’s motives or actions (including yours) in an unrealistic way, looking for hidden meanings, unfounded suspicions.
- **Invades your privacy** – shows up unexpectedly at your house, in social settings when you are out with friends. Is generally “nosey” about what you are doing, who your friends are, picks up and reads your mail when visiting you. Questions you about activities in ways that seem unreasonable or intrusive.
- **Ignores or disregards your boundaries** – pressures you in spite of your having said no (to any thing/activity), appears to deliberately do things or treat you in ways you have expressly said you dislike. Acts as though “they forgot” when crossing a boundary you have expressed previously.
- **Lies or manipulates you** – Finding out you have not been told the truth about something, often even simple things that seem silly to hide or lie about. Situations that make you feel misled and you feel you were deceived for no reason, that the truth would have been easily acceptable. Resorts to being angry or evasive when confronted with the truth.
- **Over-reacts, uptight or twitchy** - A potential abuser is over-sensitive to simple situations, small comments, often seems “on edge” or uneasy for no reason. You may ask “what’s wrong” when they are obviously acting uptight, yet they won’t share anything, preferring to answer “nothing” or try to pretend things are fine.
- **Pushy with others and/or you** – Can’t let others have their own opinions, must have the last word. May cause arguments or take issue with others, often over things that seem simple or not worth arguing over.
- **Pressuring you for sexual acts** - these are often for sexual favors or acts that you are uncomfortable with and/or dislike. Tries to point out others “do it”, swears they “can’t help themselves”. Ignores your wishes to not engage in such activities. This type of behavior is about not being able to control themselves sexually with partners.

- **Feelings of discomfort around their family/friends** – Something about their close friends, family members, etc. doesn't feel right. You often feel like a misfit in their company, or perhaps that you don't really like these individuals. Family members may seem harsh to each other, unforgiving or unreasonable in their expectations, they may argue openly in front of you.
- **Overbearing parents or other family** – Family members expect to tell them what job to do, what to do for socials, what instruments and such the children/teenagers should play, in general deciding what they should do and not do. Often times eventual victims are pushed into marriage by the potential abuser's family, as if it's ok to make the decision for you or assume marriage on your behalf, make plans and arrangements for wedding ceremonies and parties without consulting with you.
- **Road rage** - Viewing other people's bad driving as a personal assault, like they were doing something on purpose. Aggressive toward other drivers who are minding their own business, won't allow others to pass, plays games with innocent drivers just to annoy/aggravate them. Other drivers are considered "idiots".
- **Possessive** – dislikes letting you out of their sight, takes offense when others offer you compliments, feels others are trying to take you away from them.
- **Uses spiritual beliefs or religion to pressure you into commitment** - telling you God has plans for you together, how you are meant to be together because it was God's plan. Often this later leads to pressuring that you would be disobeying God if you left the relationship.
- **Disgruntled relationships with previous partners** - Abusers often have lingering discontent with former girlfriends/boyfriends or spouses. Often they blame past partners for relationship failures, deny past abuse charges or arrests (may admit the legal action occurred but deny they were at fault), or have constant arguments with former partners over the children (custody, parenting issues) from these relationships.
- **Stories of previous anger, violence or abuse** – Others close to them, often friends or family, tell stories or relate incidents of outbursts or violence. Often times to a future victim these stories seem unbelievable or out of character for the new partner, the victim cannot believe the new partner could act in such a way.

–From the [Women Are Safe website](#), where you can learn more about domestic violence and options available to victims

The cycle of violence

A comment on an earlier post mentioned that abusers will turn sweet and loving — but only until the victim returns to the relationship. After that, it starts all over again. This is known as the Cycle of Violence, a repeating loop of abusive behavior that contributes to trapping victims.

Here's what the [Women Are Safe website](#) says about this:

The cycle of violence is a recurring behavioral pattern where the offender swings between affectionate, remorseful, calm, and periods of tense demands culminating in violence.

1. Tension starts
2. Tension escalates
3. Assault
4. Honeymoon stage

The more times the cycle is completed, the less time it takes to complete. Furthermore, as the cycle is repeated, the violence usually increases in frequency and severity. After a violent episode, the offender may be genuinely sorry for what he has done. He may regret and feel ashamed of his behavior.

Often his worst fear is that his partner will leave him, so he may try as hard as he can to make up for his behavior. He may promise never to hurt her again. This means that following even severe or chronic abuse, the offender may be very penitent and determined to change.

This is what the victim hopes for. However, observers of this pattern note that the honeymoon is all too temporary.

The sad truth is, it only gets worse each time the victim returns.

It also gets more dangerous, as the abuser gets better at manipulating the victim.

Support groups and individual counseling provided by domestic violence shelter programs can help victims learn to understand the dynamics of this crime, and learn to better avoid falling back into the trap. It's also important for those who are not primary victims to learn these things, too.

Most DV programs offer community education presentations. Please contact your local program and ask if they can speak to your club, church group, or workplace. Knowledge is power.

If you stay, stay safe

I've written about people who don't realize they are victims of domestic violence. Now let's consider the victims who DO know but aren't yet prepared to leave the relationship. Never mind why they stay — they have good reasons for that, reasons they may not be able to explain fully to others or even to themselves.

If you or someone you know is still in an abusive situation, it's important to plan ahead for the next assault. Develop a safety plan, using these ideas:

Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and where there are always ways to escape. If arguments occur, try to move to those areas.

Know where the nearest pay phone is located. Know your local battered women's shelter number. Don't be afraid to call the police.

Let family, friends, or neighbors you trust know about your situation. Arrange a signal so they'll know when you need emergency help.

Be sure your children know they should *never* get involved when you are being threatened or harmed by your partner. Teach them to get away from the abusive situation and find help.

Keep an extra set of keys to house and car, emergency telephone numbers, important papers (birth certificates, income verification, social security numbers, , medication for you and/or your children, child's favorite toy, etc., extra clothes packed in trash bag (not obvious)

If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.

Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures, etc.

Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, events and threats made if possible.

Contact your local battered women's shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis.

Asking for help from a domestic violence shelter program does not obligate you to go into shelter. If you call a hotline, you don't usually have to give your name. If you're asked for your name, you don't have to give your *real* name.

These programs exist to help you stay safe. Advocates care about you and want to provide you with the resources you need to live safely and happily. All you have to do is ask....

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Break out your purple ribbon, purple tie, purple scarf, or whatever purple item of clothing you've got. October 1 is **Peaceful Purple Day**, an event to kick off Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Wear your purple with pride to show that you do NOT support domestic violence, that you do NOT condone violent behavior, and that you are doing your part to make every house a safe house.

Here are a few facts to consider

- Domestic violence is one of the most common of all crimes. About half of all couples experience at least one violent incident; in 1/4 of these couples, violence is a common occurrence.
- Twenty per cent of all murders in this country are committed within the family, and 13% are committed by spouses.
- Most family violence is committed against women. Ninety-five per cent of all spousal assaults are committed by men.
- Six million American women are beaten each year by their husbands or boyfriends. Four thousand of them are killed.
- Battering is the single major cause of injury to women — more frequent than auto accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.
- Domestic violence takes its toll on the family, society, and the future. Over one million women each year seek medical help for injuries caused by battering.
- Victims of domestic violence are three times more likely to be victimized again than are victims of other types of crimes.
- Children are emotionally traumatized by witnessing family violence; many of them grow up to repeat the pattern as victim or abuser.

- While you were reading this, 4 women were severely beaten.

When the victim is someone you care about

Primary victims aren't the only ones who suffer from abuse. Friends and family members of domestic violence victims are also trapped in a world of fear, concerned about the people they love and unable to stop the abuse.

Friends and family are not entirely helpless, however. There are things you can do to help an abuse victim.

- **Believe her.**
- **Trust her to make the right choice.** She knows her situation better than anyone, and if she chooses to stay with the abuser, she has reasons for doing that. Only she can know when she's ready to leave.
- **Stress safety.** Help her create a safety plan for herself and the children. Make her aware that her computer and cell phone activity can be traced. Help her develop a signal, an escape route, or other plans of action to use in an emergency.
- **Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault.** She does not deserve it and she does not bring it on herself. Abusers alone are responsible for the harm they do.
- **Stay in touch.** Abusers often isolate their victims from anyone who may support or help the victim. She may feel pressured to stop visiting or calling you. If that is the case, you can still visit or call her. Knowing that you are there can make all the difference in her efforts to end the abuse, even though she may not tell you so.
- **DO NOT tell the victim what to do.** Remember — she already has someone trying to control her thoughts and actions. What she needs from you is support and understanding.
- **Protect yourself.** Never go into a situation that you believe may be dangerous.

The more you know about the dynamics of domestic violence, the more you will be able to help. Your local DV shelter almost certainly has training for volunteers and they will

probably be happy to let you participate even if you don't want to join their volunteer program.

To find the shelter nearest you, call the National DV Hotline :

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Domestic violence is one small part of a greater culture of violence. If you want to make a difference, you can work to end all violence in whatever way is best suited to you — through donations, volunteering, or simply by eliminating violent acts and words from your own life.

Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent. ~ Salvor Hardin

When is it domestic violence?

There is a tendency to equate domestic violence with bruises and black eyes. Medical personnel know to look for such obvious signs, and most of us would be immediately suspicious if our friend wore black and blue every week.

Unfortunately a lot of victims of domestic violence also consider bruises the definitive definition, as well. If they aren't being physically assaulted, it may never occur to them that they are victims of abuse.

Anyone who has survived emotional and verbal abuse, though, can tell you that beatings aren't the only way abusers keep their victims in fear. In fact, it's not uncommon for clients to say to me, "Sometimes I wish he *would* hit me! That wouldn't hurt as much as what he says to me." Because there is so much focus on the outward symptoms, we can forget that an attack on spirit and soul is every bit as dangerous as an attack with fists and weapons; and because a bruised soul can't be documented in photographs, victims and others may ignore the damage.

Domestic violence is about power and control. Abusers are not people with anger management issues, or jealousy issues, or stress issues. They are weak and fearful people who try to control and intimidate others. Some of the ways they do this include:

- isolating the victim — not allowing her to visit family or friends or to go anywhere alone
- maintaining exclusive control over all money and household financial matters
- making all the decisions

- preventing the victim from learning to drive, going to school, getting a job, learning the dominant language of the culture in which s/he lives
- limiting freedom, ex. “Go to the store, get milk and come straight home. It should take you 15 minutes”
- insulting the victim, crushing her self-esteem, making fun of her/him, calling her/him names
- telling her/him “You’re crazy”
- using physical violence against pets; breaking things; throwing things; having tantrums
- threatening suicide
- coercing her/him into doing things s/he doesn’t want to do, often but not always involving sex acts or legally and ethically questionable acts

Anyone exposed to emotional and verbal torture for even a short length of time is a victim of abuse. Don’t kid yourself — it’s a serious problem and an omen of worse things to come.

Even if you don’t consider verbal and emotional abuse the real thing, even if you want to completely redefine the term ‘domestic violence,’ take note of what’s happening. No one deserves to be subjected to this sort of treatment. If you’re in a relationship with someone who uses these or similar tactics, I strongly encourage you to speak to an advocate. The National Hotline (**1-800-799-7233**) can put you in touch with a program near you.

Please don’t think you have to be bruised to be beaten.

Finding safety

Victims of domestic violence often believe that they are alone in the world, that no one would believe their stories, that there is no way out of the abusive relationship.

Batterers often isolate their victims from friends and family, sometimes from the entire world. Victims may be literally locked in their homes without transportation or telephones, with no way at all to communicate.

Other victims of violence appear to have all the freedom in the world — they attend church, hold jobs, socialize— and yet they, too, feel that they can't escape the abuse.

The dynamics of domestic violence are more complicated than I can explain in a single blog entry, but the [Women Are Safe](#) website contains a lot of information that can clear up questions.

Here, though, is a simple but critical piece of information: Domestic violence shelter programs are bound by confidentiality. If you call the hotline number or speak to an advocate in person, everything that you say will be kept private. No details about you or your situation will be shared with anyone outside the program.

If you're a victim, please call and talk to someone about your situation. Even if you don't feel that you need shelter or support groups, just talking to an advocate on the crisis line may help you to better understand what is happening.

The [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) can put you in touch with the domestic violence shelter program nearest you:

1 -800 – 799 – SAFE (7233)

1- 800 – 787 – 3224 (TTY)