

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Raising Public Awareness of Domestic Violence

PENNSTATE



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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior in any intimate relationship whereby one partner seeks to gain or maintain power and control over the other.

Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological. The abuser takes action or makes threats that influence the other person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, and gender. It can happen with couples who are married, living together, or dating.

Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.

*(Adapted from National Domestic Violence Hotline)*

## How prevalent is domestic violence?

According to a 2008 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1/4 of all women in the U.S. report that they have experienced domestic violence.

On average, more than 3 women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country every day.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 7.8 million women have been raped by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

1 in 3 women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused.<sup>3</sup>

1 in 5 female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. Abused girls are significantly more likely to get involved in other risky behaviors. They are 4 to 6 times more likely to get pregnant and 8 to 9 times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-abused peers.<sup>4</sup>

1 in 3 teens report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, slapped, choked, or otherwise physically hurt by his/her partner.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Bureau of Justice Statistics (Feb. 2003). Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001.

2 Extrapolated from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) and U.S. Census population. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2003). Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States. Atlanta, GA.

3 Silverman, J.G., Raj, A., and Clements, K. (2004). Dating Violence and associated sexual risk and pregnancy among adolescent girls in the United States. *Pediatrics*, 114(2): e220-e225.

4 These are findings from a study commissioned by Liz Claiborne Inc. to investigate the level of and attitudes towards dating abuse among American teenagers aged 13 to 18. *Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU)*. (2005).

Teen Dating Abuse Survey. Available at [www.loveisnotabuse.com/statistics\\_abuseandteens.htm](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/statistics_abuseandteens.htm)

5 Gazmararian, J.A., Petersen, R., Spitz, A.M., Goodwin, M.M., Saltzman, L.E., and Marks, J.S. (2000) Violence and reproductive health; current knowledge and future research directions. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 4(2): 79-84.

## Where do you go for help?

The National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) provides **anonymous and confidential help**. The NDVH is a nonprofit organization that provides crisis intervention, information, and referrals to victims of domestic violence, perpetrators, friends, and families.

**1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)**

### Hotline Services:

- Crisis intervention, safety planning, information about domestic violence, and referrals to local service providers
- Direct connection to domestic violence resources available in the caller's area provided by a Hotline advocate
- Assistance in both English and Spanish with Hotline advocates who have access to more than 170 different languages through interpreter services
- Assistance through e-mail
- Informational materials on such topics as domestic violence, sexual assault, battering intervention and prevention programs, working through the criminal justice system, and related issues

## What will a domestic violence advocate do?

- Listen
- Support your decisions
- Not blame you
- Help in a way that is best for you

## How can a domestic violence advocate help?

- Create a safety plan
- Navigate law enforcement
- Arrange for shelter
- Get information and referrals to local resources
- Advocate for you through the judicial system
- Set up regular counseling
- Connect with a support group

## Why do victims stay?

### Love

Abusers are not hurtful all the time. Many abusers have a likable and loving side. Many victims think that they can change the abuser's behavior.

### Fear

Many abusers threaten to hurt or kill themselves if their victim decides to leave. Abusers often threaten that the violence will get worse if the partner decides to leave.

### Doubt

It's not always easy for a victim to admit that the relationship is abusive. If the victim's partner is especially popular at school or in the community, the victim may be concerned about losing social status.

### Embarrassment

Victims can be afraid of an "I told you so" response from those who have tried to help in the past.

### Hope for Change

Victims often believe that the abuser will return to the person he was at the beginning of the relationship—the person she fell in love with.

### Isolation

As a tactic of the abuse, the abuser is likely to have made it difficult for the victim to access resources and supportive people.

### Societal Denial

Abusers often have a public face that is charming and charismatic; it is difficult for those who only know that side to believe that abuse is taking place.

### Societal Expectations

The victim may see ending the relationship as a failure and may also fear social stigma. The victim may not fit stereotypes about victims of domestic abuse.

### Lack of Resources

It may be difficult or impossible for the victim to contact supportive people, and she may not have money or any way to find housing.

## // FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS //

### **Economic Autonomy**

The number one indicator that a victim will be able to leave is economic stability outside of the relationship.

### **Children**

The victim may believe that it is better for a child if the parents are together. The victim may not want to disrupt childcare or schooling arrangements.

*(Adapted from Centre County Women's Resource Center)*

### **What can you say?**

- *I believe you.*
- *You are not alone.*
- *No one deserves to be abused.*
- *It can be difficult to know what to do.*
- *It can feel overwhelming at times.*
- *It's ok to still love him/her but not like what's happening.*
- *I am concerned for your safety.*
- *Leaving can be a very dangerous time.*
- *There are options available.*
- *Abuse is often about power and control.*
- *I've noticed you've been late, absent, tired, different lately, I'm concerned.*
- *You know your situation best.*
- *It's important for you to make the decision that is best for you.*
- *The local domestic violence program may be able to help with a safety plan.*
- *The local domestic violence program may be able to explore options with you.*

### **Some helpful things to do**

- Listen
  - Respect privacy and confidentiality
  - Respect her choices
  - Encourage her to seek professional resources
  - Validate feelings
- (Centre County Women's Resource Center and National Domestic Violence Hotline)*

### **What are some signs of domestic violence?**

#### **Look for**

- Physical signs of injury
  - Signs of anxiety and fear
  - Emotional distress
  - Isolation
  - Change in appearance and self-esteem
  - Restricted transportation
  - Clothing that is inappropriate for the season
  - Attempts to hide activities or interactions from partner
  - Minimization and denial of harassment or injuries
- (Centre County Women's Resource Center)*

### **What does an abuser look like?**

Abusers come from all walks of life. Much like victims, you cannot identify an abuser by where he lives, or what he does for a living. Abusers are unemployed workers, farmers, computer experts, car salesmen, university professors, truck drivers, psychiatrists, and teachers—everyone. Abusers are therefore not easy to identify.

### **Signs of an abuser:**

#### **Jealousy**

At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will say that jealousy is a sign of love.

#### **Controlling Behavior**

The abuser is likely to disguise or excuse controlling behavior.

#### **Quick Involvement**

Many victims of abuse dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they became engaged or started living together.

#### **Unrealistic Expectations**

The abuser may expect the victim to be the perfect spouse/partner, parent, lover, and friend. He depends on the victim for all his needs, and may also state that he can fulfill all of the victim's needs for a lover, friend, and companion.

## // FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS //

### **Isolation**

The abuser may try to curtail the victim's social interaction and may prevent her from going to work or class or being with friends and family.

### **Blame-Shifting for Problems**

Very rarely will an abuser accept responsibility for any problem or negative situation.

### **Verbal Abuse**

The abuser may say things that are meant to be cruel, hurtful, and degrading, either in public or in private. He may also downplay the victim's accomplishments.

### **Any Force During an Argument**

An abuser may physically restrain the victim from leaving the room, lash out at the victim with his/her hand or another object, pin the victim against a wall or shout "right in her face."

*(Adapted from Centre County Women's Resource Center)*

## **Can domestic violence happen to anyone?**

Victims and abuser are of every race, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, occupation, education, and religious background. Women can be abused in any neighborhood in any town. Victims are factory workers, nurses, lawyers, homemakers, police officers, and students. They are grandmothers and teenagers. Approximately 50% of all couples experience domestic violence at some time in their lives.

*(National Domestic Violence Hotline and Centre County Women's Resource Center)*

## **Are men also victims of domestic violence?**

Although the "norm" of domestic violence relationships is a male perpetrator and a female

victim, people in other relationships can be victims. Same-sex relationships and male-female relationships have similar rates of domestic violence.

*(Adapted from Centre County Women's Resource Center)*

Heterosexual males can also be victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their female partners.

They experience the same dynamics of interpersonal violence, including experiences of disbelief, ridicule, and shame that only reinforce their silence. However, members of some cultural groups are at higher risk of domestic violence than the general population.

*(Adapted from The National Domestic Violence Hotline)*

## **Are children hit too?**

Studies show that children are physically abused in approximately half the families where the mother is a known victim of domestic assault. Similarly, the mother is being battered in approximately half the families where her child is a known victim of physical abuse.<sup>6</sup>

## **The effect on children who are not abused**

- 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year, and seven million children live in families in which severe partner violence occurred.<sup>7</sup>
- Children who experience childhood trauma, including witnessing incidents of domestic violence, are at a greater risk of having serious adult health problems including tobacco use, substance abuse, obesity, cancer, heart disease, depression and a higher risk for unintended pregnancy.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Edleson, J.L. (1999). The Overlap Between Child Maltreatment and Woman Abuse. National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. Available at [http://new.nawnet.org/category/Main\\_Doc.php?docid=389](http://new.nawnet.org/category/Main_Doc.php?docid=389)

7 McDonald, R., Jouriles, E.N., Ramisetty-Mikler, S., and Caetano, R. (2006) Estimating the number of American children living in partner-violent families. *Journal of Family Psychology* 20(1): 137-142.

8 Felitti, V.J., et al. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 14(4): 248-58. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic, San Diego, CA. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/ACE/index.htm>