

# **UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

## **A Support Guide for Family and Friends**



### **24-Hour Helpline**

**Anonymous, confidential, and free. We support and respect your choices.**

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**Outreach Office in Calumet County: 107 South Side Shopping Center, Chilton WI 53014**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. How Can I Help a Friend or Family Member Who Is Being Abused?.....	3
2. What is Abuse?.....	6
3. Possible Signs to Look in a Battering Personality.....	9
4. Power & Control Wheel.....	11
5. Cycle of Violence.....	12
6. Harbor House Services.....	13
7. Indicators of Domestic Violence for Family and Friends.....	14
8. Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship.....	15
9. Additional Barriers (rural, later life, LGBT, disabilities, communities of color).....	16
10. Common Misconceptions about Domestic Violence.....	18
11. Effects of Trauma on Adult Victims of Domestic Violence.....	21
12. Effects of Trauma on Children.....	22
13. Support for Children.....	23
14. What Parents Need to Know about Teen Dating Violence.....	24
15. Resources to Learn More about Domestic Violence (books and websites).....	25

## **How Can I Help a Friend or Family Member Who Is Being Abused?**

### **Become informed.**

Gather all of the information you can about domestic violence. Contact programs and services in your area that assist abuse victims and their children. These programs not only offer a safe place to go but also provide advocacy, support and other needed services.

Sometimes your own feelings about violence may make it difficult for you to talk about the situation. Contact your local domestic violence helpline or program to talk to staff about your concern. Advocates can be an excellent source of support for both you and your friend.

### **Don't be afraid to show your concern.**

Help your friend or family member recognize the abuse. Show that you see what is going on and that you want to help. Physical violence is never acceptable at any time. There is no excuse for it—not alcohol, drugs, financial pressures, depression or other mental illness, jealousy or anger. Everyone deserves a healthy, non-abusive relationship.

### **Acknowledge that the situation is very difficult and scary.**

Encourage your friend or family member's strength and courage. Show that you know that the abuser is responsible for the abuse—the abuser, not the abused is at fault. Let your friend or family member know that they are not alone.

### **Be supportive.**

Listen. Gently ask direct questions about the situation. Letting your friend or family member know that you care and are willing to listen may be the best help you can offer. Don't force the issue. Keep your mind open and really listen to what your friend or family member tells you. Remember that it may be difficult to talk about the abuse. Show that you are available to help whenever help is needed. Don't rush into providing solutions. What your friend or family member needs most is someone who will listen, believe and help to sort out available options. Never blame them for what's happening or underestimate fear of potential danger.

### **Be nonjudgmental.**

Respect your friend or family member's decision. If they remain in the relationship, continue to be supportive while expressing your safety concerns. There are many complex reasons why people stay in abusive relationships. Victims may break up and go back to the abuser many times. Do not criticize or judge. Your support will be needed even more during those times. Do not make your friend or family member feel bad for these choices, even if you think they are wrong.

### **Focus on strengths.**

Someone experiencing domestic violence has lived with emotional as well as physical abuse. Your friend or family member has probably been called a bad person, bad parent and bad partner by the abuser. Without positive reinforcement from outside the home, your friend or family member may begin to believe that the abuser is right. Give emotional support and emphasize their strengths and skills. Tell them that everyone deserves to live a life that is free of violence.

**Encourage your friend or family member to do things with you and other friends and family and to take part in other activities outside of the abusive relationship.**

It is important to remain connected to family and friends. They are an invaluable support system that your friend or family member will need in order to feel confident and safe to move on from an abusive relationship. Participating in outside activities also helps to promote self-esteem, which is damaged through psychological and emotional abuse.

**If your family member breaks up with the abuser, continue to be supportive.**

Even though the relationship was abusive, your friend or family member may be sad and lonely when it is over. There may be temptation to get back together with the abuser, and they will especially need your support at that time. Often victims of domestic violence love their partners and feel that they didn't want the relationship to end but wanted the abuse to end. When they realize that isn't going to happen, they often make the tough decision to break off the relationship.

**Help in developing a safety plan.**

Help your loved one think of what will happen when the violence occurs again. Develop a list of phone numbers, items needed and places to go, if it becomes necessary to leave.

Tell your loved one that you will be there if you are needed. They may need assistance with transportation, child care, financial assistance, a place to store belongings, etc. Help with what you are comfortable providing and encourage them to seek services from the local domestic violence agency for referrals to community agencies for other needs.

**Encourage your friend or family member to talk to people who can help and give guidance.**

When your friend or family member asks for advice on what to do, share the information you've gathered privately. Encourage them to seek the assistance of advocates at the local domestic violence shelter or helpline. Offer to help find a counselor or support group or encourage them to talk to safe family, friends or teachers. If your family member or friend is going to the police, to court or to see a lawyer, offer to go along but make sure to let your friend or family member do the talking.

Many individuals experiencing domestic violence first seek the advice of marriage counselors, psychiatrists or members of the clergy. Not all helping professionals, however, are fully aware of the dynamics of domestic violence or the special needs of abused persons. Your friend or family member should seek assistance elsewhere if the first contact is not helpful.

**Remember that you cannot "rescue" your loved one.**

You should be there as a support person and to help your friend or family member find a way to escape the abuse and to be safe. You cannot make decisions for or rescue them from the abuser. Remember that your loved ones must make their own decisions about their lives. Focus on supporting their rights to make their own choices.

**If your friend or family member decides to leave, remember....**

The first safe place your friend or family member should contact is the local domestic violence program. Advocates can help to examine options, and shelter may be the safest place to go.

Be very careful when offering and providing safety in your home. Abused people frequently face the most physical danger when they attempt to flee. Be very discreet and talk to domestic violence program staff about the best way to handle this situation.

**It cannot be overemphasized that domestic violence is a crime that can result in serious injury or even death. It is important to remain nonjudgmental and supportive to victims of domestic violence. Often the abusers are able to cut off their whole support system, leaving the victim isolated and in more danger.**

*Information is adapted from materials provided by the Domestic Abuse Project and the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.*

## **MESSAGES TO RELAY TO A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER WHO IS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

1. I am concerned for your safety.
2. You are not responsible for the abusive behavior. No one deserves to be hurt.
3. You didn't do anything to cause the abuse. No matter how your partner justifies their behavior, it is not your fault.
4. I am concerned for your child's safety. Your children are also being affected by the abuser's behavior.
5. This behavior will not stop without intervention for the abuser. (You may want to phrase this as 'help for the abuser' since victims may feel really concerned for their well-being.)
6. I will be here whenever you are ready to talk. I will support whatever decisions you make.
7. I will not pressure you to make a decision. I just want to make sure you know that I fully support you and will not abandon you.

# What is Abuse?

Abuse is a systematic pattern of behaviors in a relationship that are used to gain and/or maintain power and control over another.

## Types of Abuse:

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is subtle and often goes unseen by others outside of the relationship. Often the victim doesn't even realize that she/he is being abused. Emotional abuse can seriously damage your self-esteem. Physical and sexual abuse often follows emotional abuse, as it is used to wear the victim down over a period of time. Emotional abuse undermines the victim's sense of self and trust in their own perceptions. The victim often takes responsibility for the abuser's behavior or simply accepts it.

Examples include:

- ❖ Cursing, swearing, and screaming.
- ❖ Repeated harassment, interrogation, degradation.
- ❖ Attacks on self-esteem and insults such as ridiculing the victim, putting them down, or name calling.
- ❖ Attacks on and/or insults about family and friends or other people the victim cares about.
- ❖ Controlling and/or limiting victim's behavior (keeping victim from using the phone or seeing friends; not letting the victim leave the room or the house; following the victim; monitoring or limiting phone conversations; checking mileage on their car; keeping victim from reading material, ideas, activities, or places that the abuser does not like).
- ❖ Interrupting the victim while eating or forcing them to stay awake or to get up from sleep.
- ❖ Blaming the victim for everything that goes wrong or accusing them of not trying hard enough.
- ❖ Forcing the victim to do degrading things, such as making them beg for money.
- ❖ Using physical size differences to intimidate the victim.
- ❖ Criticizing the victim's thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs and actions.
- ❖ Treating the victim like a servant in regard to household chores and decisions.
- ❖ Being extremely jealous, constantly accusing the victim of flirting or cheating.
- ❖ Spitting at or near the victim.
- ❖ Using money to control them (taking money; giving an allowance; controlling how extra money is spent; forcing the victim to ask for and account for any money; acting as though the work that they do at home has no value to the family).
- ❖ Telling the victim they are "sick" or "crazy" and need therapy.
- ❖ Using physical disabilities against them or putting them down for their disability.
- ❖ Withholding approval, appreciation or conversation.
- ❖ Humiliating them in private or in front of others.
- ❖ Accusing unfaithfulness.
- ❖ Refusing to discuss issues that are important to the victim.
- ❖ Leaving nasty messages.
- ❖ Being sarcastic, or mocking their interests, opinions or beliefs.

### **Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse is any threat to do bodily harm to a partner, a child, a family member, friends, pets or one's self (suicide). Psychological abuse involves not only hurt and anger, but also fear and degradation. The purpose of psychological abuse is to render the victim emotionally insecure about their own self-worth and to render them helpless and/or unable to escape further physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse.

When psychological abuse occurs, the abuser becomes not only the source of pain and abuse, but also the protector. The abuser is not only the person being abusive, but also the person who can prevent the threatened action, increasing the victim's dependence on the abuser.

Examples include:

- ❖ Threatening to punch, hit, slap, kick or use any type of physical force.
- ❖ Threatening to use a weapon.
- ❖ Threatening to harm him/herself if the victim leaves.
- ❖ Threatening to punish the children to get back at the victim.
- ❖ Threatening to or harming pets.
- ❖ Throwing objects near or around the victim.
- ❖ Vague threats, such as "You're going to get it."
- ❖ Smashing or breaking things.
- ❖ Throwing objects around the room.
- ❖ Punching walls and slamming doors.
- ❖ Hiding, stealing or destroying the victim's possessions.
- ❖ Sabotaging the victim's vehicle.

## **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is any non-consenting sexual act or behavior, including unwanted touching, intercourse (oral, vaginal or anal), forcing the victim to perform sexual acts, painful or degrading acts during intercourse (e.g. urinating or defecating on victim) and exploitation through photography, pornography or prostitution.

Examples include forcing sexual activity when:

- ❖ The victim indicates "no," and the limits are not respected.
- ❖ The victim is sleeping.
- ❖ The victim is under the influence of alcohol or drugs and unable to say no.
- ❖ The victim is afraid to say no.

Or when the abuser:

- ❖ Insists that the victim dress in a more sexual way than they are comfortable with.
- ❖ Makes demeaning remarks about the way the victim dresses.
- ❖ Makes demeaning remarks about the victim's body and/or body parts.
- ❖ Minimizes the victim's feelings about sex.
- ❖ Berates the victim about their sexual history.
- ❖ Blames the victim for being sexually abused in the past or as a child.
- ❖ Criticizes victim sexually, such as calling "frigid."
- ❖ Insists on touching victim sexually when they do not want to be touched, either when the two of them are alone or in the presence of others.
- ❖ Calls the victim a whore or slut.
- ❖ Has affairs with other partners, often flaunting them.
- ❖ Physically attacks sexual parts of the victim's body (grabbing genitalia, breasts or buttocks).
- ❖ Forces victim to perform any specific act that they do not wish to do.
- ❖ Forces the victim to act out pornographic scenes.
- ❖ Is excessively jealous.
- ❖ Forces victim to strip or forcefully strips their clothes off.
- ❖ Withholds sex or affection as a means to control.
- ❖ Makes sex conditional on behavior or agreements.

- ❖ Minimizes or denies victim's feelings about sex.
- ❖ Forces sex after a physical or verbal assault.
- ❖ Uses coercion to force sex.
- ❖ Takes unwanted sexual photographs or shares photos without the victim's consent, such as on the Internet or through cell phone.
- ❖ Forces victim into prostitution.
- ❖ Forces sex when victim is tired or ill.

## **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is any forceful or violent physical behavior. It is the most obvious form of domestic violence, as it is the most visible. Assaults often start small and become more severe and more frequent over time. Physical abuse can result in death of the victim.

Examples include:

- ❖ Slapping
- ❖ Pinching
- ❖ Spanking
- ❖ Burning
- ❖ Strangling
- ❖ Pushing
- ❖ Scratching
- ❖ Restraining (pinning or holding against wall, floor, bed, etc.)
- ❖ Punching
- ❖ Shoving
- ❖ Grabbing
- ❖ Spitting
- ❖ Kicking
- ❖ Biting
- ❖ Throwing objects at partner
- ❖ Use of weapon (gun, knife, or any object)
- ❖ Reckless driving
- ❖ Forced feeding

## **Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse may take many forms. Money becomes a tool by which the abuser can control the victim by ensuring dependence or making the victim responsible for all the family's financial responsibilities.

Examples include:

- ❖ Preventing the victim from getting or keeping a job.
- ❖ Victim has to account for every penny spent.
- ❖ Victim is put on an allowance that the abuser controls.
- ❖ Denies the victim access to the family income, bank account or other financial information.
- ❖ Abuser puts all of the bills in the abuser's name only.
- ❖ Spending money allocated for bills/groceries on him/herself.
- ❖ Forcing the victim to beg or commit crimes for money.
- ❖ Spending child support money or victim's benefits on themselves.
- ❖ Not permitting victim to spend available funds on themselves or the children.

*\*Information provided by the Domestic Abuse Project*

## POSSIBLE SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN A BATTERING PERSONALITY

You think it can't happen to a member of your family or to a friend. And it certainly could never happen to you. But, too often, we unknowingly become involved with someone who will be physically abusive.

Although no one can fully predict whether a relationship will turn out to be abusive, some warning signs do exist. If your partner displays any of these behaviors, be cautious.

1. **Jealousy**—In the beginning of a relationship, abusers will always say jealousy is a sign of love, but it is really a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. They will question who you talk to, accuse you of flirting, or be jealous of your time spent with family, friends or children. Abusers may refuse to let you work for fear you'll meet someone else.
2. **Controlling Behavior**—Initially, the batterer will say they behave this way because they are concerned for your safety or your need to make good decisions. Abusers will be angry if you are "late" returning from the store or an appointment and will question you closely about who you spoke to and where you went. As this behavior worsens, abusers may refuse to let you make any personal decisions.
3. **Quick Involvement**—Many victims of domestic violence dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were pressured to become engaged or live together.
4. **Unrealistic Expectations**—Abusers depend on their partner for all of their needs and expect you to be the perfect partner, lover, parent and friend.
5. **Isolation**—Extreme jealousy and possessiveness often leads to isolating a victim from other family and friends. Abusers may want to live in the country without a phone, not allow you to use the car, or try to keep you from working or going to school.
6. **Blames Others for Feelings**—Abusers will tell victims, "You make me mad," or "You're hurting me by not doing what I ask." They use these feelings to manipulate you.
7. **Blames Others for Problems**—Abusers never accept responsibility for mistakes. They will blame you for almost anything that goes wrong.
8. **Hypersensitivity**—Abusers are easily insulted and view the slightest setbacks as personal attacks. They will "rant and rave" about the injustice of things that have happened to them—things that are just part of living, like being asked to work overtime or to help with chores.
9. **Cruelty to Animals or Children**—This is someone who brutally punishes animals or is insensitive to their pain or suffering. They may expect children to be capable of doing things far beyond their ability (e.g., whips a two-year-old for wetting the diaper) or teases children until they cry. Sixty percent of men who beat women also beat their children.
10. **Playful Use of Force in Sex**—Abusers may want to act out sexual fantasies in which their partner is helpless. They let you know the idea of 'rape' excites them. They may show little concern about whether you want to have sex and use sulking or anger to manipulate you into compliance.
11. **Verbal Abuse**—Abusers may say cruel and hurtful things, such as telling you that you are stupid and unable

to function without them.

12. **Rigid Sex Roles**—Expecting you to serve them. Abusers will say you must stay at home and obey them in all things. The abuser sees you as inferior and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.

13. **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**—Explosiveness and mood swings are typical in abusers who beat their partners.

14. **Past Battering**—Abusers may say they have hit partners in the past, but their partner made them do it. A batterer will abuse anyone they are with; situational circumstances don't make a person an abusive personality.

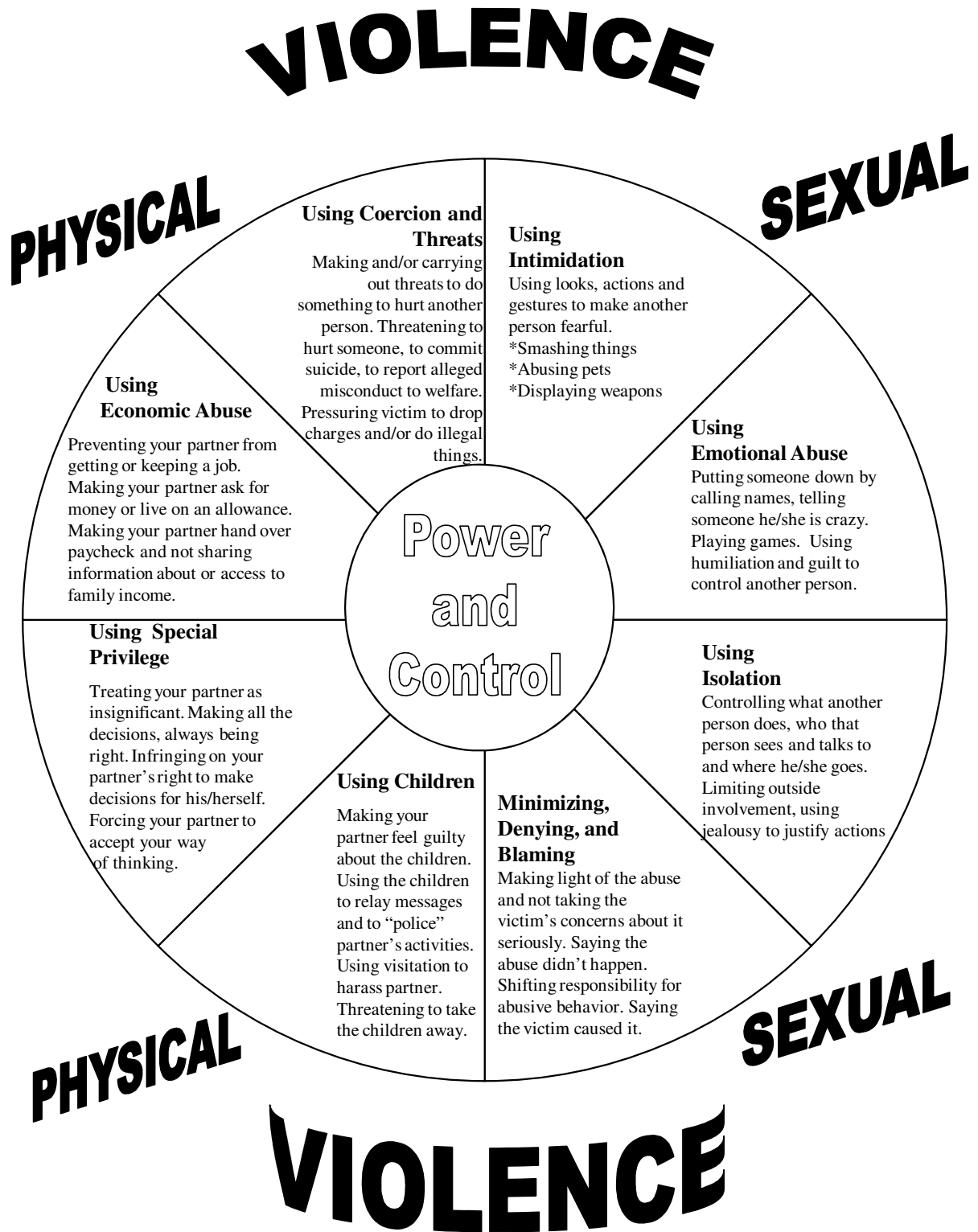
15. **Threats of Violence**—Any threat of physical violence is meant to control you.

16. **Breaking or Striking Objects**—This behavior is used as a punishment, such as breaking loved possessions, but it is mostly used to terrorize someone into submission.

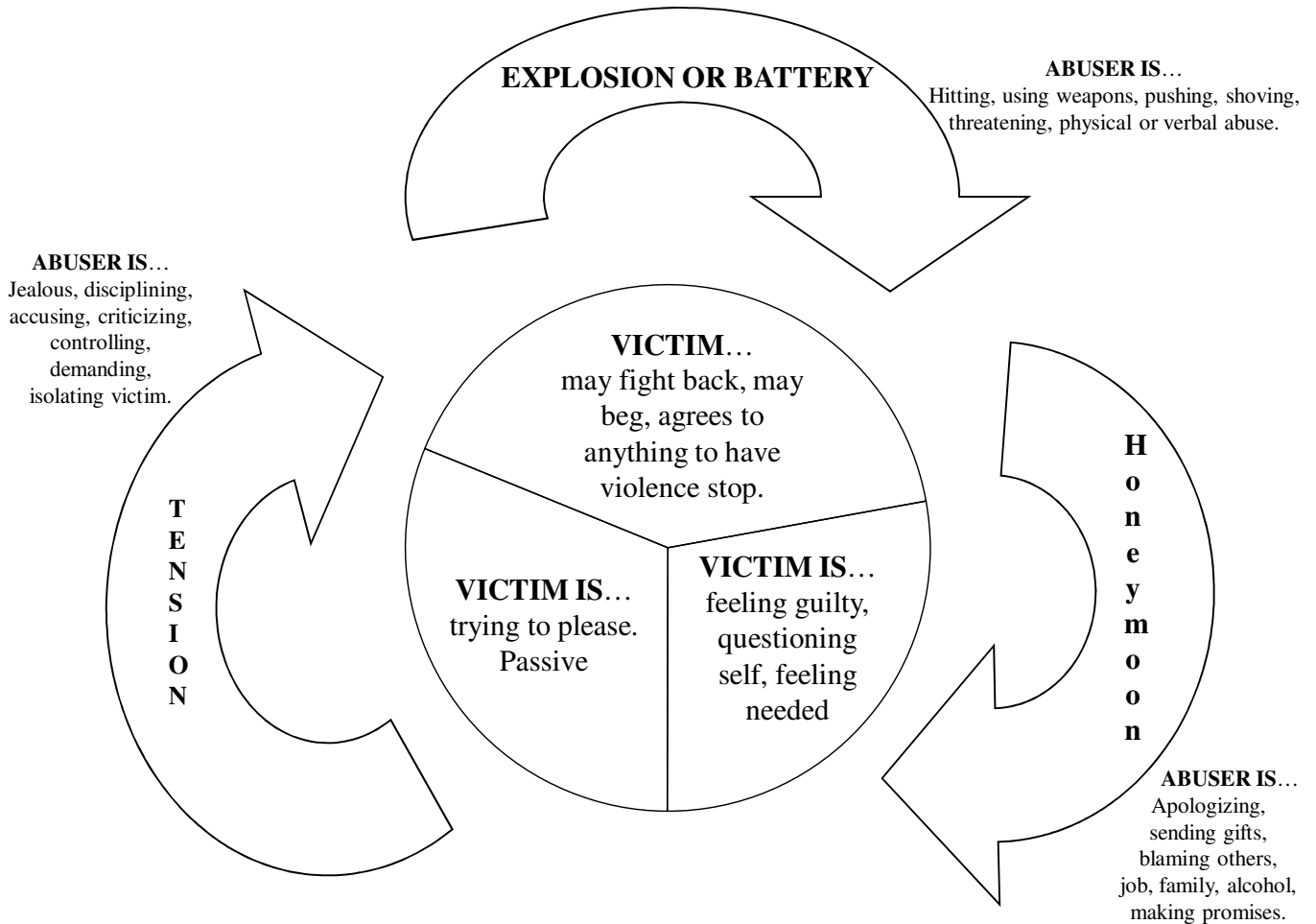
17. **Any Force During an Argument**—This may involve holding you down, physically restraining you from leaving the room, or any pushing or shoving.

The Power & Control Wheel shows the behaviors abusers use to get and maintain control in their relationships. The Wheel is a symbol to show the relationship of physical abuse to other forms of abuse.

Abuse is an intentional act, used to gain power and control over another person. Physical abuse is only one part of a whole system of abusive behavior which an abuser uses against a partner. Violence is never an isolated incident



# THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE!



## Breaking the cycle: Difficult, but possible with help

Domestic violence is part of a continuing cycle that's difficult to break. If a friend or family member is in an abusive situation, you may recognize this pattern:

- The abuser strikes using words or actions.
- The abuser may beg for forgiveness, offer gifts or promise to change.
- The abuser becomes tense, angry or depressed.
- The abuser repeats the abusive behavior.

Typically each time the abuse occurs, it worsens, and the cycle shortens. As it gets worse, victims may have a hard time doing anything about the abuse or even acknowledging it. Over time, an abusive relationship can break them down and unravel their sense of reality and self-esteem. Victims may begin to doubt their own ability to take care of themselves. They may start to feel like the abuse is their fault, or they may even feel they deserve it.

This can be paralyzing, and victims may feel helpless or as though their only option is to stay in the abusive situation. It's important to recognize that they may not be in a position to resolve the situation on their own.

But they can do something — and the sooner they take action the better. They may need outside help, and that's OK. Without help, the abuse will likely continue. Leaving the abusive relationship may be the only way to break the cycle. Encourage them to contact Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs to work with advocates for safety planning.

# Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs

## Description of Services

The most visible aspect of Harbor House programs is the Harbor House shelter, which meets the critical safety needs of those fleeing abusive situations. However, Harbor House is much more than just a shelter. Here is a list of our programming.

- **Shelter** – Safe, handicap-accessible, temporary housing available. Food, personal care items and clothing are provided in a welcoming and supportive environment. Shelter services also include crisis advocacy, referrals to other agencies, support groups and transportation services.
- **24-Hour Helpline** – An anonymous, confidential and free helpline that is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Voice, TTY and video phone available.
- **Advocacy** – Support, encouragement, information. Help with housing, links with community agencies, and assistance with police, healthcare providers, clergy, schools, and workplaces.
- **Legal Advocacy** – Assist clients with restraining order paperwork, divorce options, accompany victims to injunctions, civil and criminal hearings for advocacy support in Outagamie and Calumet counties.
- **Support Groups** – Support, encouragement and education for victims and their children both in and out of shelter; enabling them to share their experiences with others.
- **Children’s Programming** – Advocacy and support to dilute negative effects of abuse in children’s lives and promote healthy expressions of emotions; coordination with schools to keep children in school, with emphasis on prevention and breaking the abuse cycle.
- **Offender Intervention Program** – Assessment, referrals, and classes for abusive men; education for perpetrators about abuse; liaison with police departments, probation/parole officers and the district attorney’s office. Note: Men’s Batterer’s Education Programs are not held at Harbor House.
- **Ending Violence through Education (EVE) Class** – Assessment, referral and 15-week class for women arrested for using force.
- **Access to Pet Shelter** – For those seeking shelter, Harbor House has a relationship with the Fox Valley Humane Society (FVHS) to provide temporary housing for pets while victims and their children stay in shelter. While in shelter, victims and their children can visit their animals in a special wing at FVHS. Their pets will not be adopted out, but will have their own shelter provided while their family stays at Harbor House.
- **Community Education** – Harbor House’s community education coordinator provides training and presentations to community groups and organizations, churches, workplaces, salons, colleges, etc. about domestic violence.
- **Prevention Education** – Harbor House’s prevention education coordinator provides presentations at local schools to children and teens about bullying, relationship behavior and dating violence.
- **Emergency Transportation to Safety** – Harbor House can arrange transportation in our area if a victim needs to access shelter or health care services.

## Indicators of Domestic Violence for Family and Friends

Victims of abuse are often isolated. Their partners may emotionally abuse them by engaging in name-calling, insults, or other forms of degradation. Their partners may attempt to control their lives in a variety of ways.

Some indicators of abuse are:

- ❖ Not being able to use the phone.
- ❖ Being forbidden to see family and friends without the other partner present.
- ❖ Not being allowed to participate in making household decisions, including financial decisions.
- ❖ Frequent bruises or other physical injuries.
- ❖ Not being allowed to learn to drive, go to school, or get/keep a job.
- ❖ Exhibits low self-esteem, poor self-concept; may avoid eye contact, looking away or at the ground when talking.
- ❖ Has nonspecific aches and pains that are constant and recurring. May have stress-related problems, such as migraine headaches, high blood pressure, chronic pain or gastrointestinal problems.

**Children who witness domestic violence may exhibit a variety of behaviors. Some indicators of abuse in the home are:**

- ❖ Serious 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 siblings with violence. For instance, "You give me my teddy bear or I'll kill you!"
- ❖ Attempting to get attention through hitting, kicking or choking.
- ❖ Modeling after the abuser.
- ❖ Withdrawal or acting fearful.
- ❖ Fear of expressing feelings—of divorce or separation, or of the unknown.
- ❖ Confusion—feelings of conflicted loyalty.
- ❖ Depression, helplessness or powerlessness.
- ❖ Caretaking behaviors (child "parents" the parent).
- ❖ Bedwetting or nightmares.
- ❖ Frequent physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, etc.)
- ❖ Regression in developmental tasks.
- ❖ Difficulty trusting others.
- ❖ Poor conflict resolution skills.
- ❖ Isolated (no friends or creates distance in relationships).
- ❖ Excessive social involvement (overcompensates by staying away from home).
- ❖ Don't ask for what they need.
- ❖ Feel anger is bad (people get hurt when anger is expressed).
- ❖ Strict gender roles (being a boy/man means...being a girl/woman means....)

# Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship

## **Fear**

- ❖ Abuser has threatened violence if the relationship ends.
- ❖ Abuser has threatened to kidnap the children or report alleged misconduct to social services.
- ❖ Worried that abuser will spread horrible rumors to family and friends.

## **Economics**

- ❖ Few job skills.
- ❖ Limited education or work experience.
- ❖ Limited money.
- ❖ No access to bank account.
- ❖ Fear of poverty.

## **Pressure from family or church community**

- ❖ Family expectation to stay in marriage.
- ❖ Family denial of violence.
- ❖ Family blames victim for violence (or for going back in the past).
- ❖ Religion may disapprove of divorce.
- ❖ Religious leader may tell the victim to stay.

## **Guilt/self-doubt**

- ❖ Guilt about failure of the relationship.
- ❖ Guilt about choosing an abuser.
- ❖ Feelings of personal incompetence.
- ❖ Fear of being independent.
- ❖ Loneliness.
- ❖ Guilt about leaving the abuser alone. Abuser may have stated that they cannot live without victim.
- ❖ Feelings of responsibility or guilt for the abuser's sobriety. ("May start drinking again if I leave.")

## **Concern for Children**

- ❖ Abuser may charge victim with kidnapping or sue for custody.
- ❖ Abuser may abduct or abuse the children.
- ❖ Questions about whether the children will be cared for or how they will be supported.
- ❖ Fears about losing custody of the children.
- ❖ Believes children need the other parent.

## **Lack of community support**

- ❖ Unaware of services available to victims of domestic violence.
- ❖ Lack of adequate childcare.
- ❖ Few jobs.
- ❖ Negative experiences with service providers.
- ❖ Lack of affordable housing.
- ❖ Isolated from community services.
- ❖ No support from family and friends.

## **Effects of Abuse**

- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Feelings of immobility
- ❖ Difficulty making decisions.
- ❖ Feeling as though there are no other options or choices other than to remain in relationship.

## **Additional Barriers**

Harbor House Domestic Abuse programs understand that domestic violence victims often face a number of unique challenges. This is especially true for victims of color, rural victims, victims with disabilities, older victims, or for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender victims.

### **For victims in rural areas:**

- May have limited phone service.
- May have limited transportation options.
- May experience long response times for emergency services.
- May experience isolation and extended periods alone with an abuser because of extreme weather conditions.
- May be part of a farm family, often with one income.
- May be an integral part of a family farm business and worried the business will fail if they leave their abuser.

### **Victims in later life:**

- May have health/functional problems restricting mobility.
- May have an abusive caregiver.
- May serve as the caregiver to an abusive partner.
- May have no independent source of income.
- May be isolated from family members and friends.
- May have limited or no experiencing dealing with financial or legal matters.
- May feel there are no choices.

### **Lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender victims (LGBT):**

- Internalized homophobia and decreased self-esteem can lead to staying in relationship.
- Threats of 'outing'.
- Threats of stopping transitions for transgender victims. Messing with hormone medication.
- LGBT victims have more difficulty finding support services.
- The myth prevails that LGBT violence is 'mutual'.
- LGBT victims may know few or no other LGBT people; leaving the abuser could mean total isolation. (The LGBT community is surprisingly small.)
- There is no clear language to talk about abuse and rape in LGBT relationships.

### **Victims with disabilities:**

- Often financially dependent on their abusers.
- Even if a victim escapes, they may have great difficulty finding accessible refuge.
  - Facilities without ramps and lift, TTY's or video phones.
  - No attendant care.
  - No interpreter services.
  - No information in alternative formats.
  - Lack of appropriately trained staff.
- Victims with disabilities who have children risk losing custody of their children because authorities may question their ability to care for them alone.

**Victims of color:** (Information from <http://womenofcolornetwork.org>)

***General Commonalities:***

- A strong personal identification based on familial structure/hierarchy, patriarchal elements, and cultural identity (e.g., role as wife, mother and homemaker).
- Religious beliefs that reinforce victimization and legitimize the abuser's behavior.
- Fear of isolation and alienation.
- A strong loyalty to both immediate and extended family as well as loyalty to race and culture.
- Guarded trust and reluctance to discuss "private matters".
- Fear of rejection from family, friends, congregation and community.
- Individual needs often defer to family unity and strength.
- Distrust of law enforcement (fear of subjecting themselves and loved ones to a criminal and civil justice system they see as sexist, and/or racially and culturally biased).
- Skepticism and distrust that shelter and intervention services are not culturally or linguistically competent.
- For immigrant and undocumented women, in particular, a fear or threat of deportation or separation from children.

***African American:***

- Stereotypes amplify the complexities African American women encounter. Myths that they are "domineering figures that require control" or that they are "exceptionally strong under stress and are resilient" increase their vulnerability and discourage some from speaking out about abuse.
- Historically African American women have been looked to as the protectors of their family and community.

***Asian & Pacific Islander:***

- An unwillingness or hesitance to express their victimization even to people inside the close circle of friends and family.
- Gender roles established by cultural and social values are often "tightly prescribed and more rigid."
- It is not uncommon for domestic violence in these communities to include homicides that range from "honor killings, contract killings, dowry-related death; killing of family members in the home country; and being driven by one's husband and in-laws into committing suicide."
- Issues may arise regarding food, undressing in front of others (in shared living spaces), or the informal habits women often display in exclusively female surroundings that can be uncomfortable and alienate them from shelters and housing programs.

***Hispanic/Latino:***

- Designated role of wife and mother. It is socially unacceptable to be divorced.
- Religious beliefs.
- The term "Machismo" refers to excessive masculinity, and most machistas believe in conservative gender role ideas.
- Studies show that Hispanic/Latinas "are more concentrated in low-paying, semiskilled occupations than the overall workforce."

***Native American/Alaskan Indian:***

- Those living on a reservation may have difficulty finding shelter.
- Women living on a reservation are more likely to live in poverty, which may restrict their access to phones, transportation or child care.
- Cultural norms, including fear of accusations of being an "informant" and/or consequences of being sanctioned within tribal or clan groups.
- Spirituality and "interconnectedness of all things" may be used to coercively keep a victim in an abusive relationship.
- Historical and societal oppression contributes to deep mistrust for white agencies and service providers.

## **Common Misconceptions about Domestic Violence**

*There are many myths and misconceptions about domestic violence. These myths instill false beliefs about who is affected by domestic violence, how often it happens, the seriousness of the issue, what causes it and what can make it stop. Society's lack of understanding and subsequent lack of support leaves individuals who have been abused feeling isolated and alone.*

### **MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS:**

#### **Domestic abuse is rare. Only some people experience it.**

Many abuse victims are afraid to tell about the violence. The National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control estimate that 1 in 4 women are victims of domestic violence at some time in their lifespan.

#### **Drugs and alcohol cause the violence.**

Addictions are used as excuses to free the abuser from responsibility for their behavior. This theory does not explain why the abuser uses violence, why their partner is targeted for abuse, or why the abuse is still present even when sober. The abuser who is using addictive substances must be treated for two separate problems—addiction and violent & controlling behavior. Without intervention for abusive and controlling behavior, the abuse will not stop even when the abuser is no longer using alcohol or drugs.

#### **The problem is spousal abuse or couples who assault each other. Abuse is the result of a bad relationship.**

Ninety-five percent of serious domestic assaults are against women. Although some women use force against their partners, it is frequently in self-defense. An abusive relationship is one in which one person coerces, intimidates, and dominates another and causes fear. Women are the principal victims in heterosexual and lesbian relationships. Men in gay relationships are also victims of abuse by their partners at the same rate heterosexual women are victims.

People in poor relationships have a choice not to abuse their partners. Many abusers have had more than one partner to whom they have behaved violently. Abusive behavior is about the abuser's desire to have power and control over their partner.

#### **Religious beliefs or practices will prevent battering. Battering does not occur within certain faiths.**

Perpetrators of domestic violence are members of all faiths. They often use the church, church elders or a victim's faith to further abuse victims.

#### **Stress causes battering.**

Obviously some batterers experience stress, but stress does not cause abuse. Many people under severe stress do not batter. Even if the batterer reduces their stress, the violence will continue or eventually resume because the batterer still feels entitled to assault their partner. The violence must be treated as the problem, not as a symptom that will disappear.

#### **Abused people are masochistic and provoke violence.**

Individuals experiencing domestic violence are not a specific personality type. Anyone can find themselves in an abusive relationship. Abused people do not enjoy beatings, and do not feel that they deserve to be verbally abused. They do, however, frequently hear comments from their abusers like, "I

did it for your own good," or from outsiders like, "you must have made him mad." These statements cause confusion and may encourage the abused person to take responsibility for the violence.

Those experiencing abuse do not enjoy or deserve it. Some victims of domestic violence are from abusive families, and others are not. They do not seek out abusive relationships. Some have been in several violent relationships, and some have not. People stay in relationships for many reasons. They may have few choices or options. They may not have money or job skills. The abuser has taken these things from the victim. Family and religious pressure may also prevent a victim of abuse from leaving.

**Abused persons do not seek help, and they will not use it once it is offered.**

Most people experiencing abuse make many efforts to stop the violence or to seek help from agencies in their community. Often they are greeted with responses that encourage them to reunite with their abuser or ignore the abuse. A study at Yale-New Haven found that one out of four abused women leaves the hospital emergency room with diagnoses such as "neurotic," "hysterical," "hypochondriac," or "a well-known patient with multiple vague complaints." Faced with a hostile community response, they are reluctant to ask for assistance. However, when they are greeted with empathy, abused persons are often willing to reach out for help and courageously share their stories.

**Abuse will stop by itself over time.**

Abuse will most likely continue and become more severe over time. People who abuse may attempt to stop on their own, but do not succeed. The best way to stop abusive behavior is for the perpetrator to attend a counseling program. Programs that address violent behavior teach healthier methods of dealing with problems and life stresses.

**Abuse is not dangerous or serious. It is no big deal.**

Abuse is dangerous and serious. It hurts family and relationships. It can be lethal.

**People who abuse their partners are violent in all of their relationships. It is easy to spot an abuser.**

Most abusers are only violent at home. They may be friendly and polite in public. At home, they fear fewer consequences and *choose to* express their control with emotional or physical abuse. Remember, domestic violence is all about power and control. Most abusers seem like 'nice people' to those they are not abusing.

All types of people abuse their partners. Wealth, race, lack of education and social background do not make people abusive. Batterers are often seen as gentle, loving, neat, clean and successful in other areas of their lives. You may have no idea that someone you know is abusing their intimate partner.

**Abusers have no control over their behavior. They cannot change.**

Abusive people may *feel* as though they have no control over their behavior. However, they have total control over their violence. The where, when, how and why of violent behavior involves *choice*. Most abusers do not enjoy being violent. They do not lack morals or values. They have learned to make very poor choices that involve violent, abusive behavior. Abusers can learn to make better choices. They can learn new skills to cope with conflict.

**Abusers are physically violent every day. People who strike only once in a while, or who just slap or shove, are not batterers.**

Most abusers do not beat up their partners every day. Physical attacks are more or less frequent and dangerous, but abuse is abuse. Abusers usually act in controlling or intimidating ways, using psychological and emotional abuse to control their partners. Dominating or intimidating behavior is probably the “abuse of choice” for most abusers. If you have ever acted in an abusive way toward your partner, you’re an abuser. This is true even if your violence is not intense or frequent.

**Abused people are easy to spot. You can always tell who they are.**

Most people experiencing violence at home are not beat up every day, and they may go out of their way to hide injuries and scars.

People who have experienced domestic violence are found in all races, socioeconomic groups, religions and educational levels. Many wealthy, educated, and well-to-do people are abused. You may have no idea that someone you know is being abused by their partner.

**Abused people are mentally ill or crazy.**

Those experiencing abuse are often confused, scared and overwhelmed. It is hard for them to believe that they are being treated this way by their intimate partner. Their self-esteem and sense of personal safety has been lowered as a result of the abuse. They tend to blame themselves because many others blame them.

**There is no way to recover from the effects of domestic abuse.**

Those who have experienced domestic violence can heal and recover from abuse. They can learn to protect themselves from further violence. However, damage caused to relationships from battering is hard to repair. Most abusers who seek help for their behavior have already ruined their relationship beyond repair.

**There is nothing I can do for someone who is experiencing domestic abuse. It is a private matter and none of my business.**

You can help someone you know who is being abused. You can help by becoming educated about domestic violence and the dynamics of abuse, and by becoming familiar with community resources available to people who are being abused. You can listen without judgment, and be available to provide assistance if a victim of domestic violence confides in you. Support from family, friends, and the community is necessary for victims to be able to leave abusive relationships and become self-sufficient.

*Information is adapted from materials provided by the Domestic Abuse Project and the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.*

## **Effects of Trauma on Adult Victims of Domestic Violence**

Recognize that trauma is an injury. Here are some ways victims may display the effects of trauma from domestic violence:

- Illness – both physical and mental health may be diminished
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of memory – stories can change about abuse, partner, life events. This can often be caused by an injury to the head from the abuser.
- Low self-esteem
- Risk-taking behaviors
- Low or no energy
- May have an inability to self-nurture
- Lack of direction – inability to meet goals
- Fragility
- Feelings of being different
- Sleeping problems
- Acting out/Acting in – aggression toward others or self-harm and mutilation
- Controlling behaviors
- Appearance – may appear very “out of it” and “spacey”
- Lack of trust in others
- Feelings of abandonment
- Paranoia
- Anger
- Sensitivity to rejection
- Inability to work
- Poor relationship with their children or other loved ones
- Substance abuse as a way of coping

## **Effects of Trauma on Children**

Domestic violence is one of the most toxic forms of violence for young children because it happens in the one place where children are supposed to feel safe. It happens between their caregivers. And children love and depend on their parents for all their support. A child's reaction to trauma is directly related to a parent's ability to cope and to the bond of the relationship between the non-battering parent and child.

Being a bystander to violence is as traumatic as being a direct victim. Being a helpless child (sometimes on the other side of the door) is horrifying. There is no age at which a child is immune to the effects of exposure to domestic violence. A child's sense of identity, perception and wellbeing is filtered through their experiences. Violence in their home changes their view about themselves, their parents, siblings and the world around them.

Recognize that trauma *is* an injury. Here are some ways child victims may display the effects of trauma from domestic violence:

- Difficulty talking about and dealing with their feelings
- Trouble sleeping
- Acting out
- Destructive behaviors
- Failing in school
- Overachieving
- Bullying
- Low self-esteem
- Use of alcohol or drugs

### **Children who grow up in violent homes say they feel.....**

- Powerless
- Confused
- Angry
- Guilty
- Sad
- Afraid
- Alone

### **When the Batterer is a parent...**

- They are the authoritarian.
- They can be irresponsible or neglectful.
- They are self-centered.
- They are manipulative.
- They undermine the other parent.
- They have the ability to perform well under observation.
- They expose the children to violence in the home.
- They undermine and interfere with the victim's parenting by demeaning, sabotaging and increasing victim's stress.
- They damage the relationship between victim and child by forcing children to witness; being the "more appealing parent" because of control over finances and other family resources.
- They use the children to perpetrate abuse by threatening to harm children; using them as spies/go-betweens; hurting children; threatening to gain custody; using visitation to harass.
- They create a household climate dominated by domestic violence.

## **Support for Children**

### **Understanding the victim is our best chance at helping kids**

#### **Victims:**

- May not connect their traumatic experiences to the anxiety they feel.
- May blame themselves for failing to cope.
- May feel they should handle the situation on their own.
- May give up.
- May use avoidance and emotional numbing such as dulling or suppressing of emotions; withdrawing from people and activities; zoning out; showing signs of depression.
- May use safety and protection strategies that children don't like or understand.
- May leave the abuser and, if they do, children will have to leave home, school, friends and pets and possibly live in a shelter or less desirable housing.
- May experience shame or guilt about the abuse, which may inhibit the ability to foster resiliency in children.
- May have children that suffer divided loyalties. They may love the abuser but hate the abusive behavior, and love the victim but hate or resent them for not ending the abuse.
- Have had parenting and authority stripped from them by the batterer.
- Face their own issues and fears in addition to the challenges of dealing with their children's like....separation and loss of everything including the other caregiver, home, belongings, friends and, many times, their extended family members and privacy.

### **What a Battered Mother Needs**

*(from The Batterer as a Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics by Lundy Bancroft)*

- Restoration of the respect for her parenting that the batterer has denied.
- Recognition of her efforts to support and protect her children.
- An opportunity to heal from her own trauma.
- Opportunities to feel good about her relationship with her children.
- Support for challenging the values that her children have learned from the abuser.

### **How We Can Advocate & Support Battered Mothers**

- Identify and reinforce her strengths and successes as a mother.
- Support her authority as a parent.
- Provide occasional respite.
- Be a role model for positive interactions with children.
- Help facilitate communication between her and her children. Don't take sides with the child against the mother.
- Approach with an open mind.
- When facilitating a conversation with mom and child, do not speak negatively about the other parent.
- Provide support that is solid, consistent and enduring.
- Let her know she is not alone. Be available to talk.
- Reassure her that the violence and her reactions are not her fault.
- Express pride and gratitude for her courage to share.
- Accept all her feelings about the violence and the abuser.

## What Parents Need to Know About Teen Dating Violence

- One in three high school girls have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship.
- Teen dating violence often takes place in the home of one of the teen partners.
- One in five college students will experience some form of dating violence.
- One in three lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender high school teens have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship.

**Technology** – In addition to all forms of dating violence, teens are experiencing technology abuse as well.

- More than one third of teens say they have been harassed with text messages; one-quarter say their partner used cell phone, e-mail, blog or chat rooms to insult them.
- Face Book, My Space and other social networking sites are on the rise because abusers can use them to stalk their victims. We don't recommend that you deny your teen use of these sites, but talk to them about how to keep themselves safe. They can be a great tool for breaking isolation for a victim.
- Victims of abusive behavior were reluctant to tell their parents. Seventy-two percent said they had not told them about receiving a harassing number of e-mails or text messages, and 82 percent had not told them about being pressured to engage in sexual activity, a survey said.

### How to tell if your teen is a victim

- Is your teen withdrawing from school activities?
- Has your teen become secretive, ashamed or hostile to parents, family or friends because of the relationship?
- Does your teen's partner call several times a night or show up unexpectedly to "check up?"
- Does your teen apologize for their behavior?
- Has your teen stopped hanging out with friends?

### Things to keep in mind when helping a teen

- Make sure the timing is right.
- Use "I" statements when describing your feelings. Let your teen know how concerned you are for their safety, well-being and security.
- Be sure to have specific examples to share.
- Listen to and believe your teen.
- Remember, if your teen does open up to you, it is possible you will hear uncomfortable details. It is imperative that you are nonjudgmental by focusing on resolving the problem rather than criticizing your teen.
- Be a comfort zone for your teen.
- Let your teen have some control in making decisions. Their self-esteem and confidence is lowered by the abusive partner.
- Be a role model for supportive, healthy relationships with your own partner.
- Help your teen create a safety plan for the times when they are not at school or out with friends.
- Contact Harbor House for safety planning.

### Things NOT to say or do

- Do not be critical of your teen's partner. This will only put a wall between you and your teen.
- Don't ask blaming questions such as: "Why didn't you break up?" or "What did you do to provoke your partner?"
- Don't pressure your teen into making quick decisions.
- Don't talk to both teens together. This is very unsafe!
- Don't assume that the victim wants to leave the abusive relationship. Assist your teen in assessing the situation.

# Resources to learn more about Domestic Violence

## Books

### Domestic Abuse

Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free by Elaine Weiss (2004)

Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men by Lundy Bancroft (2002)

Intimate Betrayal: Domestic Violence in Lesbian Relationships by Ellyn Kaschak (2002)

Breaking the Silence: Domestic Violence in the South Asian-American Community by Sandhya Nankani (2001)

"Not to People Like Us": Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages by Susan Weitzman (2001)

It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence by Meg Kennedy Dugan, Roger Hock and Roger R. Hock (2000)

The Secret of Overcoming Verbal Abuse: Getting Off the Emotional Rollercoaster and On with Your Life by Albert Ellis and Marsha Grad Powers (2000)

No Visible Wounds: Identifying Non-physical Abuse of Women by Their Men by Mary Susan Miller, Ph.D. (1996)

Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships by Claire M. Renzetti & Charles Harvey Miley (1996)

The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize it and How to Respond by Patricia Evans (1996)

Chain Chain Change: For Black Women in Abusive Relationships by Evelyn C. White (1995)

Verbal Abuse Survivors Speak Out: On Relationship and Recovery by Patricia Evans (1993)

Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them: Battered Gay Men and Domestic Violence Hayworth Gay & Lesbian studies (1991)

Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life by Elaine Weiss (1987)

Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Lesbian Task Force (1986)

Mejor sola que mal acompañada: Para la mujer golpeada/For the Latina in an Abusive Relationship by Myrna Zambrano (1985)

## ***Domestic Violence and Children***

When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal from the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse by Lundy Bancroft (2004)

Children Who See Too Much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project by Betsy McAlister Grovers

## **Teen/Dating Violence**

In Love and in Danger: A Teen's Guide to Breaking Free of Abusive Relationships by Barrie Levy (1998)

What Parents Need to Know About Dating Violence: Learning the Facts and Helping Your Teen by Barrie Levy & Patricia Occhiuzzo (1995)

## ***Faith***

(all can be found at: <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org>)

Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse by Marie M. Fortune (1987)

God's Reconciling Love: A Pastor's Handbook on Domestic Violence by Nancy A. Murphy (2003, 2007)

Opening the Door: A Pastor's Guide to Addressing Domestic Violence in Premarital Counseling by Susan Yarrow Morris in collaboration with Jean Anton (2006)

Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities edited by Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri

A Journey Toward Freedom: A Haggah for Women Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence from The Faith Trust Institute

Love Shouldn't Hurt: Building Healthy Relationships for Jewish Youth Produced by Shalom Bayit

## **Web Sites**

Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs: [www.harborhouseonline.org](http://www.harborhouseonline.org)

Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence: [www.wcadv.org](http://www.wcadv.org)

National Domestic Violence Hotline: [www.ndvh.org](http://www.ndvh.org)

National Network to End Domestic Violence: [www.nnedv.org](http://www.nnedv.org)

Family Violence Prevention Fund: [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

The Domestic Abuse Project: [www.domesticabuseproject.org](http://www.domesticabuseproject.org)

The Women of Color Network: [www.womenofcolornetwork.org](http://www.womenofcolornetwork.org)

Faith Trust Institute: [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

Wisconsin Circuit Court (to check domestic records): <http://wcca.wicourts.gov/index.xsl>

The Network/La Red (lesbian/bisexual/transgender women): [www.thenetworklared.org](http://www.thenetworklared.org)

Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project: [www.gmdvp.org](http://www.gmdvp.org)

Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (workplace): [www.caepv.org](http://www.caepv.org)