

Helping Battered Women and Their Children in Rural Communities: A Guide for Family and Friends



YOUR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM IS:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write the name of their local domestic violence program. The box is centered on the page.

ALL SERVICES ARE FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Developed by
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

**WHEN IN DANGER, CALL 9-1-1
OR THE LOCAL POLICE.**

YOUR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM CAN HELP.

Emergency assistance, information and referral, crisis counseling and other services are available 24-hours a day, every day of the year, from the local domestic violence program. Please call if you, or someone you know, is in need of help.

Your local domestic violence program contact information is on the previous page of this booklet.

Additional resources and training on domestic violence are available from your local program. Please contact them for more information.

ALL SERVICES ARE FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

NOTE ABOUT GENDER LANGUAGE

Throughout this resource, victims of domestic violence are assumed to be female and abusers male – as reflected in the body of domestic violence research. This is not meant to take away from instances where the victim and abuser may be the same sex or the victim may be male and the abuser female.

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The contents of this publication may be reprinted with the following acknowledgement:

This material was reprinted from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence publication entitled *Helping Battered Women and Their Children in Rural Communities: A Guide for Family and Friends*.

The material in this booklet was adapted from the brochure *Helping the Battered Woman, A Guide for Family and Friends*, produced by the National Woman Abuse Prevention Project, Washington, DC.



Introduction

“ When you’re out on a farm at night, there’s no one to hear you scream. And there’s nowhere to go except out on a dark road... ”

These are the words of a battered woman from one of Pennsylvania’s rural communities. They capture the feelings of desperation, isolation and hopelessness that often come with being a victim of domestic violence living in remote corners of the commonwealth.

What can someone do when she lives in a home where fear and violence are a way of life? When there’s no one around to hear her cries for help because she lives miles away from the closest neighbor, police station or highway?

No matter where a battered woman lives in this state, **FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL** help from a local domestic violence program is just a phone call away.

➤ As a family member or friend of a battered woman, you may be in a position to link her to this program.



Use This Resource To Guide You

Inside this booklet you'll find the following information on how to talk and offer support to a family member or friend who is being abused:

- ✓ An explanation about domestic violence – who is abused and who does the abusing
- ✓ Information about the services available to battered women and their children from local domestic violence programs, such as:
 - shelter or safe home to hide in
 - trained counselors to talk to
 - someone to go to court with them
 - help with filing for welfare assistance
 - programs for children
 - advice on how to make a safety plan for living in an abusive relationship or for when trying to leave the relationship
- ✓ Tips to help keep battered mothers and their children safe
- ✓ A promise that battered women and their children don't have to struggle on their own, behind closed doors, with the violence in their lives

Please read this booklet and call your local domestic violence program. It could mean the difference between life and death for your family member or friend.



But I Didn't Know

Millions of American women in this country and tens of thousands in this commonwealth are physically and emotionally abused by their husbands or partners each year. Chances are, someone you know – your mother, sister, friend, co-worker or neighbor – is a victim of domestic violence.

All intimate relationships have their problems, and sometimes it's difficult for others to decide when it's appropriate to get involved. Maybe your family member or friend has mentioned "trouble" at home, and you've dismissed her comments by saying all couples have problems. Ask yourself how you've reacted in the past to these possible signs that your family member or friend is being abused and needs your help:

- Have you readily accepted her explanations for visible injuries, such as black eyes, bruises or broken bones?
- Do you tend not to press her further about frequent "accidents" that cause her to miss work?
- Does her partner exert an unusual amount of control over her activities? Are you reluctant to discuss his control over family finances, the way she dresses and her contact with family and friends?
- If her partner ridicules her publicly, do you and others ignore his behavior or join in the laughter at her expense? Think about why you might not be willing to stand up for her. Do you already sense the explosive nature of his comments?
- Have you noticed changes in her or her children's behavior? Does she appear frightened, exhausted or on edge? Do the children seem to be easily upset? Are they experiencing problems in school or with other activities?

Perhaps you feel her problem will "work itself out." Nothing could be further from the truth. The violence will not end until someone takes action to stop it.

Your support and encouragement can be of tremendous value to a family member or friend involved with an abusive man. You can ease the isolation and loss of control she may feel by listening to her, providing her with more information on domestic violence and helping her explore her options.



Understand The Facts

The first step you can take to help your family member or friend is to learn more about domestic violence. Society's lack of understanding about the dynamics of domestic violence often is the greatest obstacle a battered woman faces in her efforts to end the violence in her life. With this in mind, here are some answers to the thoughts and questions you may have:

"WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?"

Domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviors in a relationship that is used to gain and/or maintain power and control over another. These behaviors are often described as emotional, psychological, sexual or physical abuse.

Domestic violence is also called battering, family violence, wife beating, intimate partner violence, spouse abuse and woman abuse.

- Batterers who are violent also use nonviolent means of control. Even those batterers who do not use violence regularly remind their battered partners that not listening to rules or demands may lead to violent assaults.
- Incidents of violence may be frequent or infrequent, lengthy or brief, severe or mild.
- Many victims suffer all forms of abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse may be more subtle than physical harm, but this does not mean that it is less destructive. Many battered women report that this abuse is more difficult to experience. Physical injuries may heal; however, the emotional scars of domestic violence can last a lifetime.
- Unless there is intervention where the batterer is held accountable for his actions, domestic violence usually increases in frequency and severity over time. As the batterer's violence progresses, he may begin to abuse the children and he may direct violence or threats of violence against friends, helpers or extended family.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE includes hurting another person's feelings by saying cruel, unfair comments or by name calling, and may involve:


- ✓ cursing, swearing and/or screaming at her
- ✓ repeated harassment, interrogation or degradation
- ✓ attacks on self-esteem and/or insults to her person (name-calling, put-downs, ridicule)
- ✓ attacks on and/or insults about people she cares for (her family and friends)
- ✓ threatening to "come out for her" (to reveal a lesbian identity) at work, to her family or anywhere that the information had been kept private
- ✓ threatening to report her to "welfare to work" programs, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Internal Revenue Service, to discredit her in the local community or with her employer
- ✓ disclosing personal or damaging information (e.g., current or former psychiatric care, HIV/AIDS status or a criminal record)
- ✓ controlling and/or limiting her behavior (e.g., keeping her from using the phone or seeing friends, not letting her leave the room or the house, following her, monitoring or limiting her phone conversations, checking the mileage on her car, or keeping her from reading material, activities and places that he does not approve of)
- ✓ interrupting her while she is eating, forcing her to stay awake or waking her up
- ✓ blaming her for everything that goes wrong
- ✓ forcing her to do degrading things (e.g., making her kneel, beg for money)
- ✓ using the difference in physical size to intimidate her
- ✓ criticizing her thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs and actions
- ✓ treating her like a servant in matters of household chores and decisions
- ✓ being extremely jealous, constantly accusing her of flirting or cheating
- ✓ forcing her to commit illegal activity

- ✓ using money to control her (e.g., taking money from her, giving her an allowance, controlling how extra money is spent, forcing her to ask and account for any money she gets, and acting like the work she does at home is of no economic value to the family)
- ✓ telling her that she is "sick" and in need of therapy
- ✓ using her physical disabilities against her or putting her down for her disability
- ✓ forcing the children to "report" on her activities: "Who did Mommy see today?" "Who did she talk to on the phone?" "Where did she go?"

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 intimidation and fear. The purpose of psychological abuse is to make her emotionally insecure about her own self-worth and to cause her to feel helpless and/or not able to escape further physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse.

Examples include the abuser...

- ✓ threatening to punch, hit, slap or kick her
- ✓ threatening to use a weapon
- ✓ threatening to harm himself/commit suicide if she leaves
- ✓ threatening to punish the children to "get back" at her
- ✓ threatening to kidnap the children or gain custody
- ✓ threatening to harm or kill beloved pets
- ✓ throwing objects in her direction
- ✓ making vague threats, such as "You're going to get it," or "I'm really going to let you have it."
- ✓ minimizing the abuse, saying it didn't happen or that she caused it
- ✓ harming or killing a pet to "get back" at her
- ✓ smashing and breaking things
- ✓ throwing objects around the room
- ✓ punching walls, slamming doors
- ✓ hiding, stealing or destroying her possessions
- ✓ damaging her car
- ✓ spitting on or near her


 **SEXUAL ABUSE** is any non-consenting sexual act or behavior.

Examples include the abuser forcing sexual activity when...

- ✓ she says "no" and her limits are not respected
- ✓ she is afraid to say "no"
- ✓ she is sleeping
- ✓ she is drunk or high and is unable to say "no"

Other examples include when the abuser...

- ✓ insists that she dress in a more sexual way than she wishes to dress
- ✓ makes demeaning remarks about how she is dressed
- ✓ makes insulting comments about her body and/or body parts
- ✓ minimizes her feelings about sex
- ✓ berates her about her sexual history; blames her if she was sexually abused in the past or as a child
- ✓ criticizes her (e.g., calling her "frigid")
- ✓ insists on touching her sexually when she does not want to be touched, alone or in the presence of others
- ✓ accuses her of sexual activity with others
- ✓ calls her a whore or a slut
- ✓ has affairs with other women (often flaunting them) after agreeing not to have sex with anyone but her
- ✓ physically attacks sexual parts of her body, (e.g., grabbing her breasts, pinching her buttocks, burning, biting or cutting genitalia)
- ✓ forces her to perform any sexual act that she does not wish to do (e.g., oral sex, watching or acting out pornography or prostitution)

 **PHYSICAL ABUSE** is any forceful or violent physical behavior.

Examples include:

- ✓ slapping
- ✓ choking
- ✓ punching
- ✓ kicking
- ✓ pinching
- ✓ pushing
- ✓ strangling
- ✓ shoving
- ✓ biting
- ✓ pulling hair
- ✓ twisting limbs
- ✓ tripping
- ✓ spanking
- ✓ scratching
- ✓ grabbing
- ✓ burning
- ✓ restraining by force
- ✓ throwing objects at the partner
- ✓ using or threatening to use a weapon of any kind (stick, ruler, belt, whip, knife, spoon, gun, etc.)

Women in rural areas are just as likely as women in cities and suburbs to be victims of intimate violence, but its frequency often goes unnoticed, due to geographical isolation, cultural values and the tactics of the batterer.

– Websdale, Neil. *Rural Battering and the Justice System*.
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.



Don't Believe The Myths

"I SHOULDN'T GET INVOLVED IN A FAMILY MATTER."

Domestic violence is not just a family problem. It is a crime that could be deadly for your family member or friend. Domestic violence affects her, her children and the entire community. It is probably difficult for her to talk about and may be dangerous for her to even reach out for help. You should get involved. Start by reading this booklet and then help her safely place a call to the local domestic violence program for free and confidential assistance.

"THAT DOESN'T GO ON IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD."

Domestic violence occurs regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, religious background or geographical region. It happens to people of all educational and income levels. It happens in dating relationships, new marriages and in long term intimate partnerships. Women can be beaten in any town, near any mile marker. It happens in rural communities as often as in cities or suburbs.

Battered women are factory workers, nurses, homemakers, lawyers, police officers, college students and farmers. They are grandmothers and they are teenagers. She may be your neighbor, your sister, your daughter-in-law or your niece.

The only factor that most victims have in common is gender, because the majority of domestic violence victims are women. The following is a list of behaviors that might indicate that a woman is being abused:

- fear of intimate partner's temper or jealousy
- lack of access to money, car, friends or family
- repeated mental health and stress related issues such as depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, headaches and ulcers
- repeated injuries that do not seem accidental

"THE VIOLENCE CAN'T REALLY BE THAT SERIOUS."

Domestic violence can involve threats, pushing, punching, slapping, strangling, choking, sexual assault, assault with weapons and murder. It is rarely a one-time occurrence and usually increases in frequency and severity over time. Any act of domestic violence is something to take seriously.

“IF IT’S SO BAD, WHY DOESN’T SHE JUST LEAVE?”

For most of us, the decision to end a relationship is not an easy one. There may be any number of circumstances that affect a battered woman’s decision to leave:

- When she has tried to leave in the past, her partner may have used violence to stop her.
- She may be fearful that the violence will escalate if she tries again.
- If she leaves she may lose everything – her home, community, sense of security, pets, farm animals, a business, etc.
- Her emotional ties to her partner may still be strong, supporting her hope that the violence will end.
- If she has been financially dependent on her partner and leaves with her children, she will likely face severe economic hardship.
- She may not know about available resources.
- Perhaps social and justice systems have been unresponsive to her in the past.
- Religious, cultural or family pressures may make her believe it’s her duty to keep her marriage together at all costs.

Many battered women do eventually leave. And, she may be in more danger when she leaves. When a batterer discovers that his partner is thinking about leaving or planning divorce, he will often increase the violence, putting her at significantly greater risk.

**“LATELY SHE’S BEEN DISTANT.
I DON’T KNOW IF WE’RE STILL FRIENDS.”**

The abuser senses that the fewer friendships the woman has, the more easily he can control her. He may be extremely jealous of any relationships she has outside the home. He may have cut off access to her support systems, not allowing her to see friends, make phone calls, attend meetings, etc., so that she is not able to talk about what is happening or reach out for help. A battered woman may distance herself from friends, fearing the violence from her mate if she breaks this “rule.” She may also be afraid that her family and friends will discover the violence and blame her for it.

“HOW CAN SHE CARE FOR A MAN WHO ABUSES HER?”

Chances are, the man is not always abusive. He may actually show remorse for his violence, promising that he will change. She understandably hopes for such change. Their relationship probably involves good times, bad times and in-between times. However, the longer the violent relationship continues, the less likely there will be any good times at all.

“SHE DOESN'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO HER KIDS.”

Your family member or friend is probably doing her best to protect her children from the violence. She may feel that the abuse is only directed at her and does not realize its effects on the children. Perhaps she believes that her children need a father or she lacks the resources to support them on her own. The children may beg her to stay, not wanting to leave their home or their friends. She fears that if she leaves she will lose custody of her children due to threats made by the abuser. Some children can be affected by even witnessing domestic violence. They may experience a sense of worthlessness and loss; they may face chronic elevated levels of tension and stress; they may have low self-esteem; they may behave aggressively and violently. They are at risk of being hurt if they try to protect their mother and they are at risk of being abused themselves.

Experts agree the best way to protect children is to protect their mother. There is strong evidence that intervention, support and safety can often reverse the negative impact of domestic violence on children.

“I REALLY DON'T THINK HE COULD HURT ANYONE.”

Many abusers are not violent in other relationships. They can be charming and lovable in a social situation, yet display extreme violence in the privacy of the home.

Batterers can be our neighbors, service providers and respected members of the community. They are computer experts, farmers, unemployed workers, pastors, car salesmen, university professors, truck drivers, psychiatrists and house painters. Behind closed doors, they may also terrorize their family members.

“SHE MUST BE DOING SOMETHING TO PROVOKE HIM.”

Despite the faults a victim may have, she never deserves abuse. Having personality flaws does not ever justify abusive behaviors. Attitudes such as those that follow are all excuses and only serve to perpetrate more violence.

- “She should just keep her mouth shut – she knows what provokes his anger, so she should just stop.”
- “She’s not a very good wife; if she would take care of her responsibilities in the family, he wouldn’t have to discipline her.”
- “She exaggerates what he does to her. He’s a nice guy and she’s just trying to hurt him.”

Whatever problems exist in a relationship, the use of violence to resolve them is never justified or acceptable. If your family member or friend is the victim of battering; she is not to blame nor does she ever deserve such treatment.

Nobody enjoys being hurt. A victim may love her abuser, but she does not love being abused by him.

Domestic violence is not “mutual battering.” Many times in homes where there is domestic violence, women will fight back against their abusers in an attempt to defend themselves. This does not mean that the violence is “mutual.” We must consider the dynamic of power and control in the relationship. Does one partner live in constant fear of another? Is one partner afraid to speak, go to work or tell anyone about the violence?

**“I THINK HE HAS A DRINKING PROBLEM.
COULD THAT BE THE CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE?”**

Alcohol and drug use does not cause violence. Abusers use violence whether drunk or sober. Many abusers don’t drink or use drugs at all. Using drugs and alcohol as an excuse relieves the abuser of responsibility for his actions. In fact, some batterers, even those who drink alcohol until they are intoxicated, are in control enough to be selective about where they hit their partners so that injuries will not show. An alcoholic or drug addicted abuser must be treated for two separate problems – violence as well as drug and alcohol abuse. An abuser may not stop abusing if he becomes sober.

“HE’S BEEN UNDER A LOT OF STRESS.”

Battering is not caused by the loss of a job, the death of a parent or any other stressful event. Men who batter typically make excuses for their violence, claiming a loss of control due to extreme stress. Battering does not represent a loss of control, but a way of achieving it. A batterer is selective about who he hurts; he is not usually choosing to assault his boss, a neighbor or the mail carrier, but instead batterers target their intimate partners and children.

“HE MUST BE SICK.”

Battering is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. The abuser’s experience as a child, or the messages he gets from society in general, may tell him that violence is an effective way to achieve power and control over his partner’s behavior. Men who batter must be held accountable for their own actions. Viewing him as “sick” wrongly excuses him from taking responsibility for his behavior.

“IF SHE WANTED MY HELP, SHE’D ASK FOR IT.”

Your family member or friend may not yet feel comfortable confiding in others, fearing that they will not understand her situation. Try talking to her about the problem of battering in a general way. For example, you might mention a documentary or talk show about domestic violence that you’ve seen. Tell her you’re concerned about women who must endure physical abuse. Let her know you do not blame battered women for the violence.

“THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO TO HELP.”

A victim of domestic violence usually needs many things: a listening ear, emotional support, safe shelter, someone to care for her pets or farm animals, transportation, money, assistance with finding a new place to live and help with moving, child care and more. Your most important role is to link victims with the domestic violence program in your area. This booklet offers ideas on actions you can take to help a family member or friend who may be in danger from an abusive partner. If you decide to offer assistance, you can start slow, add other actions later and change your mind at any time. The local domestic program will provide free and confidential help to her at any time. It can also provide support to you and help you to assess your role in this work.

“IT’S NOT SAFE FOR ME TO DIRECT HER TO HELP.”

Sometimes batterers will act violently with anyone who is helping the battered woman. You may be in danger if you are directly helping a victim; there are no guarantees of safety.

Your first and safest action should be to link her with a domestic violence program. This action may really be offering a lifeline.

You can also call the local domestic violence program to talk with staff about safety. They can help you to assess the risks of the situation and make a plan to enhance your safety while helping. Any help you receive at the domestic violence program is free and confidential.

“IT IS TOO HARD ON ME TO GET INVOLVED.”

If you have offered to be a listening ear and you feel emotionally drained after speaking with your abused family member or friend who is the target of intimate violence, suggest that next time she speak with a counselor at the domestic violence program. Perhaps instead you can provide a safe place for her to telephone the this program. You can also talk confidentially with the advocates at the domestic violence program about your family member or friend’s situation and ways that you can safely help her. The services are also free for you.

“ABUSE DOESN’T OCCUR WHEN PEOPLE ARE DATING.”

On the contrary, many young women in high school report abuse in their relationships. Teenagers who are abusive use various tactics of control against their partners. Physical abuse in relationships rarely starts out as severe violence. Some behaviors, which show the possibility that a dating partner may eventually become physically violent, include extreme jealousy, blaming others for all problems, never being able to admit to wrongdoing, cruelty to animals and holding rigid beliefs about sex-roles for men and women.



DATING VIOLENCE
What's love got to do with it?

If you know a teenage girl who is in an abusive dating relationship, make sure she knows that:

- No one has the right to hurt her as a way to control her.
- It's against the law for someone to hit her.
- If she gets assaulted, she can call the police.
- If she is being abused, she can call the domestic violence program in her area. All services are free and confidential.

Ask her to consider these questions:

- Does your boyfriend strike out at you or make you feel afraid or uncomfortable?
- Do you change your behavior to try to keep him happy?
- Are you afraid you will get hurt if you try to end the relationship?

The Dating Bill of Rights

I have the right to:

- ♥ trust myself and my instincts
- ♥ be respected as a person
- ♥ change my mind
- ♥ express my feelings
- ♥ refuse a date
- ♥ not be physically, emotionally,
or sexually abused



What You Can Do

BECOME INFORMED

Gather all the information you can about domestic violence. Contact programs and services in your area that assist battered women and their children. These programs not only offer women safety, but also provide counseling, court accompaniment, support and other needed services.

Sometimes your own feelings about the violence may make it difficult for you to confront the situation. Contact your local domestic violence program and talk to staff about your concerns. This service, like all services at the local domestic violence program, is available free of charge. Battered women's advocates can be an excellent source of support for both you and your family member or friend.

LEND A SYMPATHETIC EAR

Letting your friend know that you care and are willing to listen may be the best help you can offer. Don't force the issue, but allow her to confide in you at her own pace. Keep your mind open and really listen to what she tells you. Never judge or blame her for what's happening or underestimate her fear of potential danger. No one knows better than she does what the abuser is capable of doing.

SUPPORT HER DECISIONS

In an abusive relationship, the batterer maintains a position of power and control over the target of his violence. When helping, it is important to remember that your family member or friend must make her own decisions about her life. Focus on supporting her right to make her own choices and approving the decisions she makes. Don't blame her or try to change her mind, if her choices are not the ones you would make. Do not offer advice. Especially, do not advise her to leave without knowing how dangerous such a choice might be for her.

PROTECT HER CONFIDENTIALITY

When your family member or friend trusts you with information about the violence in her life, treat her disclosure like a precious gift. Be respectful and kind. Listen with an open heart and, most importantly, keep her information confidential. A slip anywhere, anytime, can result in increased danger to her.

When you know the abuser, it may be tempting to intervene and try to stop the abuse. If the abuser finds out that the victim

reached out for help, he may double his efforts to control her and make sure that she doesn't ask for help again. Don't say anything that might indicate you know what is going on in the home. If you do, your family member or friend may be in greater danger.

GUIDE HER TO COMMUNITY SERVICES

When she asks for advice on what she should do, privately share any information you've gathered after you have read this booklet and called the local domestic violence program. Let her know she is not alone and that caring people are available to help her. Encourage her to seek the assistance of battered women's advocates through the local domestic violence program. Assure her that any information she shares with them will be kept strictly confidential.

Many battered women first seek the advice of marriage counselors, psychiatrists or members of the clergy. Not all helping professionals, however, are fully aware of the special circumstances of abused women. If the first person she contacts is not helpful, encourage her to find assistance elsewhere. Calling the local domestic violence program will ensure that she has an opportunity to talk with someone who is supportive and understands her situation. They can also refer her to other informed and supportive helping professionals (clergy, doctors, attorneys, etc.) in the community.

FOCUS ON HER STRENGTHS

Battered women live with emotional as well as physical abuse. The abuser probably continually tells your family member or friend that she is a bad woman, a bad wife and a bad mother. Without positive reinforcement from outside the home, she may begin to believe she can't do anything right – that there really is something wrong with her.

Give her the emotional support she needs to believe that she is a good person. Help her examine her skills. Point out her strengths. Acknowledge her worth. Notice when she does something well. Even small comments about how great she looks that day, how amazing her garden is this year or how delicious her cookies were at the church social are important.

Say something like,

- "You are not to blame for the abuse."
- "It's not your fault."
- "There is no excuse for being violent."

Do **not** say something like,

- "If my partner abused me, I would leave the first time it happened."

Help her believe that she can do things well – that there really is nothing wrong with her. Emphasize that she deserves a life that is free from violence, especially in her own home.

BE A FRIEND IN DEED

Tell her you're there for her when she needs you. Provide whatever assistance you can:

- a safe place to make telephone calls
- transportation to court or other appointments
- childcare
- a place to store a few important papers or emergency belongings
- financial assistance
- a listening ear
- taking care of pets or farm animals or financial assistance to board them
- assistance with finding a new place to live
- help with moving
- a ride to the domestic violence program

Be a friend to children and teens, too.

Sometimes, people think they are not doing enough, but they fail to realize that a kind word or gesture can be the key to making another person feel valued and cared for. Providing information and the domestic violence program hotline number may be offering a lifeline.

HELP HER UNDERSTAND THE DANGER

At some point, you may find it difficult to be supportive of your family member or friend, if she remains in the violent relationship or returns to the abuser after a temporary separation. It can be difficult to understand the choices she makes for herself. Yet, it is very important to remain supportive; you may be the last link she has outside of the relationship.

Let her know that not everyone lives with abuse. Be willing to help her understand the physical and emotional harm that she and her children could suffer if she stays. Help your family member or friend face up to the dangerous reality of living with an abusive partner. Remind her that even a push or a shove can result in serious injury.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED FOR HER SAFETY, SPEAK UP.

- If you notice an injury, inquire about it – if you feel comfortable. Be sure talk with her in private to ensure her safety.
- Ask a question like: “I have seen other women who have this type of injury, and they have been hurt by their partners. I wonder if this is happening to you?”
- Use the *7 Things to Say to a Battered Woman* as a guide:

7 Things to Say to a Battered Woman

(Adapted from a speech by Sarah Buel*, 1995.)

1. I am really sorry to hear this is happening to you.
2. I am afraid for your safety or I'm scared for you.
3. I am afraid for the safety of your children.
4. I am afraid it will only get worse.
(Said in a non-blaming way.)
5. I will help you find someone who can help.
6. You don't deserve to be abused.
7. I won't tell anyone what we discussed.

Remember that you can find support for your helping efforts by contacting the local domestic violence program. Free and confidential help is available anytime – seven days a week, 24 hours a day – just call your local domestic violence hotline.

HELP HER DEVELOP A SAFETY PLAN

Encourage your family member or friend to call the local domestic violence program to get help with reviewing or developing a plan to protect herself and her children. She can get help whether or not she chooses to leave the relationship. You can help her think through the steps that she can take if her partner becomes abusive again. Make a list of people she can call in an emergency. She may already have a plan in place. If so, offer to help review her plan or

*Sarah Buel, a formerly battered woman, is a national expert and trainer on domestic violence.

work on developing resources or new ideas for difficult issues. Because leaving is a dangerous process, it is important for her to make a safe plan for leaving.

Suggest that she put together and hide a suitcase of clothing, personal items, money, social security cards, bank books, the children's birth certificates and school records, and other important documents so she can be ready to leave at a moment's notice. Medicines and prescriptions will need to be accessible too. If necessary and safe to do so, offer to store her bag in your home or help her find another safe place to keep it.

IF SHE DECIDES TO LEAVE

The first safe place your family member or friend should contact is the local domestic violence program. Workers there can help her examine her options. If she decides to leave, a shelter may be the safest place she can go. The sad truth, however, is that not all communities, especially in rural areas, have shelters or safe homes. Sometimes shelters don't have enough room for all the women and children who need their help. Your family member or friend may need to rely on family or friends for temporary housing until the program can link her with a nearby shelter.

Be very careful when offering and providing safety in your home. Talk to the battered women's advocates at your local program about the best way to handle this. Remember that the battered woman frequently faces the most physical danger when she attempts to flee. Be sure to consider your risks – it is important that you are safe, too.

IF SHE DECIDES TO STAY

Do not be surprised if your family member or friend chooses to stay in the abusive relationship or leaves and subsequently returns to the relationship. If she chooses to leave, her leaving will likely be a process that will take place over time. Some battered women never choose to leave. Many women would like the relationship to continue but the violence to stop.

The biggest reason that a battered woman stays in an abusive relationship is fear – fear for her safety and the safety of her children. It is important to repeat that leaving can potentially be the most deadly time.

Other barriers to leaving also may include:

- concern that her children will be taken from her
- no transportation
- nowhere to go
- lack of resources
- concern for pets and farm animals
- religious reasons
- hope for change
- lack of awareness that domestic violence is wrong and is a crime

Sometimes identifying her barriers to leaving can help her find information and assistance to overcome those barriers. She can talk about her concerns and fears about leaving with you and with the staff at the local domestic violence program.

If she chooses to stay in or return to a violent relationship, know that...

- she is not a failure
- she may know that staying in the relationship provides her with the best outcomes at that time
- she may be very intentional about her choice or she may not be sure of her decision
- she can still work to enhance her safety while in the relationship
- she needs your support more than ever
- she is still eligible for free and confidential assistance from the domestic violence program

DEALING WITH THE ABUSER

When you know the person who is abusing his partner or children, it can become very difficult to come in contact socially or professionally with him. While it may be tempting to intervene to try to stop the abuse, an appearance of neutrality is the best policy. If you say anything that might indicate that you know what is going on in the home, the victim may be in greater danger.

If the abuser does confide in you about his abusive actions, you may call the domestic violence program for a counseling referral to share with him or suggest that he call a mental health professional or batterers' treatment program directly.

Do not suggest that he call the domestic violence program – unless he is the target of violence and needs protection from his partner.

It cannot be overemphasized that domestic violence is a crime that can result in serious physical injury and even death. If you know that the victim is in imminent physical danger, call the police immediately. Calling the police does not always mean the abuser will be placed in jail; but it may be the most effective way to protect the woman and her children from immediate harm.

After you call the police, you can also call the domestic violence program for support and additional information.





Your Local Domestic Violence Program

HOW TO CONTACT THE PROGRAM

If you know someone who is being hit or hurt by her partner, or needs help, call your local domestic violence program for free and confidential assistance. The number is located on the inside front page of this booklet.

Free and confidential assistance is available to family members and friends, too.

You can also call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) – anywhere in the U.S. This National Domestic Violence Hotline will directly connect callers – at no cost – to the domestic violence program located closest to their community.

LIFE-SAVING SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE

It is important for you to know about local and community resources for domestic violence victims and their children. Contact your local domestic violence program for more information. It has resource materials such as posters, booklets and brochures that you can offer to your family member or friend, or others concerned about domestic violence.

The most important referral you can make for a victim of domestic violence is to the nearest domestic violence program. In rural areas, programs often serve more than one county. Advocates can arrange for transportation to shelter or for someone to meet with the victim in your community.

The services offered vary from program to program, but advocates may be able to offer the following:

- 24-hour crisis hotline
- one-on-one counseling
- shelter or safe housing
- assistance with obtaining a protection order and other types of legal advocacy
- battered women's support groups
- child advocacy services
- assistance with emergency and basic living needs
- emergency transportation
- assistance with finding permanent housing or obtaining welfare

- referrals to other resources
- support for family members and friends of a victim of domestic violence
- information, training and resources on domestic violence
- medical advocates at local hospitals

YOUR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM NEEDS YOUR HELP!

It is critical that all victims of domestic violence have access to the aid they need. Please help us ensure that services continue to be available in your community.

The need for financial contributions, donations and other unique support that could be provided by community members is never ending. Here are a few suggestions on how you can support your local domestic violence program.

Get involved!

- Volunteer! You could staff the hotline, work as a court advocate, train other community members, raise money or become a board member. There are many opportunities; call your local program for information.
- Sponsor a workshop on domestic violence, in conjunction with your local domestic violence program, for your workplace, church or community group.
- Offer to take care of pets while families are living in a safe house or emergency shelter.
- Board large animals (horses, cows, goats, etc.) for families in transition.
- Organize a fundraiser to benefit your local domestic violence program.
- Ask the domestic violence program what donations are needed. Collect holiday baskets, gifts or supplies for families who have to flee their homes in emergencies.
- Collect financial donations for moving costs, an emergency fund or for boarding pets.
- Make a monthly financial contribution. Regular financial donations – even if they are small – are really helpful to meet on-going costs.
- Invite your family members and friends to get involved in this community issue.
- Say NO to domestic violence everywhere, all the time.



Refer To The Following Resources For Additional Information On Domestic Violence

Berry, Dawn Bradley. *The Domestic Violence Sourcebook: Everything You Need To Know*. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1995.

Evans, Patricia. *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize It and How to Respond*. Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1996.

- Almost everyone has heard of or knows someone who is part of a verbally abusive relationship – if they're not involved in one themselves. In *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, survivors will find validation, understanding and encouragement for their efforts to change the situation. Author Patricia Evans explores the damaging effects of verbal abuse on children and the family, and offers valuable insight and recommendations to therapists, as well as those who seek therapeutic support. ISBN: 1558505822

Jones, Ann. *Next Time, She'll Be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994, 2000.

- If you ever thought that women who stayed in abusive relationships must somehow like it, or deserve it, or if you're a woman who ever thought "It could never happen to me," then you should read this book. A revealing look at battered women and abusive men and society's response. If you want to know what you can do to help stop domestic violence, this book is for you. ISBN: 0807067717.

Jones, Ann and Susan Schechter. *When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

- Full of moving first-person stories and drawing on the authors' 15 years of experience working with women in controlling and abusive relationships, *When Love Goes Wrong* provides guidance and practical options for the millions of women whose partners have crossed the line between love and control. ISBN: 0060923695

Miller, Mary Susan. *No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women by Their Men*. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1995.

- Domestic violence against women is not limited to physical assaults. In *No Visible Wounds*, Mary Susan Miller breaks the silence that surrounds this devastating form of abuse, identifies the many types of nonphysical battering, and explores why this outrageous treatment of women continues unabated in our society. ISBN: 0449910792

NiCarthy, Ginny. *Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1982, 1997.

- Although *Getting Free* was written in 1982, it is still called the bible of all domestic violence texts. It's not just the content of the book – 24 chapters covering a gamut of issues – but the tone. The problems of and solutions to domestic violence are clearly defined through the voices of women as they share their experiences and carve out their steps toward freedom. At the time that *Getting Free* was first published, the more common feeling about domestic abuse was that women brought it on themselves. This landmark book changed that perception, not only bringing a social problem to light, but also offering a lifeline to thousands of women. It continues to do so. ISBN: 1878067923.

Stenack, Richard J. *Stop Controlling Me! What to Do When Someone You Love Has Too Much Power Over You*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2001.

- Control issues are a major factor in the nearly 50 percent of American marriages that end in divorce. Women with low self-esteem are most likely to attract a dominating partner. This book offers exercises to uncover mistaken beliefs, identify unacceptable compromises and regain self-worth, as well as step-by-step tools to end relationships that can't be saved. ISBN: 1572242469