
Family Shelter Service

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EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE VICTIM

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Domestic violence will have a range of immediate and longer-term consequences for the victim/survivor. Any of the following individual reactions are considered to be normal reactions to a violation which threatens the person's life and personal integrity, involves a loss of power and control over one's physical well-being and environment, and degrades the victim/survivor:

- Shock: numbing, denial, shaking, feeling cold, crying, nausea, flashbacks, confusion, disorientation
- Powerlessness and loss of control
- Fear of: repeated violence and retaliation by offender, other's reactions, System's response, emotional and sexual intimacy
- Guilt, self-blame
- Shame, embarrassment
- Anger, rage
- Sadness, sense of loss, grief
- Sense of betrayal
- Self disgust, self hatred
- Degradation, humiliation
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Sleep disturbances: insomnia, nightmares, night sweats
- Flashbacks, intrusive memories
- Loss of confidence, self-doubt
- Emotional and social isolation
- Feelings of entrapment and being under siege

LONGER TERM CONSEQUENCES OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE (some effects may reoccur for years)

- Depression
- Suicide (ideation, attempted, or actual)
- Homicide (ideation, attempted, or actual)
- Relationship problems (fear of emotional and sexual intimacy, loss of trust)
- Mood Swings (feelings of "going crazy")
- Inability to concentrate
- Sudden on-set of or increase in: eating disorders, substance abuse, compulsive behaviors (work, food, sex, etc.), self-harming behaviors, agoraphobia (fear of open spaces), anxiety/panic attacks, intrusive memories, flashbacks, ongoing sleep disturbances
- Emotional and social isolation
- Continued feelings of: fear, guilt and self-blame, self-hatred, powerlessness, betrayal, anger, rage, grief and sadness
- Questioning of: religious beliefs, social norms, personal integrity, relationships with family, friends,
- Diminished self-esteem, sense of worthlessness
- Chronic physical complaints: indigestion, headaches, muscle and joint pain, back pain, changes in menses, uterine and/or abdominal cramps, fatigue
- Often, in a variety of individual ways, a survivor of intimate violence will be motivated to reach out to others in the same situation, work for change in inadequate or negligent System's Response, and participate in education about and prevention of intimate violence.

Compelling Reasons That Keep Women In Abusive Relationships

The one question our culture generally asks of victims/survivors of domestic abuse is: "Why do/did you stay in an abusive relationship?" Sometimes the question is meant as an honest inquiry, though at other times it is spoken with an undercurrent of hostility or disbelief, (e.g.: "It couldn't have been *that* bad, you must have liked it," or "If you *really* wanted to leave, you would have.") This victim-blaming attitude is extremely counter-productive. Domestic violence is always the responsibility of the abuser, and it is also important to remember that leaving the relationship does not necessarily end the abuse (many abusers escalate their violence when the victim attempts to leave).

The following list, adapted from a publication of the Domestic Abuse Project (www.domesticabuseproject.org), is a composite of views collected from their women support groups over a period of several years. These women offered many answers to the question: "What keeps women in abusive relationships?"

Fear of Partner's Actions:

- He will threaten to leave me.
- He said he would "hunt me down and kill me."
- He will kidnap the children and disappear.
- He will spread horrible rumors about me.
- I will never be safe, I might as well live with him.
- She will "out" me at work or to my family. (*if victim is gay or lesbian*)

Effects of Abuse:

- Depression
- Feelings of immobility
- Can't face making decisions
- I am so used to my life being this way.
- I have no real options or choices.

Roles the Culture Forces upon Women:

Guilt:

- I will ruin his life if I leave.
- She will lose her job if I report this.
- He will start drinking again.
- I will disappoint my family.
- I have to take care of him.

Economic Dependence:

- He has all the money
- I have never had a good job, how will I care for kids alone?
- Better to be beaten up at home than to be on the street

- I would rather die than be on welfare.

Dependence on Traditional Gender Roles:

- I am afraid to be on my own, who will protect me?
- I fear that I will never be in a relationship again.
- He gives me a sense of security
- I don't want to be a divorced woman.

The Children:

- My children will blame me and resent me.
- My children need a father.
- Children need a “real family”.
- Unwilling to give up the “house with a white picket fence, 2.2 children” dream.
- He will steal the children.
- He will turn the children against me.
- Sons need male role models.
- She is the biological mother; I have no legal rights.

Isolation:

- He doesn't let me out of the house; I don't even have any friends to call for help.
- If I *ever* tell *anyone* about this, he will kill me.
- My sister said I couldn't come stay with her anymore, after the last time....
- He said he would teach Helen a lesson if I went over there again.

Personal History:

- My father beat my mom- it just goes with being in a relationship.
- Getting hit isn't the worst thing that can happen in a family—I know of worse things...

Love and Hope:

- I keep hoping that he will change.
- I believe him when he keep saying that it will never happen again.
- I don't want to give up the good times.
- She promised she would go to therapy.
- Sex and intimacy
- My marriage vows
- My religion
- I love him.

Note: This list is not necessarily comprehensive, and not all of these reasons are found in each case, but a combination of some of them can usually be found and may be compelling enough to keep a woman in the relationship.

Personalized Domestic Violence Safety Plan

The following steps represent my plan for addressing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility of further violence. Although I do not have control over my partner's violence, I do have a choice about how to respond to him or her and how to best get myself and my children to safety.

Step 1: Safety during a violent incident. Battered partners cannot always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, battered partners may use a variety of strategies.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

- A. If I decide to leave, I will _____
(What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes would you use?)
- B. I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them (where) _____
- C. I can tell _____ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.
- D. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to call 911.
- E. I will use _____ as my code word with my children or friends so they can call for help.
- F. If I have to leave my home, I will go _____ or _____.
- G. I can also teach some of these strategies to some/all of my children.
- H. When I expect the abuse is about to occur, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as _____ (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without access to an outside door).
- I. I will use my judgment and intuition. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

Step 2: Safety when preparing to leave. Battered partners frequently leave the residence they share with the battering partner. Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Batterers often strike back when they believe that a battered partner is leaving a relationship. I can use some or all of the following strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____
- B. I will keep copies of important documents or keys at _____
- C. I will open a savings account by _____
- D. Other things I can do to increase my independence include: (Increased independence can lead to increased risk.)

- E. The domestic violence program's hotline number is _____
- F. I can keep change for phone calls on me at all times. I understand that if I use my telephone credit card, the following month the telephone bill will tell my batterer those numbers I called after I left. To keep my telephone calls confidential, I must either use coins or I might get a friend to permit me to use their telephone credit card for a limited time when I first leave.
- G. I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- H. I can leave extra clothes with _____
- I. I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence and make any changes necessary.
- J. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.

Step 3: Safety in my own residence. There are many things a battered partner can do to increase safety in his/her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step. Safety measures I can use include:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- B. I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- C. I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, and electronic system, etc.
- D. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- E. I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- F. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.
- G. I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to _____ (friend/minister/other) in the event that my partner takes the children.
- H. I will tell the people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:

- _____ (school)
- _____ (day care staff)
- _____ (babysitter)
- _____ (Sunday school teacher)
- _____ (teacher)
- _____ (others)

I. I can inform _____ (neighbor, pastor, or friend) my partner no longer resides with me and should call the police if he or she is observed near my residence.

Step 4: Safety with a protection order. Many batterers obey protection orders, but one can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will violate protection orders. I recognize that I may need to ask the police and the courts to enforce my protection order.

The following are some steps I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:

- A. I will keep my protection order _____ (Always keep it on or near your person).
- B. There should be a county registry of protection orders that all police departments can call to confirm the existence and/or status of a protection order. I can check to make sure that my order is on the registry. The telephone number for the county registry of protection orders is: _____
- C. For further safety, if I often visit other counties in my state, I might file my protection order in those counties _____
- D. I can call the local domestic violence program if I am not sure about B, C, or D above or if I have some problem with my protection order.
- E. I will inform my employer, minister, and closest friend, I have an active protection order.
- F. If my partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.

Step 5: Safety on the job and in public. Each battered partner must decide if and when he/she will tell others that he/she has been battered and that he/she may be at continued risk. Friends, family, and co-workers can help to protect. Each battered partner should consider carefully who to invite to help secure his/her safety. **I might do any or all of the following:**

- A. I can inform my boss, the security supervisor, and _____ at work of my situation.
- B. I can ask _____ to help screen my telephone calls at work.
- C. When leaving work, I can _____
- D. When driving home, if problems occur I can _____
- E. If I use public transit, I can _____
- F. I can use different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different than those used when residing with my battering partner.
- G. I can use a different bank and take care of my banking at hours different from those I used when residing with my battering partner.

Step 6: Safety and my emotional health. The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life for myself takes much courage and incredible energy. To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to support my mental and emotional well-being, **I can do some or all of the following:**

- A. If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abuse situation, I can _____
- B. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can _____
- C. I can try to use "I can..." statements with myself and to be assertive with others.
- D. I can tell myself " _____ " whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.

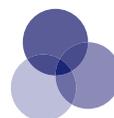
Telephone numbers I need to know:

- Police departments: _____
- Battered women's program: _____
- County registry of protection orders: _____
- Work number: _____
- Supervisor's home number: _____

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



Green Flags

1. Has a gentle nature and is kind.
2. Loves his/her family and treats them all well.
3. Is a peacemaker when people are restless.
4. Loves children, and old people and those in between.
5. Does not blame others for things that happen.
6. Is responsible in all ways. Admits when wrong.
7. Is not willing or able to do things that are hurtful.
8. Respects others rights to their opinions.
9. Knows that everyone sometimes feels they need their space and is ok with that.
10. Has his/her own friends and encourages you to have yours.
11. Is respectful to your family and goes with you to your family functions.
12. Is comfortable with himself/herself and with you.
13. Helps you with things that you need help with.
14. Is honest with you and with others.
15. Is able to fit into most situations.
16. You feel safe when with him/her.
17. Is aware of your feelings and does not put you in situations you do not feel comfortable/safe in.
18. Is trustworthy and knows you are too.
19. Obeys the law. Does not judge others
20. Respects authority and that the world has to have boundaries for those who do not.
21. Is just what he/she seems to be
22. Conveys a message of what he/she stands for when he/she enters a room.
23. Is able to cry for joy and for sadness without being embarrassed or ashamed.
24. Lets you know he/she loves you by his/her actions and his/her words. Likes to make you happy.
25. Respects your wishes and boundaries with regard to you body and soul.

Red Flags

Your partner may be abusive if more than 4 or 5 of these items are true:

Major Indicators:

1. Believes in male/female roles
2. Was violent before you met
3. Is often angry/has a bad temper
4. Blames others for what he/she does
5. Grew up in a violent/abusive home

Other Indicators:

6. Is very jealous
7. Puts you and others down
8. Lies
9. Is afraid of losing the relationship
10. Is very possessive
11. Wants sex before you get to know each other
12. Tries to be with you all of the time
13. Is overly charming, giving gifts, etc.
14. Insults you, then says “just kidding” or you’re too sensitive
15. Has a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality
16. Frequently talks about previous partners
17. Is cruel to animals
18. Often drinks too much

You:

19. Blame yourself for his/her anger
20. Are afraid of his/her reaction
21. Express your feelings and opinions less and less
22. Drop out of activities and have fewer friends
23. Question your own judgment
24. Think of him/her as an angry man/woman
25. Are often confused
26. Have trouble concentrating
27. Feel he/she doesn’t hear you
28. Try to convince him/her you love them
29. Feel alone most of the time
30. Avoid contact with others of the opposite sex
31. Apologize frequently
32. Have a sleep or eating disorder
33. Feel a need to protect your pets or valuables (children later)
34. Do things you don’t want to do
35. Feel that nothing pleases him

If these sound familiar, get help!