

Section II: Information About Domestic Violence

I. What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a term used to describe a *pattern* of abusive behavior that one partner uses to maintain power and control their partner. Domestic Violence is not only physical abuse. Batterers often use a variety of tactics to maintain control over their partners including verbal, emotional, sexual and economic abuse.

II. Types of Domestic Violence

Many people often feel that if their partner has not physically abused them, they are not in a domestic violence relationship. The truth is that there are many forms of abuse.

In addition to using physical force, the assailant may use some of the following tactics to scare, terrorize and control a person.

You may be able to identify with some of these tactics or you may know someone else who is.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse

Over time, emotional and verbal abuse can be equally as damaging as physical abuse. By putting you down and making you feel bad about yourself, your partner is attacking your self-worth and making you believe that you are incapable of surviving without them.

Some signs of emotional abuse include:

- name calling and belittling
- making you feel guilty
- humiliating you
- making you feel like you are crazy
- playing mind games

Intimidation

Abusers know that their partner can be afraid of them. They are often able to scare their partner through their actions, body language and other gestures. This is called intimidation.

Some examples of intimidation include:

- smashing things
- slamming doors
- displaying weapons
- using threatening looks and body language

Economic Abuse

One tactic that abusers often use to maintain power over their partner is to control access to or knowledge about the families finances. By controlling access to money, the abuser is limiting his partner's ability to make decisions about herself, her home or her children. He may also be sabotaging her efforts to leave the relationship.

Some examples of economic abuse are:

- preventing partner from getting or keeping a job
- making partner ask for money
- making partner show him everything she purchased
- taking partner's money
- withholding information about family income

Threats

Making threats is a common tactic that abusers may use to scare their partner. They may express an intent to harm you or try to control you by making you think that they will do something to hurt you.

Some abusers may threaten to:

- physically hurt their partner
- leave the relationship
- take the children
- call Human Services
- commit suicide or harm themselves
- hurt your family
- kill their partner

Isolation

Keeping women away from other people is another way that abusers maintain control. By sabotaging relationships with friends, family and colleagues, the abuser is weakening his partner's ability to build a healthy support system. This may allow the abuser to have more control over their partner.

Some ways that abusers isolate their partners are:

- limiting outside involvement
- using jealousy to justify actions
- controlling where their partner goes
- interfering with relationships at work or school
- interfering with his partner's relationships with her family

Using Privilege

Some men feel that the man of the house should be the decision-maker and that his wife and children have to respect his "authority".

Not all men feel this way. Most healthy relationships involve a shared responsibility and equal decision-making between men and women.

Some examples of using privilege are:

- treating their partner like a servant or a child
- making all of the decisions
- telling the woman how she should act
- creating a double- standard about personal time

Using Children

Abusers often make threats about the children to scare their partners. They may realize that their partner will do anything to protect her children and will use this to their advantage to control her.

Some examples of using the children are:

- threatening to take them away
- threatening to hurt them
- threatening to call Human Services
- making partner feel guilty about the children
- using the children to relay messages

Minimizing, Denying and Blaming

It is common for abusers to shift the responsibility of their abuse onto their partner. Abusers almost never take full accountability for their actions and usually blame the abuse on someone or something else. By making their partner feel that they did something to cause the abuse or by denying the abuse altogether, the abuser is making it seem like what he did was not wrong and that his partner is crazy or stupid for feeling hurt. Wrong is wrong! ***Remember that you are not crazy or in any way responsible for the abuse.***

Some examples of this tactic are:

- saying that the abuse did not happen
- saying that she started the argument and caused the abuse
- lying about what actually happened
- telling other people a different story

Sexual Abuse

This can be a difficult subject to talk about for many women. However, sexual abuse is common in many domestic violence relationships. Often abusers will threaten abuse if his partner does not have sex with him. Women may feel pressured to engage in a sexual activity against their will in order to avoid an assault. In some cases, it may be difficult to recognize sexual abuse or to identify that you have been a survivor of marital or partner rape.

Some ways that abusers sexually abuse their partners are:

- forcing partner to perform a sexual act against her will
- comparing her to other women and degrading her sexuality
- forcing her to watch pornographic material or act it out
- deliberately giving partner a sexually transmitted infection
- taking sexual pictures of partner and threatening to use them against her
- accusing you of having sex with someone else and demanding to “examine” your private areas

Not all situations are the same. Each relationship is different and may not include all of the tactics mentioned above. However, by reading these examples you may be able to identify some aspects of your own relationship that are similar.

Abuse of any kind is WRONG!

It is important to remember that the abuse is not your fault. You should not feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed about what has happened to you. Nothing that you did *caused* the abuse to happen. Your partner is the one who made the decision to be abusive.