

# Domestic Violence

Domestic violence victims are often exposed repeatedly to threats, violence, intimidation, and physical, emotional and psychological abuse. Constant, repeated exposure to violence has a profound effect on a victim's daily activities and functioning, thinking, interpersonal relationships, and sense of self.

Reactions a domestic violence survivor may experience include:

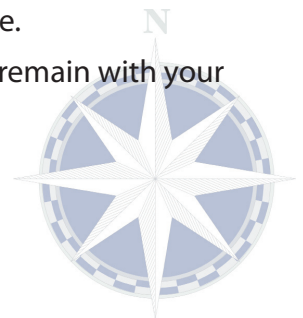
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low self-esteem
- Chronic physical complaints
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of helplessness / hopelessness
- Nightmares and sleep disturbances
- Anger
- Depression
- Shame and embarrassment
- Substance abuse
- Numbness
- Hyper-vigilance (inability to relax, jumpiness)

If you are a victim of domestic violence you may blame your own behavior, rather than the violent actions of the abuser. You may try continually to alter your behavior and circumstances in order to please the abuser – believing that if you follow certain rules and make sure the abuser is happy – you will not be hurt. However, you need to know that violence perpetrated by abusers is often self-driven and depends little on your actions or words.

Domestic violence victims many times minimize the seriousness of incidents in order to cope, and not seek medical attention or assistance when needed. Because you fear the perpetrator and may be ashamed of your situation, you may be reluctant to disclose the abuse to family, friends, work, the authorities, or victim assistance professionals. As a consequence, you may decide to suffer in silence and isolation.

People stay with abusive partners for many different reasons. By understanding these reasons, you can explore your options for living a violence-free life and avoid feelings of guilt and isolation.

- You fear you will be beaten more severely. Your batterer has threatened to find and kill or harm you, your children, and your family.
- You depend on the batterer for shelter, food, and other necessities.
- You have no one to talk to who understands and believes you.
- You believe your children need two parents, and you don't want to raise them alone.
- You want to keep the family together and live up to your religious commitment to remain with your partner.
- You fear that you won't be able to take care of yourself and your children alone.



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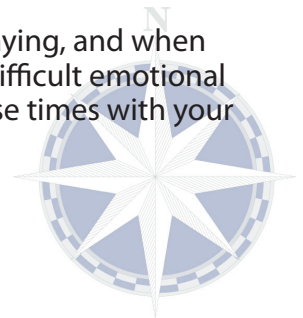
- You want to stand by your partner and be loyal to the relationship.
- Your partner has threatened to commit suicide if you leave.
- You believe that things will get better.
- You believe that no one else will love you.
- You fear your family and friends will be ashamed of you.
- You feel ashamed, embarrassed, and humiliated and don't want anyone to know what is happening.
- You think others will believe that you are "low class" or stupid for staying as long as you already have.
- You believe that you need to be in a relationship to feel like a complete person.
- You fear that you will be deported or that your children will be taken out of the country.
- If you are in a same sex relationship, you fear that you will be "outed" or that no one will believe you.
- Your job is to make the relationship work, and if it does not work, you are to blame.
- If you stay, you can "save" the batterer and help him or her get better.

Abusive relationships are terrifying, but terminating a relationship with someone whom is hurting you can be even more terrifying. It is a myth that people don't leave violent relationships. Many leave an average of five to seven times before they are able to leave permanently. You may feel that you are in greater danger from your partner's abuse when you leave. Only you can decide what is best for you and your children. Whether you decide to remain with your abusive partner or leave, it is important for you to plan for your safety. Keeping yourself (and your children) safe is of the utmost importance; therefore it is imperative that you follow a comprehensive safety plan.

## *How to Stay Safe:*

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- Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) professional for confidential consultation, counseling, support, safety planning, and links to workplace and community resources.
- Plan a safe place to stay. Make sure that your "safe-place" is unknown to the person who is abusing you such as a shelter for battered adults. If you have children, make sure that the place you are going to is set up to take children.
- Never disclose your whereabouts to your abuser. Tell a friend where you will be staying, and when you plan to return. Establish a support system that will help you get through the difficult emotional times ahead. Friends and family, counselors and pastors will be of help during these times with your financial affairs as well as practical day-to-day matters.



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- Get as many safety devices as possible. Especially a cellular phone and keep it with you at all times.
- Pack an “emergency bag” with things you will need for an extended stay, and keep it hidden, but ready to use in case you feel that your life is in danger, and need to leave at a moment’s notice.
- Document everything about the abuse. Documentation is key when trying to substantiate your claim of being abused. Photographs, video and audiotapes, police and medical reports will help attorneys mount an effective defense. Keep these at a friend or relative’s house or in a safety deposit box, and never tell the abuser they exist.
- Seek legal help. There are laws that protect victims of domestic violence, and the courts will grant you a restraining order and special hearings to monitor your abuser’s compliance. Once you begin a legal action, follow through. This is the best way to ensure that you remain safe.
- Notify your supervisor and security about your situation, allow a neutral person to assess the risk for violence in the workplace, and submit a recent photograph of the abuser to security in the event of a confrontation at work.
- Discuss work options such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting, safety precautions, and employee benefits such as leave or flex time with your supervisor.

Domestic violence is perpetrated by, and on, both men and women, and occurs in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. If you are a male victim of domestic violence, you may have found it difficult to find adequate help and support. Unfortunately there is still a belief among some that men simply cannot be victims of domestic violence. This can make it even more difficult for male victims to confide in anyone about what is happening which can lead to depression, despair, low self esteem, a feeling of hopelessness and isolation. If you are a man who is being abused in this way there ARE people out there who can offer support, understanding, information, advice, and help. Do not hesitate to contact the EAP or the other resources specializing in Domestic Violence.

## Get Help

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It is not your fault that you are being abused. Nobody deserves to be assaulted, least of all by a partner who is supposed to be part of a caring relationship. People often blame themselves because that is what they are told by the abuser, but that is just their way of justifying what they are doing to you. You should always remember that being assaulted is wrong.

It is very easy to say that you must find help, but that is exactly what you should do. It might not be easy to talk to someone about what is happening to you, but you must. Either confide in a friend or contact a local resource specializing in Domestic Violence. It is important to talk to someone who can offer you emotional support and also practical help.



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## *The Employee Assistance Program can help*

If you are currently experiencing or have experienced abuse in an intimate relationship, support is available. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free, confidential services to both victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The EAP is committed to helping employees and their household members feel safe – in their homes, communities and workplaces.

Domestic violence can severely affect every aspect of a person's life. Leaving may involve rearranging your whole life. It may mean losing economic security, friends, a home and a job. It can also be dangerous if the abuser has threatened to kill a partner who leaves. Safety is a major concern of the EAP. The EAP will discuss safety concerns and the level of risk to an employee to help determine the best course of action.

The EAP is available to provide a variety of services to employees affected by domestic abuse, including:

- Initial and ongoing support
- Problem solving
- Safety planning assistance for home and work
- Referrals to community resources
- Knowledgeable referrals to community-based domestic violence service programs
- Support groups

All services are strictly confidential. We find that the best results come from people using multiple services.

