

Domestic Violence: It's everyone's problem...

Survivors' Stories...

If you have ever been in gym class at school and have been hit in the face with a fast flying basketball, this is how I felt the first time my abuser hit me. It was swiftly and out of nowhere. I remember being stunned. It was so out of character.

It was over who was going to drive to an auto parts store. I reached up to feel if I had a lump and there was not only a lump but blood on my hands as well. He backhanded me right in the nose. I just was in so much shock I didn't know what to do or say.

I had heard about women who get hit or beaten by their partners but never thought it could happen to me. Immediately my abuser was sorry. He actually cried. I remember thinking maybe I was too demanding. I actually felt sorry for him. I remember thinking I should have just let him drive to the stupid store! Most of our arguments were over extremely petty issues.

One day we were in my car on our way to a movie. We had a small disagreement over which movie to see. I hated to be scared and he wanted to see a very frightening movie. He slammed the car into reverse as I was driving 55 mph on the freeway! I nearly lost control of the car then he called me stupid because I almost wrecked the car.

I asked him what he was trying to do. He then punched me in the mouth. I drove right to the hospital with him in the passenger seat. I knew I wasn't going to tell anyone; I just wanted to scare him.

I was always trying to get it right. I was not allowed to disagree. Money was a huge control tool for my abuser. I had to show him receipts after buying diapers for the baby. I was not allowed to work. And he would even go so far as to let the air out of my tires so I couldn't look for work when he himself was at work. In the evening he would refill the tires. I got real good at hiding my bruises. My friends probably thought I was the clumsiest person. With no job or skills and a baby, I had no idea what to do or where to go.

I remember someone handed me a list of shelters. I thought, "I am not going to take my baby with me to a shelter." I took a bus and started filling out job applications. I got on waiting lists for temporary housing. One day I accidentally left an application on the table and he came home from work early. Needless to say I endured another beating.

The very last time he laid his hands on me was when I asked him for money to buy bananas and diapers. I had secretly stashed \$5 away in my purse. I had my purse on my shoulder and the baby in the other hand. I was simply going to go to the grocery store. He thought perhaps I had another motive for wanting the money. He grabbed my purse off of my arm and swung me around and kept slamming my head against the wall, saying over and over, "You are leaving me aren't you?" I will never forget that look.

I ran to the bedroom with my baby and locked the door and called 911. He was outside the door trying to come in. He then got on the phone and started telling the dispatcher that he didn't do anything. He finally got in through the door, grabbed me and the baby and threw us out on the front porch bleeding and bruised. He was arrested that day for domestic violence assault.

When I finally left him it wasn't long until he found me. I remember going to the department of housing to check on my status. I had this huge black eye. The receptionist gave me her sunglasses. That was the nicest thing anyone had done for me in months.



Who are the abusers? -- A profile of men who batter

Jealousy

Men who batter almost routinely accuse their partners of having other sexual relationships. Slight evidence is sufficient to fire their imagination. Such intensely irrational jealousy may arise from the man's own insecurities and projection. He may be having sexual liaisons outside their primary bond himself. Objectification of women is also a contributing factor.

Control and Isolation of Partner

Perpetrators of domestic violence will go to extreme lengths to isolate and control their partners.

Jekyll and Hyde Personalities

Men who have a problem with violence exhibit drastic personality changes. Much of the time, they are gentle and loving husbands and fathers. This is the personality with which the woman fell in love originally and continues to love. Periodically, sometimes in rather predictable cycles, he seems to metamorphasize into an ogre. Some men display their Dr. Jekyll side to the public consistently. Mr. Hyde emerges only at home. This is doubly treacherous to the partner because others do not believe her when she speaks of monstrous acts.

Explosive Temper

A most trivial happening such as failure to balance a checkbook or burning the toast can trigger a beating. In other cases, there is no apparent precipitating event. Many women have been pulled from bed while sleeping soundly and beaten. A frequent response of the victims is to attempt to be the perfect wife and mother. An oft-repeated lament is, "I feel like I'm walking on eggshells."

Projection

A man who batters is a master at blaming other people and external events for his own behavior. A life-long pattern of avoiding the consequences for his behavior effectively limits his sense of personal responsibility for his destructiveness as well as suppresses any motivation for change. The partner becomes a surrogate punching bag. Therefore, when a battered woman says, "He needs me," she is right in one sense. If he can project his faults onto her, thereby not having to deal with them himself, he is able to perpetuate his own blameless state.

Verbal as Well as Physical Abuse

An enormous amount of verbal abuse accompanies physical abuse. A barrage of derogatory labels are heaped upon the victim. Mind games are rampant. Some verbal abuse is less obvious to the abused party. It can be so subtle that the woman is unable to identify the intent of the words. She accepts this judgment that her housekeeping is sloppy, her childcare lax and she is a hopeless, unappealing drudge. Her self-esteem slips even lower.

Denial

"I didn't hit her," or, "I just pushed her a little bit," are almost universally uttered denials. Sometimes awareness of his own behavior is so totally repressed that he will notice his partner's injury that he inflicted the previous evening and ask, "What happened to you?" Indeed, one of the most crucial aspects of treatment for men who batter is to help them get in touch with their violence. When they acknowledge the truth of their past behavior, they may encounter within themselves a backlog of guilt and revulsion of themselves so overwhelming that they either fall into depression or regress into deeper denial.

Cycle of Violence and Contrition

Often it seems that the male who batters purposely is trying to drive away his partner. When he succeeds, he will go to great lengths to retrieve her. He may abduct the children, cry real tears, bring flowers, promise to go to counseling every day, vow to stop drinking, and tell her that he needs her and can't survive without her. These actions are very convincing. Each time she leaves and then returns, the cycle escalates. The violence becomes more severe and the contrite state becomes craftier. She, sadly, reinforces his behavior by believing him and attempting to resume life with him.

Below are some characteristics that might identify a potential batterer or abuser:

- Extreme dependence on relationships.
- Rationalization of his/her own violence, denial of the severity of the abuse or denial that the abuse occurred at all.
- Rigid sex roles, believes men are superior and should be in charge of women.
- Impulsive in decision-making.
- General possessiveness and jealousy, which can reach pathological levels.
- Focuses on fear of losing partner, often imagines partner is having an affair.
- Not open to hearing options or rational explanations.
- Tries to isolate partner from friends, family, and co-workers.
- Difficulty in identifying and expressing feelings and oppression of emotions.
- Sees violence as a problem solver and tension release
- May be mystified that the law should object.
- May not feel guilty or ashamed, minimizes or denies the abuse.
- May have affairs.
- Witnessed/experienced family violence while growing up
- Unrealistic expectations of self, partner, family, etc.
- "Jekyll and Hyde" personality.
- Impulsive with explosive personality, flies into rages unexpectedly.
- Rigid style of demanding and controlling behaviors.
- Sees only short-term horizons, ignores/doesn't see long-term consequences of abusive behavior.
- Personality disorder(s).
- Criminal record.
- Sometimes becomes more abusive when the partner is pregnant or shortly after she gives birth.
- May display addictive behaviors (alcohol, drugs, overeating, gambling).
- Puts blame on spouse/companion and accepts little responsibility for own behavior.
- Is extremely manipulative.
- If in counseling, is primarily interested in keeping partner in the relationship, not in changing self.
- Will end counseling as soon as partner returns or a new relationship is established.
- Without counseling, will repeat the violence since there is no basic change in functioning.

Where To Get Help...

- 24 Hour Crisis Hotline: 1-800-500-1119 or 225-9979
- Go online for more information: Micah's Place at www.micahsplace.org; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence at www.ncadv.org; and Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence at www.fcadv.org.

Advice for a friend of someone who is a victim of domestic or dating violence:

- Assure your friend that she is not alone and that she is not crazy.
- Let your friend know that there are resources where she can get help.
- Be supportive, patient and respectful.
- Respect your friend's confidentiality.
- Encourage your friend to develop a safety plan.
- Do not confront the abuser.
- Do not leave voicemails, send e-mails or leave brochures about abuse. Communication may be monitored.
- Encourage your friend to seek help.

The Nassau County Record, the Nassau County Domestic Violence Task Force and Micah's Place have partnered together to bring information and resources to local residents about domestic violence and where to go for help. For information on Micah's Place and its services, call 491-6364. The task force meets on the fourth Monday of each month at the Callahan Lions Club at 6 p.m.



My Daddy hurts my Mommy.
Sometimes he hits me.
I stay at my Auntie's house.
The policeman took my Daddy.
My Mommy is in the hospital.
My Daddy is in jail.
I went to the hospital.
Now my arm is broken.
I don't like my Daddy. He is dumb.

-- Elijah, age 5

Dad, I wanted to be a policeman like you.
I wanted to chase bad guys like you.
I wanted to wear a uniform like you.
I wanted to drive a cool police car like you.
I will never hit my wife like you.
I will never kick my dog like you.
I will never throw my son into a wall like you.
I don't want to be like you anymore.

-- Steven, age 11

Daddy, I'm hiding in the closet.
Why do you drink?
Why do you hurt Mommy?
I saw her crying.
I saw her bleeding.
Daddy, I'm hiding under the covers.
Why do you scream?
Why do you hurt Mommy?
I saw you
Through the crack in the door.
Daddy, I saw her with bruises.
I saw her lying.
Daddy...
Please don't hurt my Mommy.

-- Joshua, age 7

The stories and poems that appear here are from real accounts, but the names have been changed to protect those who are potentially still in danger. The photographs are not of local victims.

