

How to talk to your kids about
Domestic Violence



**ABUSE IS A CRIME!
A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND SHOULD NOT BE KEPT A SECRET!**

Myths about Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is not a problem in my community

Domestic violence only happens to poor women and colored women

Some people deserve to be hit

Alcohol, drug abuse, stress and mental illness causes domestic violence

Domestic violence is a personal problem between a husband and a wife

If it were that bad she would just leave

A husband cannot rape his wife

Domestic violence is not just hitting. It is a pattern of actions that one person uses to control or dominate his or her intimate partner through violence and the threat of violence.

A *batterer* is any person who uses physical violence and the threat of violence to control or limit the actions of his or her intimate partner.

A *victim* of domestic violence is any person who is in an intimate relationship with a batterer.

DV happens in every neighborhood, in every social class, and in every religious, racial and ethnic group. It can happen to our friends, grandparents, neighbors, coworkers and ourselves.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HURTS EVERYONE!



MYTHS ABOUT ABUSERS/ BATTERER:

abusive men are easy to identify - comes across as angry, hot tempered, "macho" or having a criminal record.

abusers/batterers have a problem with anger.

abusers/batterers lack, anger management, communication, conflict resolutions and psychological awareness skills.

abusers/batterers often suffer from low self-esteem.

the majority of abusers/batterers have mental health problems.

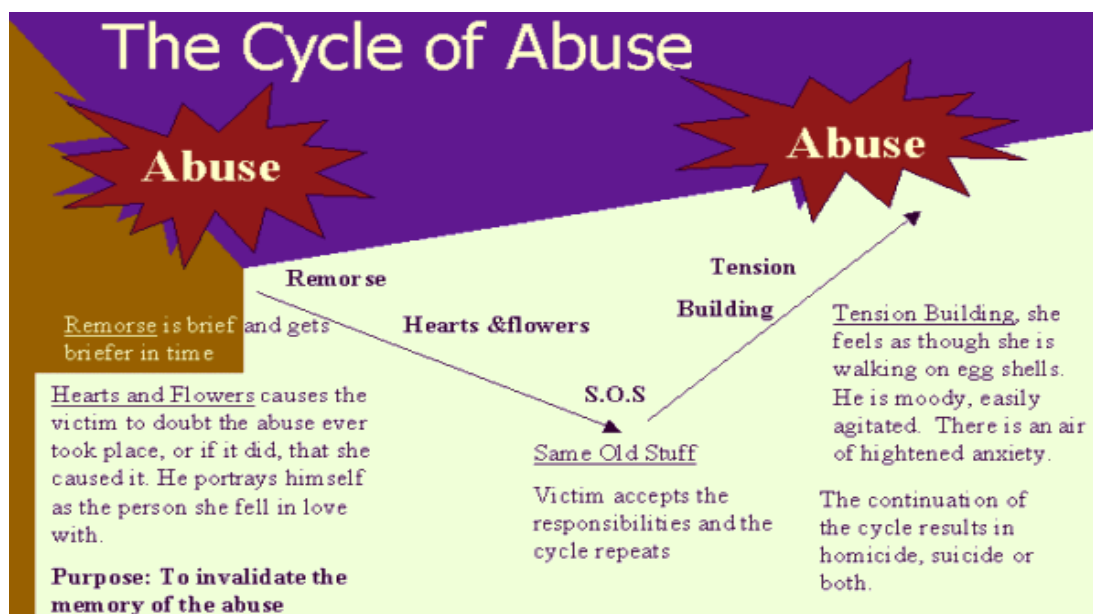
abusers/batterers who express remorse are more likely to change.

if the violence has only occurred once, there isn't a pattern.

abusers/batterers don't change.

just because a person has abused his partner does not mean he is a bad parent.

Abusers have a story, an **image** they have to manage. Abusers **justify** their actions by **minimizing** and **denying** the abuse. Abusers **manipulate** the victim with **monitoring**, **blaming**, **undermining** and **bargaining**. Abusers use of alcohol and substance abuse allows abusers to create **excuses**.



Abusiveness is a skill encompassing control, manipulation and image maintenance. There may be a prior history of non-physical abuse,

Remorse and apologies are part of the cycle of abuse

Both the victim and the abuser may be minimizing

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE VICTIM:

- No privacy
- No freedom to express ideas, especially when she doesn't agree with her husband
- Constant fear for herself and her children
- No freedom to spend money, make decisions about how to spend it
- No freedom to decide when/in what way to have sex
- Limited contact with friends, family members

- Insulted, humiliated, embarrassed
- Having the rules she sets for the children undermined or changed
- No help with the children
- No time for herself
- Is blamed and punished for children's misbehavior
- Sees her children being punished abusively
- Exhausted
- No security in terms of her sense of safety, stability



He says
he is
sorry



EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE BATTERER

- Loss of trust from his partner.
- Loss of intimacy.
- Loss of respect.
- Loss of self-respect.
- Fear of getting caught.

- Possible arrest and jail-time if police are called.
- Possible loss of job and friends.
- Possible loss of partner and children.

HOW THE USE OF VIOLENCE AFFECTS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILDREN:

- are afraid of him
- run away when he tries to show them affection
- withhold information about their lives
- don't ask him for help or support
- don't talk freely with him
- aren't able to have fun with him because they are afraid of what he might do

- lie to him to protect themselves or their Mom
- use violence against him
- don't respect him
- undermining the mother

There are three important aspects of parenting:

- How you treat your children
- how you treat the other parent of your children
- how you treat yourself

Emotions of Children Who Have Witnessed Domestic Violence

- Fear of those they love in their own home, where they should feel most safe
- Anger at the abuser, or at the survivor for not leaving the situation
- Feeling torn between feelings of anger and love toward the abuser. Feeling guilty for both feelings
- *Confusion about being able to love both parents*
- Loss of a healthy, safe family
- Loss of one parent if they leave (or the constant threat of this)
- Loss of comfort in the home
- Guilt for causing the violence, or not stopping it somehow
- Responsible for preventing the violence, and taking care of Mom and the family
- Feeling vulnerable on a daily basis, with no power or control about what will happen

Child needs to:

- Be able to talk to someone they trust about their feelings
- Learn ways to keep themselves safe and to know they have a plan for what to do when there is violence
- Have a feeling of control in the situation ("I will go over to my neighbors when it happens"):
- Know that it is **normal** and **okay** to feel angry about this
- Express their anger in non-destructive ways
- Learn that it's okay to feel both anger and love toward someone
- Know it is okay to love their parent even when they hate the behavior they see
- Know they are not bad if they love the abuser
- Feeling they need to take sides (e.g. "if I love Mom, I can't love Dad" and vice versa)
- To know that it is okay to love both parents at the same time
- Develop a support system of extended family or friends outside the home:

- Understand that the violence is not their fault, and that it is an adult problem for the adults to work out.
- Find areas in their lives where they can have control and make plans and decisions
- Create a safety plan with someone they trust
- Create some structure and stability wherever possible (creating daily routines that provide a sense of control)

How Denial Affects Kids

- Child learns that the violence is normal
- Child is afraid to talk about the violence
- Child is confused, doesn't understand
- Blames her/himself
- Learns to deny and not to talk about their own feelings
- Makes them feel like they are crazy
- Makes them feel lonely, isolated from their friends
- Learns that it's not OK to ask about the violence or discuss it
- Gives children unrealistic beliefs about the causes of the violence

OBSTACLES IN TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I have tried to talk about it. My child won't listen. ○ I feel uncomfortable. ○ I'm scared to bring it up. ○ I don't know what to say. ○ I don't have time. ○ I'm embarrassed. ○ I'm afraid I'll make things worse. ○ I don't think it's such a big deal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It's over now, why talk about it. ○ I don't want them to hate their Dad/Mom. ○ They won't understand. ○ They didn't know it happened. ○ They are too young to hear about it. ○ They'll just be more scared. ○ They'll tell other people. ○ Their Dad/Mom will be mad. |
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Ways of Overcoming Obstacles

- Be patient. Don't push it. Try another time. They usually hear you anyway.
- Acknowledge that it may be uncomfortable for you to talk about the violence. Try to get more comfortable by talking to someone you trust.
- Acknowledge that it may be scary for you to remember the violence. It's scary for your kids, too. Once you start talking, it may feel less scary.
- Acknowledge that saying that you don't have time is probably because it's difficult, or you don't feel capable of talking to your child about it.

Benefits of Talking to Kids about the Violence

- Children feel safer.
- They learn that violence isn't their fault.
- They learn that violence isn't an OK way to solve problems.
- It helps them to feel cared for, and understood.
- Children learn that it's OK to talk about feelings.

What Children Need to Hear About Domestic Violence from the Abuser

- My behavior was not okay, violence is not okay.
- I am responsible.
- It's not your fault.
- It's not your mother's fault.
- I am sorry you had to see/hear that.
- You must have been scared.
- I will listen to you
- It's okay if you are mad at me, scared of me. I would be, too.
- You shouldn't have to have this happen in your family.
- Your feelings are important.
- I am getting help so you can feel safer.