

## The Truth About Domestic Violence

**Fact: Once a batterer uses violence, the abuse tends to get worse and more frequent,** sometimes causing permanent injury or death. What may begin as an occasional slap or shove will turn in to a push down the stairs, a punch in the face or a kick in the stomach.

**Fact: Battering is not about anger or losing control.** Batterers chose not to beat their bosses or terrorize their friends when they are angry. Battering, far from being an uncontrolled act, is used specifically to maintain the batterer's control over the partner.

**Fact: The batterer is responsible for the violence— not the victim.** Victims are blamed for the violence by the batterer, friends, family and society. Women are often blamed for staying with a violent partner. It's not the violence women want to preserve, it's the relationship. No one wants to be beaten.

**Fact: Violence does occur in same sex relationships,** and the issues of power and control are similar to those found in heterosexual relationships. Homophobia allows us to trivialize the violence in same sex relationships and compounds the effects of the violence for the victim.

**Fact: Violence inflicted by an intimate partner is viewed as less serious than violence inflicted by a stranger.** In order for domestic violence to be taken seriously, we must challenge society's and the batterer's firmly held belief that one partner has a right to control another.

**Fact: Battering crosses all economic, educational, ethnic, sexual orientation, age and racial lines in equal proportions.** There is no "typical" victim.

**Fact: Racism compounds the effect of battering for women of color.** Services for women of color are often not culturally sensitive or language appropriate, which makes seeking safety more difficult.

**Fact: Batterers do not batter because they are crazy, mentally ill, insecure, jealous, have an anger problem or poor communication skills.** These things contribute to or worsen the batterer's violence, but they do not cause violence.

**Fact: Battering is not mutual.** If women choose to use violence against the partner, either in self-defense or anger, the intent is not domination or intimidation. Women who choose to use violence against the male batterer face more severe consequences by the criminal justice system.

**Fact: Battering is a widespread social problem.** Our society presents violence as a normal part of intimate relationships. By encouraging male dominance, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and promoting a "power over others" ideology, our whole society is responsible for the violence, not individual families.

Fact: It doesn't matter how a woman acts or what she says, whether she is passive or assertive. **No matter what the victim does, no action warrants or provokes violence.** The batterer makes the *choice* to be violent. Even when partners disagree, no one deserves to be beaten or threatened.

**Fact: Batterers are unlikely to change or stop their violence.** Batterers absolutely will *not* change until they recognize that they have a problem and this will not happen if they still blame the victim. Batterers must be held accountable for their actions. Participation in a batterer's program does not guarantee that a batterer will not be violent again. Short-lived reconciliation periods are common in which the batterer is liable to say or do anything. In all likelihood these "good intentions" will quickly pass and the violence will begin again.

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## Domestic Violence: Dispelling the Myths

The violence can't really be that serious. Millions of women are physically abused by husbands, boyfriends or intimate partners<sup>1</sup> each year. Domestic violence includes threats, pushing, punching, slapping, choking, sexual assault and assault with weapons. *It is rarely a one-time occurrence and usually escalates in frequency and severity.* Battering can be deadly: 30% of women murdered in the U.S. are killed by husbands, boyfriends or lovers.

I shouldn't get involved in a private family matter. Domestic violence is not just a family problem. It is a crime with serious repercussions, for your friend<sup>2</sup>, for the children and the entire community.

She must be doing something to provoke his/her violence. A victim of battering is never to blame for another person's choice to use violence. Problems exist in any relationship, but the use of violence to resolve them is never acceptable.

If it's so bad, why doesn't she just leave? For most of us, a decision to end a relationship is not easy. A battered woman's emotional ties to her partner may be strong, supporting her hope that the violence will end. She may be financially dependent and in leaving, she will likely face severe economic hardships. She may not know about available resources. The social and justice systems may have been unhelpful to her in the past. Religious, cultural or family pressures may make her think it's her duty to keep her relationship or marriage together. When she's tried to leave in the past, her partner may have used violence to stop her.

Doesn't she care about what's happening to her children? Your friend is probably doing her best to protect the children from violence. She may believe her children need a father or second parent, or lacks the resources to support them on her own. The children may beg her to stay, not wanting to leave their hope or friends. She fears that if she leaves, she will lose custody of her children.

I know him/her—I really don't think that they could hurt anyone. Many abusers are not violent in other relationships and can be charming in social situations, yet be extremely violent in the privacy of the home.

They must be sick. Battering is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. An abuser's experience as a child and the messages they get from society allow that violence is an easy way to get power and control over his partner's behavior. Men who batter choose this behavior. Viewing them as "sick" wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for their choice to use violence.

I think they have a drinking problem. Could that be the cause of the violence? Alcohol or drug use may intensify violent behavior but it does not cause battering. Men who batter typically make excuses for their violence, claiming a loss of control due to alcohol/drug use or extreme stress. Battering, however, does not represent a loss of control, but a method of achieving control.

How can she still care for someone who abuses her? Chances are, the person is not always abusive. They may actually show remorse for their violence, promising that they will change. Your friend understandably hopes for such changes. Their relationship probably involves good times, bad times and in between times.

If she wanted my help, she'd ask for it. Your friend may not feel comfortable confiding in you, feeling you may not understand her situation. Talk to her about battering in a general way. Tell her you're concerned about women who get abused and that you do not blame battered women for the violence.

<sup>1</sup>This material addresses mainly violence in heterosexual relationships, but violence occurs in lesbian and gay relationships, too.

<sup>2</sup>This material uses the term "friend" but the information provided is also useful to other support providers of battered women.