

Chapter 9

Domestic Violence

“It’s so clear that you have to cherish everyone...that every soul is to be cherished, that every flower is to bloom.” ~ Alice Walker

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

- Be able to define domestic violence
- Understand the myths and facts surrounding domestic violence
- Be able to identify the cause(s) of domestic violence
- Be familiar with the behaviors displayed by domestic abusers
- Be able to list several of the effects of domestic violence on victims
- Have a better understanding of why victims do not “just leave”
- Be able to brainstorm safety strategies with victims
- Know local resources available to victims of domestic violence

In a relationship where there is domestic violence, sexual abuse is almost always present. It is important to keep this in mind when advocating with RVAP. The skills you will use are the same as with any victim: rapport building, active listening, feeling identification, support, and referral. What is different with a domestic violence victim is the need for you to understand safety concerns and assist the victim in safety planning.

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pattern of violent and/or abusive behaviors by a present or former intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse. Domestic violence is physical contact that is insulting or can cause injury to another person. Domestic violence is also the threat of physical contact resulting in injury. If a person uses a weapon of any kind in a threatening manner against their partner, it is domestic violence. Sexual abuse goes hand-in-hand with domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS

- Between January 1995 and March 2010, at least 139 Iowa women and 24 men were murdered by their partners. During this time, 46 bystanders, including 25 children, were killed in related homicides.¹
- During that same time period in Iowa, 253 sons and daughters survived the murder of their mothers or fathers, 168 of the surviving children were minors, and 67 children were present at the scene of the murder.¹
- In Fiscal Year 2007, 2,249 women and 1,945 children sought refuge in Iowa's domestic violence shelters. Five male victims also received shelter.²
- In 2005, the Department of Public Safety states that there were 5,954 incidents of domestic abuse reported to law enforcement.
- Although many adults believe that they have protected their children from exposure to domestic violence, 80% to 90% of children in those homes can give detailed descriptions of the violence in their families.³

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH: Domestic violence only affects a small percentage of the population.

FACT: National studies estimate that 3 to 4 million women experience sexual violence each year in our country. A study conducted in 1995 found that 31% of women surveyed admitted to having been physically assaulted by an intimate partner. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in our country, and the FBI estimates that a woman is beaten every 15 seconds. Thirty percent of female homicide victims are killed by partners or ex-partners and 1,500 women are murdered as a result of domestic violence each year in the United States.

MYTH: Domestic violence occurs only in poor, uneducated and minority families.

FACT: Studies of domestic violence consistently have found that battering occurs among all types of families, regardless of income, profession, religion, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation, educational level, or race. However, the fact that lower-

¹ Anderson, Marti. "List of Iowans Killed by Domestic Violence Since 1995." 6 April 2010. Microsoft Word file.

² Iowa Department of Justice Attorney General's Office, Crime Victim Assistance Division. "Annual Report Fiscal Year 2007." n.d. PDF.

³ Doyne, Stephen, et al. (1999). "Custody Disputes Involving Domestic Violence: Making Children's Needs a Priority." *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 50.2 (1999): 1-12. Print.

income victims and abusers are over-represented in calls to police, battered women's shelters and social services may be due to a lack of other resources.

MYTH: The real problem is couples assault each other. Women are just as violent as men.

FACT: A well-publicized study conducted by Dr. Murray Strauss at the University of New Hampshire found that women use violent means to resolve conflict in relationships as often as men. However, the study also concluded that when the context and consequences of an assault are measured, the majority of victims are women. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that 95% of the victims of spouse abuse are female.

MYTH: Alcohol abuse causes domestic violence.

FACT: Although there is a high correlation between alcohol, or other substance abuse, and battering, it is not a causal relationship. Batterers use drinking as one of many excuses for their violence and as a way to place the responsibility for their violence elsewhere. Stopping the abusers' drinking will not stop the violence. Both battering and substance abuse need to be addressed separately as overlapping, yet independent problems.

MYTH: Domestic violence is usually a one-time, isolated occurrence.

FACT: Battering is a pattern of coercion and control that one person exerts over another. Battering is not just one physical attack. It includes the repeated use of a number of tactics, including intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, isolation, and psychological and sexual abuse. Physical violence is just one tactic. The various forms of abuse utilized by batterers help to maintain power and control over their partners.

MYTH: Men who batter are often good fathers and should have joint custody of their children if the couple separates.

FACT: Studies have found that men who batter their wives also abuse their children in 70% of known cases. Even when children are not directly abused, they suffer as a result of witnessing one parent assaulting another. Batterers often display an increased interest in their children at the time of separation as a means of maintaining contact with, and thus control over, their partners.

MYTH: When there is violence in the family, all members are participating in the dynamic and, therefore, all family members must change for the violence to stop.

FACT: Only the batterer has the ability to stop the violence. Battering is a behavioral choice for which the batterer must be held accountable. Many battered women/men make numerous attempts to change their behavior in the hope that this will stop the

abuse. This does not work because the abusive behavior is not theirs. Changes in family members' behavior will not cause the batterer to be non-violent.

MYTH: Battered women/men are masochistic and provoke the abuse. They must like it or they would leave.

FACT: Victim provocation is no more common in domestic violence than in any other crime. Battered women/men often make repeated attempts to leave violent relationships, but are prevented from doing so by increased violence and control tactics on the part of the abuser. Other factors which inhibit a victim's ability to leave include economic dependence; few viable options for housing and support; unhelpful responses from the criminal justice system or other agencies; social isolation; cultural or religious constraints; a commitment to the abuser and the relationship, and fear of further violence or death. It has been estimated that the danger to a victim increases by 70% when making attempts to leave, as the abuser escalates the use of violence after sensing a loss of control.

MYTH: Men have a right to discipline their partners for misbehaving. Battering is not a crime.

FACT: While our society derives from a patriarchal legal system that afforded men the right to physically chastise their wives and children, we do not live under such a system now. Women and children are no longer considered the property of men, and domestic violence is a crime in every state in the country.

CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The central and motivating factor behind domestic violence is power and control. It is one person having and exerting power and control over another person.

Drugs and alcohol are not the CAUSE of domestic violence. Substance abuse can exacerbate violence. Ultimately, the abuser is making a choice in how to handle the situation. It is never the victim's fault, nor is it ever simply because the abuser was intoxicated. A choice was made by one person to exert power and control over another person using violence.

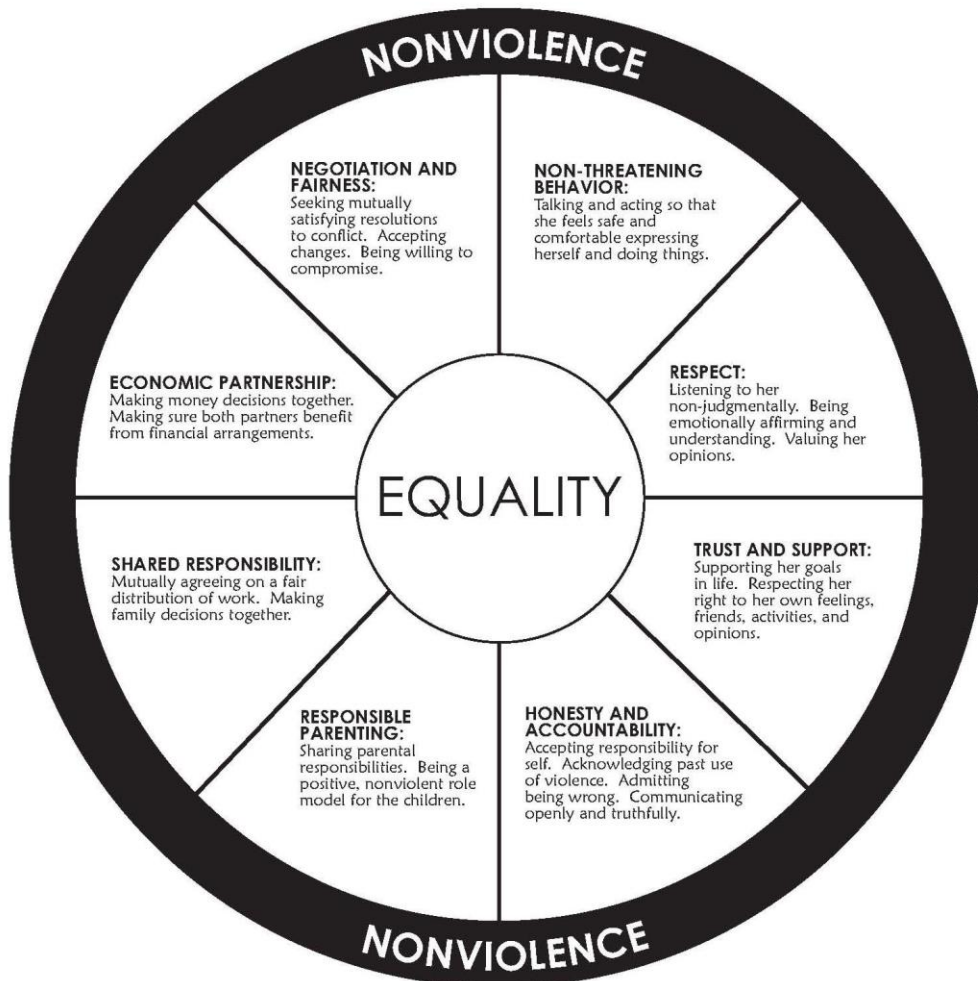
Physical, emotional and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, makes up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill the threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the victim's life.

Power and Control Wheel



The Power and Control Wheel is a very helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over a partner. Often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control over the relationship.

Equality Wheel



The Equality Wheel illustrates the concept of equality in a relationship. The outside dark area of the wheel is the non-violence that is, or should be, used in a relationship. The inner spokes are forms of non-violent interactions and behaviors. These sections are held together by the use of respect, equality, and non-violence.

PATTERNS OF ABUSIVE THINKING AND BEHAVIOR IN ABUSIVE PEOPLE

Abusive people do not come across as abusive right away when you meet them. They are normally very charming and warm people. An abuser does not abuse all others around them. They are abusive only to their intimate partners. Abuser traits may include:

Excuse making: Abusive people give excuses instead of accepting responsibility for their actions, especially when confronted by others. Abusers try to make others responsible for their feelings. The abuser says, “You make me angry,” instead of “I am angry,” or says, “You’re hurting me by not doing what I tell you”

Blaming: Blaming others for their own behavior. This allows abusers to deny their behavior and to justify their anger towards the other person

Justifying: Attempts to explain away the behavior as necessary, unavoidable or caused by factors outside the abuser

Redefining: Shifting the focus from the abuser’s behavior to something else

Lying: Lying is used to maintain control over information, to confuse, to make a fool of the other person, and to gain advantage in the situation. Typically, abusive people are very skilled at lying, deceiving or misleading

Anger: Abusive people are not generally any angrier than anybody else. They use anger and angry behavior to intimidate and control a situation

Power plays: Dramatic tactics to regain control; typically includes threats, violence or guilt (i.e., threaten to take the kids or to commit suicide if the victim leaves)

Quick involvement: Comes on strong, claiming, “I’ve never felt loved like this by anyone.” An abuser pressures the new partner for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.

Jealousy: Excessively possessive, calls constantly or visits unexpectedly; prevents the victim from going to work because “you might meet someone;” checks the mileage on the victim’s car; keeps track of cell phone calls and emails

Controlling: Interrogates the victim intensely (especially if the victim is late) about whom they talked to and where they were; keeps all the money; insists that the victim ask permission to go anywhere or do anything

Isolation: Tries to isolate the victim from family and friends; accuses people who are supporters of the victim of “causing trouble.” The abuser may deprive the victim of a phone or car, or try to prevent the victim from holding a job

Cruelty to animals or children: Kills or punishes animals brutally or use them to control family members. Also, may expect children to do things that are far beyond their ability (whips a 3-year-old for wetting a diaper) or may tease them until they cry

“Playful” use of force during sex: Enjoys throwing partner down or holding partner down against the partner’s will during sex; finds the idea of rape exciting

Verbal abuse: Constantly criticizes or says blatantly cruel, hurtful things; degrades, curses, calls the victim ugly names

Rigid gender roles: Expects partner to serve, obey and remain at home

Sudden mood swings: Switches from sweet to violent instantly

Past battering: Admits to hitting a mate in the past, but has an explanation for it or claims to have changed

Threats of violence: Says things like, “I’ll break your neck,” or “I’ll kill you,” and then dismisses them with “I didn’t really mean it,” or “I was only joking”

Ownership: This attitude applies to possessions and people. It justifies taking other people’s possessions, controlling and physically abusing others (i.e., “You are mine,” and “If I can’t have you, no one else will”)

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence affects every member of the household. No one is left untouched in one way or another. The following is a partial list of how people are affected by domestic violence:

- Children learn that violence is how conflicts are resolved.
- Violence destroys feelings of intimacy and closeness.

- Many victims develop a high tolerance for pain, as they will numb or mask feelings in response to the battering.
- Many lose their sense of what is “normal” in a relationship.
- Family members typically operate on a survival level, working to meet basic needs with few resources.
- With the combination of violence directed at a victim and victim-blaming for those actions, typically family members begin to see the victim as “responsible” for all the problems.
- Family patterns and roles are very rigid. Family members are silenced and intimidated to not interact with other systems.
- Creates a high level of denial. There is a desire to keep secret what is happening at home for fear of being harmed.
- Battering destroys trust within the family.
- There is a lack of nurturing, structure, routine, and rules.
- Victims often minimize the impact of abusive incidents, concerns or problems.

WHY VICTIMS STAY

The average victim leaves seven times before leaving permanently. What we need to remember is that the abuser is following a pattern. The relationship is usually established and involved before power and control behaviors become noticeably scary.

There are many reasons that victims of violence do not “just leave.” The reasons often come from situational and emotional factors, personal beliefs and safety concerns.

Situational Factors

After experiencing the pattern of abuse over a period of time, victims of domestic violence may find themselves without reserve “in too deep.” Many of the aspects of their lives that once gave them strength have been taken away or given up to appease the batterer. Situational factors may include:

- **Isolation:** From friends and family, no support system to fall back on
- **Control:** All control over their own lives is taken away from them
- **Finances:** No economic support for the victim or the children
- **Societal pressure:** Many professional agencies and religious organizations try to maintain the family unit (e.g., “being a good wife”). Often society holds the woman responsible for anything that “ails” the relationship

- **Employment:** Jobs can be difficult to find, especially if the abuser has been responsible for the victim losing past jobs (e.g., calling incessantly)
- **Child care:** Day care facilities are too expensive and too few
- **Alienation from peers:** Often, victims and abusers may have the same peer group. If the victim breaks up with the abuser or accuses him/her of being abusive, the victim may be alienated from peers and possible sources of support.

Emotional Factors

Most victims did not fall in love with someone who was a jerk; the abuser began exhibiting abusive behaviors over time. For many, working through the emotions of leaving is a very difficult process. Victims' emotional factors may include:

- **Ambivalence:** They are ambivalent towards their abuser...love the person but hate the abuse
- **Loss of sense of self:** Loss of dignity and self-esteem
- **Guilt:** Children will lose a parent; maybe they caused the problems; breaking vows
- **Shame:** The victim may feel shame about what is happening and be too embarrassed to ask anyone for help
- **Love:** The victim may love the abuser. The relationship may be very involved and intense, and the victim may feel loyalty towards the abuser
- **Self-esteem Sabotaged:** The abuser may use tactics that lowers the victim's self-esteem. The victim may begin to feel they are no good and will not be able to find anyone else. The victim may also feel like they are "damaged goods" because of the abuse

Personal Beliefs

The personal beliefs that keep a victim in an abusive situation come from family norms or messages society gives about gender and relationships. Offenders tell victims that these things are true. Victims' personal beliefs may include:

- **Identifying abuse:** Victims may have been told by the abuser that the behaviors are normal or that the abuser is just "jealous" or "possessive"
- **Blaming the victim:** Victims are often told "look what you made me do!"
- **Things could be worse:** Fears that if leaving the situation, the victim may face a worse situation

- **Family attitudes:** Victims may feel as though they are admitting defeat by asking parents for help. They may also not want to worry their families
- **Justify frequency:** If the abuser is only abusive once in a while, the victim may be able to justify the behavior by holding on to the good things. “He’s only abusive once in a while. He is a really nice guy. He really loves me, he just has a bad temper”
- **Faith in abuser’s promises:** After a big fight, the abuser may cry and say things like “I’m sorry, I’ll never do it again,” “I didn’t mean to hurt you,” “Sometimes I just get out of control,” and “I know I have a problem and I want to get some help.” The victim may believe the abuser means these things and really wants to change
- **Normalizing:** The victim and/or the abuser may have grown up in a home where this type of behavior happened and was acceptable, therefore, the victim believes it is the norm

SAFETY CONCERNS

One of the most immediate reasons a victim of domestic violence chooses to stay in the relationship is fear for safety. This fear is valid, as research has shown that people are at increased risk of being harmed or killed after leaving an abusive partner. Some safety concerns victims may have include:

- **Fear:** The abuser may be threatening to hurt the victim and also the victim’s family or pets if they break up. The abuser may also threaten to hurt anyone else the victim dates. Prior actions of the abuser, such as other threats that were carried out, may make the victim believe the abuser will carry out the threat.
- **Retaliation:** Fears the abuser will find the victim and retaliate.
- **Restraining orders ARE just a piece of paper:** The police will respond to a call from someone who has one, but only AFTER the order has been violated. Even then, the burden of proof is usually the responsibility of the victim. Even after an arrest for a violation of a restraining order, the batterer is usually released from jail within 24 hours and may escalate the abuse.
- **Safety:** The victim may have learned that the abuser’s behavior escalates when the victim tries to break up. It may be safer for the victim to remain in the relationship.

SAFETY PLANNING

It is the victim's decision whether to return home or to an alternative living arrangement; either way, safety for the victim and their children is paramount! Many victims want to believe that the violence will not happen again. As a precaution, we want to encourage the victim to develop an escape plan in case the abuse happens again.

Safety Strategies

- If possible, have a phone handy at all times. 911 phones may be available from the local domestic violence shelter or law enforcement.
- Teach the children how to get help. Agree on a code word with the kids in case they are at school or somewhere and they need to NOT go with the batterer if they show up. Also speak to the school ahead of time so that they can assist in keeping the child safe.
- Make a habit of backing the car in and keeping it fueled up for quick access.
- Keep any evidence of physical abuse in a safe place.
- Know where to get help; tell someone trustworthy what is happening.
- Arrange a code word or signal with neighbors and family members if another incident occurs.
- Pack a bag with essentials in it, important documents, cash, etc. and hide it in a secret location that is accessible.
- Keep a journal of all incidents.
- Keep important papers together and accessible.
- Have a safe room identified in the home.
- Contact the local domestic violence shelter and find out about laws and other resources available before they are needed in a crisis.
- Leave while the abuser is away or ask police for help in getting out.

Local Resources / Shelter

The *Domestic Violence Intervention Program* (DVIP) has many services available to victims of domestic violence. Services include:

- A 24-hour crisis hotline answered by trained staff and volunteers to provide information, support, advocacy and referrals to other services in our community

- A 24-hour safe shelter for women and their children. Transportation can be arranged by calling them. They have a 15-bedroom shelter that typically houses 25 to 35 women and children nightly.
- Outreach services and advocates to accompany the victim when accessing community services such as human services, law enforcement and other agencies
- Youth support services to respond to needs such as food, clothing, medical, and school issues
- Support groups, tutoring and play activities
- Community education programs

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Make sure the victim is in a safe place, and has a safe place to stay
- Give information to about DVIP and other resources
- There is no such thing as “just” physical battering (minimizing). Emotional and mental abuse is *just as* devastating and controlling as physical abuse – sometimes more
- It is *NEVER* the victim’s fault. The perpetrator is always responsible for any abuse.

FOR FURTHER READING

Jones, Ann. *Next Time She'll be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994. Print.

White, Evelyn C. *Chain, Chain, Change: For Black Women in Abusive Relationships*. New York: New Leaf Publishing, 1995. Print.

Davidson, Sue and Ginny Nicarchy. *You Can Be Free: An Easy-to-Read Handbook for Abused Women*. Washington: Seal Press, 1989. Print.

Jones, Ann and Susan Schechter. *When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right. Strategies for Women with Controlling Partners*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 1992. Print.

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER.....135

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE135

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS136

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MYTHS AND FACTS136

CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE138

**PATTERNS OF ABUSIVE THINKING AND BEHAVIOR IN ABUSIVE
PEOPLE141**

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE142

WHY VICTIMS STAY143

SAFETY CONCERNS145

SAFETY PLANNING146

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW147

FOR FURTHER READING.....147