

Are You In an Abusive Relationship?

IS VIOLENCE A PROBLEM IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Relationship violence is an equal opportunity problem. Men have it. Women have it. Relationship abuse and violence occurs among all races, ages, classes, and religious groups. It is a sadly frequent component in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian dating relationships. It damages and destroys committed relationships such as marriage and long-term partnerships as well as the new relationship. Abuse in relationships can take the form of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or economic abuse and typically includes threats, intimidation, intense criticism, forced isolation, and/or physical violence.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF OR A FRIEND IN THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS?

- Are you afraid of your partner or feel like you have to walk on pins and needles sometimes to keep your partner from getting angry?
- Has your partner ever hit, slapped, or pushed you?
- Do you ever get the feeling you've done something wrong but you'd have to read your partner's mind to find out what it is?
- Is your partner very good to you most of the time -- sometimes downright wonderful, but every once in a while very cruel or scary?
- Have you been forced by your partner to do something you didn't want to do?
- Have you lost all or most of your friends since you've been with your partner?
- Do you feel isolated, like there's nowhere to turn for help, and that no one would believe you anyway?
- If your partner asks, do you feel like you have to say everything's okay even when it's really not?

If you found yourself answering "yes" to several of the preceding questions, then violence may be a problem in your relationship. The information in this brochure may help you choose what to do next.

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE FACTS:

- It is now estimated that at least one out three high school and college-aged youth experience abuse at some point in their relationships. It can range from a single episode to chronic abuse.
- Battering is the single major cause of injury to women ...more than injuries caused by muggings, rape, and car accidents combined. It is the second leading cause of death to women age twenty to forty-five.
- Abuse rarely occurs only once. Abuse usually increases in frequency and severity over time.
- Chronic abusers display a typical pattern following physical abuse episodes. They tend to be apologetic, on their best behavior, promising that it will never happen again. This is often exactly the behavior the victim has hoped for and often causes her to decide to remain in the relationship.
- Repeated abusers almost never change their abusive responses spontaneously. It is not the victim's job to change this aspect of his personality. The abuser must seek professional assistance if he/she is to change.
- No one deserves to be victimized by abuse in order to have a relationship.

THREE STAGES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

• Stage One: Tension-Building

Rather than using mutual communication, negotiation, or compromise to solve problems, violent individuals tend to rely on the use of force or coercion to get what they want. Typically, violence occurs after a build-up of tension in the relationship about issues which are not directly discussed or resolved.

During this period, tension mounts, communication decreases, and both partners may feel tense, edgy, and jumpy. Arguments and criticism tend to increase during this period.

• Stage Two: Violence

After this build-up, physical violence may erupt over seemingly insignificant issues. Tension seems to be released, and often, the relationship seems to improve.

• Stage Three: Seduction

Perpetrators of violence often apologize, make promises to change, and pay special attention to their partners immediately following a violent incident. This period is sometimes referred to as the "honeymoon period" because of the positive feelings resulting from the release of tension and the hope that things will change for the better. This kind of spontaneous change rarely occurs, however, because the underlying pattern of control and lack of communication and compromise has not changed.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS BEING ABUSED

1. Ask direct questions, gently. Give the person ample opportunity to talk. Don't rush into providing solutions.
2. Listen - without judging.
3. Let your friend know that you offer your support and caring, that the responsibility for the violence lies elsewhere, and that only the abuser can stop the violence.
4. Explain that physical violence in a relationship is never acceptable, at any time. There's no excuse for it - not alcohol or drugs, not financial pressures, not depression, not jealousy.
5. If your friend has children and is concerned for them, reinforce that concern and let him or her know that domestic violence is damaging to children. In fact, you may want to reach out to support the children, letting them know you're there for them, as well.
6. Let the person know that, in spite of the partner's promises, the violence is likely to continue and, probably, escalate.
7. Emphasize that, if it becomes necessary, it is possible to make a choice to leave the relationship, and help is available. Provide your friend information about local resources.
8. If the person chooses to remain in the relationship, continue to be a friend, while at the same time firmly communicating that no one deserves to be in a violent situation.
9. If you see or hear an assault in progress, call the police. But because these assaults are often dangerous, do not physically intervene.

LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- 911 Emergency
- (608) 789-9999 UW-L Campus Police
- (608) 785-8073 UW-L Counseling and Testing Center
- (608) 791-2600 New Horizon's for Victims of Domestic Abuse
- (608) 775-5462 Gundersen Lutheran's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Program
- (608) 392-7804 Safe Path Program – Franciscan Skemp Mayo Health System

Information from:

- California State University-Bakersfield (www.csub.edu/counselingcenter/mentalHealth/dangerousTerritories.shtml)
- Walker, L. (1979). "The Battered Woman," New York: Harper & Row



THE UWL COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER STAFF ARE AVAILABLE

TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE DEALING WITH RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE AND OTHER LIFE ISSUES. CALL (608)785-8073 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TALK WITH A COUNSELOR.