

How To Help Victims Of Domestic Violence And Abuse

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Domestic violence is a major problem resulting in family and marriage breakdown, bullying, depression, homicide, suicide, addiction, homelessness, criminality and mental distress leading to cycles of abuse for the adult children of family violence.

This report from the College of Mental Health Counseling at www.collegemhc.com is prepared for concerned friends, family members, and counselors, as well as victims and survivors of domestic violence who want to make healthy choices for themselves and their children.

Please share this report freely with clients, friends, and family members who may be experiencing domestic abuse.

For deeper understanding of how abuse and loss of caring in the family can affect adult life and relationships, see "Effective Counseling Skills" by Daniel Keeran, MSW, in digital and hard copy at <http://www.amazon.com/Effective-Counseling-Skills-therapeutic-statements/dp/1442177993>

What Is Domestic Violence?

Domestic abuse occurs when physical or verbal behaviour causes physical or emotional pain or harm to others. Physical abuse often begins with verbal abuse such as chronic hostility, name-calling, threats, sarcastic put downs, or judgmental terms. Sometimes after episodes of violence, the abuser will express remorse and make promises to stop the abuse, only to repeat the abusive behavior.

What Are Some Causes Of Domestic Violence?

Men who abuse women are most often sociopathic personalities, or they believe women must be subordinated by physical discipline. Adult males may have observed abuse in childhood or may have been taught to use physical discipline in marriage, sometimes through religious teaching that women must be physically disciplined in order for them to be obedient to the husband. The use of alcohol may precede episodes of abuse.

The abusive man is sometimes jealous and often aggressive, threatening, and controlling. He struggles with feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, and insecurity. His use of violence may be evidence of low self-confidence and a sense of powerlessness. The abusive male believes physical violence or punishment is the solution to problems.

The female victim is often overly passive and dependent and lacks a sense of self-worth. Less often, the woman is very aggressive, resulting in a mutually aggressive or violent relationship.

What Is The Affect Of Violence On Children?

The cycle of abuse is continued when male children who observe abuse grow up to either abuse women or to become overly passive as a reaction against violent anger. Females who witness their mothers as abuse victims, may passively allow themselves to be abused, or they may become aggressive in their way of relating to men.

Generally speaking, males who observed abuse in childhood are as adults attracted to passive-dependent women. Dependent women with abusive fathers are attracted to abusive men because of an unconscious desire to change them into the caring father they wished they had. This form of repetition compulsion results in depression and hopelessness in adult life and relationships.

How Can Family Violence Be Reduced?

Public education can include training children to reject physical means and vengeance to settle family and interpersonal problems, to use a structured process of mutual problem-solving that moves beyond power, to teach women assertive communication, how to identify psychologically healthy men and how to be a healthy partner. Laws can be enacted to criminalize the physical assault of women by their husbands, especially in countries where such abuse has been culturally accepted.

What Are The Affects Of Violence On Female Victims?

Adult female survivors of domestic violence often suffer post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and fear of asserting their issues. They often become more passive and fearful than before the abuse. Depression, addiction, poverty following divorce, and suicide are other effects of abuse.

How Can The Victim Be Helped?

Follow these steps:

1. Tell her that it is not unusual for a victim of abuse to return to the abuser several times before making a final break.
2. Talk to the victim about a plan to leave, saying, "Have you thought about what you might do if you decide to leave? What steps would you take?"
3. Rather than tell the victim to leave the abuser, tell her you will support her decision if she decides to leave and also if she decides to stay. Help her to plan a detailed safe way to leave, including going to a shelter. Having a plan helps her visualize and be psychologically prepared to leave.
4. If there are children in the home, tell her that the children must be protected from the abuse.
5. Do not advise the victim to be assertive with the abuser as this may trigger further violence.

For mutual problem-solving as an alternative to physical conflict and violence, see this article and distribute it freely http://www.ctihalifax.com/images/Steps_To_Making_Peace.pdf

See this video from the College President <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aodrYDAo9xk>