

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CANNOT BE IGNORED**

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There is a bumper sticker that reads "there's no excuse for domestic violence." It's a simple and reasonable statement, yet one which is often ignored. Our state has a big problem with domestic violence (DV) which often leads to the death of a spouse or girlfriend. Our government and other stakeholders must continue to battle this disease which has devastating impacts on families and communities.

Abuse is a choice the abuser makes to gain power and control over another person. Physical and/or sexual abuse is only one part of a system of abusive behaviors. The abuser's goal is to gain power and control. Information from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Minnesota was used in the preparation of this article.

### *Using Emotional Abuse*

Putting her down – making her feel bad about herself – calling her names – making her think she's crazy – playing mind games – humiliating her – making her feel guilty

### *Using Isolation*

Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes – limiting her outside involvement – using jealousy to justify actions

### *Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming*

Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously – saying the abuse didn't happen – shifting responsibility for the abuse – saying she caused the abuse

### *Using Children*

Making her feel guilty about the children – using the children to relay messages – using visitation to harass her – threatening to take the children away

### *Using Economic Abuse*

Preventing her from getting or keeping a job – withholding money or making her ask for money – giving an allowance – taking her money – not letting her know about or have access to family income

### *Using Male Privilege*

Treating her like a servant – making all the big decisions – acting like the "master of the castle" – being the one to define men's and women's roles

### *Using Intimidation*

Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures – smashing things – destroying her property – abusing pets – displaying weapons -- stalking

### *Using Coercion and Threats*

Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her – threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare – making her drop charges – making her do illegal things

### *Physical Harm*

Actual or threatened physical harm – sexual assault, including forced or unwanted sexual activity – hitting, pushing, shoving

**If it were that bad, she would just leave.** Leaving can be dangerous. The most dangerous time for a woman who is being abused is when she tries to leave, according to the U.S. Dept. of Justice's 1995 National Crime Victim Survey. Not leaving does not mean she wants to be abused. Victims have reasons why they stay. Sometimes the elderly or physically or mentally challenged are abused, and cannot leave because they may not have anyone else to take care of them. Religion may make someone feel that they have to stay. Social reasons may make a victim feel that she cannot leave because she would be breaking up the family. Gay and lesbian individuals may not want someone to know their sexual orientation. It's often hard for teens to leave their abuser if they go to the same school.

**You know someone.** Abuse isn't caused by alcohol or drug use or stress or mental illness. Domestic violence happens when an abuser chooses to abuse. It happens in all kinds of families and relationships, without regard to any class, culture, religion, or age. Most victims are women. Around one in three American women has been physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives. According to the FBI, in 1996, 30% of all female murder victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends. Michigan State police records from 1997 show that a woman is killed by a partner or former partner about once a week. These statistics lead to the thought-provoking statement:

**If I know someone who has been abused, I probably also know people who are the abusers.**

**What about the children?** Children who live in homes with domestic violence are more likely to be abused and/or neglected. The American Psychological Association reports that 40% to 60% of men who abuse women also abuse children. These children live with scary noises, yelling and hitting. They feel upset or that the violence is their fault. They are afraid for their parents and themselves. Children feel helpless to stop the violence, and bad that they cannot stop the violence. If they try to stop the fight, they can be hurt, or they can also be hurt by the things that are thrown or weapons that are used. Children in these homes may not get the care they need because abusive parents statistically also abuse their children. The abused parent may be in too much pain to take good care of the children. Even if the children are not physically harmed themselves, they may have emotional and behavior problems. They can have trouble sleeping, trouble in school or getting along with others. They often feel sad and scared all the time, or grow up feeling bad about themselves. These problems do not go away on their own.

You could be a victim of abuse or at risk if you are dating someone who:

- Is very jealous and/or spies on you
- Will not let you break off the relationship
- Hurts you in any way, is violent, or brags about hurting other people
- Puts you down or makes you feel bad
- Forces you to have sex or makes you afraid to say no to sex
- Pressures you to use drugs or alcohol
- Has a history of bad relationships and blames it on others

If your family or friends warn you about the person you're dating or are involved with, seriously think about getting help. Remember – you are not alone – it is not your fault – help is available. You can find the names of agencies who can help on Aloha United Way's 211 website: [www.auw211.org](http://www.auw211.org), and type in "domestic violence" in the search box.