

Southern Valley Alliance for Battered Women

Services:

- 24-hour emergency assistance for victims of battering
- Temporary shelter for battered women and their children
- Legal advocacy
- Criminal Justice Intervention Project
- i'M o.K® Children's Visitation Center
- Support/education groups for battered women
- Latina Advocacy Program
- Community education
- Opportunities for volunteers

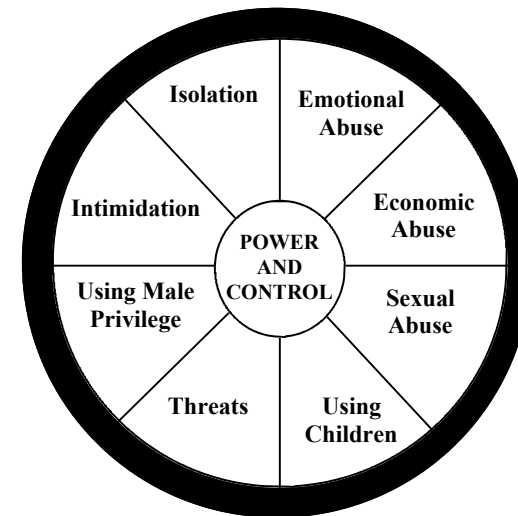
**For help
or information in
Scott or Carver Counties,
call
952.873.4214**

A GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Southern Valley Alliance for Battered Women

What Is Battering?



Battering, or the use of physical force, is part of a system of behaviors used to establish and maintain power and control over another person.

Intimidation

Putting her in fear by using looks, actions, gestures, loud voice, smashing things, destroying her property.

Isolation

Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, where she goes.

Emotional Abuse

Putting her down or making her feel bad about herself, calling her names. Making her think she's crazy. Playing mind games.

Economic Abuse

Trying to keep her from getting or keeping a job.

Sexual Abuse

Making her do sexual things against her will. Physically attacking the sexual parts of her body. Treating her like a sex object.

Using Children

Making her feel guilty about the children, using the children to give messages, using visitation as a way to harass her.

Threats

Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her emotionally. Threatening to take the children, commit suicide, report her to welfare.

Using Male Privilege

Treating her like a servant. Making all the "big" decisions. Acting like the "master of the castle".

Information Received From:

Minnesota Coalition
For Battered Women
St. Paul, MN 55104

These behaviors are more powerful because they are reinforced by the threat or use of physical abuse.

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Suggest that she put together and hide a suitcase of clothing, personal items, money, social security cards, bank books, the children's birth certificates and school records, and other important documents.

She Decides to Leave

The first safe place your friend should contact is the local domestic violence hotline or battered women's shelter. Shelter workers can help her examine her options. If she decides to leave, a shelter may be the safest place she can go. The sad truth, however, is that not all communities have shelters or safe homes. Sometimes shelters don't have enough room for all the women and children who need their help. Your friend may need to rely on family or friends for temporary housing.

Be very careful when offering and providing safety in your home. The battered woman frequently faces the most physical danger when she attempts to flee. Be very discreet and talk to domestic violence program staff about the best way to handle this.

When To Intervene

It cannot be overemphasized that domestic violence is a crime that can result in serious physical injury and even death. If you are a neighbor or otherwise know that a battering incident is occurring, call the police immediately. Calling the police does not always mean the abuser will be put in jail. It is simply the most effective way to protect the women and her children from immediate harm.

A Guide for Family and Friends

“BUT I DIDN'T KNOW”

All intimate relationships have their problems, and sometimes it's difficult for others to decide when it's appropriate to intervene. Maybe your friend has mentioned “trouble” at home, and you've dismissed her comments by saying all couples have problems. Ask yourself how you've reacted in the past to these possible signs that your friend is being abused and needs your help:

- Have you readily accepted her explanations for visible injuries, such as black eyes, bruises, or broken bones? Do you tend not to press her further about frequent “accidents” that cause her to miss work?
- Does her partner exert an unusual amount of control over her activities? Are you reluctant to discuss his control over family finances, the way she dresses, and her contact with friends and/or family?
- If her partner ridicules her publicly, do you and others ignore his behavior or join in the laughter at her expense? Think about why you might not be willing to stand up for her. Do you already sense the volatile nature of his comments?
- Have you noticed changes in her or her children's behavior? Does she appear frightened, exhausted, or on the edge? Do the children seem to be easily upset? Are they experiencing sudden problems in school or other activities?

What You Should Know About Domestic Violence

The first step you can take to help your friend is to learn more about domestic violence. Society's lack of understanding about the dynamics of domestic violence often is the greatest obstacle a battered woman faces in her efforts to end the violence in her life. With this in mind, here are some thoughts and questions you may have:

"I shouldn't get involved in a private family matter."

Domestic violence - also called spouse abuse, battering, woman abuse, wife beating - is not just a family problem. It is a crime with serious repercussions for your friend, her children, and the entire community.

"The violence can't really be that serious."

Domestic violence can involve 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 over time.

Any act of violence is something to take seriously. Wife beating results in more injuries that require medical treatment than rape, auto accidents, and muggings combined. Domestic violence can be deadly: thirty percent of the women murdered in this country are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.

"That kind of behavior doesn't go on in my neighborhood."

Domestic violence occurs among all ages, races and religions. It happens to people of all educational and income levels.

Focus On Her Strengths

Battered women live with emotional as well as physical abuse. Your friend is probably continually told by the abuser that she is a bad woman, a bad wife, and a bad mother. Without positive reinforcement from outside the home, she may begin to believe she can't do anything right—that there really is something wrong with her.

Give her the emotional support she needs to believe that she is a good person. Help her examine her strengths and skills. Emphasize that she deserves a life that is free from violence.

Be A Friend In Deed

Tell her you're there for her when she needs you. Provide whatever you can: transportation, child care, financial assistance.

Confront Her With The Danger

At some point, you may find it difficult to be supportive of your friend if she remains in the violent relationship or returns to the abuser after a temporary separation. Let her know that not everyone lives with abuse. Be willing to confront her with the physical and emotional harm that she and her children will suffer if she stays. Help your friend face up to the dangerous reality of living with an abusive partner. Remind her that even a push or a shove can result in serious injury.

Help Her Develop A Safety Plan

Encourage your friend to develop a plan to protect herself and her children. Help her think through the steps she should take if her partner becomes abusive again. Make a list of people she can call in an emergency.

Lend A Sympathetic Ear

Letting your friend know that you care and are willing to listen may be the best help you can offer. Don't force the issue, but allow her to confide in you at her own pace. Keep your mind open and really listen to what she tells you. Never blame her for what's happening or underestimate her fear of potential danger.

Remember that your friend must make her own decisions about her life. Focus on supporting her right to make her own choices.

Guide Her to Community Services

When she asks for advice on what she should do, share the information you've gathered with her privately. Let her know she is not alone and that caring people are available to help her. Encourage her to seek the assistance of battered women's advocates at the local domestic violence hotline or program. Assure her that any information she shares with them will be kept strictly confidential.

Many battered women first seek the advice of marriage counselors, psychiatrists, or members of the clergy. Not all helping professionals, however, are fully aware of the special circumstances of abused women. If the first person she contacts is not helpful, she should be encouraged to find assistance elsewhere.

"She must be doing something to provoke his violence."

Your friend is the victim of battering; she is not to blame nor does she ever deserve such treatment. Whatever problems exist in a relationship, the use of violence to resolve them is never justified or acceptable.

"If it's so bad, why doesn't she just leave?"

For most of us, the decision to end a relationship is not an easy one. A battered women's emotional ties to her partner may still be strong, supporting her hope that the violence will end. If she has been financially dependent on her partner and leaves with her children, she will likely face severe economic hardship. She may not know about available resources. Or perhaps social and justice systems have been unresponsive to her in the past. Religious, cultural, or family pressures may make her believe it's her duty to keep her marriage together at all costs. When she has 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 her children from the violence. She may feel that the abuse is only directed at her, and does not yet realize its effects on the children. Perhaps she believes that her children need a father, or lacks the resources to support them on her own. The children may beg her to stay, not wanting to leave their home or their friends. She fears that if she leaves she will lose custody of her children.

“I know him - I really don’t think he could hurt anyone.”

Many abusers are not violent in other relationships. They can be charming and loveable in a social situation, yet display extreme violence in the privacy of the home.

“He must be sick.”

Battering is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. The abuser’s experience as a child, and the messages he gets from society in general, tell him that violence is an effective way to achieve power and control over his partner’s behavior. Men who batter are accountable for their own actions. Viewing them as “sick” wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for their behavior.

“I think he has a drinking problem. Could that be the cause of the violence?”

Although alcohol or drug use may intensify an already existing violent behavior, 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 way of achieving it.

“How can she still care for someone who abuses her?”

Chances are, the man is not always abusive. He may actually show some remorse for his violence, promising that he will change. Your friend understandably hopes for such change. Their relationship probably involves a cycle of good times, bad times, and in-between times. However, the longer the violent relationship continues, the less likely there will be any good times at all.

“Lately she’s been distant. I don’t know if we’re still friends.”

The abuser senses that the fewer relationships the woman has, the more easily he can control her. He may be extremely jealous of any relationships she has outside the home. A battered woman may distance herself from friends fearing that they will discover the violence and blame her for it.

“If she wanted my help, she’d ask for it.”

Your friend may not yet feel comfortable confiding in others, feeling that they will not understand her situation. Try talking to her about the problem of battering in a general way. For example, you might mention a documentary or talk show about domestic violence that you’ve seen. Tell her you’re concerned about women who must endure physical abuse. Let her know you do not blame battered women for the violence.

What You Can Do

Become Informed

Gather all the information you can about domestic violence. Contact programs and services in your area that assist battered women and their children. These programs not only offer women safety, but also provide advocacy, support, and other needed services.

Sometimes your own feelings about the violence may make it difficult for you to confront the situation. Contact your local domestic violence hotline or program and talk to staff about your concerns. Battered women’s advocates can be an excellent source of support for both you and your friend.