

# The Hidden Crime: Domestic Violence

One out of every four women in this country will suffer some kind of violence at the hands of her husband or boyfriend.

Very few will tell anyone--not a friend, a relative, a neighbor, or the police.

Victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life--all cultures, all income groups, all ages, all religions. They share feelings of helplessness, isolation, guilt, fear, and shame.

All hope it won't happen again, but often it does.

## Are You Abused? Does the Person You Love...

- "Track" all of your time?
- Constantly accuse you of being unfaithful?
- Discourage your relationships with family and friends?
- Prevent you from working or attending school?
- Criticize you for little things?
- Anger easily when drinking or on drugs?
- Control all finances and force you to account in detail for what you spend?
- Humiliate you in front of others?
- Destroy personal property or sentimental items?
- Hit, punch, slap, kick, or bite you or the children?
- Use or threaten to use a weapon against you?
- Threaten to hurt you or the children?
- Force you to have sex against your will?

*If you find yourself saying yes, it's time to get help.*

## If You Are Hurt, What Can You Do?

There are no easy answers, but there are things you can do to protect yourself.

- Call the police or sheriff. Assault, even by family members, is a crime. The police often have information about shelters and other agencies that help victims of domestic violence.
- Leave, or have someone come and stay with you. Go to a battered women's shelter--call a crisis hotline in your community or a health center to locate a shelter. If you believe that you and your children are in danger, leave immediately.
- Get medical attention from your doctor or a hospital emergency room. Ask the staff to photograph your injuries and keep detailed records in case you decide to take legal action.
- Contact your family court for information about a civil protection order that does not involve criminal charges or penalties.

## Don't Ignore The Problem

- Talk to someone. Part of the abuser's power comes from secrecy. Victims are often ashamed to let anyone know about intimate family problems. Go to a friend or neighbor, or call a domestic violence hotline to talk to a counselor.
- Plan ahead and know what you will do if you are attacked again. If you decide to leave, choose a place to go; set aside some money. Put important papers together--marriage license, birth certificates, check books--in a place where you can get them quickly.
- Learn to think independently. Try to plan for the future and set goals for yourself.



## **Have You Hurt Someone In Your Family?**

- Accept the fact that your violent behavior will destroy your family. Be aware that you break the law when you physically hurt someone.
- Take responsibility for your actions and get help.
- When you feel tension building, get away. Work off the angry energy through a walk, a project, or a sport.
- Call a domestic violence hotline or health center and ask about counseling and support groups for people who batter.

## **The High Costs of Domestic Violence**

- Men and women who follow their parents' example and use violence to solve conflicts are teaching the same destructive behavior to their children.
- Jobs can be lost or careers stalled because of injuries, arrests, or harassments.
- Lives are lost when violence results in death.

## **Take a Stand!**

- Reach out to someone you believe is a victim of family violence, or to someone you think is being abusive. Don't give up easily--change takes time. Ending the family's isolation is a critical first step.
- Urge organizations and businesses to raise community awareness by hosting speakers on domestic violence, launching public education campaigns, and raising funds for shelters and hotlines.
- Ask the local newspaper, radio station, or television station to examine the problem and publicize resources in the community through special features and forums.
- Most communities offer resources for victims of family violence. Check your telephone directory or ask a law enforcement agency.