

What to Do to Stop Abuse

The first step toward ending the abuse is simply *telling someone*, maybe a doctor or nurse. (They're there to help keep people healthy, and that includes helping them avoid injury.) Talking about the situation may be hard at first, but most women start feeling better and more able to cope after they've shared the "secret" of their abusive relationship.

The next step is to find out where to go for help. Many community services for abused women are free and easy to reach. They include the police department, crisis hot lines, domestic violence programs, legal aid services, hospital emergency rooms, shelters for abused women and their children, and mental health centers. Here, too, the doctor or nurse may be able to help, either by phoning helping agencies or telling the woman how to contact them. These services are also usually listed in the telephone book.

Wherever a woman decides to go to get away from abuse, she should know exactly how to get to where she's going, especially if it's in the middle of the night. It's a good idea to plan ahead. She can start by packing a suitcase and storing it with a friend or neighbor. Items to pack include an extra set of house and car keys, some extra cash, a checkbook or credit card, ID cards, any important health, financial, or family records, and, if children are coming too, some books and toys.

Once she's safe, she will have time to think about whether to end the relationship. If she's married, it's important for her to get a lawyer who has experience in dealing with abuse cases. Unfortunately, although marriage counseling is often very helpful with other types of problems, it can actually do more harm than good where abuse is concerned: The stress of talking about the abuse can make the man even more violent. He may be helped, however, if he's willing to go to a counselor by himself.

Remember, there are many services to help women who need to escape from their abusive partners. If you're being abused, whatever you decide to do, give yourself credit for making some hard choices. It's not easy to leave or change a relationship, even an abusive one. Give yourself time (while still keeping yourself safe) to consider all your options and find out where you can go for help in your community. Then, when you're ready to take action, you can feel secure in knowing that the people you turn to can really help you.

Source:
Healthcare for Life
SEARLE

If you are in an abusive relationship and looking for help, there are resources available:

Police: 911
Turning Point: (610) 437-3369
Crime Victims Council: (610) 437-6611

Allentown Women's Center®

Physical Address: 31 South Commerce Way, Suite 100, Bethlehem, PA 18017

Mailing/Billing Address: PO Box 20227, Lehigh Valley, PA 18002-0227

484-821-0821 • 1-877-DIAL-AWC • Fax: 484-821-0826

www.allentownwomenscenter.com • Twitter: @allentownwomens

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Help for Women in Abusive Relationships

Getting hurt by someone you're in a relationship with is known by many names. Domestic violence, wife battering, partner abuse, and spousal abuse are just some of them. Whatever it's called, abuse is *never* acceptable as a way of dealing with problems in a relationship. This is true even if you think that it may be your fault. If your partner punches, hits, slaps, or otherwise abuses you, there are people in your community, including your doctor, who can help you decide what you want to do to stop it.

It's believed that as many as 4 million women nationwide are abused – physically or emotionally, forced to do what their partners want them to do, with no regard for the women's rights or feelings. Often their children are abused too, as are many pregnant women and their unborn children. Battering is a major cause of injury in women.

That may sound like something most women would say "Stop!" to, but if you're in an abusive relationship, you know that's not as easy as it sounds. Furthermore, sometimes a woman may be so used to her partner's abuse she doesn't see it for what it is. If you're not sure whether you partner is abusing you, check the kinds of abuse listed below. Have any of them happened to you?

Recognizing Abuse...

- **Physical abuse.** Pushing, shoving, slapping, kicking, punching, hitting, spitting, pinching, pulling hair, choking, using objects as weapons, throwing objects, tying down/restraining, abandoning in a dangerous place, refusing to help during illness.
- **Sexual abuse.** Forcing sex on a woman when she is afraid to say no or without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases; causing pain during sex; assaulting genitals, including use of objects vaginally, orally, or anally; using sexually degrading names.
- **Psychological abuse.** Threatening harm to the woman or the children, threatening to kill himself if the woman leaves, being obsessively jealous and possessive, intimidating and degrading her, depriving her of basic needs, terrorizing her, controlling her activities.
- **Emotional abuse.** Making false accusations; ridiculing the woman's belief; ignoring her needs; forcing her to witness the children being hurt; humiliating her in public or in private; threatening to take the children if she leaves; withholding affection or praise; insulting her, her family, or friends; breaking promises; undermining self-esteem.
- **Social abuse.** Confining the woman to her home, imposing physical isolation, refusing to allow her to see friends or family.
- **Financial abuse.** Not allowing the woman to have control of any money, forcing her to rely on him for all her basic needs, making her account for every penny she spends, preventing her from working or from improving her earning capacity.
- **Property abuse.** Destroying or threatening to destroy the woman's property, depriving her of her belongings.

... And Getting Immediate Help

If you are physically attacked (assaulted) by your husband or boyfriend and have the chance to get away, *do it*. As soon as you can, call the police: Assault is a crime, and the attacker can be sent to jail. Next, get medical treatment. You may think you are not badly hurt, but that may not be so – for example, you may be bleeding internally, which could be life-threatening. (A medical report will also be proof that you were injured if you press charges. Get a copy of that report to take with you.) Finally, think about how you can end the abuse.

What Kinds of Women Are Abused?

You may be surprised to learn that the answer to this question is, “All kinds.” Abusive men also come from all different backgrounds. You should know, however, that certain situations increase a woman’s risk of being abused by her partner. These situations include

- being single, separated, or divorced
- trying to get a protection order
- being between the ages of 17 and 28
- being a drug or alcohol abuser
- being pregnant
- having a very possessive or jealous partner
- having been abused as a child, or having seen abuse as a child
- having a partner who was abused, or saw abuse happen, as a child

Some Reasons That Men Abuse Women

It may be helpful for an abused woman to know some of the reasons why abuse happens. Then she can understand that it’s not what she does, but how her partner feels, that makes the abuse happen. However, every woman should also know that no matter how many problems a man has in his background, they *don’t* add up to an excuse for abuse.

An abusive man most often comes from a family where he was abused – so he thinks it’s okay to push other people around in order to get his way. He may also strike out at his partner as a way of feeling more powerful and in control. Many abusers also abuse drugs and/or alcohol; such a man may abuse his partner more when he’s “under the influence”. Abusive relationships don’t usually start with a drug or alcohol problem, and they seldom stop if the drug or alcohol abuse does.

Does this situation sound familiar to you? An abusive man’s everyday abuses suddenly get worse, with or without a “reason” – something his partner has done or not done. He shouts at her, calls her names, threatens her, and starts shoving her around. Although she tries to calm him down, he gets so angry he attacks her violently, causing physical injuries.

The man may not be apologetic afterward, especially if he feels the woman “asked for it.” But usually he tells her how sorry he is, how guilty he feels, how sure he is that he’ll never hurt her again. He may even buy her presents. After a while, though, he usually stops apologizing, because attacker her gives him the feeling of power and control he wants.

Meanwhile, the attacks usually get more and more violent, the woman’s injuries more and more severe. Unless this cycle of abuse is stopped, the woman may eventually be killed.

Abuse During Pregnancy

You may not be aware that of all abused women, some 25% to 45% are pregnant. The fact is, abuse often begins, or gets worse, when a woman is pregnant. It’s a stressful time for any couple – but for relationships where abuse is a factor, it’s likely to be a time when the violence gets out of control.

The man who feels jealous of his partner’s involvement with the coming baby may attack her, perhaps hoping to end the pregnancy. All too often, miscarriage or stillbirth is the tragic result. Even if the abuse doesn’t end the pregnancy, it’s typically a sign of what’s in store for the child later on: Many of the men who abuse their partners also abuse their children.

Why Do Abused Women Stay?

You probably wonder why any woman would stay in a relationship with a man who abuses her. There are many reasons. Maybe you’ll recognize some of these abused women’s explanations:

- “He kept telling me I deserved to be hurt, and for a long time I believed him.”
- “I was more afraid of how he’d hurt me if I left than I was of what was happening at home.”
- “He kept saying that he couldn’t live without me! I thought, I can’t leave him when it would make him feel so bad.”
- “I thought [the abuse] was just because I couldn’t do anything right. If I could just do better, he’d stop. But no matter how hard I tried, he didn’t stop. The best thing I did was to get away.”
- “One day I just thought, the heck with it, there’s nothing I can do about it. That’s when the drugs and alcohol got the better of me, at least for a while.”
- “He kept begging me to forgive him, promising he’d never hurt me again. I guess I believed him, over and over, because I didn’t want the children to not have a father if we left.”
- “If I let him, I didn’t think I could make it on my own. Where would I go? How would I earn a living?”

These women *did* make the brave choice to leave their abusive partners and start new and independent lives. If you’re in an abusive relationship, you can too.