

Domestic Violence: Part 2

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Preview:

In part 1 of this article series, the context and reality of domestic violence and its impact on children was discussed. This article will focus on better understanding domestic violence and the challenges victims face in leaving abusive relationships. Additionally, this article will review steps that safe adults can take to help victims and child witnesses.

Article:

VIRTUS Editor's Note: This is part 2 of a 2-part article series. Part 1 of this article series provides an initial overview of the issue of domestic violence. It is recommended to review part 1 of this series, entitled "Domestic Violence: Part 1" prior to reading this part 2 article.

Introduction

In part 1 of this article series, the context and reality of domestic violence and its impact on children was discussed. This article will focus on better understanding domestic violence and the challenges victims face in leaving abusive relationships. Additionally, this article will review steps that safe adults can take to help victims and child witnesses.

Understanding domestic violence

It can be difficult for people learning about domestic violence to understand why a partner may stay in such an abusive relationship. There is not one simple answer to this question, but it can help to have greater awareness of how complex and dangerous the abusive relationship can be. DV usually does not begin abruptly—it gradually worsens over a period of time, during which the abuser systematically increases control and power over the victim. By the time the abuse is severe, the victim may be isolated from friends and family without any place to go for help. They may not be able to leave the house on their own without dire consequences, may not have access to a phone or computer without being monitored, and may not have access to any money.

The abuser may also threaten the partner victim, threaten the welfare of their children, or even threaten suicide. These threats are manipulative and coercive, but they should not be considered empty threats. The threat of serious injury or murder is real amongst DV victims, and this risk is highest when the victim attempts to leave.¹ For many who have no means of supporting themselves financially, who have no way to safely plan an escape, and who may be concerned about losing custody of their children, staying may feel safer than leaving.

¹ Leemis, R.W., Friar, N., Khatiwada, S., Chen, M.S., Kresnow, M., Smith, S.G., Caslin, S., & Basile, K.C. (2022). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How can you help?

In such complex situations, it is difficult knowing how to help someone. If you suspect someone is suffering from domestic violence, 24/7 guidance and access to free resources are available at www.thehotline.org, a nationwide domestic violence site. This site has many resources for victims and concerned parties, including safety planning tools to identify local resources and form a plan of escape. It can help with assessing the degree of danger an individual is in and with documenting abuse, which can be important for victims who are seeking child custody or restraining orders.

As a concerned friend or acquaintance, it is important to understand a victim may not be ready to leave. Even if a victim is not ready to leave, you can still be helpful to them. Show the victim that you can be trusted by letting them talk and asking them what you can do, instead of suggesting a course of action. Remember that making decisions for the victim and inserting oneself beyond what is desired could not only be unwanted, it could be dangerous for the victim(s). Do not underestimate the power of being a resource and person with whom they feel safe. Know the laws of your state about mandatory reporting and child abuse if children are a part of the household. If you suspect a child has witnessed domestic violence or has been abused, contact the Child Protective Services agency in your state or local law enforcement.

Additional Resources are available at:

- The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence²
- U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women³

There may also be additional resources available through community organizations, such as local Catholic Charities agencies, or other organizations.

Talking to children about healthy relationships

When interacting with children and youth, it is also important to teach them about healthy relationships and healthy interactions with their peers and with adults. Children need to know that violence and abusive language is wrong, and that everyone has the right to feel safe and respected. Simply talking about how important it is to treat everyone with kindness and respect can help instill in them foundational elements of how they should be treating others. Similarly, demonstrating appropriate ways of interacting with others can show children what healthy relationships look like. The more we can teach children about healthy relationships, the greater likelihood they will have of being in healthy relationships throughout their lives.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a common form of abuse that happens within intimate relationships and can lead to serious and lifelong consequences for the affected partner and children in the household. Children who witness domestic violence suffer from the same types of behavioral and health problems as children who are directly abused, and they are at greater risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence in their lifetimes. It can be difficult for victims to leave abusive relationships, but there are free local and national resources to help. If you know someone who is experiencing domestic violence, show support by listening, sharing resources

² <https://nrcdv.org/>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/resources-for-survivors>

with them, and asking how you can help. Protect children who are witnessing domestic abuse by filing a report with CPS or law enforcement.