

Domestic violence is a pattern of aggressive and intimidating behaviors in which one person controls another through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. A person does not have to be hit to be abused. Abuse can be verbal, emotional, physical, sexual and economic and is based on power and control. Stalking, destruction of property, excessive control over daily activity, isolation, threats or acts of abuse against children, significant others or family pets and forced sexual relations, are often present in domestic violence situations.

Domestic abuse is rarely a one-time event; it usually increases in severity and frequency over time. Women are more than 95% more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women in the U.S. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, men batter over one million women a year and 3 women a day are murdered. According to the American Medical Association, injuries sustained from domestic violence account for 35% of visits by women to emergency rooms annually. Untold numbers of women suffer permanent injuries—brain damage, blindness, deafness, speech loss through damage to the larynx, disfigurement and mutilation, damage to or loss of internal organs, paralysis, sterility, and so on.

Women who are victims of domestic violence are more likely to attempt suicide, suffer from depression, anxiety, general chronic pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, arthritis, stomach ulcers and gynecological problems. Many pregnant women suffer from complications, including miscarriage; many birth defects and miscarriages are caused by assault on the mother during pregnancy. Many women have been infected with HIV or other Sexually Transmitted Infections by batterers who force them into unprotected sex.

If someone you know is being abused, here are some ways you can help:

- Be a good listener without judging.
- Be clear that nothing excuses the violence – not alcohol, drugs, financial pressures, depression, or jealousy. Violence is never acceptable.
- If she has children or other dependents, confirm her concern that the violence is damaging to them. If you can, let her children know you're there for them too.
- Supply information and phone numbers for local resources – the domestic violence hotline, support groups, counseling, shelter programs and legal advocacy services.

Steps to take to help yourself if you are being abused:

- Call the police or leave if you or your children are in danger! Call a crisis hotline or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE or TDD 800-787-3224, which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English, Spanish, and other languages. This helpline can give you the phone number of local hotlines and other resources.
- Create a safety plan to get out of the house and review the plan monthly. Safety planning helps you develop tools and strategies before dangerous situations happen.
- Don't keep it to yourself. Get help. Talk with someone: a family member, friend, colleague, or faith counselor.
- Set aside some money and choose a place to go. If you decide to leave, you'll be prepared. Put important papers – marriage license, birth certificates, checkbook, and other papers and items – in a place where you can get them quickly.

For more information:

National Domestic Violence Hotline, (800) 799-SAFE
Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV), www.wcadv.org

Sexual violence is any act (verbal and/or physical) which breaks a person's trust and/or safety and is sexual in nature. The term "sexual violence" includes: rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, date and acquaintance rape, marital or partner rape, sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. Assaults are motivated primarily out of anger and/or a need to feel powerful by controlling, dominating, or humiliating the victim. Victims/survivors of sexual assaults are forced, coerced, and/or manipulated to participate in unwanted sexual activity. Victims/survivors do not cause their assaults and are not to blame.

One in 3 women have been the victim of sexual assault at some point in her life. 93% of sexual assault survivors are violated by someone they know, someone they trusted.

Sexual assault has a devastating impact on survivors and our communities. Depression, anxiety, panic, isolation, self-hatred, pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infection, HIV and AIDS, eating disorders and post traumatic stress disorder are just some of the effects on survivors of sexual assault. Emergency contraception can be provided to help prevent an unintended pregnancy.

What should I do if I am sexually assaulted?

- Find a safe environment - anywhere away from the attacker. Ask a trusted friend to stay with you for moral support.
- Preserve evidence of the attack—don't bathe or brush your teeth. Write down all the details you can recall about the attack and the attacker.
- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline for free, confidential counseling, 24 hours a day: 1-800-656-HOPE.
- Get medical attention. Even with no physical injuries, it is important to determine the risks of STIs and pregnancy.
- To preserve forensic evidence, ask the hospital to conduct a rape kit exam.
- If you suspect you may have been drugged, ask that a urine sample be collected. The sample will need to be analyzed later on by a forensic lab.
- Report the rape to law enforcement authorities. A counselor can provide the information you'll need to understand the process.
- Remember it wasn't your fault.
- Recognize that healing from sexual assault takes time. Give yourself the time you need.
- Know that it's never too late to call. Even if the attack happened years ago, the National Sexual Assault Hotline can still help. Many victims do not realize they need help until months or years later.

What you can do to reduce your risk of sexual assault:

- Don't leave your beverage unattended or accept a drink from an open container.
- When you go to a party, go with a group of friends. Arrive together, watch out for each other, and leave together.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Don't allow yourself to be isolated with someone you don't know or trust.
- Think about the level of intimacy you want in a relationship, and clearly state your limits.

How you can help a friend who has been sexually assaulted:

- Listen. Be there. Don't be judgmental.
- Encourage your friend to seriously consider reporting the rape to law enforcement authorities.
- Be patient. Remember, it will take your friend some time to deal with the crime.
- Let your friend know that professional help is available through the National Sexual Assault Hotline.
- Encourage him or her to call the hotline, but realize that only your friend can make the decision to get help.

For more information:

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), www.rainn.org

National Sexual Assault Hotline, (800) 656-HOPE

National Sexual Violence Resource Center, www.nsvrc.org

Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA), www.wcasa.org