

Resources

ANNA MARIE'S ALLIANCE

PO Box 367, St. Cloud, MN 56302-0367
Shelter and support for women and their children who are experiencing domestic abuse.

24 hr Crisis Line • Free • Confidential

320.253.6900

TTY **320.258.3321**

www.annamaries.org

CENTRAL MN SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTER

15 Riverside Drive NE, St. Cloud, MN 56304-0435

320.251.4357 or 800.237.5090

24 hr Crisis Line • Free • Confidential

CARITAS MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC

Counseling Programs for Non-Violence

- Domestic Abuse Counseling Program for Men
- Women's Anger and Self-Esteem Domestic Abuse Counseling Program

911 Eighteenth Street North, St. Cloud, MN 56303

320.650.1660 or 800.830.8254

MEN'S LINE/Crisis Connection

24 hr Crisis Line • Free • Confidential

Help for men and those who care about them

612.379.6367 or 866.379.6367

Family Violence Prevention Fund

www.endabuse.org

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

www.mcbw.org

**Understanding
Domestic Abuse
and Helping
Battered Women**

**A Guide for
Family and Friends**

*Providing safety and
shelter today...*

*violence free
communities
tomorrow*



Central MN Task Force on Battered Women

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Millions of women in the United States of America are physically and emotionally abused by their husbands or partners each year. Chances are, someone you know—your mother, sister, friend, co-worker or neighbor—is a victim of domestic violence.

Perhaps you feel their problem will “work itself out”. Nothing could be further from the truth. The violence will not end until someone takes action to stop it.

Your support and encouragement can be of tremendous value to a friend involved with an abusive partner. You can ease isolation and the loss of control she may feel by listening to her, providing her with more information on domestic violence, and helping her to explore her options.

For immediate assistance in a crisis situation, the woman is encouraged to **call 911** without delay. This is critical to her safety, and that of her children.

What You Need To Know

The first step you can take to help your friend or relative 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, continue reading for information on domestic violence and how you can help.

“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 or relative 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 family?
- If her partner ridicules her publicly, do you and others ignore this 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 her partner's comments?
- Have you noticed changes in her or her children's behavior? Does she appear frightened, exhausted, or on edge? Do the children seem easily upset? Are they experiencing sudden problems in school or other activities?



Understanding Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is not just a family problem—it is a *crime* with serious repercussions for your friend, her children, and the entire community.

Domestic Violence is serious. It involves emotional abuse, isolation, 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.

Domestic Violence knows no boundaries. It happens to people of all ages, races, religions, income, and educational levels.

Understanding the Abuser

Domestic Violence is about power and control. It is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. The abuser's experience as a child, and the messages they have gotten from society in general, tell them that violence is an effective way to achieve power and control over their partner's behavior. Those who batter are accountable for their own actions. Viewing them as "sick" wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for their behavior.

Domestic Violence does not represent a loss of control, but a way of achieving it. Although alcohol or drug use may intensify an already existing violent behavior, it does not cause battering. Partners who batter typically make excuses for their violence, claiming a loss of control due to alcohol/drug use or extreme stress. This is a way the batterer tries to shift responsibility for the abusive choices they have made.

Domestic Violence and those who batter may be difficult to understand. Many abusers are not violent in other relationships. They may be charming and loveable in a social situation, yet display extreme violence in the privacy of the home. Seeing only the sociable side of the abuser can make it difficult to believe abusers are capable of such violent behavior.

Information provided in this brochure originally appeared in a publication by the former National Woman Abuse Prevention Project entitled [Helping the Battered Women A Guide for Family and Friends](#).

Understanding the Victim

For most of us, the decision to end a relationship is not an easy one. A battered woman'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 that 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.

Your friend or relative is probably doing her best to protect her children from the violence. She may feel that the abuse is directed only at her, and does not yet realize its effects on the children. Perhaps she believes that her children need a father no matter what his behavior, or lacks the resources to support them on her own. The children may beg her to stay, not wanting to leave their home or friends. She fears if she leaves she will lose custody of her children.

It can be hard to understand how your friend could still care for someone who is abusing her. Chances are, her partner is not always abusive. He may actually show remorse for his violence, promising that he will change. Your friend understandably hopes for such a change. Their relationship probably involves a cycle of good times, bad times, and in-between times. However, the longer the violent relationship continues, the more likely it is that the violence will escalate.

If your friend or relation seems distant and you find yourself wondering if you are still friends, remember that the fewer relationships the woman has, the more easily her abuser can control her. He may be extremely jealous of any relationships she has outside the home. A battered woman may distance herself from friends and family fearing that they will discover the violence and blame her for it.

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

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 will provide advocacy, support, and other needed services.

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

Listen

Letting your friend or relation 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.

Focus on Her Strengths

Battered women live with emotional as well as physical abuse. Your friend is probably continually told by her abuser that she is a bad woman, 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

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

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.

Confront Her With the Danger

At some point, you may find it difficult to be supportive of your friend or relation if she remains in the violent relationship or returns to her 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 her face up to the dangerous reality of living with an abusive partner.

Help Her Develop a Safety Plan

Encourage your friend to develop a safety plan by thinking through steps to take when her partner becomes abusive again. Make a list of people she could call in an emergency. Suggest she put together and hide a suitcase of clothing, personal items, money, social security cards, bank books, children's birth certificates and school records, and other important documents. Encourage her to call a local battered women's shelter for assistance with a cell phone.

If She Decides to Leave

The safest place your friend should contact is the local domestic violence hotline or shelter. Shelter workers will help her examine her options. 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 your local shelter staff about the best way to handle this.

When to Intervene: If you are a neighbor or otherwise know that a battering incident is occurring, *call 911 immediately*. This is the most effective way to protect the woman and her children from immediate harm.