

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Safety, Health and Employee Welfare Division

Domestic Violence Awareness Handbook

Stop the Cycle of Violence!

All of you know how much needs to be done to take meaningful steps to end domestic violence and sexual assault. We need tough law enforcement, aggressive prosecutions, effective prevention programs and available shelters for families in distress. Most importantly, we need to insure that more people know and understand that domestic violence is not a private matter. It is a critical national problem that affects us all -- in every community, in every work place and in every school.

Each of us can do more -- and this handbook shows us how.

President Clinton recognized the seriousness of the problem when he signed the Violence Against Women Act as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. In the past year, the Department of Justice has sought to combine tough federal penalties along with substantial resources to the states to begin dealing with the problem of domestic violence in a comprehensive, multi-faceted way. States and local law enforcement agencies have been encouraged to begin programs that will enhance their ability to prevent domestic violence, to punish it and to stop the cycle of violence. The Act also established a:

National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE.

President Clinton has called on all the Departments of the Federal government to develop employee awareness campaigns to help combat domestic violence. The Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office, prepared this handbook as a resource guide for anyone seeking assistance or information on Domestic Violence. The following web site addresses are provided as additional resources:

- [Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office](#)
- [Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Women's Health](#)
- [Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Office of Personnel Management, Handling Traumatic Events: A Manager's Handbook](#)

- [NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund](#)
 - [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
 - [The National Center for Victims of Crime](#)
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Domestic Violence Awareness Handbook

- [Breaking the Silence on Domestic Violence](#)
- [Domestic Violence...What Is It?](#)
- [Who Are the Victims?](#)
- [Myths About Family Violence](#)
- [What You Can Say to a Victim?](#)
- [What is a Safety Plan?](#)
- [What Each of Us Can Do](#)
- [What Communities Can Do to Prevent Domestic Violence](#)
- [Domestic Violence and the Workplace](#)
- [Where Can You Get Help?](#)

Breaking the Silence on Domestic Violence

Tough new laws are one way to reduce domestic violence and sexual assaults. Nothing sends a clearer message to a wife-beater -- Department of Justice statistics confirm that women are battered far more than men -- than prosecuting and jailing other wife-beaters. New laws, however, are not the only answer.

Too many people continue to believe that domestic violence is a private matter between a couple, rather than a criminal offense that merits a strong and swift response. Even today, the victim of a domestic assault runs the risk of being asked, "What did you do to make your husband angry?" This question implies the victim is to blame for this abuse. People in our criminal justice system -- police, prosecutors, judges, and jurors -- need to be educated about the role they can play in curbing acts of domestic violence.

Even when cases are brought, domestic crimes are difficult to prosecute. All too often victims are so terrorized that they fear for their lives if they call the police. Silence is the batterer's best friend. We have to end the silence and change our attitudes toward domestic crime.

Neighbors must contact the police when they hear violent fights in their neighborhoods. Don't turn up the television to block out the sounds of the drunken argument next door. Call the police.

Teachers should be alert to signs that students have witnessed violence at home. Children who grow up in violent homes are more likely to become violent themselves.

Medical professionals who see the victims of violence need to ask them about these crimes. Too often, doctors or emergency room personnel accept the statement of fearful victims that their bruises or cuts are the result of household accidents or falls. When a woman with a black eye says that she fell and hit the doorknob, doctors and nurses must ask: "Did someone hit you?"

Members of the clergy need to become more involved as well. We just can't tell a battered spouse to "go home and make it work," as was done in the past. Sending a woman back to a battering husband often places her life at risk. Of course, we can't tell a woman who lives in a violent relationship what to do, but we can make a greater effort to let her know that other options are available for her and her children. Early intervention is crucial.

These crimes are serious. Experience shows that levels of violence in these relationships tend to escalate, and many police departments cite domestic violence as their number one problem. Tough laws and effective prosecutions, combined with education and a cooperative approach among law enforcement and social service agencies, will take time to be effective. Until then, we all must take a greater role in reporting domestic abuse. Our efforts to break the silence can make a difference.

[\[TOP\]](#)

Domestic Violence...What is It?

As domestic violence awareness has increased, it has become evident that abuse can occur within a number of relationships. The laws in many states cover incidents of violence occurring between married couples, as well as abuse of elders by family members, abuse between roommates, dating couples and those in lesbian and gay relationships.

In an abusive relationship, the abuser may use a number of tactics other than physical violence in order to maintain power and control over his or her partner:

Emotional and verbal abuse:

Survivors of domestic violence recount stories of put-downs, public humiliation, name-calling, mind games and manipulation by their partners. Many say that the emotional abuse they have suffered has left the deepest scars.

Isolation:

It is common for an abuser to be extremely jealous, and insist that the victim not see her friends or family members. The resulting feeling of isolation may then be increased for the victim if she loses her job as a result of absenteeism or decreased productivity (which are often associated with people who are experiencing domestic violence).

Threats and Intimidation:

Threats -- including threats of violence, suicide, or of taking away the children -- are a very common tactic employed by the batterer.

The existence of emotional and verbal abuse, attempts to isolate, and threats and intimidation within a relationship may be an indication that physical abuse is to follow. Even if they are not accompanied by physical abuse, the effect of these incidents must not be minimized. Many of the resources listed in this book have information available for people who are involved with an emotionally abusive intimate partner.

For additional information on the domestic violence definitions and laws in your state, please contact the state resource listed in this handbook.

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Who Are the Victims?

- Women were attacked about six times more often by offenders with whom they had an intimate relationship than were male violence victims.
- Nearly 30 percent of all female homicide victims were known to have been killed by their husbands, former husbands or boyfriends.
- In contrast, just over 3 percent of male homicide victims were known to have been killed by their wives, former wives or girlfriends.
- Husbands, former husbands, boyfriends and ex-boyfriends committed more than one million violent acts against women.
- Family members or other people they knew committed more than 2.7 million violent crimes against women.
- Husbands, former husbands, boyfriends and ex-boyfriends committed 26 percent of rapes and sexual assaults.

- **Forty-five percent of all violent attacks against female victims 12 years old and older by multiple offenders involve offenders they know.**
- **The rate of intimate-offender attacks on women separated from their husbands was about three times higher than that of divorced women and about 25 times higher than that of married women.**
- **Women of all races were equally vulnerable to attacks by intimates.**
- **Female victims of violence were more likely to be injured when attacked by someone they knew than female victims of violence who were attacked by strangers.**

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Myths About Family Violence

- **Myth:***Family violence is rare...*
 - **Although statistics on family violence are not precise, it's clear that millions of children, women and even men are abused physically by family members and other intimates.**
 - **Myth:***Family violence is confined to the lower classes...*
 - **Reports from police records, victim services, and academic studies show domestic violence exists equally in every socioeconomic group, regardless of race or culture.**
 - **Myth:***Alcohol and drug abuse are the real causes of violence in the home...*
 - **Because many male batterers also abuse alcohol and other drugs, it's easy to conclude that these substances may cause domestic violence. They apparently do increase the lethality of the violence, but they also offer the batterer another excuse to evade responsibility for his behavior. The abusive man -- and men are the abusers in the overwhelming majority of domestic violence incidents -- typically controls his actions, even when drunk or high, by choosing a time and place for the assaults to take place in private and go undetected. In addition, successful completion of a drug treatment program does not guarantee an end to battering. Domestic violence and substance abuse are two different problems that should be treated separately.**
 - **Myth:***Battered wives like being hit, otherwise they would leave...*
 - **The most common response to battering-- "Why doesn't she just leave?"-- ignores economic and social realities facing many women. Shelters are often full, and family, friends, and the workplace are frequently less than fully supportive. Faced with rent and utility deposits, day care, health insurance, and other basic expenses, the woman may feel that she cannot support herself and her children.**

Moreover, in some instances, the woman may be increasing the chance of physical harm or even death if she leaves an abusive spouse.

Adapted from: "Preventing Violence Against Women, Not Just a Women's Issue," National Crime Prevention Council, 1995.

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What Can You Say to a Victim?

- **I'm afraid for your safety.**
- **I'm afraid for the safety of your children.**
- **It will only get worse.**
- **We're here for you when you are ready or when you are able to leave.**
- **You deserve better than this.**
- **Let's figure out a safety plan for you.**

Adapted from: Sarah Buel, Esq., in "Courts and Communities: Confronting Violence in the Family," Conference Highlights, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1994.

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What is a Safety Plan?

Every individual in an abusive relationship needs a safety plan. Shelters and crisis counselors have been urging safety plans for years, and police departments, victim services, hospitals, and courts have adopted this strategy. Safety plans should be individualized -- for example, taking account of age, marital status, whether children are involved, geographic location, and resources available -- but still contain common elements.

When creating a safety plan:

- ***Think about all possible escape routes.* Doors, first-floor windows, basement exits, elevators, stairwells. Rehearse if possible.**
- ***Choose a place to go.* To the home of a friend or relative who will offer unconditional support, or a motel or hotel, or a shelter - most importantly somewhere you will feel safe.**

- ***Pack a survival kit.*** Money for cab fare, a change of clothes, extra house and car keys, birth certificates, passports, medications and copies of prescriptions, insurance information, checkbook, credit cards, legal documents such as separation agreements and protection orders, address books, and valuable jewelry, and papers that show jointly owned assets. Conceal it in the home or leave it with a trusted neighbor, friend, or relative. Important papers can also be left in a bank deposit box.
- ***Try to start an individual savings account.*** Have statements sent to a trusted relative or friend.
- ***Avoid arguments with the abuser in areas with potential weapons.*** Kitchen, garage, or in small spaces without access to an outside door.
- ***Know the telephone number of the domestic violence hotline.*** Contact it for information on resources and legal rights.
- ***Review the safety plan monthly.***

Adapted from: "Preventing Domestic Violence" by Laura Crites in Prevention Communique, March 1992, Crime Prevention Division, Department of the Attorney General, Hawaii.

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What Can Each of Us Do?

- **Call the police if you see or hear evidence of domestic violence.**
- **Speak out publicly against domestic violence.**
- **Take action personally against domestic violence when a neighbor, a co-worker, a friend, or a family member is involved or being abused.**
- **Encourage your neighborhood watch or block association to become as concerned with watching out for domestic violence as with burglaries and other crimes.**
- **Reach out to support someone whom you believe is a victim of domestic violence and/or talk with a person you believe is being abusive.**
- **Help others become informed, by inviting speakers to your church, professional organization, civic group, or workplace.**
- **Support domestic violence counseling programs and shelters.**

Adapted from: "Preventing Domestic Violence" by Laura Crites in Prevention Communique, March 1992, Crime Prevention Division, Department of the Attorney General, Hawaii.

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What Can Communities do to Prevent Domestic Violence?

- Expand education and awareness efforts to increase positive attitudes toward nonviolence and encourage individuals to report family violence.
- Form or task forces to assess the problem, develop an action plan, and monitor progress.
- Mandate training in domestic violence for all social services and criminal justice professionals.
- Advocate laws and judicial procedures at the state and local levels that support and protect battered women.
- Establish centers where visits between batterers and their children may be supervised, for the children's safety.
- Fund shelters adequately.
- Recruit and train volunteers to staff hotlines, accompany victims to court, and provide administrative support to shelters and victim services.
- Improve collection of child support.
- Establish medical protocols to help physicians and other health care personnel identify and help victims of domestic abuse.
- Provide legal representation for victims of domestic violence.
- Advocate for the accessibility of services for all population groups, especially underserved populations which include immigrants and refugees, gays and lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities and the disabled.

Adapted from: "Preventing Violence Against Women: Not Just A Women's Issue," the National Crime Prevention Council, 1995.

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Domestic Violence and the Workplace

As awareness about domestic violence has grown, so has the recognition that this crime has a major impact in the workplace. The abuse an employee receives at home can lead to lost productivity, higher stress, increased absenteeism and higher health care costs. A 1994 survey of senior corporate executives conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide on behalf of Liz Claiborne, Inc. found that:

- Fifty-seven percent believe domestic violence is a major problem in society.
- One-third thought this problem had a negative impact on their bottom lines.

- **Four out of ten executives surveyed were personally aware of employees and other individuals affected by domestic violence.**

To ensure that the Federal government will be a leader in educating employees about the serious implications of domestic violence, President Clinton has directed the heads of every Federal department to conduct employee awareness campaigns on the issue. Similar programs are underway in corporate America, led by companies such as the Polaroid Corporation, Marshalls Inc., Liz Claiborne Inc., and Aetna.

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Where Can You Get Help?

This handbook is another step in the Federal Employee Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence, the goal of which is to educate and foster awareness about domestic violence for United States government employees worldwide.

Through this campaign, we hope to put people in touch with resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and publications which will be helpful in combatting the crime of domestic violence.

On February 21, 1996, President Clinton announced a nationwide, 24-hour, toll-free domestic violence hotline. The number is 1-800-799-SAFE and the TDD number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-787-3224. Help is also available to callers in Spanish and to other non-English speakers. The hotline provides immediate crisis intervention for those in need. Callers can receive counseling and be referred directly to help in their communities, including emergency services and shelters. Also, operators can offer information and referrals, counseling and assistance in reporting abuse to survivors of domestic violence, family members, neighbors, and the general public.

In many areas, there are local domestic violence agencies which can provide crisis services such as shelter, counseling, and legal assistance. These numbers can be obtained from state or regional coalitions, from the phone book, or by calling information.

The Department of Agriculture's Employee Assistance Program can also provide you with assistance and referrals, support groups, counseling and other services.