

STOP THE ABUSE!

Domestic violence is described as a pattern of behavior that a person uses to get and maintain power and control over another individual in an intimate relationship. The actual acts of violence are as follows:

Verbal abuse: insults (“you are so fat/ugly/dumb”), humiliation, threatening to take children away, acting jealous or possessive.

Emotional abuse: shifting responsibility (“if you and your family knew how to treat me, then we would not have any problems”), giving threatening looks or gestures, isolating the woman from her family/friends through deliberate disagreements or dishonesty.

Physical abuse: slapping, kicking, choking, driving recklessly; generally starts after a pattern of verbal or emotional abuse.

Financial abuse: not allowing the woman to work, not giving money to the woman, or squandering money away on immoral or excessive activities such as gambling, alcohol.

Sexual abuse: forcing the woman to engage in unwanted sexual acts, engaging in illicit sexual behavior.

System abuse: abuser violates court orders, violates child custody agreements, or makes false allegations against the woman in court or to the police.

It is important to note here that some of these behaviors can be very subtle or done in a such a persuasive way that the woman does not realize until much later that a particular act was really a power play by the abuser. For instance, an abuser may convince the woman to not hold a job by telling her that “I will take care of you – you don’t need to worry about working outside”, while in another instance verbally abusing her about her family’s alleged meddling in their lives. This pattern of subtle/aggressive behavior results in a woman becoming confused about the situation and not being able to recognize the pattern of the different forms of abuse until much later, when the situation becomes worse.

One of the main reasons women stay in an abusive situation is due to an underlying fear of her children being hurt or losing custody of the children, fear of the abuser inflicting more violence if she resists his demands, or fear of not getting sufficient protection from the legal system. The reality is that the U.S. legal system has made tremendous progress in helping to protect abused women and their children. In addition to providing free or low cost legal help, lawyers and court advocates can work with survivors to help get protection under the law.

Another reason women stay in abusive situations is due to emotional dependency that the woman feels towards her abuser. That is, many women fear the social and religious stigma of divorce, they fear the consequences of potential independence, and they suffer from a lack of emotional support from others. Thankfully, the social and religious tides are slowly shifting to remove the stigma attached to divorced women. And, there are many organizations that provide counseling services and emotional support to survivors and their children so they can move forward with their lives.

Many women stay in abusive situations because the abuser may be the only wage earner and the women fear that if they leave the abuser, they and their children may become homeless or end up in poverty. Through government programs and private organizations, survivors can get education or employment assistance to help secure their own future financial stability.

Additionally, many women stay in abusive situations because they feel isolated in their dilemma, or feel immense embarrassment/shame. Instead of trying to escape the situation, the women hope that the abuser will stop the destructive behavior and the children can have the illusion of a “whole” family. Sadly however, the situation usually does not improve but actually deteriorates, causing more trauma and damage to the woman and the children. Women in abusive situations must come to a realization that the situation will not improve itself and that she herself must take the initiative to use the services offered to improve her and children’s lives.

While we all struggle through the challenges that life puts in our way, it is a woman’s inner courage and self-determination that can help her in changing a tragedy into a success story. *If you or someone you know is in an abusive situation, you may contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-SAFE or Bijal M. Jani, Esq. (845) 735-0247 for immediate help.*