



Thoughts that might be preventing you from helping someone who is being abused.

Chances are someone you know – your mother, sister, friend, coworker or neighbor – is a victim of domestic violence. While you may think the problem will work itself out, this is extremely unlikely. Violence in relationships usually continues and often gets worse over time if no action is taken to stop it.

Below are some things that you might be thinking that are preventing you from helping your friend or family member and some tips about how you can help. The more you know, the easier it is to lend a hand and help break the silence.

You Might be Thinking...

▽ *I shouldn't get involved in a private family matter.* Domestic violence – also called spouse abuse, battering or intimate partner violence – is not just a family problem. It is a crime with serious repercussions for your friend or family member, her children and the entire community.

▽ *The violence can't really be that serious.* Domestic violence includes 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. Even if the violence is “only” verbal, it can seriously affect the victim's health and well-being, so any act of domestic violence is something to take seriously. Domestic violence also can be fatal – every 5 days a Virginian is murdered by an intimate partner (Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 2003).

▽ *She must be doing something to provoke his violence.* A victim of battering is never to blame for another person's choice to use violence against her. Problems exist in any relationship, but the use of violence to resolve them is never acceptable.

▽ *If it's so bad, why doesn't she just leave?* For most of us, a decision to end a relationship is not easy. A battered woman's emotional ties to her partner may be strong, supporting her hope that the violence will end. She may be financially dependent and in leaving she will likely face severe economic hardship. She may not know about available resources and social and justice systems may have been unhelpful to her in the past. Religious, cultural or family pressures may make her think it's her duty to keep her marriage together. When she's tried to leave in the past, her partner may have used violence to stop her. These are just some of the many compelling reasons that may keep a woman in an abusive relationship.

▽ *Doesn't she care about what's happening to her children?* Your friend or family member is probably doing her best to protect her children from violence. She may feel that the abuse is only directed at her and does not yet realize its effects on children. She may believe her children need a father or that she 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 may fear that if she leaves she will lose custody of her children.

▽ *I know him – I really don't think he could hurt anyone.* Many abusers are not violent in other relationships and can be charming in social situations, but are extremely violent in the privacy of the home.

▽ *He must be sick.* Battering is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. An abuser's experience as a child and the messages he gets from society tell him that violence is an easy way to get power and control over his partner's behavior. Men who batter choose this behavior and viewing them as “sick” wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for it.

continued





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▼ *I think he has a drinking problem.* Could that be the cause of violence? Alcohol or drug use may intensify violent behavior, but it does not cause battering. Men who batter typically make excuses for their violence, claiming a loss of control because of alcohol/drug use or extreme stress. Battering, however, does not represent a loss of control, but a way of achieving it.

▼ *How can she still care for someone who abuses her?* Chances are the abuser is not always abusive. He may show remorse for his violence after it happens and promise to change. Your friend or family member understandably hopes for such changes. Their relationship probably involves good times, bad times, and in-between times.

▼ *If she wanted my help, she'd ask for it.* Your friend or family member may not feel comfortable confiding in you, feeling you may not understand her situation. She may not think that anyone can help her. Talk to her about battering in a general way. Tell her you're concerned about women who get abused and that you do not blame women for violence.

