



Resource and Referral Information for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence

Updated 2013

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES AND CLIENT RIGHTS

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) assists people dealing with sexual assault and/or domestic violence. Clients of DVSAS have the right to confidential, respectful, and timely services by trained and well-supervised volunteers or staff.

Clients 13 years and older can give consent for confidential services. Clients who are under 13 years of age or are considered vulnerable adults must have consent from a guardian.

Staff and volunteers of DVSAS must obtain a Release of Confidential Information signed by the client to release any client information. Staff or volunteers may break confidentiality without a release if they suspect a child or vulnerable adult has suffered abuse/neglect, in the case of suicide or threat of harm to another, or when subpoenaed by a court of law.

Clients may have access to their own file and may also ask to review agency policies regarding confidentiality and release of client information. To maintain confidentiality of current and past records, unauthorized personnel will not have access to client files. Client files will be retained for 7 years after the close of the client file.

Without a Release of Confidential Information, client records can only be accessed by non-agency personnel with court subpoenas. In the event of a subpoena, DVSAS is legally obligated to provide requested records or testimony. Staff will make every effort to contact the client to notify them of the subpoenaed request and use available resources to maintain client confidentiality.

For the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of our services, certain client information is collected and documented including: demographic information, identified needs, and any services received. This information is kept in secured client files and a secured agency database. Non-identifying information is then used to generate statistical reports for staff, the Board of Directors, and funding sources. At times, funding agencies may review client records in order to verify data. Any person reviewing the files will sign a confidentiality agreement before being permitted to access the files.

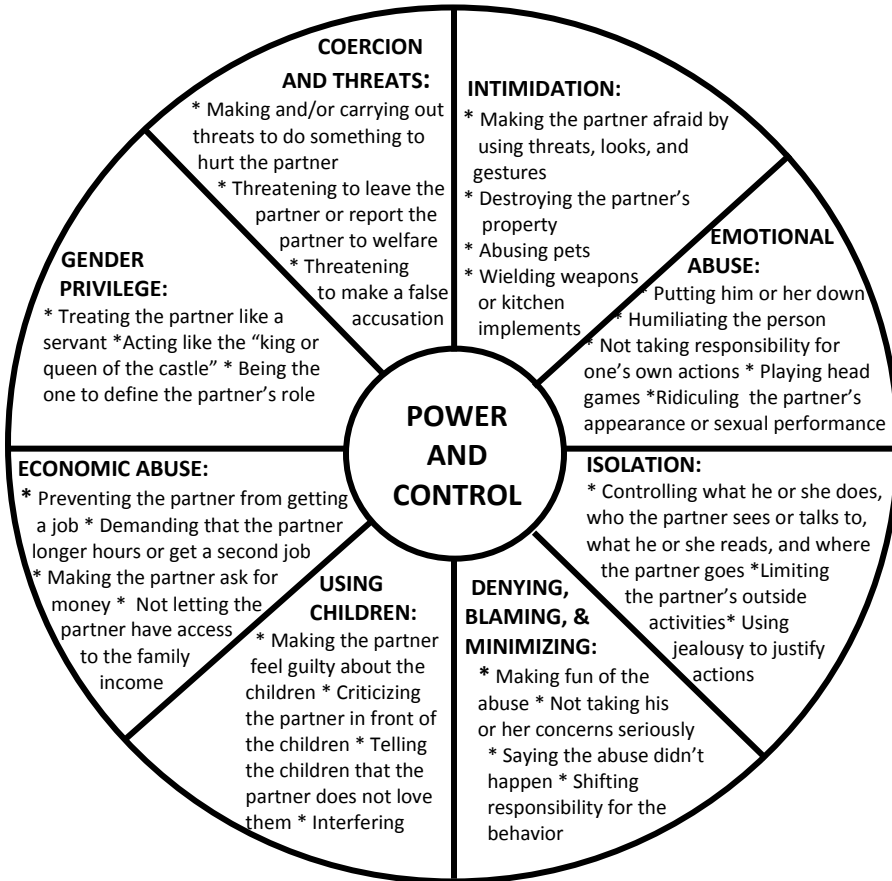
Clients participating in agency related public appearances or activities that would require disclosure of identity as DVSAS clients will be asked to sign a waiver.

What is Domestic Violence?

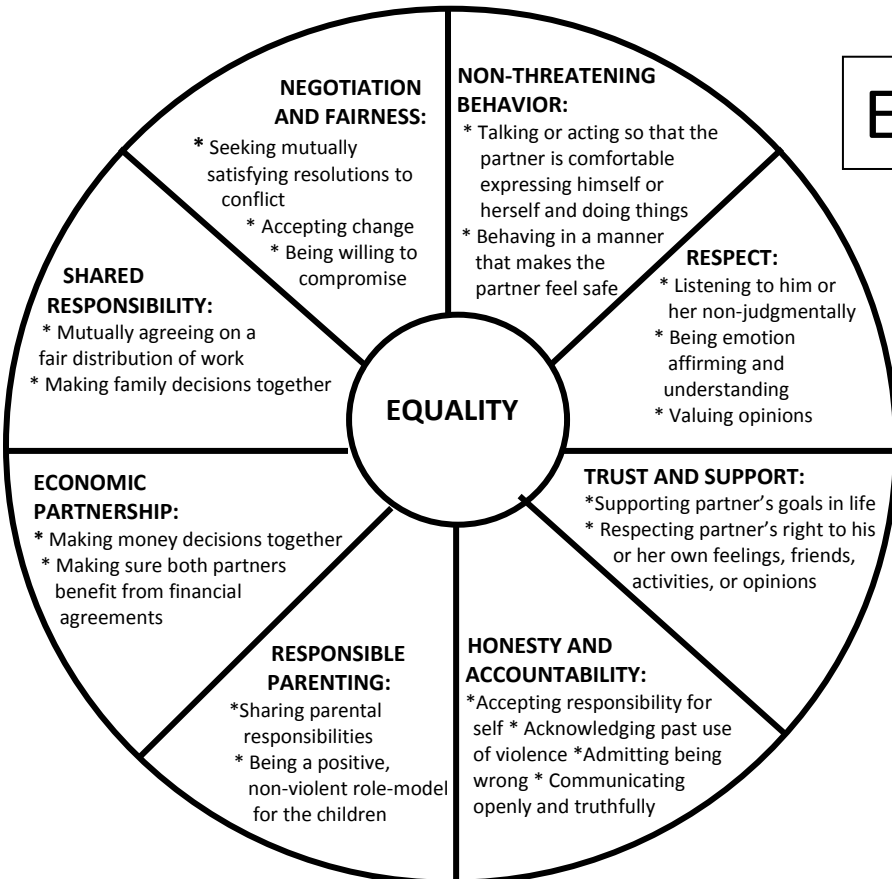
- ❖ Domestic violence is not consensual.
- ❖ It is a systematic pattern of behavior used by an individual to establish coercive control over an intimate partner.
- ❖ Abusers believe that they are entitled to control their partner.
- ❖ Domestic violence may consist of physical, sexual, psychological, and/or emotional abuse.
- ❖ Often the abusive behavior becomes more frequent and severe over time.
- ❖ Acts of domestic violence may be committed by both adults and adolescents.
- ❖ Domestic violence can occur in **any** intimate partner relationship—be it a dating relationship or marriage, same-sex relationship or opposite-sex relationship, current or former relationships.
- ❖ There is no typical survivor of domestic violence. Survivors include individuals of all:
 - Ages
 - Sexes
 - Races
 - Cultural Backgrounds
 - Religions
 - Sexual Orientations
 - Family Backgrounds
 - Education Levels
 - Occupations
 - Socioeconomic Status
 - Personality Types

The only person/thing responsible for the abuse is the abusive partner.

Power and Control Wheel



Equality Wheel



Types of Domestic Violence

Emotional/Psychological Abuse: Emotional and psychological abuse refers to when one partner degrades or belittles the other or makes repetitive accusations that the other is stupid, unattractive, a bad parent, unfaithful, or similar faults. Although emotional, psychological, and financial abuses may not always be considered criminal behaviors, *they are forms of domestic violence* and could possibly lead to/occur with other forms of abuse.

Controlling with Body Language and Gestures: Body language and gestures can be used to maintain power and control over the victim. Body language may show the victim that the abuser is angry and that abuse will soon occur. Body language and gestures can also be a way of controlling the victim in a public setting, as the behavior of the abuser may seem normal to others, but indicates to the victim that abuse will occur when they get home.

Sexual Abuse: Abusers may view their victims as sexual objects. Sexual acts that occur in a relationship become abusive when they are committed without the consent of all partners. Force and/or violence may be used or threatened if the partner does not agree to the sexual activity. When a person submits to sexual acts out of fear or coercion, it is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse that occurs within an intimate relationship is sometimes called intimate partner sexual violence.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse, or battering, can range from mild to life-threatening or even lethal acts of violence. Physical abuse often, but not always, begins with acts that are believed to be trivial. However, it can escalate in severity and frequency over time. The violence is used by the abuser to establish and maintain control over the victim.

“Crazy-Making”: A form of emotional abuse, crazy-making occurs when the abuser finds ways to make the victim question his/her own sanity and/or concept of self. This may include moving around or hiding the victim’s possessions so that the victim begins to believe he/she is unable to keep track of things. (An abuser may also try to defeat the victim by convincing him/her that what he/she felt was his/her own personal strengths are actually weaknesses, such as making the victim believe that he/she is selfish rather than independent.)

Reproductive Coercion: A form of abuse in which a partner uses behaviors to maintain power and control in a relationship surrounding issues of reproductive health. This can include attempting to impregnate a partner against her wishes, controlling outcomes of a pregnancy and interfering with or controlling birth control methods. This allows an abuser to establish and maintain power and control over another person’s decision making and inhibits a survivor’s autonomy over their own body.

Acts of Emotional, Physical, Sexual and Economic Abuse

The following list identifies a series of behaviors often demonstrated by batterers and abusive people. All of the following forms of abuse, psychological, economic and physical, come from the abuser's desire for power and control. This list may help people to recognize if their situation is a violent one. The more of the following behaviors that apply, the more dangerous and abusive the situation may be.

- **Destructive Criticism/Verbal Abuse:** Name-calling, mocking, accusing, blaming, yelling, swearing, making humiliating remarks and/or gestures.
- **Pressure Tactics:** Rushing you to make decisions through "guilt-tripping" and other forms of intimidation.
- **Abusing Authority:** Always claiming to be right, telling you what to do, making all the big decisions.
- **Disrespect:** Interrupting, changing topics, not listening or responding, twisting your words, putting you down in front of others.
- **Abusing Trust:** Lying, withholding information, cheating, being obsessively jealous.
- **Breaking Promises:** Not following through on agreements, not taking a fair share of responsibility, refusing to help with childcare or housework.
- **Emotional Withholding:** Not expressing emotions, not giving support or attention, not respecting feelings or opinions.
- **Blaming, Minimizing, Denying:** Making light of behavior/abuse and not taking concerns seriously, saying the abuse did not happen, shifting responsibility for abusive behavior.
- **Self-Destructive Behavior:** Abusing drugs/alcohol, threatening suicide or other forms of self-harm, deliberately doing or saying things that will have negative consequences.
- **Isolation:** Preventing or making it difficult to see friends or relatives, monitoring phone calls, telling you where you can and cannot go.
- **Economic Control:** Interfering with your work or not letting you work, refusing to give you money, continuously taking money, taking the car keys and/or the car, threatening to report you to welfare or other social service agencies.
- **Intimidation:** Making angry or threatening gestures, use of physical size to intimidate, blocking doorway during arguments, shouting, reckless driving.
- **Destruction:** Destroying possessions, furniture, punching walls, throwing and/or breaking objects.
- **Threats:** Making and/or carrying out threats to hurt you or others.
- **Birth Control:** Use of coercion to partake in birth control or coercion and threats to prevent use of birth control.
- **Sexual Violence:** Degrading treatment based on your sex or sexual orientation, using force or coercion to obtain sex or perform sexual acts, nagging or harassing until you give in to sexual acts.
- **Physical Violence:** Violent behavior towards you and the children or pets, slapping, punching, grabbing, kicking, choking, pushing, biting, burning, stabbing, shooting.
- **Weapons:** Use or threatening the use of weapons, keeping weapons around that frighten you, threatening or attempting to kill you and those you love.
- **Stalking and Monitoring:** Tracking you physically (e.g., following you, driving by your house, etc.) or electronically (e.g., harassing phone calls, texts, emails, etc.).
- **Denying Physical Needs:** Preventing/limiting your sleep, food/ liquid consumption, and cleanliness habits

Dynamics of Domestic Violence: Lenore Walker's "The Cycle of Violence"

Abuse often occurs in the context of something that we call the *Cycle of Violence*. We have found that even though every relationship is unique, abusive relationships often follow similar cycles. In 1979, Lenore Walker interviewed 1500 abused women. She found that woman after woman described the same kind of cycle in her relationship. She called this the cycle of violence.

TENSION BUILDING STAGE: We start the cycle in this relationship at the "okay" stage. The couple is basically okay, interactions are positive or close. Then, as "real life" sets in, tensions start building. We call this the tension building stage. These tensions may be anything from a bad day to major life changes like pregnancy or job loss. It's good to note here that all relationships have periods of tension. In healthy relationships, the couple may disagree or argue, but both have equal power in the relationship. In abusive relationships, the abusers' desire for power and control underlie anger and blaming. The tension continues to escalate. Survivors often describe feeling like they're "walking on eggshells" during this time.

CRISIS PHASE: Ultimately, there is an explosion or battering incident. Abusers may hit, attack, verbally assault, threaten, or scream at their partners. Many people wrongly believe that abuse occurs because someone is so angry or so drunk that they lose control of themselves. We hear comments like, "if she hadn't kept nagging me I wouldn't have lost my temper," or "I was so out of it, I didn't know what I was doing." In reality, abusers TAKE CONTROL when they commit abuse. They take control of the immediate situation, their partner, their physical space and usually the outcome of the situation. Domestic violence is a crime of power and control, not passion out of control.

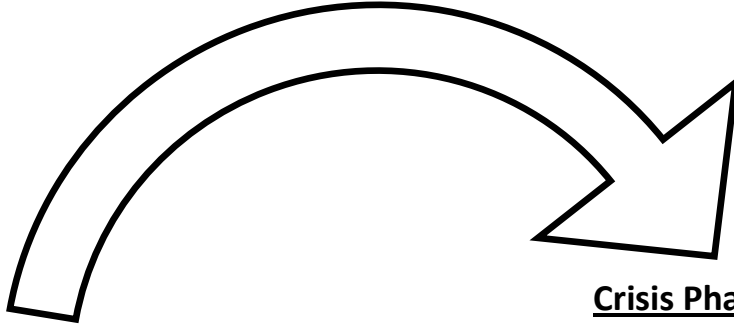
CALM STAGE: After the explosion comes the honeymoon or calm stage. The abuser is likely to have experienced a physiological release of tension. The abuser is frequently sorry, feeling guilty and willing to try anything to make up. There may be flowers or gifts, dates and romance as in the beginning of the relationship. The couple may even have sex in an attempt to reestablish intimacy and security after the explosion (although this sexual activity may still be coerced or forced). The abuser may also blame the survivor for "having to hit him/her" and may minimize what just happened. The survivor may be in shock, upset, and/or possibly hurt. The survivor may be confused and feel guilty that somehow he/she may have caused it. The survivor may want to believe the abuser's promises. Both partners may deny how bad the abuse was and that it could happen again. The survivor may not want the relationship to end; he/she may just want the abuse to end. In this stage, the increased intimacy and promises to get help or never do it again may give the survivor hope that things might change.

After a while, the loving stage fades again and the cycle starts once more. They both may believe that it will never happen again, that it was a one-time occurrence. The couple may convince themselves that each incident is isolated and unrelated to the next. There are two things we know about the cycle:

1. Without intervention, this cycle does not get better; it usually becomes more frequent.
2. The violence may escalate over time. Without intervention, the abuse may get worse, and the calm stage may become less apologetic. Eventually the calm stage may drop out entirely. When crisis callers describe a cycle of violence with no calm stage, we know she/he is possibly in a great deal of danger.

Cycle of Domestic Violence

Adapted from Lenore Walker. The Battered Woman. 1979

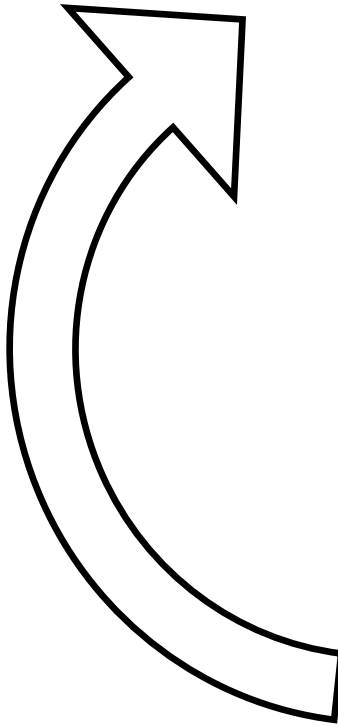


Tension Building Phase

- May last for weeks and months
- Stress builds and communication breaks down
- Victim may feel like he/she is “walking on eggshells” around abuser
- “Minor” violence/abuse occurs; this abuse may steadily increase
- Family may deny or minimize abuse and blame external factor

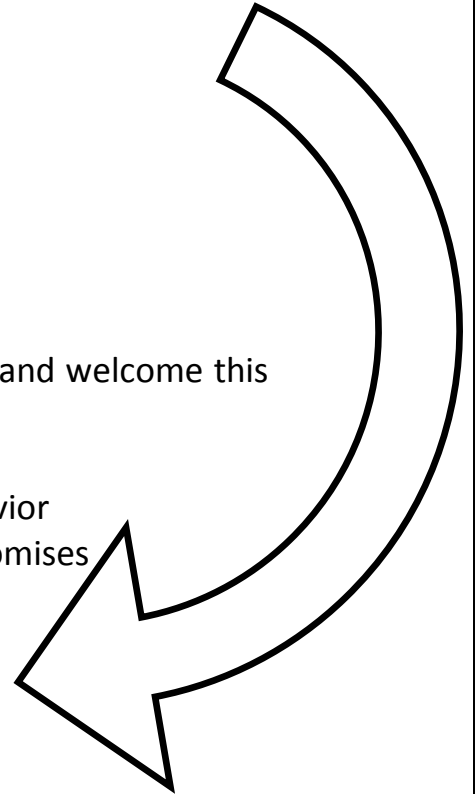
Crisis Phase

- May last 2-24 hours, or a few days
- High anxiety
- Major violence occurs
- Explosive, acute, unpredictable violence
- There may be serious injuries, including death
- Abuser blames victim
- Victim accommodates in order to survive



Calm Phase

- May last for days or weeks
- All are relieved that the crisis is past and welcome this “honeymoon stage”
- Abuser may be extremely remorseful
- Abuser may display kind, loving behavior
- Victim is worn down and accepts promises and gifts
- The abuser and victim bond again
- Family wants to believe that violence won't recur
- Survival via denial and negotiation



Safety Planning

Safety plans help survivors anticipate and respond to the dangers they face in abusive relationships. Such plans are useful regardless of whether or not you plan to leave the relationship. Some safety planning considerations are listed below. If you would like more assistance, DVSA offers safety planning services 24 hours a day.

Safety plans are not just for leaving your relationship.

Safety plans can be made for a variety of situations: for dealing with an emergency, such as when you are threatened with a physical assault or an assault has occurred; for continuing to live with or to date a partner who has been abusive; or for protecting yourself after you have ended a relationship with an abusive partner.

Use what you already know.

If you are being abused, you probably know more about safety planning and risk assessment than you might realize. Being in a relationship with an abusive partner – and surviving – requires considerable skill and resourcefulness. Any time you do or say something as a way to protect yourself or your children, you are assessing risk and enacting a safety plan. You do it all the time. It's just not always a conscious process.

Think it through.

It can be a helpful safety strategy to evaluate risks and make safety plans in a more intentional way. It is beneficial to consider logistics and specific barriers to your safety (e.g., technology, employment, finances). Such specific planning is helpful whether you are currently with your partner or have ended the relationship and whether you choose to use the available services system or involve the police.

Be aware of dangers.

If you are planning to leave your partner or have already left, be aware that batterers often escalate their violence during times of separation. At such times, your risk of harm increases, including serious and life-threatening injury. Making a separation safety plan can help reduce the risks to you and your children. These factors may also increase the risk of danger to you: suicide threat of abuser; homicide threat of abuser; abuser is unemployed; children in the home are not biologically his.

Evaluate your options.

Only you can judge who it's safe to tell about your situation and who to ask for help. Sometimes people who don't have good information about domestic violence respond to survivors in ways that aren't helpful, even when they mean well. On the other hand, you might feel more comfortable asking for help from someone you know. It's your decision. The important thing is for you to identify all the people who might be willing and able to help you. Make a list of their phone numbers and keep it with you for easy reference.

Plan Ahead

You don't have to wait for an emergency to ask for help. In fact, it's a good idea to talk to people who can help before there's a crisis. Find out what they are willing and able to do for you. That way, you'll know in advance if you have a place to stay, a source of financial assistance, or a safe person to keep copies of important papers.

Facts about Domestic Violence

- **Domestic abuse happens - more than many people think.** Every year, women experience approximately 4.8 million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes. Men experience about 2.9 million intimate partner related physical assaults. (National Violence Against Women Survey, 2000). The majority of violence against women (64%) is committed by an intimate partner (National Violence Against Women Survey, 2000). One out of every four American women report that they have been physically abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives (National Violence Against Women Survey, 2000). Moreover, domestic violence is drastically underreported (US. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Family Violence Statistics," 2005).
- **Abuse comes in many forms:** physical, verbal, emotional/psychological, and sexual (RCW 26.50.010). Abuse is not just physical. In fact, many survivors report that some of the worst abuse they suffered was emotional abuse (Lenore Walker, "The Battered Woman").
- Domestic abuse can be perpetrated against a person of any gender. **However, the majority of survivors are women.** Among all female murder victims in 2008, approximately 35% were killed by husbands and boyfriends. Approximately 2% of the male victims were murdered by wives or girlfriends (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008).
- **Domestic violence can occur in any setting.** Women and men of all cultures, races, occupations, and ages are abused. Abusers can include husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends, lovers, and/or partners. Many abusers are well respected in their communities and professions.
- Domestic violence is not about love or an abuser being "out of control." Rather, **abuse is the establishment of control and fear that occurs in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse.** The abuser uses acts of violence and other behaviors (intimidation, threats, and isolation) to coerce and control the other person. (March of Dimes, 1999).
- **Domestic violence has serious consequences.** Survivors of domestic violence are often severely injured: in 1999, women reportedly made 486,151 visits to hospital emergency rooms to treat injuries sustained from intimate partner rape and physical assault (National Violence Against Women Survey, 2000). In 2008, 1,069 women were murdered by their husbands or boyfriends (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008).
- Leaving an abuser is not easy. **Many factors prevent battered women from leaving their abuser,** such as finances, children, religious/cultural beliefs, hope for change in relationship, embarrassment, and threat of greater harm. Women often experience a great safety risk when they attempt to leave their abusers.

- **Survivors do not get involved in abusive relationships due to low self-esteem.** Many traditional theories presumed that individuals with adequate self-esteem would not “allow” themselves to be abused by intimate partners or spouses. In fact, there is little support for the theory that low self-esteem causes victims to become involved in abusive relationships; however, some victims may experience a decrease in self-esteem as a result of being abused, since perpetrators frequently degrade, humiliate, and criticize victims.
- **Abuse does not occur because of alcohol or drug use.** However, drug/alcohol use is often used as an excuse for domestic violence. Substance abuse may increase the frequency or severity of violent episodes in some cases (Jillian & Scott, 1996). Because substance abuse does not cause domestic violence, requiring batterers to attend only substance abuse treatment programs will not effectively end the violence. Such programs may be useful in conjunction with other programs, such as domestic violence perpetrator treatment (<http://www.abanet.org/domviol/myths.html>).
- **Perpetrators do not abuse their partners/spouses because they are under a lot of stress or unemployed.** Since domestic violence cuts across socioeconomic lines, abuse cannot be attributed to unemployment or poverty.

Local Domestic Violence Statistics

Bellingham-Whatcom County Statistics

These **2006** statistics are from the Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence report *Domestic Violence in Whatcom County 2001-2006*.

- ◆ Total 2006 law enforcement domestic violence responses: 2,921
- ◆ Law enforcement agencies reported a total of 1,387 Domestic Violence offenses.
- ◆ Law enforcement responded to 1,534 verbal domestic incidents* that did not result in arrests.
- ◆ There were 1,136 domestic violence-related bookings in Whatcom County Jail (20% of total bookings)
- ◆ Approximately 14% of all reported criminal offenses were domestic violence offenses (a trend consistent within the past few years).
- ◆ 332 domestic violence Protection Orders were filed in the Whatcom County Courts.
- ◆ 3,237 domestic violence victims were served by DVSAS.
- ◆ 273 women and children sought emergency shelter to escape a domestic violence situation.

*Verbal domestics represent incidents where law enforcement determines that no physical assault has occurred, and/or where no other conditions are met that warrant arrest.

Washington State Statistics

From the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chief's reports *Crime in Washington 2005, 2006 and 2007 Annual Reports*. These statistics include all Washington State counties; however, not every agency in Washington responded to this survey. Simple assault and protection order violations are not included in these numbers.

- ◆ In **2007**, 48,102 domestic violence offenses were reported by law enforcement agencies.
- ◆ In **2006**, 49,980 domestic violence offenses were reported by law enforcement agencies.
- ◆ In **2005**, 53,770 domestic violence offenses were reported by law enforcement agencies.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Remember, these statistics represent only the domestic violence incidents that were reported to law enforcement agencies. We know that domestic violence is underreported and many abusive tactics do not meet the legal definition of domestic violence. The state defines domestic violence as:

RCW 26.50.010 "Domestic violence" means: (a) Physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or the infliction of fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury or assault, between family or household members; (b) sexual assault of one family or household member by another; or (c) stalking as defined in RCW 9A.46.110 of one family or household member by another family or household member.

At DVSAS, we consider domestic violence to be a systematic pattern of behavior used by an individual to establish and maintain coercive control over one's intimate partner. Domestic violence consists of physical, sexual, psychological, and/or emotional abuse.

Legal Options for Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence Protection Orders:

- This type of order typically applies to persons who are married or have been married, dating or have dated, live together, and/or have children in common. Sometimes the media and general public mistakenly refer to domestic violence protection orders as restraining orders. However, there are several differences between the two types of orders (see next page for more information on restraining orders).
- If a judge or commissioner deems the situation emergent, a temporary two-week order will be issued. During this 14-day period, the temporary order remains in full effect. A hearing will be set within 14 days and the respondent (abuser) will be given notice of that hearing. If the petitioner (survivor/victim) does not appear in court on the day of the hearing, the protection order will be dropped. If the hearing is held, the court will decide if the order should be made effective for one year or longer.
- **Protection orders CAN:**
 - Order the respondent not to threaten or hurt the petitioner.
 - Order the respondent not to enter the petitioner's residence or place of work.
 - Give one parent temporary custody of the children.
 - Set a temporary schedule for visitation with minor child(ren).
 - Grant the petitioner possession of essential personal effects (e.g., clothing and toiletries).
 - Order the respondent to leave a shared residence.
 - Grant the petitioner use of a vehicle.
 - Order the respondent to attend counseling.
- **Protection Orders CANNOT**
 - Order child support and establish permanent child custody.
 - Order maintenance (alimony).
 - Assign property to either party.

Domestic Violence Protection Orders for Minors:

- **Can a Protection Order be obtained against a minor (under eighteen)?**
 - Only if the minor is at least sixteen (16) years old and involved in a dating relationship with the petitioner, or if the minor is a spouse, former spouse, or the parent of a child you have in common.
- **Can adults seeking protection ask that this protection extend to their minor children?**
 - Yes. The Domestic Violence Protection Act states that "a person may petition for relief on behalf of himself or herself *and* on behalf of minor family or household members."
- **What if a minor child is being abused, but the parent is not?**
 - Minors sixteen (16) years of age and older can file a petition on their own behalf. Parents may file a petition on behalf of minor children under the age of sixteen. Often Child Protection Services (CPS) uses the Order for Protection as a referral for adults seeking protection for minor children. Parents must substantiate allegations that a child has been abused by another family or household member. Hospital reports, affidavits, or names of witnesses, the name of the CPS caseworker, etc., may/can be included in the petition, or presented at the full hearing.

Temporary Order for Protection:

- If it is considered emergent, a temporary order that is good for up to 14 days will be issued. During this 14-day period, the temporary order remains in full force and effect unless the petitioner files an order to terminate. A hearing will be set within 14 days and the respondent will be given notice of that hearing.

No-Contact Order:

- This type of order is filed by the court as part of a criminal action (e.g., following an arrest). Generally this order does not last as long as a protection order and it does not award custody, establish visitation, or order counseling. This order is intended to protect the victim while the criminal case is going on. However, the court may change the order or let it expire.
- Since this order does not award temporary custody or visitation arrangement with the children, many petitioners also file a civil Order of Protection to receive such relief.

Anti-Harassment Order:

- This type of order typically applies to situations when the persons are not related or married to one another, have not lived together, and/or do not have children in common (e.g., neighbor disputes).
- This type of order is helpful when a person is being harassed, but has not been assaulted or threatened with physical harm.
- It is very important to document a pattern of harassment, beginning with the most recent incident. Be as accurate as possible with dates and events.

Restraining Order:

- This is broader than a domestic violence protection order. It can deal with property issues, child support, spousal support, domestic violence issues, and temporary custody issues.
- A restraining order is normally filed as part of a marriage dissolution, a paternity case, or other sorts of family law cases. If the petitioner is concerned about preventing the respondent from disposing of assets during separation, getting a restraining order may help.

Other Legal Resources:

CLEAR LINE: 1-888-201-1014 - Open to low income people for non-criminal legal problems. Attorneys and paralegals provide general legal answers and referrals

NORTHWEST WOMEN'S LAW CENTER: 206-621-7691 - Open to all people, including men. Attorneys and paralegals provide general legal answers and referrals

WASHINGTON LAW HELP: washingtonlawhelp.org - Legal education materials and tools that give you basic information on a number of legal problems, and in some cases, detailed instructions and forms to help you represent yourself in court. Find help with Family Law, Housing, Elder Law, Civil Rights, Native American Issues, Domestic Violence, Employment Rights, Criminal, Health and more.

**For more information and free legal advocacy, contact:
Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County
Helpline: (360) 715-1563 (Local) or (877) 715-1563 (Toll Free)**

Our Domestic Violence Services

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services is part of a network of agencies working to meet the needs of people affected by domestic violence. Domestic violence services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week through our 24-hour helpline: (360) 715-1563 or (877) 715-1563. Walk-in services are available Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm. All services are free and confidential. Advocacy is provided by trained volunteers and staff. Our advocacy services are tailored to fit the needs of each survivor, whether the abusive relationship is past or current. Services provided include:

Individual Support

24-Hour Helpline: Advocacy counselors provide support and information through the helpline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Advocacy counseling sessions: Advocacy counseling is available to clients who want to meet one-on-one with an advocacy counselor. Sessions are available on a walk-in basis during business hours. Clients may also meet with an advocacy counselor on a regular, ongoing basis.

Safety planning: When a client feels that they or their children are in danger, advocacy counselors can help to assess the situation and create a safety plan. Safety plans can be created whether during or after an abusive relationship and can include issues such as physical safety, planning to leave, and stalking.

Shelter, medical, and emergency referrals: Because domestic violence and sexual assault can impact many areas of a victim's life, advocacy counselors make referrals to other service providers when necessary.

Assistance accessing public benefits: An off-site advocacy counselor is housed at the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to help women affected by domestic violence access public benefits.

Support during medical exams: When an individual undergoes a sexual assault forensic exam at St. Joseph Hospital, advocacy counselors are dispatched to support the victim and family or friends through the process. Advocates also provide support during other exams related to domestic violence or sexual assault and can help victims to access necessary services.

Legal Support

Reporting to law enforcement: If clients decide to report domestic violence or sexual assault to law enforcement, advocacy counselors can help guide clients through the process. Law enforcement officers are often able to take reports at the DVSAS office, where clients are able to make the report in a comfortable atmosphere with the support of an advocacy counselor.

Assistance with filing protection orders: Advocacy counselors are available to help clients complete protection order forms, file necessary paperwork, and prepare for court hearings. Assistance is available on a walk-in basis during business hours.

Court preparation and accompaniment: Legal advocates support clients through court processes related to domestic violence and sexual assault, including child custody hearings, trials, and interviews. Support includes preparing clients for court, attending court hearings, post-hearing debriefing, and case management.

Attorney referrals: Advocacy counselors make referrals to appropriate legal resources including attorneys and legal aid when clients are in need of further legal assistance.

Group Support

Adult and teen support groups: Support groups are held for adults and teens at DVSAS and off-site at local schools. New Beginnings Support Group is offered twice-weekly for women who have experienced or are currently experiencing domestic violence. Connections is a 12-week group for men and women who have experienced sexual assault. Teen groups are held throughout the school year for girls who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

Children's groups: A parallel children's group is offered during New Beginnings and Connections. The children of group participants have the opportunity to play in a safe, child-appropriate environment while increasing social skills, learning positive conflict resolution, and processing their own difficult feelings.

Parenting after violence program: For women who have experienced domestic violence, parenting can be a challenge. This group helps women to understand the effects of domestic violence on themselves and their children, learn healthy discipline techniques, and explore their parental role.

Financial empowerment classes: Increasing financial literacy can lead to empowerment and independence. These classes help women to gain financial knowledge, identify economic abuse, and better understand their financial situation.

Education and Training

Teen violence prevention programs: Interactive violence prevention programs are offered at local middle schools, high schools, and youth organizations. These programs help teens to understand the dynamics of abusive and healthy relationships, explore consent, and develop confidence in setting boundaries. The Empowerment Project, a three-session curriculum specially designed for ages 13-18, also includes a session for teens to read real-life survivor stories and utilize journaling and art to process their reactions.

Professional trainings and education: As a leader in the community, DVSAS provides trainings and education to local business, organizations, and service providers on domestic violence and sexual assault. These trainings are focused on a wide variety of topics, including sexual harassment in the workplace, medical provider trainings, working with victims of violence, and responding to children and teens who have experienced violence.

For more information, or to speak with an advocacy counselor, please call:

24-Hour Helpline: 360-715-1563 or 1-877-715-1563

In Her Own Words

The following women share their own personal experiences of domestic violence - in their very own words. As shown in the stories below, no two experiences of domestic violence are exactly the same. However there are several commonalities between the subsequent narratives.

My boyfriend of some years raped me. I was stunned, numb, and deeply conflicted. I was in extreme emotional pain. I felt as if my identity had spun lose and I was just dangling in the universe; I had no sense of self. I didn't know what to think or how to think about it. I started to eat all the time just to try to numb my feelings more. I was disoriented, lost, and deeply troubled. I never told anyone because I was so confused about what had happened and I felt too vulnerable. I realize now that I felt extremely angry, but I didn't feel it then. I disconnected from myself and from others. I felt like I was two people, one was acting in a show, the other was lost in the dark. I was isolated and alone. I endured more abuse from this man - I didn't really know what abuse was at that time and besides that, I always felt I had caused it. Today I am no longer confused about what happened. It was rape. His patterns of abuse were verbal, emotional, mental, and sexual. At the time it seemed normal.

I have since learned that rape is a crime; it is an act of violence, control, and power. I have learned that I did not deserve it, ask for it or cause it. I am no less of a valuable human being because of it. I don't have to be two people today. Today I know what happened and it was not my fault.

- Anonymous

My family tells me I overreact... I'll stop "over reacting" when everyone else starts reacting at all. It took me even longer to speak the words that I had been assaulted. It took even longer to cry, and to let myself believe that I am entitled to a world that does not hurt. I began to believe in change. I began to believe in a world where women (and men) are safe. I began to see that there are men who are not violent, and who work for equality and change, too. I began to see the strength of so many women, who gave me strength to fight. My voice may shake, my hands may tremble, and I may cry, but my voice will be heard, for myself and for others who are not yet ready or able. I will forever speak out and work to create a world where women are safe, valued, and loved. Too many women have stories.

- Anonymous

I am what might seemingly appear the antithesis of a victim. I came from two loving parents, had a good education, and worked a professional job. I married a man from wealthy background, who had a professional career. By all outward accounts I had it all: a nice house, a handsome and charming husband, a nice car, and a good job.

But behind closed doors, it was very different. It happened gradually over a number of years. The "checking in" to see what I was doing, turned into moment by moment accounts of where I was, who I was talking to, and who I was allowed to see. Friend after friend was deemed unworthy to the point of no support system for me. One wrong move and it could mean screaming, tearing doors off hinges, punching out a wall or a windshield. Then it turned physical against me: pushing, shoving, grabbing, bruising. It took a very violent episode against me physically to muster up the courage to leave. In that moment it all clicked. This is not LOVE. I did not cause this. I cannot fix this relationship, this man, his anger. I can fix me. That was over 16 years ago.

It takes immense courage and inner strength to endure personal violence, whether verbal or physical. I am living proof that you can harness that same courage and inner strength to get out, rise above, and break the cycle of violence. It may seem impossible to someone going through it. My advice is this – Don't ever leave your personal worth in someone else's hands. You are worthy of much, much more than you have been lead to believe.

- Anonymous

Further Reading Resources

Books:

Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men. Bancroft & Lundy, (2002)

Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women who Broke Free. Weiss, (2004)

It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence. Dugan & Hock, (2013)

Healing the Trauma of Domestic Violence: A Workbook for Women. McCaig & Kubany, (2004)

Web Sites:

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County

<http://www.DVSAS.org>

The Northwest Network of Trans, Bi, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse

<http://www.nwnetwork.org>

Women of Color Network

<http://womenofcolornetwork.org/>

Washington State Office of Crime Victim Assistance

<http://www.ocva.wa.gov>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<http://www.ncadv.org>

Futures Without Violence (Formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund)

<http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org>

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<http://www.wscadv.org>