PARTNER ABUSE
Prisoners of Fear

It may start when you’re dating. You notice your partner’s sudden outbursts of temper, a sneer in his voice or a little too much possessiveness. As time goes on, his shouting and name-calling turn into pushing and shoving. Once he uses actual physical violence, a pattern starts. The cycle of abuse has begun.

Here are some frightening facts:

- One-fifth to one-third of U.S. women will be physically abused by a partner or ex-partner sometime in their lives. Over 10% of such abuse results in injuries that require hospitalization or emergency room treatment.
- Every 15 seconds, a woman is beaten by her partner. Battering claims more lives than muggings, rapes, and automobile accidents combined. This means that many women are safer out on the streets than they are at home!
- One in 12 pregnant women is battered. These women are four times more likely to have low birthweight babies and twice as likely to miscarry.
- More than half of the women murdered in the United States are killed by a current or former husband or boyfriend.
- While women commit only 8% of all U.S. homicides, approximately half of them are against partners with a history of partner abuse.
- Family violence leads to 100,000 days of hospitalizations, 30,000 emergency room visits, and 40,000 physician visits each year.
- Most cases of domestic violence are not reported because the victim is afraid or ashamed, so the pattern of abuse continues until one day someone dies.

Date Rape: Often the First Step Toward Partner Abuse

About 1 in 10 females will have forced sexual encounters while on dates. This is due, in part, to the mixed messages children get while growing up, equating “scoring” with being masculine and “keeping the boy from going too far” as feminine. The male wants to prove his manhood, and the female walks a fine line between being called a “prude” and a “tramp.”

Television shows and movies also encourage boys to push for what they want, and give girls the message that, to be popular, they must give in to the boy.

Many female college students report some type of sexual assault, and probably twice as many – especially younger females – do not report it.

A pattern of “roughing up” women can begin early on and continue throughout an abuser’s life. If you are dating, be aware if the person you date:

1. Says abusive things to you
2. Damages your self-esteem
3. Limits your freedom so you are cut off from friends or family
4. Asks embarrassing personal questions in front of others
5. Tries to push you into having a physical relationship you don’t want
6. Has a hot temper and behaves unreasonably
7. Doesn’t care about your feelings
8. Refers to women (men) in disrespectful ways.

Partner abuse also involves women who behave in the ways listed above and who do bodily harm to men. Abuse can also occur in same-sex couples.
What Is the "Battered Woman Syndrome?"

You can't leave the house because of what he would do to you if you were not there to take his frequent phone calls. When he comes home, you never know what his mood will be. Nothing you do is ever good enough to please him. He often tells you you are worthless, lazy, stupid and ugly, and that nobody else will ever want you. You wait on him hand and foot, and try to keep your young children away from him as much as possible because their crying sometimes sets off his terrible rage.

You have been to the emergency room at the local hospital half a dozen times in the past year and have told the doctors that you fell down some stairs and broke your arm or that you burned yourself with the iron. They seem to accept your lies. You have no friends to confide in because he won't let you have any. You can't even talk on the phone or answer the door when he's home unless he tells you it's OK. You are like a prisoner in your own house. In fact, many of your symptoms are similar to those described by soldiers who suffer from combat fatigue.

If you suffer from "Battered Woman Syndrome," you were already being abused before your partner ever laid a hand on you. Verbal and emotional abuse usually comes before physical abuse. It is used to break your spirit. By the time you are being battered regularly, you have probably become too dependent and afraid to escape.

Symptoms of "Battered Woman Syndrome"

1. Fear - You never feel safe or secure.
2. Shame - Your partner may involve you in substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, illegal activities, or sexual activities that make you uncomfortable.
4. Depression - You feel sad and trapped, unable to get free.
5. Guilt - You are made to feel that the situation is all your fault.
6. Isolation - You feel alone and are afraid to tell anyone about the abuse.
7. Inability to act - Your behavior doesn't get a reasonable response from your partner. This makes you give up and let him control you.
8. Poor physical condition - You may be exhausted, stressed, and perhaps hungry, as well as being physically hurt.
Three Classic Stages of the Abuse Pattern

1. The Tension-building Phase
   - The abused person (you) tries to keep things on an even keel.
   - Minor abuse—psychological, physical, or sexual—begins, although you manage to keep some control.
   - The abuser becomes more possessive and less reasonable.
   - You feel very angry, but try to keep the peace, not letting the anger show.

2. A Major Event of Battering
   - This can go on for several hours or days, and doesn’t have to have a triggering event—you may even be asleep when it begins.
   - You will recall details of the assault while the abuser will usually only remember feeling out of control. You will both blame the event on drugs, alcohol, or some other outside cause—anything other than that the abuser is sick.

3. The “Honeymoon Phase”
   - The abuser is ashamed and sorry and promises that the violence will never happen again.
   - The abuser is loving and affectionate, so you forgive.
   - Then the tension begins to build again.

Once the pattern starts, it will increase until abuse becomes a way of life. The battered person actually lets the abuser continue the violent behavior by forgiving, lying, and covering up for the batterer.

Profile of a Batterer

Certain things make it more likely that a person will become a batterer.

Batterers often:
- Have low self-esteem. They may try to raise it by drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or bullying others. Substance abuse is often blamed for causing partner abuse, but usually there is another cause for partner abuse—alcohol just makes the problem worse.
- Go into sudden rages, which the abused person cannot avoid because the rages have no real cause.
- Feel insecure and jealous. They try to balance this by controlling the victim and demanding perfection.
- Can be very charming and loving after an incident of battering has taken place. Sometimes the remorse is real, sometimes it is not.
- Have money trouble, may have trouble holding a job, or may be wanted by the law.
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How to Leave an Abusive Situation

Here are some actions that can help a battered woman (or man) get to safety. These may apply to you if you are the victim or to someone else who needs help.

**Getting Ready:**

1. If you are abused, you should talk with someone about the abuse and the fact that you and/or your children are in danger. You may be surprised to find that many people already thought there was a problem.

2. You should make a list of emergency phone numbers—of “safe houses,” abuse shelters, counseling agencies, and other places your mate might not think to look or might be unable to find. (Abuse shelters are not listed by address in the phone book. Their locations are kept secret so angry partners cannot find an escaping family.) Look in the yellow pages of a phone book, ask your doctor, or call the information desk at the library to get the phone numbers.

3. If you can’t drive and have no way of getting to a safe place, you should start putting aside money for cab fare and, if possible, for one night in a motel (until you can reach a shelter). Keep a change of clothing for yourself and your children at a neighbor’s house or at work.

4. Have an extra set of house keys and car keys made and hide them in a safe place. This should be somewhere handy in case you need them in a hurry, or your abuser hides all the other keys.

5. You can generally tell when the situation is about to reach the danger zone. When this happens, have your older children gather the younger ones and make a quick exit to safety with you.

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**Getting Help:**

Where to Go? Which Way to Turn?

The physical abuse has been getting worse, and now you fear for your life. But you have no family or friends nearby, and you have no money or job skills. You have small children at home who need you, and you feel worthless. Every day is a nightmare. You never know what will start his rages. You never know just how bad the beating may be this time. Sometimes you want to kill yourself. Sometimes you want to kill him! It all seems so hopeless...

At a time when many women have more rights and opportunities than ever before, it is hard to believe so many women are still being held prisoners in their own homes. Many are so used to feeling worthless, they need help just to form a plan of escape.

However, it’s not hopeless. If you are a battered woman, you can help yourself and your children. You do have choices, and there are programs, laws, systems, and people to help you rebuild your life.

No single plan works for everyone who is abused and needs to get out, but the important thing is to take that first step!
**Seeking Medical Help**

If you are battered on the day (or night) you finally decide to leave, you should go to a hospital emergency room or your family doctor as soon as possible. Even if you don’t know the doctor, you should be honest about how you were injured. Photos of recent injuries, as well as X-rays that show where past injuries—broken bones and so on—have healed, can be helpful if you decide to take legal action against the batterer.

**Seeking Legal Help**

Most battered persons file charges to get protection, but many of them drop the charges later on because they think they have “patched things up” with their batterers. Unfortunately, the pattern of abuse is not that easy to break.

The most effective way to stop the beatings is to arrest the batterer. But in the past, this did not usually happen. Instead, police tried to settle family-disturbance calls by separating the people for a cooling-off period.

*This is finally changing.*

In many states today, police may arrest a batterer if there is evidence of abuse, even if the victim does not press charges. Although the legal system is often slow, battering is now more widely seen as an issue to be dealt with by the legal process.

If you are battered, you may file a civil action or a criminal complaint. Civil actions include legal separation and suing for child custody, child support, and divorce. You may also ask for a temporary restraining order to keep the batterer away from you and your children. If your partner ignores the restraining order, he or she can be arrested.

You can file a criminal complaint as well as, or instead of, a civil action. A criminal complaint involves a police investigation and can lead to the arrest of the batterer. A judgment against a batterer in a criminal complaint can result in a jail term, or it can force the abuser to have counseling.
Seeking Financial Help

Many people who are battered feel they must stay in an abusive situation because they have no job skills and no source of income other than the batterer. Often, the abuser won’t allow the abused to go back to school or get a job because of the fear of losing control of the situation.

If you don’t have job skills, it’s important to get them. Federal programs and other help – like Aid to Families with Dependent Children or food stamps – are available. Look under “Social Services” in your phone book. Many family abuse shelters work with battered women to get training and jobs whenever possible.

When you leave an abusive situation, be sure to take any necessary documents – birth certificates, citizenship papers, social security cards – that you might need to apply for a job or financial aid.

Seeking Psychological Help

If you are battered, both you and the batterer need counseling. Often, a number of things must happen before the abuser will accept this fact. You can help yourself and your children by finding a good counselor and a support group of other battered persons. They can help you recover your sense of self-worth, which will help you make a better life.

Be sure not to change your mind once you have had the courage to leave the abusive situation. Do not go back just because the abuser says they will never do it again. Even if they promise to get counseling, wait until they have actually started before you think of going back to them. Sometimes, you can work things out with your abuser if they get counseling and change their behavior. Sometimes, you must go on alone.

There can be happy endings, but family violence is a pattern that doesn’t simply go away in one day. You must find out what causes it and what can be done to heal it.
Other Issues About Partner Abuse

When Men Are the Victims
Everything that abused women go through, abused men go through, too. Although the numbers of abused men are much lower, their hurt is just as real and they may feel they can’t defend themselves because their attackers are women.

Men are less likely than women to report partner abuse because they feel that they would be made fun of if anyone knew their partners had beaten them.

The following are resources for anyone who is being abused:

National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence
(800) 222-2000 or (202) 429-6695

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
(303) 839-1852

National Domestic Violence hotline
(800) 799-SAFE

National Victim Center
(800) FYI-CALL

When Children See Family Violence

In an abusive home, the battered person is often not the batterer’s only victim. Children in the household may also be abused. Even if the children are not being physically battered, the fact that they are seeing family violence will leave scars on their minds and emotions. They may grow up to become batterers themselves, or they may be fearful and withdrawn.

When you leave a batterer, be sure to get counseling for yourself and any children in the family, whether they were abused or not. Even adults who are grown and living away from home should get counseling if they saw family violence as children.