

# **Breaking the Silence:**

# Acknowledgements:

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Quantities of this publication are available by contacting the Nebraska Department of Social Services.



## Notes on Language:

Because the vast majority of abusers are male and their victims female, we refer to the abuser as he throughout this publication. However, battering occurs in lesbian relationships and among gay males, as well as among married and unmarried heterosexuals. The dynamics are the same and the use of language is certainly not intended to eliminate or ignore these victims.

## CHECKING IT OUT: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?

Yes No

- I am afraid of my spouse/partner.
- I cannot express my anger or my opinion for fear of my spouse/partner's reaction.
- I must always ask my spouse/partner for permission to see family or friends/spend money/buy something for myself, etc.
- I constantly manipulate myself, my children and my environment in order to make things just "so" for my spouse/partner.
- I sometimes feel numb inside.
- I try and try to please my spouse/partner only to find that my efforts still do not please him.
- I sometimes feel like I am living with two different people, a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde.
- I am confused about the differences in the way my spouse/partner views our relationship and the way I see it.
- I often feel totally alone.
- I am beginning to believe all the terrible things my spouse/partner says about me and accuses me of. Sometimes I am not sure what is real anymore. Maybe I'm going crazy.

Begin to trust your instincts about your situation. How do you feel about what is happening to you? If you feel that you are being emotionally and/or physically abused, you are probably right. If you haven't been sure, but answered "yes" to most of the questions above, you are probably a victim of your spouse/partner's abusive behavior.

**Identifying yourself as a victim does not mean that you are to blame for what is happening in any way.** Identifying yourself as a victim does not mean that you must leave the situation immediately. Your safety is what you should be most concerned about.

## SECTION ONE

# THE BEGINNING: FACING YOUR VICTIMIZATION

*“... I didn't want to admit that I was a battered woman, that these terrible things were really going on in my home. I felt dirty and ashamed, as though I had done something wrong. But when I did face it and say it: “I am a battered woman,” I found that there was help available to me and that the people who really cared for me did not turn away from me in embarrassment or disgust. It hurt to say those words, but once I did, I felt so much better. I felt like now I've faced what's really wrong and I can begin to do something about it.”*

— D.K., 34, survivor

Being physically or emotionally abused by a spouse/partner is a frightening and lonely experience. You may feel that you are the only person to whom this is happening. In reality, millions of women in the United States experience battering every year. Statistics indicate that a woman is battered every 18 seconds and one in every two women will be the victim of a violent encounter with her mate at some point in her life. Knowing that you are not the only one experiencing battering in an intimate relationship can help to free you from the shame and embarrassment you may be feeling and help you understand that the abuse does not occur because you are doing something “wrong” or that you do something to cause it to happen.

### **YOU ARE BEING BATTERED IF:**

- You have been slapped, shaken, pushed, bitten, punched, beaten, pinched, kicked, stabbed, had an object thrown at you, been hit with a weapon or shot...
- You have been forced to perform unwanted sex acts, raped, forced to have sex with others or to watch others, called demeaning sexual names...
- You have been threatened, accused unjustly of having affairs, constantly criticized, humiliated in public, called derogatory names, had your thoughts and feelings constantly ignored or denied...
- Your personal liberty has been restrained, you have no access to financial resources or part in making financial decisions, you have been isolated from friends and family members, prevented from seeking employment, denied proper medical care when ill or pregnant, been locked out of the house or abandoned in dangerous places...

- Your children have been abused to punish you, affection has been withheld as punishment, you have been forced to submit to reckless driving, property or pets that you value have been harmed or destroyed, you have been manipulated with lies, promises and contradictions...

*"...my kids and I spent so many nights in the car. About once a week, I'd put the kids in the car and drive off to avoid a beating. It seems crazy now, but for awhile it was a way of life . . . ."*  
--J.J., 29, a survivor

## **YOU ARE NO LESS A VICTIM BECAUSE . . .**

- the incidents of physical abuse seem minor when compared to those you have read about, seen on television or heard other women talk about. There really isn't a "better" or "worse" form of physical abuse; you can be severely injured as a result of being pushed, for example.
- the incidents of physical abuse have only occurred one or two times in the relationship. Studies indicate that if your spouse/partner has injured you on two occasions, it is likely he will continue to physically assault you...
- the physical assaults stopped when you became passive and gave up your right to express yourself as you desire, to move about freely and see others, and to make decisions. It is not a victory if you have to give up your rights as a person and a partner in exchange for not being assaulted!
- there has not been any physical violence. Many women are emotionally and verbally assaulted. This can be as equally frightening and painful as physical assault, and is often more confusing to try to understand.

**Abusive Behavior** is a pattern which often includes intimidation, isolation, lies, threats and verbal abuse in addition to physical attacks and/or the threat of physical violence. All are forms of battering and control should be taken seriously.

**RESEARCH ALSO SHOWS THAT, WHILE ANY VIOLENCE MAY BE INFREQUENT AND MINOR IN THE EARLY STAGES, IT WILL PROBABLY GET WORSE IN INTENSITY AND FREQUENCY AS TIME GOES ON.**

## **YOU ARE STILL A VICTIM IF:**

- you are not legally married to your abusive partner...
- you are in a lesbian relationship with someone who abuses you emotionally, physically or sexually...

- you have formally or legally ended your relationship but your ex-spouse/partner continues to behave in an abusive manner towards you.
- you are not living with your spouse/partner but he or she does behave towards you in an abusive way.

In the past, you may have tried to minimize or deny the violence — telling yourself and others that what is happening is not really serious or that it is only a minor problem in an otherwise good relationship. You may have hidden your injuries from family and friends. You may have been dishonest with doctors and others about the cause of injuries. If you are in a lesbian relationship, denial of the abuse may be compounded by the fear of disclosure about your relationship. Do not feel guilty about these actions; they are coping skills you have developed to help you survive. It is not uncommon for people to minimize and deny dangerous and traumatic situations in their lives.

You may also have thought at one time or another that you are partially responsible for the violence. You may have been told by others, especially your partner, that it is your fault. Batterers often try to promote the illusion that you “control” the violence — *This is **Not True***. The first step in understanding your situation is to put responsibility for the abuse where it belongs — with your partner.

**YOU DO NOT CAUSE YOUR MATE TO ABUSE YOU  
EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY OR SEXUALLY.  
YOUR ABUSER IS SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE.**

Abusive behavior usually springs from a combination of learned behavior and rigid stereotypical attitudes about male/female roles. As one batterer put it, “She couldn’t make me hit her, if I didn’t want to.” Women have also been given the primary responsibility of making intimate relationships successful. Traditionally, a woman’s role was seen as a caretaker one, that of keeping her mate and children happy and comfortable. This tradition is not one that serves us well — you cannot make everything okay by yourself. Such beliefs lead battered women to accept blame for the violence. We have all heard sayings such as “What did you do to deserve this?” or “If you would just be a better parent, spouse, cook, etc...this would not be happening.”

By refusing to accept responsibility for your partner’s abusive behavior and by ending the denial that you lived with for months or years, you can begin to make changes in how you feel about yourself and your situation. You may need to forgive yourself for past events and behaviors which produced guilt

and self-blame. Identifying yourself as a victim can be a difficult experience. However, to protect yourself and your children from further physical, emotional and sexual harm, you will need to begin making choices and changes. Consider thinking about yourself in new ways:

- **I am not to blame for being beaten and abused.**
- **I am not the cause of my partner's violent behavior.**
- **I do not like being abused and do not have to take it.**
- **I am an important human being.**
- **I deserve to be treated with respect.**
- **I do have power over my own life.**
- **I can decide for myself what is best for me.**
- **I can make changes in my life if I want to.**
- **I am not alone; I can ask others to help me.**
- **I am worth working for and changing for.**
- **I deserve to make my own life safe and healthy.**
- **I am a worthwhile person.**
- **As a human being and as a partner, I have rights.**
- **I can still love my partner and protect myself emotionally, sexually and physically.**
- **I can allow my partner to be responsible for himself.**

No one can force you to identify yourself as a victim of abuse. Only you can take this first step, although help is available to you in doing so. You must decide if your relationship is meeting your needs and if you are indeed being abused. Once you have taken that step, you have both the freedom and the responsibility to care about yourself.



**Not everything that is faced  
can be changed  
but nothing can be changed  
until it is faced.**

--Baldwin

Consider what rights you have in your relationship with your spouse/partner. The happiest, most fulfilling and longest lasting relationships are those that are egalitarian; that is, relationships where each partner is an equal of the other in decision-making, parenting, career, finances, etc., and where both partners are free and able to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas to the other.

You ARE an adult in an adult relationship. It is not necessary or appropriate that you be treated like a child or subjected to “discipline.” As an adult, you are capable of competent, responsible thought and action — and you deserve to be treated that way. Even if your partner has more experience in some areas, you also have the right to explore and develop your own skills in any area you choose.

*“ . . .doing these things isn’t hard. Getting tags for the license plates, having the tires rotated. . .he convinced me they were too hard for me. They’re not hard at all! I do them all the time now.”*

*--M.J., 33, survivor*

*“ . . .I did not know that I could just hang up the phone. I listened to him berate me and call me names on the telephone until my counselor told me I didn’t have to. I had a right to hang up the phone rather than listen to that. I felt so free the first time I did it.”*

*--R.C., 49, survivor*



## **RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

The right to share equally with your partner in all decisions and responsibilities related to your relationship, children, home and future.

The right to share equally with your partner in all financial decisions.

The right to have friendships with both women and men outside your primary relationship.

The right to express your opinions and have them given the same respect and considerations as those of your partner.

The right to have and express your sexual needs and desires without feeling guilty, demanding, selfish or aggressive.

The right to have your emotional, physical, intellectual and economic needs be as important as the needs of your partner.

The right to expect your mate to give at least 50% to resolve difficulties in your relationship.

The right to allow your partner to be responsible for his behavior rather than you being responsible for his behavior.

The right to seek professional help.

The right NEVER to be physically attacked, psychologically degraded or verbally abused by your partner and the right to leave the relationship for a short or long time or to end the relationship if either occurs.

The right to expect significant behavioral changes rather than apologies and promises from your mate if a single battering incident occurs.

The right to be believed by professionals and/or family and friends and to not be controlled by them or told that you are responsible for your partner's behavior.

The right to not blame yourself if the relationship in which you have invested so much love and effort is ended.

## SECTION TWO

### THE REALITY OF BATTERING

*"He's not all bad. He has many good qualities. And we've had more good times in our marriage than bad."*

*"I still love him despite all he's done to me. I can't face life without him."*

*"I'm afraid to try and make it alone. I have no job skills and I have three little kids."*

*"I think sometimes I do provoke him. I'm not perfect, you know."*

*"My Church teaches wifely submission. When I talked to the pastor about my husband's violent temper, he told me to go home and pray about it."*

*"My children need their father and he's wonderful to them."*

*"He promised me that he would never hurt me again. How could I have been stupid enough to believe him?"*

*"My mother told me I'd better stick it out. After all, he is a good provider."*

*"He says I need him, that no one else would have me and my kids. I don't want to end up alone."*

*"If I leave, he'll get custody of the kids. He said I'd never see them again."*

Women who are being abused express many confused thoughts and feelings about the violence in their relationship. They struggle to understand why it happens, who or what is causing it, and what can be done to stop it. Over the past twenty years, as more and more women have courageously come forward and talked about the abuse they have experienced, we have learned a great deal about the extent and severity of domestic violence. This section includes some basic information about the historical acceptance of male violence against women, misconceptions about why men batter, and the many tactics of control utilized by abusers to keep their partners fearful and afraid. Hopefully this information will help you understand that much of your behavior is a normal response to the degradation and fear you are experiencing because of your partner's violent and abusive behavior.

#### **Historical Perspectives on battering**

Domestic violence has a long history of acceptance in our society. For hundreds of years, dating back to the origins of English Common Law,

women and children were considered to be the property of men. The law even supported a man's right to discipline his wife and children with a "reasonable" amount of physical force. It was not until the late 1800's that several states began to pass legislation which criminalized spouse abuse. Public response to the problem, however, was not addressed in a meaningful way until the early 1970's when shelters and crisis lines began to open across the country. Prior to that time, women and their children had very few options and could not expect to receive assistance from the legal system.

Within the past decade, the criminal justice system has begun to take the problem of domestic violence more seriously. Law enforcement agencies are slowly beginning to adopt preferred arrest policies and victims of abuse are now able to obtain some protection through the court system. Although these legal changes have been of some benefit to women in abusive relationships, most abusers continue to go unpunished for their use of violence. Furthermore, many of the abusive acts your partner uses against you, such as threats of violence, verbal attacks and intimidating behaviors, are not considered illegal. However, these tactics can have a very powerful impact on your ability to feel safe, to feel sane, and to feel you have alternatives.

We also live in a society which promotes and allows a great deal of violence against women. Attitudes about a man's right to control women and children in the privacy of his own home have been very slow to change. These factors cannot be ignored in an effort to understand why women are abused in such large numbers. It is important to remember the abuse you are experiencing is not just a problem unique to your relationship — it exists because of a historical legacy which has allowed men to abuse women without negative consequences and it is perpetuated by cultural attitudes and social institutions which continue to passively tolerate these acts.

## **Common Misconceptions about Battering**

There are also a number of misconceptions about domestic violence which aid in society's denial of the problem. Most of these focus on blaming women for the violence instead of addressing the issue of why men abuse their partners. Some of the most common misconceptions include:

**Myth:** A woman, through her actions or behaviors, provokes the violence.

**Fact:** The use of violence has little to do with the woman's behavior and everything to do with her partner's need to control others, his choice

to use physical force, his own attitudes and expectations about male/female roles, and the lack of negative consequences he experiences from his use of violence. If you are being abused, you have probably been told, at one time or another, you do things which “cause” him to be violent. Remember, regardless of your behavior, it is your partner’s choice and decision to use violence. Blaming you for his actions is just one of the ways he will deny responsibility for the abuse.

*“...he beat me because dinner wasn’t ready when he came home, so I made sure it was on the table when he came through the door. He threw the food on the floor and beat me anyway.”*

*-P.M., 39, survivor*

**Myth:** Women who stay in abusive relationships are asking to be beaten, and therefore must “enjoy the abuse.”

**Fact:** This myth is especially insulting to someone who is being abused. No one wants to be beaten and, in fact, many women do leave. The Reasons a woman may remain in an abusive relationship are varied and complex. It may be out of economic necessity, she may hope the abuse will end, or she may have religious beliefs or traditional values about marriage and parenthood which make it difficult for her to leave. Most women are also threatened with severe harm to themselves or their children if they attempt to leave. These fears are often real.

*“...Just seeing those lights coming down the driveway made me wonder what would happen and the fear would start.”*

*-A.J., 35, survivor*

**Myth:** Domestic violence is caused by external factors or events, such as job stress, financial problems and alcohol/drug use.

**Fact:** The truth is while some or all of these factors may be present in an abusive relationship, none, separately or together, are the cause of your partner’s violence. However, they are often used as convenient excuses for the abuse. It is important to know eliminating alcohol/drug use or minimizing the amount of stress in your relationship or in his environment will rarely stop the abuse.

**Myth:** Batterers are “out of control” and/or just have a problem expressing anger.

**Fact:** Abusers often report they “just have a bad temper” and temporarily “lost control” during the assault. In reality, however, most abusers control their use of violence quite well. They are usually NOT violent towards you in the presence of others, nor are they abusive to their boss, their friends, or their neighbors. They only use violence against their partners or their children in the privacy of their own home. They choose the time, place and people they will abuse.

Remember, violence is a learned behavior your partner uses to control and dominate you and to get a variety of his needs met. This is not being out of control. Rather, it is exerting control.

*“...he made me lay on the floor on a mat for hours. I stayed there without moving, thinking that he wouldn't get angry if I just pretended I was sleeping.”*  
-E.V., 78, survivor

**Myth:** Abuse does not affect the children in the family. Usually, they do not even know it is happening.

**Fact:** Abuse can have a devastating impact on children, even at a very early age. Children witnessing violence usually have a very accurate perception of what is happening. Witnessing abuse is certainly emotional child abuse — causing fear, hostility, loss of trust and a tendency towards learned violence. Many children develop learning and behavioral problems which deepen as they grow older. If you have believed your children need their father, or that your abusive partner is actually a good parent, you should consider the effects the violence is having on them.

*“...The counselor tells me Ron couldn't possibly remember the beatings because he was too young (only 2 or 3), but he does. He asked me why B's children didn't live with their daddy and I told him because he was mean to B. He said You mean like my daddy was mean? And I used to protect you, didn't I Mommy?” And he did. He used to step between us when my ex-husband was about to hit me and yell, “Don't you hit my mommy!”*

-B.A., 26, survivor

There are certainly other myths which perpetuate violence against women by minimizing the seriousness of the situation and focusing on the woman's behavior instead of the abuser's choice to use violence. If you have believed

in these myths, you have probably been torn between your need for safety and the desire to preserve your relationship. These myths may have also reinforced a belief that you are somehow responsible for your partner's behavior. Keep in mind an abuser will encourage a belief in these myths so the responsibility for the abuse will not be placed with him.

*"...I was college-educated and had pretty good self-esteem, but he was so subtle and so smart in undermining my confidence in myself. It took me a long time to realize what was happening."*

*-D.J., 43, survivor*

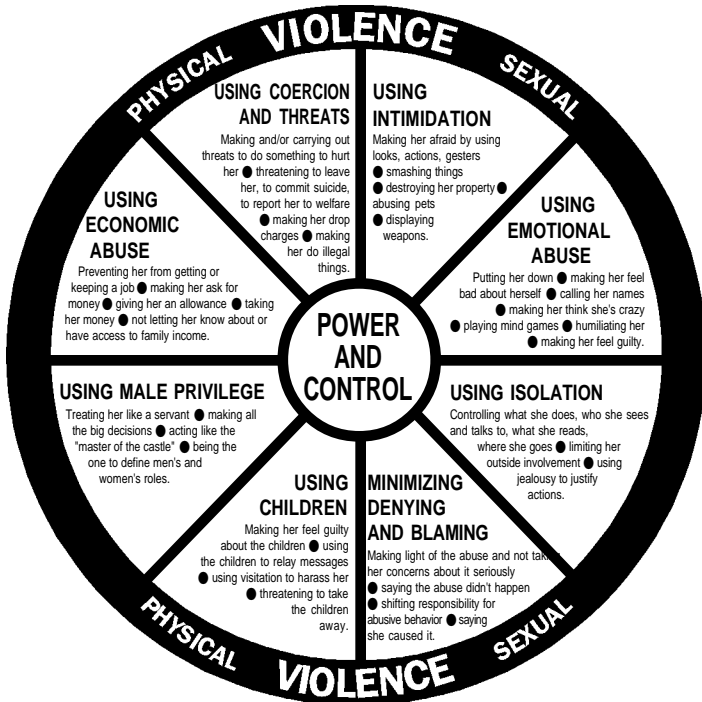
## **The Progression of Violence & Tactics of control**

In attempting to understand why you have remained in a relationship where you are being physically and emotionally mistreated, it may be helpful for you to reflect on when the violence first began and how the abuse has progressed over time.

In all probability, your partner was not abusive in the beginning stages of your relationship and, even now, does not always use physical violence. It is rare for an abuser to physically assault his partner prior to beginning a pattern of verbal abuse and emotion control. It is likely, as you look back on the relationship, you can begin to recognize how the abuse began in very subtle ways — through attacks on your feelings of self-worth, your abilities as a person, and by slowly isolating you from others. Often, it is not until a woman feels "trapped", either emotionally, financially or socially, that she recognizes how destructive and abusive her partner has become. The physical violence often begins to increase in severity and intensity at this stage - after an abuser is reasonably sure his partner is isolated and cut off from much of her support system.

The dynamics of domestic violence also involve much more than physical abuse. In addition to being assaulted, whether it is once a week, once a month, or once a year, most abusers engage in other behaviors which make their partners fearful and afraid. On the following page is a diagram of the "Power and Control Wheel", developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. The wheel serves as an illustration of the many tactics an abuser will use, in addition to physical and/or sexual abuse, to control and dominate his partner. It is often the use of these tactics which have the greatest impact on a woman's feelings of self-worth. Recognizing which of these tactics have been used by your partner may help you to understand how

# POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



difficult it has been for you to feel you have alternatives and how it is these behaviors, in addition to the violence and abuse, which is limiting your freedom, your safety and your self-determination. Some of these behaviors include:

### **Emotional Abuse**

Most women who are being physically abused are also being emotionally abused. The most obvious type of emotional abuse is being constantly criticized or degraded. Your partner may also be emotionally abusive by ignoring you, withholding affection, calling you names, accusing you of having affairs, or telling you that you are an unfit mother, friend or spouse. Emotional abuse can be subtle and is often hard to recognize. It is also the most effective tactic to keep you from feeling you are deserving of love and respect.

### **Isolation**

Most abusers will isolate their partners, geographically, emotionally or socially, in order to keep them under their control. They may move the family miles away from friends and relatives or discourage a woman from having close relationships with others. Frequently, “discourage” actually means “forbid”. Women often report they are not allowed to see friends or family, get a job, have access to transportation, or have outside interests or activities. Even if these activities are not strictly “forbidden”, abusers will often put such limits on them many women begin to feel it is simply easier to stop doing these things. Your partner may interrogate you about your whereabouts anytime you go out, he may monitor your phone calls or mail, or he may attempt to humiliate you in public to the point that you quit going places or doing things because of the abuse you experience.

### **Minimizing, Denying and Blaming**

Abusers will often make their partners feel like they are “overreacting” to the violence. Abusers will minimize or deny the severity of the physical assaults, and will refuse to acknowledge the controlling behaviors and constant attacks on your self-esteem. This tactic is extremely effective at increasing a woman’s sense of isolation, because she is aware that he will deny the assaults if she tells others about his behavior.

### **Economic Abuse**

Many women report their partners frequently control access to their financial resources by withholding money from them, sabotaging their efforts to get or keep a job, berating them about how they spend money, and by lying about assets. Some abusers may keep all bank accounts



and credit cards in his name so his partner has no access to funds without his permission. Not having access to financial resources keeps many women economically dependent on their abusers and is a major barrier to a woman who wants to leave the relationship.

## **Using Children**

One of the most prevalent, yet often minimized, forms of abuse is using your children to keep you in the relationship or to make you feel bad about yourself. Perhaps your partner has repeatedly told you that you are not a good mother and if you ever attempt to leave, he will fight you for custody. Some abusers also threaten to kill the woman and children or to kidnap the children if the woman makes any effort to escape. Many abusers try to turn children against their mothers by telling lies or by threatening them with harm. These threats are very real to a woman in a battering relationship and may make her too afraid to leave.

## **Using Coercion and Threats**

Your partner may threaten to increase the use of violence towards you or your children if you do not obey him at all costs. He may threaten suicide or threaten to harm other members of your family or your friends if you attempt to leave. Coercion may also include engaging you in illegal activities and subsequently threatening to report you to child protective services or law enforcement. These behaviors are designed to keep you afraid and to keep you from ending the relationship by “holding something over you”.

## **Using Male Privilege**

Part of an abuser’s belief system is a feeling that they “own” their partners and are entitled to demand absolute obedience from them. They often have very rigid attitudes about gender roles, acting like the “master of the castle” and treating their partner as a servant.

## **Intimidation**

Intimidating behaviors and actions can range from threatening looks or gestures to slamming objects, destroying property and displaying weapons. An abuser will often destroy an item which has special meaning to the woman, while letting her know that she could be his next target.

Even though your partner might not always use physical violence, it is likely he is constantly utilizing many of these tactics to control and degrade you. If

you have heard over and over again how worthless you are, how everything is your fault, and how you deserve to be “punished” for your failures, you are likely to begin to believe it. This is especially true if there is no one around to support you as a worthwhile person and who sees your partner’s abusive behavior as destructive and inappropriate.

Furthermore, given the isolation, the constant negative reinforcement and the violence you are experiencing, it is not uncommon for a person to become increasingly confused about what is happening. You may begin to feel numb inside as your perceptions of yourself and your relationship become more and more distorted. You may be feeling immobilized — recognizing the dangers you face if you leave and realizing there is nothing you can do to stop the abuse. It is not uncommon for victims of battering to begin to exhibit symptoms similar to prisoners of war - they are disoriented, may be suffering from sleep deprivation, interrupted eating patterns and shock. These symptoms are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances and should not be interpreted as “going crazy”.

Battering is a very powerful and effective form of control and any person experiencing this type of violence is likely to become temporarily immobilized. However, the more you can begin to understand what is happening, the better you will be at recognizing that he is responsible for his behavior and what is happening to you is not your fault.

*“...He told me over and over again that I was fat and ugly, that I smelled, and that I was sexually undesirable. When I look in the mirror, I see someone who is fat and ugly (I am 5’6” and weigh 123 pounds). I dieted constantly and took aerobics. I lost weight but it didn’t make any difference. He still called me fat. When someone tells me I am attractive, I think they must be kidding!”*

*-J.B., 23, survivor*

Women who are in abusive relationships are often surprised to learn that abusers have many other beliefs and behaviors in common, including:

- A belief in all the myths about battering relationships.
- A belief in male superiority and the stereotypes of a masculine role in the family, i.e., women are suppose to be obedient and men are suppose to be “in charge”.
- A belief that anger causes violence, and a belief that he can only express his emotions through anger.

- A tendency to minimize the seriousness of his violent behavior to himself and others. Minimizing may be a form of self-denial rather than lying.
- A tendency to exhibit dependency and possessiveness of his partner. This is often shown through excessive and unrealistic claims of jealousy.
- A tendency to attribute successes and failures to external factors. Abusers often attribute their use of violence as being out of control and/or justify the assaults by blaming the causes on their partner, alcohol or drug use, his job, the children, or some other factor outside of himself.
- Abusers have a great need to control and dominate people and events, but rarely define "control" as self-control. When experiencing feelings he interprets as being out of control, he often attempts to regain a sense of well-being by dominating others through aggression and violence. Many abusers also believe if they do not control their partner, she will control him.

Beginning to understand your partner's behavior is no guarantee it will change, nor will it ease the pain you are probably experiencing. Only your partner can **choose** to be violent or non-violent and most abusers need outside intervention to deal with their violence.

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

(Adapted from **The Battered Woman** by Lenore Walker, Harper & Row, 1976.)

Dr. Lenore Walker, in her research with over 500 battered women, identified a distinct cycle of physical violence which seems to be repeated over and over again in abusive relationships. You may be able to identify with this cycle and recognize how you have been convinced by your abuser, time and time again, that he is truly sorry and that he will change his behavior. Understanding this cycle can also help you to realize you do not cause your partner's abuse and you cannot stop him from being violent. It may also help you to begin to protect yourself more effectively from future assaults and to understand how your behavior has often shifted in response to repeated abuse.

### Phase One: Tension Building

The first phase is referred to as the tension building phase. During this time, your partner may be reacting negatively to any little thing. He may claim to be upset about his job, the children or something else in his environment. Little episodes of violence, such as slamming doors, driving too fast, throwing

objects and shouting at you begin to escalate to the level of “minor” assaults, such as shoving and pushing. Verbal abuse, jealousy, threats of physical violence and intimidating actions may also be a part of this phase. Many women indicate they are “walking on egg shells” at this time, in hopes of preventing a physical assault. Abusers often become fearful their partners will leave and become increasingly more oppressive, jealous, threatening and possessive. Women who have been in an abusive relationship for a period of time, soon realize there is nothing they can do to stop him from the violent outbursts.

## **Phase Two: Acute Battering Incident**

The next phase is the actual physical assault, which may range from a slap or shove, to a severe beating or a sexual assault. The assault may last for a few minutes to a few hours. The reason for the attack has little to do with the woman’s behavior, although the abuser will often try to make her believe it was something she caused. When the assault is over, it is often followed by initial shock, denial and disbelief over what has happened. Many women report reactions similar to those of disaster victims, suffering emotional collapse 24-48 hours after the attack.

*“...I couldn’t believe it was happening. The next morning my eye was swollen shut and half my face was bruised. He looked at me and said “I don’t remember doing that”. I told the people at work that I had been in a minor accident and that I’d hit the steering wheel with my face.”*

*-F.W., 41, survivor*

## **Phase Three: Honeymoon Phase**

The third phase is sometimes referred to as the honeymoon phase, because it is often characterized by the kind, loving and contrite behavior of the abuser. In the early stages of a relationship, abusers are also likely to express shock and remorse over what they have done and promise never to use violence again. However, their apologies usually contain a message in which they attempt to blame their partner for the violence. Watch for statements such as “I’m sorry I had to hit you, but you made me so angry”, or “You know what that does to me when you act like that...” In essence, he is trying to convince you that you control the violence and that he could not help himself.

During this stage the batterer will often begin an intense campaign to win forgiveness and to prevent you from leaving or seeking support. He may enlist family members, friends, clergy, and even counselors in an attempt to

persuade you that breaking up the relationship is a bad decision. He can be very convincing and family and friends may want to believe his statements - he is sorry and will change, his workload or drinking is to blame, that the children need a father, and that he needs your help to work through his problems. If you do not comply or you remain unsure of his promises, you are often blamed for failing to support him.

Since every woman wants to believe she will not be battered again, it is likely you also want to believe his promises to change. It is during this phase you get a glimpse of the good times in your relationship. However, if you have been in the relationship for any length of time, it is likely you recognize that before you know it, minor battering incidents begin to occur. In some cases, the honeymoon phase may last only brief moments and in many long-standing battering relationships, this phase disappears completely.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THIS INFORMATION**

All of this information raises some important questions about your partner's behavior. Who is he really? Is he the raging, jealous and abusive person you fear OR is he the kind, warm, loving and vulnerable person who is expressing remorse, telling you it will never happen again, and that you are the most important person in his life? Most frequently, he is both - in reality, he is neither all bad nor all good. He probably has many good qualities. You may be holding on to those qualities as one reason for staying, but another reality is that your partner has characteristics which make him very dangerous and, at least part of the time, your relationship is torn with hostility, fear, coercion and violence.

By beginning to understand how a great deal of your partner's behavior is an attempt to manipulate and control you, you can be more aware of how he is keeping you from seeking assistance. When violence or the threat of violence fails, he may use charm, romance and affection. If neither violence nor charm work, abusers usually become vulnerable, needy and pitiable. Suddenly, they freely express their need for help, display emotions which they ordinarily do not show, and may even express suicidal thoughts. Since women are socialized to be great nurturers, it is not surprising that you may be responding to the weak, vulnerable and emotional side of your partner's character. Be aware of your partner's behavior as he vacillates between cruelty and kindness.

Whether his manipulation takes the form of physical assaults, sincere flattery or of desperate cries for help, it is still an attempt on his part to force you or

trick you into accepting responsibility for his behavior. Batterers most certainly do need help, but they need objective and confrontive professional intervention. Attempting to help him yourself by staying is placing yourself and your children in danger. In reality, most abusers will only seek counseling after a woman has left and if he believes seeking help will convince her to return.

If you can identify violence as part of your relationship, you can begin to understand why you are staying in a relationship where you are being emotionally and physically harmed, and how much your own behavior is actually a reaction to the radically changing behavior of your abuser. If you have been angry at yourself and have blamed yourself for behavior which seemed inconsistent or inappropriate, you can now see you have been doing the best you can in a situation which is frightening and confusing. Start telling yourself right now, "I'm doing the best I can, and I can help myself" and repeat this whenever you feel down on yourself.

You may also begin to be able to protect yourself more effectively. When you sense the tension-building phase begin, make concrete plans to distance yourself from the batterer for a time (see Making an Escape Plan in Section Three). You can try to stop being taken in by your partner's manipulative behavior in all phases.

*"...He is in counseling but the counselor says he isn't really working on his problem honestly. I can feel the tension building. I know something is going to happen and I've got to get out of here!"*

*-C.R., 36, survivor*

YOU ARE A VALUABLE AND LOVABLE HUMAN BEING  
WHO DESERVES THE LOVE, FULFILLMENT AND HAPPINESS A  
HEALTHY, NURTURING RELATIONSHIP HAS TO OFFER...

*"...while I was in shelter, I wrote him a letter and outlined exactly what I wanted him to do: go to alcohol treatment, stop drinking, get some counseling for the violence and NEVER physically abuse me again. I made it clear that I would not be coming home until he had done those things and until I felt safe."*

*-B.M., 31, survivor*

## YOU ARE A SURVIVOR WHEN:

- You stop blaming yourself for the violence and abuse in your relationship.
- You refuse to take responsibility for your partner's abusive behavior.
- You begin to understand that if you are to take care of your family, you must first take care of yourself.
- You recognize your feelings and ideas are legitimate and deserving of consideration and respect.
- You can allow yourself to make mistakes and know you don't have to be perfect in order to be loved.
- You begin to feel good about yourself and your ability to function as an adult.
- You are able to accept and deal with what is real, rather than hanging into what might have been or what was.
- You accept your right to autonomy (self-direction) to make up your own mind.
- You put as much time and effort into having a healthy relationship with yourself as you put into having a healthy relationship with someone else.
- No one treats you in an abusive manner any longer.

*"...and I'm starting to feel like a person again, like the old Vickie. I lost myself for awhile, became someone I didn't know or like. I'm not about to give me up again."*

*-V.W., 54, survivor*

## SECTION THREE

# EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS

### **A Message to Battered and Assaulted Women...**

*We are here for you. We won't judge, condemn, or tell you what to do. We will believe you. We will listen to you. We will offer our support, a safe space, food, transportation, emergency assistance and counseling. We will do our best to meet your needs as you become a survivor.*

The ultimate choice that you face is whether to stay or to leave — either temporarily or permanently. You may have left on several occasions in the past, only to change your mind and return a few days later. You may feel weak or embarrassed because you did return and found yourself being abused again. Do not let self-blame immobilize you. Ending the most important relationship in your life is not easy. It is made more complicated by the good in your partner and the good in your relationship. At times you may be pressured by friends, family members and others to leave your relationship. You may feel extremely ambivalent and confused, sometimes wanting nothing more than to get away and at other times wanting to cling to the relationship and preserve it.

As you are considering your options however, be aware of the following information about battering:

- It will probably happen again. Without outside help, the violence usually becomes more severe and more frequent over time.
- Your batterer's promises to stop abusing you are often a form of manipulation designed to keep you in line and to prevent you from leaving.
- There is no guarantee that even with the best counseling, your partner will change. Most batterers resist counseling and deny they need help. Even if the physical assaults stop temporarily, be aware of how he may still be controlling you through isolation, intimidation and threats.
- The violence is terribly destructive to you, your partner, and to your children. The longer you remain silent, the more dangerous and frightening it will become.
- Thousands of women are killed each year by their abusive partners.
- You and your children deserve to feel safe and be safe from physical and emotional abuse.



## IF YOU STAY....

If you decide at this time to stay with your abusive partner, there are some things you can do to make your situation better and to protect yourself and your children.

- **Contact the domestic violence program in your area.** They can provide emotional support, peer counseling, safe emergency housing, information and other services while you are in the relationship, as well as if you decide to leave.
- **If possible, discuss with your partner the need for him to obtain individual counseling which directly confronts his use of violence.** He needs to accept responsibility for his use of violence and receive help to choose non-violent responses. After he has sought help and the abusive behavior — both physically and emotionally — has ceased, you may wish to try joint counseling.
- **Build as strong a support system as your partner will allow.** Whenever possible, get involved with people and activities outside your home and encourage your children to do so.
- **Be Kind to Yourself!** Develop a positive way of looking at yourself and talking to yourself. Use affirmations to counter the negative comments you get from your abuser. Allow yourself time for doing things you enjoy.
- **Make an Escape Plan**  
Since it is likely you will be physically abused again in the near future, having an escape plan can make the difference between being severely injured or killed and avoiding such a tragedy. A plan may include:
  1. Access to a hidden set of car keys.
  2. A hidden emergency fund. Even if you can only manage to save one or two dollars at a time, begin building an emergency fund for the time when you may need some cash to get away.
  3. Pack a suitcase with a couple changes clothes for yourself and your family and leave it with a trusted friend or hide it where your partner won't find it. If possible, include copies of birth certificates and social security cards for everyone in the family who will flee. You may need them. Also gather financial records, e.g., rent, mortgage, utility receipts, insurance cards, and checking and/or savings account books. If packing a suitcase isn't possible, fill one drawer of your dresser with items you will need.

4. Develop a plan for calling the police in an emergency. Older children might be coached to get to an extension phone or to the neighbors if you cannot reach the phone. Some women even work out signals with empathic neighbors.
  5. Know where you can go and how you will get there in case you have to leave suddenly.
- **Learn non-violent means of disciplining your children.** Since children often model adult behavior, it is very important you teach your children non-violent problem solving. There are resources in your community which can support you and provide you with suggestions.
  - **Be honest with your children.** They are probably very aware something is not right. Help them to understand that hitting someone you love is wrong and that they are not responsible for your abuser's behavior. They need to know that staying does not mean the violence is ok.
  - **When you are in danger, GET OUT!!** You can always return the next day if you wish. But when you feel the tension building, protect yourself and your children by leaving.

Planning for your safety and recognizing your options can help you protect yourself and your children. The domestic violence program in your area can offer you assistance with many of these services and volunteer advocates are available 24 hours a day.

***REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND AND DECIDE TO LEAVE AT ANY TIME. CHOOSING TO STAY MAY SEEM THE BEST OPTION TO YOU NOW, BUT IF THAT CHANGES, DO NOT HESITATE OR FEEL GUILTY. YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO CHANGE YOUR MIND!!!!!!***

## **IF YOU LEAVE...**

Leaving does not mean your partner will stop being abusive. In fact, he may become more abusive as you attempt to leave. He may be so afraid of "losing" you that he will increase any threats to hurt you, the children or himself. You are the best judge of how dangerous your situation may become if you attempt to leave. It is very important for you to accurately assess the danger and take the necessary precautions to protect yourself and your children.

You may also feel very overwhelmed by financial concerns — including where you will live and how you will afford to take care of yourself and your children. Thinking about economic survival can be discouraging and

frightening. The domestic violence program in your area can help you sort through the many challenges you have ahead and can help you get the emotional and financial support you may need.

If you have made a decision to leave permanently, allow yourself to feel the natural grief at the loss of your relationship. No matter how bad it was, there were good things too, and it was a very important relationship. Many battered women leave and return several times before permanently separating from the relationship. Leaving is often a process. Be patient with yourself.

***You may feel emotions of loss, sadness and depression.*** Accept these feelings as natural and allow yourself to experience them. If you find yourself thinking, “I’m stupid to care after what I’ve been through” or “I shouldn’t feel this way” find a trusted advocate or friend to talk with and remind yourself, “it’s okay for me to be feeling this way now.”

Building a strong support system is essential when freeing yourself from a violent relationship and when making a healthy transition to being a survivor. This support system could include:

- empathic family and friends (they may need to do some reading or talk to an advocate to better understand your experience)
- an advocate from a domestic violence program
- a mental health counselor (if you choose to seek counseling)
- a support group
- your children

**YOU HAVE BEEN STRONG ENOUGH TO KEEP YOUR FAMILY TOGETHER UNDER THE WORST POSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. NOW, WITH THE HELP OF A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM YOU ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO BUILD A LIFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE.**

While there are certainly many additional questions and considerations you may face while you decide to stay or leave, these are a beginning. It may also be helpful to list the positives and negatives, or pros and cons of both staying and leaving. Questions other women have asked are:

- What do I gain by staying/leaving?
- What do my children gain by living in a violent home?

- What are my expectations for the future? How can I work to get them?
- What am I willing to do without if necessary - material things, my health, my emotional stability, my self-esteem etc.?
- What is the price I've been paying to stay in this relationship?
- How will staying/leaving affect me one year/five years from now?
- What do I value? What do I want and need from myself and others?

*. . . It took me a while to realize what was happening. I finally left when I realized he would never change.”*  
*S.V., 38, survivor*

## **HELP IS AVAILABLE....**

*“ . . . My family of three children and our dog were taken into the shelter on very short notice and we were given nothing but the best and kindest support during every phase of our crisis. I'll never forget the help and all the littlethings like getting us sheets and hugging the kids and giving us support.”*  
*T.S., 35, survivor*

*“ . . . Myself and my children had been physically abused, as well as emotionally and psychologically and deprived economically. We came in my car with only our personal belongings. We had no money at all. The domestic violence program was able to lend me money to use as the deposit to get into a place to live. We were directed to the Department of Social Services, which gave us some immediate cash for food, toiletries, laundry and household items. The program has a regular support group which meets on Mondays. This interchange of knowledge and experience has been invaluable to me in learning more about myself, understanding the battering cycle and characteristics, and learning more effective ways to deal with the coercive techniques used by my battering husband. These resources have enabled me to begin the journey OUT of a violent relationship. The journey is a long one; it can at times be tiring and very discouraging, but the advocates have never wavered in their determination to stand by me, respect my decisions, and allow me to grow personally toward a fulfilling future without violence.”*

*B.M., 31, survivor*

Whether you decide to stay or to leave, there are resources throughout Nebraska which can make your situation easier. Over the past several years there have been significant changes in the way law enforcement, social services, judicial and helping agencies respond to the needs of battered women and their children.

Although it is not possible to list the resources available in every community for legal assistance, law enforcement intervention, medical care, housing, transportation, financial assistance and other needed services, any of the domestic violence programs listed in this booklet can help you find out about these services in your area and provide you with crisis counseling and support. All domestic violence programs provide access to the following basic services:

### **Crisis Intervention and Advocacy:**

Each program has a 24-hour crisis line you can call to obtain emergency shelter, transportation, and medical and legal referrals. You do not have to give your name if you choose to remain anonymous. You can call at any time to talk with an advocate. Staff and trained volunteers are available to listen to you, provide you emotional support and give you information about your options. They will support the decisions you make and assist you in carrying out those decisions.

Advocates are aware of your rights to social services, legal and medical assistance and are familiar with the procedures of these agencies/services. They can accompany you to court for civil and criminal court proceedings, provide on-going emotional support and peer counseling, and referrals to community resources for counseling, housing, employment, job training opportunities, educational programs, and others. They will usually provide you with agency names and telephone numbers for you to obtain needed appointments. However, if you have difficulty doing these things on your own (many women do because of past unsuccessful experiences with helping agencies), an advocate will be available to help you.

### **Emergency Transportation:**

All programs can help you get to a place of safety. This might be transportation to the hospital, the shelter, or an appointment with an attorney or social services.

### **Emergency Financial Assistance:**

Although most programs have extremely limited funds, they can help you get emergency monies for such items as food, clothing, child care and long distance travel. Advocates can also help you access financial assistance from other sources for such items as housing, medical and legal assistance.

### **Emergency Shelter:**

Each program in the state has emergency shelter services where you and your children can stay. Some programs have a formal shelter facility where

you can reside for up to six weeks. The shelter facility is a safe refuge and is usually in a confidential location so the abuser cannot find you and harm you. The shelters are comfortable, well furnished and home-like. Usually you can stay long enough to rest and regain emotional and physical strength, make some decisions about your needs, and begin to put those decisions into action. Each shelter houses from one to several families at a time, so you will be in touch with other women who have had similar experiences. The facilities have house rules for the safety and convenience of everyone at the shelter. You will be asked to abide by those rules and cooperate in a communal living arrangement. Shelter staff is available to answer questions, provide emotional support and assist you with reestablishing yourself and your children.

In communities where formal shelter facilities do not exist, domestic violence programs provide shelter by alternate means. Usually, this is a system of volunteer safe homes or motel rooms. They will also assist you in getting to a nearby shelter if you wish. Most programs have some means of helping women relocate to another part of the country or can help you obtain the resources to relocate if you wish to do so. Advocates can get information about the availability of shelter programs and other services anywhere in the United States.

Provision of shelter and safe space is an important component of Nebraska's domestic violence programs. You are assured of a warm, comfortable and secure place to go to escape further violence. If you have delayed leaving because you do not have a place to go or because you didn't want to impose on family or friends, call a domestic violence program. You will find warm, understanding advocates who will help you obtain shelter without pressuring you to make decisions or take action you may not be ready for.

**MAKING A DECISION TO GO TO A SHELTER DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN YOU ARE LEAVING FOREVER. IF YOU DECIDE TO GO BACK HOME, THE STAFF WILL SUPPORT YOU IN THAT DECISION. THEY WILL LET YOU KNOW YOU CAN COME BACK AT ANYTIME AND THEY ARE AVAILABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN THE FUTURE.**

### **Battered Women's Support Groups:**

Most programs offer a weekly, support group for battered and formerly battered women (both those who stay in the shelter and those who do not). The support group is a safe place to share experiences and feelings with other women who have been abused and to learn new coping techniques for living.

### **Other Services:**

In some areas of the state, the local program also provides support groups

specifically for assisting your children, and, groups for abusers. Staff and volunteers are also trained to assist with sexual assault and can assist you or your children deal with incest, rape, or child sexual assault issues.

Domestic violence programs can be a very helpful resource to you, as the paid and volunteer staff are specifically educated about the dynamics of abuse. Many, at some time in their lives, have experienced a similar situation. They also have information and knowledge of what local services you have a right to and the procedures for obtaining these services. Finally, they can help you understand and cope with your own feelings, fears, and confusion. They can provide vital support to you as you make important decisions about your life and the lives of your children. The services are available to you 24 hours a day and are **free of charge**.

**The domestic violence program in your area will:**

- *provide emotional support and peer counseling*
- *give you information about resources and options*
- *treat you with respect and dignity*

**The domestic violence program will not:**

- *pressure you into making any certain decision*
- *deny services if you decide to return to the abuser*
- *reveal confidential information about you to anyone outside the program without your written permission.*

**ANY INFORMATION YOU GIVE TO THE PROGRAM (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF INFORMATION CONCERNING CHILD ABUSE) WILL BE HELD IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE.**

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Regardless if you decide to stay or leave the relationship, some women seek help from professional counselors, private therapists or clergy. While most of these individuals can be a valuable resource and extremely helpful, there are others who may not recognize the seriousness of the violence or who do not have an understanding of how the dynamics of domestic violence affects a person. Some women report they have been told they are contributing to the violence and they have to change their behaviors to become more assertive

and understanding of their partners. Others are incorrectly labeled as suffering from “low self-esteem”, being “co-dependent”, or “enabling” the violence by staying or by not being “a good wife”. All of these are placing the responsibility for the violence on you and could be increasing your risk of being seriously hurt or killed.

If you are seeing anyone who attributes the violence to these factors, it may be wise to seek out assistance from another individual or agency which has a clear understanding of domestic violence and does not place the responsibility for the violence on you. These beliefs and actions, even if they are done with the best intentions, indicates the person does not understand domestic violence and they could be encouraging you to do things which could be harmful to your safety.

## LEGAL OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU

The legal system, though by no means perfect or totally adequate, can provide you assistance and protection from further abuse. Below is a brief description of some of your legal options.

### **CRIMINAL COMPLAINTS (ARREST)**

Anytime your partner physically assaults you, he is committing a crime. While you may not wish to see him jailed or punished, the reality is that pressing charges may be an effective way to begin placing responsibility on your partner for the violence. It is an assertive statement on your part which says you will not tolerate further abuse. Abusers are usually charged with misdemeanor assault and rarely spend more than a night in jail. However, the courts can fine an abuser, give out a jail sentence (usually suspended), and order your partner to seek counseling.

### **Role of Law Enforcement...**

If you call the police during or immediately after you have been assaulted, they will not necessarily arrest your partner. Under Nebraska laws, police officers must arrest for felony assault and they may arrest for misdemeanor assault. When they arrive at your home, try to remain calm and tell them what has happened. They may want to talk to each of you separately and may ask you if you would like to have your partner arrested. If he is arrested for felony assault, he will be taken into custody; if he is arrested for a misdemeanor, he may be taken down to the station, or, he may simply receive a



violation in the form of a written ticket requiring him to appear in court at a later date. Regardless of whether or not they arrest, most law enforcement agencies will file a report so there is an official record of the incident.

If you did not call the police, but decide at a later time (the next day, for example), you would like to bring assault charges against your abuser, you can go to the local law enforcement agency or county attorney's office and file a complaint. However, the longer you delay reporting the incident, the less likely they are to file charges against your abuser.

If you do not feel you have been treated fairly and/or if an officer seems reluctant to intervene or to arrest, you should: 1) Be firm with them, tell them you want to file a complaint and have your assailant arrested; 2) Write down the officers' badge numbers, and 3) Write down the number of the police report in case you should need to get in touch with the police department again concerning the assault. Read the police report before you sign it. Police reports may be used for future proceedings. If you feel they have mis-reported something, bring it to their attention. It may also be useful to document information about the incident for yourself, including any physical injuries. Since bruises often take a few days to develop, you may want to have pictures taken at that time.

### **Role of the County Attorney....**

If your partner is arrested — for a felony or misdemeanor, it is the county or city attorney, not yourself, who is bringing the charges against your partner. Whether the police arrest or you have filed a complaint yourself, the county/city attorney has the discretion whether or not to proceed with prosecution. If he or she feels there is sufficient evidence to prosecute, it is likely you will be called to testify as a witness at a hearing or trial. You will probably meet with an attorney before court to discuss the charges and to get an idea of what type of questions you may be asked in court.

If you have decided you will not testify, or if you do not show up for the trial, the case will most likely be dismissed. Charges against your partner may also be dismissed if he agrees and/or is eligible for a pretrial diversion program. To be considered for pretrial diversion, your partner must admit guilt and sign an agreement which usually specifies he seek counseling. If your partner does not follow through with the conditions of the agreement, the assault charges will be reinstated, plus any additional charges if you have been assaulted again.

Making a decision to press charges is usually difficult. Making a statement, signing a complaint, and giving court testimony may be painful and nerve-

wracking. Advocates from the domestic violence program can help you through the necessary procedures and provide you with emotional support throughout the process.

**REMEMBER.....YOU HAVE A RIGHT UNDER THE LAW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM ASSAULT.** Placing responsibility with the abuser for the violent act and the consequences of the violence can be empowering to you. This may be the first time he is told that using violence is not okay, and that his behavior will have negative consequences if he continues to batter you. It is not your fault if he is jailed and brought to court after an assault. Similarly, it is not your fault if he must pay a fine, lose time at work to go to court or has a police record. When he assaults you, he is responsible. As you consider making a decision to press charges, avoid falling into a pattern of feeling responsible (and guilty) about any punishment your partner receives.

## **PROTECTION ORDERS**

Under Nebraska's Protection From Domestic Abuse Act, you can file for a Protection Order which legally forbids your partner from threatening or assaulting you. This order is available to: spouses or former spouses; persons who are not married but are living together or who have lived together in the past; persons who have a child in common whether or not they have been married or have lived together at any time; and individuals related by blood or affinity (in-laws, for example). In other words, you do not have to be married to get an order, and, if you are married, you can get an order without filing for divorce. You do not need to hire an attorney to file for a protection order under this act. There are standard forms available at the clerk of the district court's office which you can complete. If you do not have the money to pay the filing fee and service costs, you can also file an affidavit showing you are unable to pay costs.

Temporary protection orders can be issued ex parte (meaning you can get an order without a hearing and immediate notification to your abusive partner). These orders can specifically state that your partner cannot have contact with you or with your children, and, can prohibit him from certain premises. However, it is up to the discretion of the judge whether or not he or she will be willing to include your children in the order, or, an eviction from premises. You will be asked to give specific information about the violence and about the threats to your safety.

If the temporary order is granted, the district court clerk will send a copy of the order to the sheriff's department for service upon your abuser. The order becomes effective when your partner is served and is in effect to the court

date which been specified on the order (up to a maximum of 14 days after service). When your partner is served the order, he is given the court date at which time he can go to court to show why such an order should not remain in effect. If he does not attend the court hearing, you can request to have a permanent order, which will be effective for one year unless otherwise changed by the court.

If you think your partner will be at the final hearing to protest the order, you may want to consult an attorney. If you are unsure of how to complete the forms, the domestic violence program in your area can assist you. Programs can also help you obtain legal assistance.

If your partner violates the order under Nebraska laws, law enforcement must arrest him and take him into custody. Although law enforcement will have record of your order, it is a good idea to keep your copy of the order with you to show to an officer when they respond to your call.

### **Some Considerations about Protection Order**

Although protection orders can be very useful and necessary, they do have their limitations. As you are probably well aware, your partner may or may not be deterred by a court order, and could still assault you before you are able to call law enforcement for assistance. A protection order issued under this act does not contain provisions for temporary custody of any children and/or temporary child support. As such, your partner could continue to demand to see the children, and/or could attempt to take the children with him and you would not have any legal means to demand he return them to you. If you are married to your assailant and feel a divorce is imminent, you will probably be best advised to seek an attorney to assist with a divorce and a restraining order available under the divorce laws which can provide for temporary child custody and support.

If you choose to obtain a Protection Order, it is important for you to make every effort to protect yourself. If you wish to reconcile with your partner when the order is still in effect, you need to request the court to remove the order.

## **OTHER OPTIONS:**

### **Divorce**

Divorce is the dissolution of marriage. Divorce actions decide issues of child custody, child support, alimony, division of property and division of debts.

Nebraska has a “no-fault” divorce statute which means it is not necessary to prove one party caused the breakup of the marriage or is at fault. Divorce proceedings are lawsuits which are begun by filing a petition in district court. The spouse who files the petition is the “petitioner” and the other spouse is the “respondent”. A petition is simply a sworn statement to the court stating that the marriage is irretrievably broken and certain rights as to property and children must be determined.

You must wait 60 days after your spouse has been given notice of the proceedings before the court can hold a final hearing (or trial) on the divorce. If at the trial, the judge determines that your marriage is in fact irretrievably broken, they will sign a decree so stating. This decree is not final until 6 months after its issued date. Essentially, this means you are divorced, but neither partner may marry during this period.

### **Legal Separation**

Legal Separation is a method where a married couple lives separate and apart. It provides for the division of property, temporary custody of minor children, and child support. Essentially, you can get the same legal provisions you would in a divorce proceeding without dissolving the marriage. If you decide before the final hearing that divorce is what you want, your attorney can petition the court for a change in the decree. If you decide you want a divorce after a decree for legal separation is entered, a new divorce action will have to be filed. Legal separation is used most often by women who; 1) have religious objections to a divorce; 2) are not sure they want a divorce, but the situation is too volatile for the women to continue living with her partner, or 3) have not met the one year state residency requirement for divorce.

### **Civil Suit for Damages**

It is possible to bring suit against your abuser for any injuries inflicted which cause permanent damage, high medical costs, loss of time at work, etc. You will need to check with an attorney and have legal representation to do so.

Nebraska also has a Crime Victims Reparation Fund which may be able to assist you in paying for medical costs and loss of wages. To be eligible for the fund you must have reported the crime to a law enforcement agency within three days of the incident and be willing to actively participate in any prosecution. For more information, contact your local domestic violence program or the Nebraska Crime Commission at 402/471-2828.

After a while you learn the subtle difference  
Between holding a hand and chaining a soul,  
And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning  
And company doesn't mean security,  
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts  
And presents aren't promises.  
And you begin to accept your defeats  
With your head up and your eyes open,  
With the grace of an woman and not the grief of a child.  
And you learn to build all your roads on today  
Because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans.  
And futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight.  
After a while you learn  
That even sunshine burns if you get too much.  
So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul,  
Instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.  
And you learn that you really can endure...  
That you really strong.  
And you really do have worth.  
And you learn and learn...  
With every goodbye you learn.

AN ANONYMOUS SURVIVOR

## Our Philosophy.....

We are here to listen...  
not to work miracles.

We are here to help you discover what you are feeling...  
not to make the feelings go away.

We are here to help you identify your options...  
not to decide for you what you should do.

We are here to discuss steps with you...  
not to take the steps for you.

We are here to help you discover your own strengths...  
not to rescue you and leave you still vulnerable.

We are here to help you discover that you can help yourself...  
not to take responsibility for you.

We are here to help you learn to choose...  
not to keep you from making difficult choices

***We Are Here To Provide Support For Change.***



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Here is a partial list of books you may find helpful. The domestic violence program or the local library may have these titles. The Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition also has a lending library with many of these books and other materials, including a video and resource library. For a complete listing of these resources, contact them at 402-476-6256.

**Battered Wives**, Del Martin, Pocket Books, 1977.

**The Battered Woman**, Lenore Walker, Harper & Row, 1979.

**The Battered Woman's Survival Guide: Breaking the Cycle**, Jan Berliner Statman, Taylor Publishing, 1990.

**The Burning Bed**, Faith McNulty, Bantam, 1981.

**Chain, Chain, Change: For Black Women Dealing with Physical and Emotional Abuse**, Evelyn White, Seal Press, 1985.

**Mommy & Daddy are Fighting: A Book for Children About Family Violence**, Susan Paris, Seal Press.

**Children of Battered Women**, Peter Jaffe, David Wolfe & Susan Kaye Wilson, 1990.

**Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships**, Ginny NiCarthy, Seal Press, 1984.

**The Ones Who Got Away: Women Who Left Abusive Partners**, Ginny NiCarthy; Seal Press.

**You Can Be Free: An Easy-to-Read Handbook for Abused Women**, Ginny NiCarthy & Sue Davidson, Seal Press.

**Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman**, Rev. Marie Fortune, Harper & Row, 1987.

**Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse**, Kersti Yllo & Michele Bogard (Editors), Sage Publications, 1988.

**Mejor Sola Que Mai Acompanada: Para la Mujer Golpeada/For Latina Women in An Abusive Relationship**, Myrna Zambrano, Seal Press, 1985.

**Naming the Violence: Speaking out About Lesbian Battering**, Kerry Lobel (Editor), Seal Press, 1986.

**Rape in Marriage**, Diana Russell, MacMillian, 1982.

**Shattered Dreams**, Charlene Fedders

## **Nebraska's Network of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Programs**

### **Family Rescue Services**

(Box Butte, Dawes, Sheridan, Sioux)  
P.O. Box 877, Chadron, NE 69337 ..... (308) 432-4113

### **Domestic Violence Emergency Services**

(Banner, Cheyenne, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff)  
P.O. Box 434, Scottsbluff, NE 69361 ..... (308) 436-4357

### **North Central Quad County Task Force**

(Brown, Cherry, Keya Paha, Rock)  
421 E 3rd Street, Valentine, NE 69201 ..... (402) 376-2045

### **Domestic Abuse/Sexual Assault Services**

(Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Red Willow)  
P.O. Box 714, McCook, NE 69001 ..... (308) 345-5534

### **Rape/Domestic Abuse Program**

(Hooker, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Thomas)  
P.O. Box 393, North Platte, NE 69101 ..... (308) 534-3495

### **Parent-Child Center**

(Dawson, Gosper)  
P.O. Box 722, Lexington, NE 68850.....(308) 324-3040 or (800) 215-3040

### **Sandhills Crisis Intervention Program**

(Arthur, Deuel, Garden, Grant, Keith, Perkins)  
P.O. Box 22, Ogallala, NE 69153 ..... (308) 284-6055

### **Domestic Abuse Crisis Center**

(Blaine, Custer, Garfield, Greeley, Loup, Sherman, Valley, Wheeler)  
425 S. 7th, Broken Bow, NE 68822.....(308) 872-5988 or (800) 942-4040

### **The S.A.F.E. Center**

(Buffalo, Franklin, Harlan, Kearney, Phelps)  
3720 Avenue A, Suite C, Kearney, NE 68847 ..... (308) 237-2599

### **The Crisis Center**

(Hall, Hamilton, Howard, Merrick)  
P.O. Box 1008, Grand Island, NE 68802 ..... (308) 381-0555

### **Spouse Abuse/Sexual Assault Crisis Center**

(Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, Webster)  
200 N Burlington Ave, Suite 150, Hastings, NE 68901 .... (402) 463-4677



**Center For Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Survivors**

(Boone, Butler, Colfax, Nance, Platte, Polk)  
P.O. Box 42, Columbus, NE 68601.....(402) 564-2155 or (800) 658-4482

**Haven House Family Service Center**

(Cedar, Dakota, Dixon, Thurston, Wayne)  
P.O. Box 44, Wayne NE 68787.....(402) 375-4633 or (800) 440-4633

**Bright Horizons**

(Antelope, Boyd, Holt, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Stanton)  
P.O. Box 1711, Norfolk, NE 68701 ..... (402) 379-3798

**Domestic Abuse/Sexual Assault Crisis Center**

(Burt, Cuming, Dodge, Saunders, Washington)  
P.O. Box 622, Fremont, NE 68025.....(402) 727-7777 or (800) 479-6221

**Blue Valley Crisis Intervention**

(Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Saline, Seward, Thayer, York)  
P.O. Box 273, Fairbury, NE 68352 ..... (800) 777-7332

**Rape/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center**

(Lancaster)  
2545 N Street, Lincoln, NE 68510 ..... (402) 475-7273

**Friendship Home**

(Lancaster)  
P.O. Box 30268, Lincoln, NE 68503 ..... (402) 475-7273

**Project Response**

(Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson)  
P.O. Box 213, Auburn, NE 68305 ..... (800) 456-5764

**Family Service Domestic Abuse Program**

(Cass, Sarpy)  
116 E Mission Avenue,  
Bellevue, NE 68005.....(402) 292-5888 or (800) 523-3666

**Catholic Charities - The Shelter**

(Douglas)  
P.O. Box 4346, Omaha, NE 68104 ..... (402) 558-5700

**YWCA-Women Against Violence**

(Douglas)  
222 South 29th Street, Omaha, NE 68131 ..... (402) 345-7273

**or Call**

**1-800-876-6238**

**Nebraska's Statewide Domestic  
Violence/Sexual Assault Crisis Line**

**For Additional Information**

**Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition**

315 South 9th Street, Suite 18,

Lincoln, NE 68508-2253 ..... (402) 476-6256

The Nebraska Coalition is a statewide advocacy organization which offers professional trainings and inservices, an extensive Resource Lending Library, and a variety of printed materials and publications.

# NOTES

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The Nebraska Department of Social Services  
is committed to affirmative action/equal  
employment opportunity and does not  
discriminate in delivering benefits or services.

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(Previous version 2/92 should **NOT** be used)