

■ What do you do if you're in an abusive relationship?

Begin by stopping the violence. Because even though violence can be a symptom of a lot of other problems—both internal and external—once it gets started it is the problem.

And the only way to deal with it is to deal with *it*—not with any of the other issues that your partner may believe is contributing to it.

That means that if violence is happening to you, you have two real choices: get help or get out.

Don't think you can change an abuser by an act of will alone. It will take time, and some form of outside help, to save your relationship if you want it saved.



Game plan. If your relationship is violent and still worth saving, get help. If not, get out.

If you need to contact a woman's shelter for temporary housing, do that. If you need to call the police, call them. If you're not sure what to do, call someone you can trust—a minister, a therapist, even your parents—and at least let *somebody* know what's happening.

Because the fact is that domestic violence can be caused by a lot of different things.

But it can't be cured if it isn't identified for what it is—violence, pure and simple.

And the healing can't start if the violence isn't stopped—once and for all, forever. ■



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



▶ Love & Control

A D.I.N. PUBLICATION BY COLLEEN PIXLEY

ALL IN THE FAMILY ■

Violence. You see it almost everywhere you look these days: on the street, in our schools, in movies, on TV.

The last thing any of us want to do is come **home** to it. But millions of people—men and women—do just that every day.

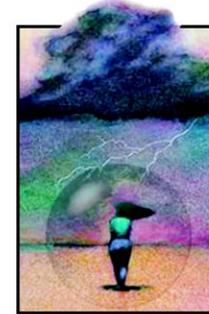
Call it whatever you want—domestic violence, family violence, partner abuse—it's all the same sad thing: someone being hurt by someone they trusted.

And the hurt and broken trust has gotten completely out of hand. Consider:

▶ The FBI reports that two million women are beaten in the U.S. each year.

▶ Abuse by husbands and partners is the leading cause of injury to women age 15 to 44.

▶ Some 1,400 women a year are killed by husbands, ex-husbands, and boyfriends.



Out of the shadows. Domestic violence isn't new. But talking about it in public still is.

And it's not only participants who are affected. One study showed that 79 percent of institutionalized violent children had witnessed extreme violence between parents, compared with only 20 percent of nonviolent kids.

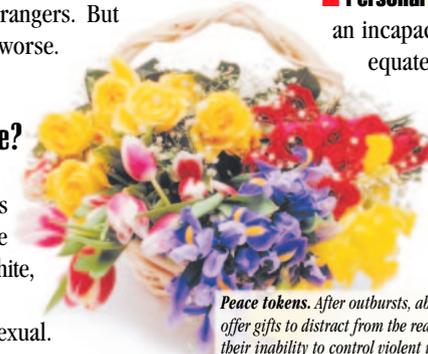
That's why we've put together this pamphlet: to examine what domestic violence is and how it starts, and discuss ways to stop it in your life—if it's happening to you—and if it's not, to help ensure that it never does.

Because violence is bad enough when it comes out of the blue, a collision between total strangers. But when it happens in a relationship, it's worse.

■ What is domestic violence?

In the simplest possible terms, it's violence that occurs at home. The people involved can be married, single, black, white, young, old, or in-between.

They don't even have to be heterosexual.



Peace tokens. After outbursts, abusers may offer gifts to distract from the real problem: their inability to control violent impulses.

Violence by husbands and partners is the **leading** cause of injury to women age 15 to 44.



In fact, the National Coalition on Domestic Violence estimates that a third of same-sex relationships are violent.

The only thing that abusers necessarily have in common is an interest in controlling another person through violent, abusive acts.

That used to mean acts of physical aggression only. But in recent years, the definition has expanded to include not only physical violence, but various forms of verbal, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse, and other violations of personal rights.

■ How many kinds of abuse are there?

Too many. It's almost like the old Paul Simon song, "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," except when it comes to abuse, there are at least 50 ways to *hurt* your lover.

Some examples of the main types of abuse include:

■ **Physical:** Pushing, hitting, slapping, battering, rape or sexual violence, kidnap, or neglect.

■ **Emotional/Verbal:** Shouting, taunting, verbal insults, obscenities or demeaning language, sarcasm, belittlement, contempt, and other psychological ploys.

■ **Financial:** Misuse of money or other financial resources by a person in a relationship.

■ **Personal Rights:** Denial of needed medical care to an incapacitated person, or refusal to provide adequate nutrition or shelter.

Even though all forms of abuse are serious, we'll focus on the dynamics of physical and emotional violence in an intimate love-partner relationship.

The factors that lead to violence are more alike than different in intimate relationships, and ways of preventing them are similar, too.

■ How do abusive relationships start?

The way all relationships start—with two people falling in love. Abusiveness—on the part of either partner or both—may be there from the start. But, more often, it only emerges later, after the romance has worn off and the stresses of everyday life begin to mount.

A first episode can erupt over a trivial matter, and cool down as quickly as it heated up. For this reason, the person on the receiving end of the violence may rationalize it, thinking that he or she somehow provoked it or assume that their partner was just having a “bad day.”

An abuser often helps such rationalizations along by being apologetic, charming, minimizing the incident, or swearing it will never happen again. The problem is that once a pattern of abuse begins, it can recur and escalate in intensity, and even follow a predictable cycle.

■ What sort of cycle?

The pattern that domestic violence typically follows is like a wave: It starts with a gradual buildup of tension that crests in a violent outburst, followed by a period of relative calm.

■ RATING THE RISKS

Although domestic violence can happen in any family, it's a lot more common in some homes than others. Main risk factors include:

- ▶ Male (or more assertive partner) is unemployed
- ▶ Male uses illegal drugs at least once a year
- ▶ Partners have different religious backgrounds
- ▶ Family income is below the poverty line
- ▶ Either partner is violent with children at home
- ▶ Male did not graduate from high school
- ▶ Male has a blue-collar job, if employed
- ▶ Male is between 18 and 30
- ▶ Male saw his father hit his mother
- ▶ Partners are unmarried

Homes in which two of the above risk factors apply are twice as likely to be violent as homes with none. In homes with seven or more factors, the risk is 40 times higher. ■

Source: Gelles, Lachner, and Wolfner, 1994.

The ebb and flow of individual waves is different for every couple. The buildup of anger and animosity can extend over days or weeks. And months or even years can go by between incidents of abuse.

Still, even though neither partner may be fully aware of their pattern—or know, exactly, when the next wave will come—they *can* learn to recognize the signs that lead up to it. But they seldom do it on their own.

■ Why does an abused partner stay?

For all the reasons you can imagine: dependency, fear, money, compassion. They might stay for the kids and they might stay because they can't think of anywhere else to go. Or they might stay for the most tangled, complicated reason of all: love.

Because in acts of domestic violence, a relationship exists between the partners—often a powerful one. It might be manipulative or coercive, but there's usually an upside to even the most upside-down-and-dirty destructive relationship.

In fact, researchers say that violent relationships are often characterized by high levels of romance and excitement. Many times both partners feel they've found real acceptance and that they share a special relationship.

Unfortunately, when things start to go wrong, it isn't that special, at all.

■ How do things go wrong?

In lots of ways. Because lots of factors—biological, psychological, and cultural—shape violent relationships.

But in general, abusive partners share common traits: They tend to misread other people's actions, act impulsively, and focus on negative emotions. In addition, many abusers attribute hostile intent where none exists.

Also, partners in an abusive relationship typically don't know how to back down from conflict—and conflict is inevitable in all relationships, violent or not.



Ceasefire. To end a pattern of abuse, it's necessary to stop all violence—unconditionally and forever.

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One of the most striking characteristics of domestic violence is that it often springs out of feelings of powerlessness on both fronts. Because even though marital violence often reflects the receding patriarchy (or male domination) of our culture, both men and women, victim and aggressor, see the use of force as a loss of control.

And, abusers don't like to be out of control—of their feelings, their actions, or their homes.

■ Are men more violent than women?

Not necessarily. In fact, according to researchers, women may *initiate* violence more often than men: slapping, poking, or otherwise physically provoking a man to violence.

The problem seems to revolve around the perception of **threat**: Men generally don't fear a woman's violent acts, and women *do* fear violence from a man.

As a result, men are less likely to label a woman's aggression as “violent” or report it to police.

That doesn't mean that all acts of violence are equal—or equally dangerous.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, a woman is 11 times more likely to be injured through domestic violence than is a man.

■ Are certain problems more likely than others to trigger violence?

Sometimes, but not always. Because different couples have different issues that drive them crazy differently.

Some (sexual incompatibility, for example, or jealousy) might seem as though they'd be more likely to trigger problems, but specific issues can arise in the context of one relationship that have an overwhelming power that might not have much emotional charge at all for another couple.

The simple fact is that the problem that may *seem* to trigger abuse isn't the problem. When a relationship turns violent, the problem *is* violence. Period.

▶ WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS?

If you think the scars that domestic violence leaves behind are bad enough for adults, think about its effects on kids. Research shows that children who are raised in an abusive home have more problems in school and are more likely to have drug and alcohol problems later in life than other kids.

They often feel alone, depressed, *different*. They may have problems expressing their own anger and rebel, or they may withdraw from relationships altogether, on the grounds that something so potentially painful can't be worth much.

They're also more likely to be victims—or abusers—themselves, as the cycle of abuse perpetuates itself, and as the relationship “scripts” they learned as children are cued in their own adult lives.

Still, that doesn't *have* to happen. Kids are naturally resilient—up to a point, at least—and have the ability to bounce back from bad experiences if they have the love and support of someone who helps them bounce back.

Still, before they can overcome the negative effects of growing up in a violent home, the abuse first has to stop. Otherwise, they may never learn that violence doesn't work and love doesn't have to hurt. ■



Silent witnesses. Of all the lives torn by domestic violence, the saddest are the youngest.