

## Taking Action To Escape An Abusive Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

Most Americans are only vaguely aware of how large a problem domestic violence is in this country. While we may see occasional media reports of individual incidences of physical or sexual abuse, the actual statistics concerning domestic violence are truly shocking.

It's estimated that every 9 seconds a woman in the U.S. is assaulted or beaten. Domestic violence causes more injuries to women than muggings, rapes and car accidents combined. Annually, more than 3 million women (who are the victims in 85 percent of domestic violence incidents) are physically or sexually abused by a current or former spouse or boyfriend.

Domestic violence can occur in a number of different forms. The generally accepted definition is that it's a pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

While such abuse can be physical, it can also take the form of sexual, economic, or psychological threats and actions with the aim of frightening, intimidating, humiliating, manipulating or terrorizing the other person in order to control her or him.

Recognizing that you have been the victim of physical is usually fairly straight-forward. If you've been slapped, kicked or pushed, had things thrown at you, been prevented from leaving your home, or constantly threatened by a partner, these are all actions that constitute physical abuse.

Similarly, a sexually abusive relationship occurs when the victim is viewed as an object rather than a person, with mistreatment running from sexual insults to forced sexual acts.

But while physical and sexual abuse may be the most commonly recognized forms of domestic violence, emotional abuse can be just as destructive. It occurs when someone is continually criticized or insulted, isn't trusted, is monitored regarding friends or travel, or is prevented from working. The victim might have no control of money, must ask permission for everything and is constantly humiliated.

Recognizing when you are in an abusive relationship is but a first step in dealing with the problem. While there's almost never an easy way to make things better, there are trained people and organizations ready to help. Many towns now have a domestic violence center with people you can talk to about getting assistance and shelter. To locate one in your area, or to find out what other help is available, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org*

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