



Domestic Violence Fact Sheet

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence can be defined as:

- A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.
- The use of abusive and violent behavior among people who are married, living together, or have an ongoing or prior intimate relationship.
- Battery, which is a behavior that physically harms, arouses fear, prevents a woman from doing what she wishes, or forces her to behave in ways she does not want, is the same as assault. Under Texas law, that includes causing pain. There does *not have to be any visible injury at all*.
- Battering, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse, and family violence: they are all the same.
- A slap is a form of assault. Texas law specifies that assault of another person, *including one's spouse*, is illegal.
- Domestic violence also includes any actions or threats of actions that are used to influence another person.

An abusive partner may:

- Intimidate
- Manipulate
- Humiliate
- Isolate
- Frighten
- Terrorize
- Coerce
- Threaten
- Blame
- Hurt, injure and/or cause bruising

Types of Domestic Violence

- **Physical Abuse:** Hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair-pulling etc. Physical abuse also includes denying a partner medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Coercing or attempting to coerce any sexual contact or behavior without consent. Sexual abuse includes, but is certainly not limited to marital rape, attacks on sexual parts of the body, forcing sex after physical violence has occurred, or treating one in a sexually demeaning manner.

- **Emotional Abuse:** Undermining an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem. This may include, but is not limited to, constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, or damaging one's relationship with his or her children.
- **Economic Abuse:** Making or attempting to make an individual financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding one's access to money, or forbidding one's attendance at school or employment.
- **Psychological Abuse:** Causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner, children, or partner's family or friends; destruction of pets and property; and forcing isolation from family, friends, or school and/or work.
- **Spiritual abuse:** Justifying the abuse with religion, not allowing access to beliefs.

Abused partners may experience the following:

- Constant fear of their partner
- Feelings of helplessness
- Belief that they deserve to be mistreated
- Feelings of humiliation
- Being embarrassed to disclose to friends/family
- Feeling their partner blames them for their partner's abusive behavior
- Feeling their partner's temper is unpredictable
- Feeling their partner always tries to control them

Domestic violence often occurs in cycles, with periods of "normal or happy times" followed by increased tension and abuse. The cycle of violence repeats, sometimes over a period of months, sometimes within the same day. Domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or religion. Domestic violence occurs in same-sex relationships, and men can be victims as well.

Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship

The fact that many victims do leave or seek help is truly remarkable in light of the many barriers they face.

Leaving an abusive relationship does not guarantee an end to the abuse; rather, the abuse often escalates at the time of separation.

Sadly, the majority of domestic violence murder-suicides occur after the victim has tried to leave the relationship.

Specific factors are:

- **Fear of injury or death**
 - The highest risk for serious injury or death is when she is leaving or when she has left her violent partner.
 - The battered woman will leave and go back 7-9 times before she leaves for good. Each time, her chance of being killed increases.
- **Fear of losing their children**
 - Battering men use custodial access to the children as a tool to terrorize battered women or to retaliate for separation.
 - Of the domestic violence-related child abductions, most are perpetrated by fathers or others acting on the father's behalf.

- **Economic Hardship**

- 74% of employed battered women experience harassment at work by their abusive partner, either in person or on the telephone. This often results in their being late for work, missing work, or losing their jobs.
- Up to 50% of homeless women and children in this country are fleeing domestic violence.

Sources: *National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Center for Victims of Crime, and WomensLaw.org, U.S. Department of Justice, Texas Council on Family Violence*