

April 2022

## A Safer Naper --- Supporting Victims of Interpersonal Violence

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner.

As much as we want to believe these types of violence are not a part of the lives of the people that we know and care about, from a statistical standpoint, it is virtually impossible that you do not know someone who is living through regular victimization. Finding a way to leave these controlling, volatile relationships can be incredibly difficult; in fact, it takes most victims seven attempts of leaving that relationship before they are successful in removing this abuse from their lives. The complex mechanisms of control that an abuser often exhibits over the victim is depicted in this Power and Control Wheel.



Reporting the abuse to law enforcement can certainly be a step in the right direction, but it doesn't guarantee that the abuse will stop. Victims oftentimes believe that involving law enforcement and potentially having the abuser face criminal charges might escalate the violence and further infuriate them. They may have been threatened that calling the police may result in increased physical or sexual violence. Victims may face economic abuse and worry that if the abuser is arrested, they may cease

financial support for essential items. Additionally, they may be reliant on the abuser for childcare or have other concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children if the abuser's actions are revealed to outsiders. The abuser may also threaten other harmful actions such as destroying the victim's reputation or releasing private information about the victim if they share about the abuse. While this is hardly an exhaustive list, it does highlight some of the common reasons victims don't "just leave" despite the horrors they are living with.

With this in mind, it's important to be aware of some of the signs that may indicate that someone is living with abuse. We will provide some resources and information that may be helpful if/when someone you know discloses to you that they are living with abuse. While, as the police department, we always want to protect individuals who are victims of crimes, we understand that reporting may not always be the right option for someone in any particular moment. Therefore, we will also highlight some safety planning tools for staying safe in an unsafe situation. Finally, we would like to draw attention to a widely recognized but rarely addressed barrier to leaving an abusive situation – ensuring safety for family pets!

### **Recognizing Abuse**

Here are some common signs that someone you know and care about may be experiencing violence at home. If you choose to address your loved one directly and ask if they are experiencing abuse, make sure you are in a safe and private place to have that conversation and respect any boundaries they have while reinforcing your support. Common sign may include:

#### Behavioral:

- Increasing isolation from family friends or canceled plans with no explanation
- Disengagement from activities they once previously enjoyed and participated in
- May be constantly connect to their phone or have to respond to constant check-ins from their partner
- Only shares limited information about their romantic relationship or won't talk about it at all
- Engaging in excessive substance use

#### Emotional:

- Increasing anxiety, depression or emotional dysregulation. May demonstrate hyper vigilance
- May express struggles with self-worth
- Often suggests they are to blame for issues; overly eager to comply or please. May be afraid of making mistakes
- Loss of confidence or assertiveness; changes in body language such as downcast eyes, arms crossed, shoulders rolled forward, etc.

#### Physical:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Wearing clothing that isn't appropriate for the season
- Changes to physical appearance or changes to typical care routine (no longer getting hair done, manicures or other things the person previously did regularly OR spending more time on their appearance)

### **Responding to Abuse and Resource Sharing**

You do NOT have to have all the answers or feel pressure to come up with what you perceive to be the “perfect” response if someone discloses abuse. It is most important that you believe what the person is sharing with you, listen to them without judgment and direct them to resources that are best equipped to comprehensively support their needs moving forward. [See this webpage for some basic guidelines for responding to abuse disclosures.](#)

Our [City’s website](#) is a great place to start to seek additional support or information. The [section on safety planning](#) is critical. It is important to recognize that breaking the cycle of abuse is tremendously difficult and, with this in mind, working through safety considerations while in an unsafe situation can give someone a tangible plan when and if they are in danger.

### **Safety for Pets**

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) identified that among pet-owning victims of domestic violence, 71% of them report that their abuser harmed their animals and 25% of these victims either struggled to leave or returned to the relationship after having left based on concern for the animals. As such, highlighting some organizations that may be able to step in and provide safety for pets while a victim leaves is a valuable conversation.

- [ADOPT Shelter’s Blessed Bonds](#) program offers assistance and temporarily fosters animals for individuals facing a crisis situation
- [Red Rover Relief Safe Escape Grants](#) may offer funding for pet boarding while a victim escapes an abusive situation
- [Noah’s Rest](#) arranges temporary, safe shelter for all types of pets as victims flee violence