



St. Joseph County Sherriff's Office



Are You a Victim of Domestic Violence?

A man kills his wife and then turns the gun on himself. Police are called to a hospital to investigate an elderly woman with a fractured hip after being pushed down by her adult son. A teenage girl is punched in the stomach by her ex-boyfriend in the hallway at school. Each of these events raises the same question: Could this tragedy have been prevented?

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of learned behavior in which one person uses physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to control another person.

Domestic violence is not a family matter. It is a crime, and it is in Michigan. Uniform Crime Report tells us there were 54,258 reported victims and 30 reported murders related to domestic violence in 2004. Domestic violence is a misdemeanor punishable by up to 93 days in jail and/or a \$500 fine.

Under Michigan law, a person has a domestic relationship if any of the following apply:

- Spouse or former spouse
- Dating relationship or former dating relationship
- Child in common
- Resident or former resident of the same household

What does domestic violence look like?

The following are some of the most common tactics used by abusers to control their partners but certainly not a complete list. If you or someone you know has their personal freedom restricted or is afraid of their partner, they may be a victim of domestic violence.

Physical Abuse

- Pushed, shoved or kicked
- Slapped or bitten
- Strangled
- Hit or punched
- Locked out of your home
- Denied help when ill, injured or pregnant
- Weapon used against you
- By physical force, not being allowed to leave
- Objects thrown at you
- Abandoned in a dangerous situation

Sexual Abuse

- Forced to have sex or watch sexual acts
- Forced to perform sexual acts or have sexual acts performed on you
- Forced to dress more sexually than you wish
- Forced to have sex after a physical assault, when you are ill or as a condition of the relationship

Emotional & Psychological Abuse

- Threatened harm to you, your family or your pets
- Beliefs, race, heritage, class, religion, or sexual orientation ridiculed
- Manipulated with lies and contradictions
- Being convinced you are to blame for the abuse
- Stalked

Economic Abuse

- Denied access to bank accounts, credit cards or vehicle
- Partner controls all the finances
- Prevented from getting or keeping a job or from going to school
- Limits your access to health, prescription or dental insurance

What can you do to help someone who is being abused?

- Educate yourself about domestic violence
- Let go of any expectations you have that there is a "quick fix" to domestic violence or to the obstacles a woman faces. Understand that a woman's "inaction" may very well be her best safety strategy at any given time.
- Believe her and let her know that you do
- Listen to what she tells you and avoid making judgments
- Validate her feelings
- Avoid victim blaming. Tell her the abuse is not her fault.
- Take her fears seriously. If you are concerned about her safety, express your concern without judgment by saying, "Your situation sounds dangerous and I'm concerned for your safety."
- Support her decisions. Remember there are risks attached to every decision an abused woman makes. If you truly want to help, be patient and respectful, even if you don't agree.

Who do you contact for help?

Often, the best source of help and information is your local program. For more information on local support services, please visit the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence website at: www.mcadv.org and click on "Locate Help Near You."

You may also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233.) Call toll free, 24 hours a day, anywhere in the U.S. Trained counselors provide confidential crisis intervention, support, information and referrals to local programs to victims of domestic violence, their families and friends. The hotline links people to help in their area, including shelters, legal and social assistance programs. Help in English and Spanish with interpreters available in 139 more languages.

Sources: The Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; Calhoun County Domestic Violence Council Education Prevention Safety and Support Information Guide; and the 2002 MSP Uniform Crime Report.