

Commonly Asked Questions about Abuse

What is abuse?

Abuse is taking place when one person is hurting, demeaning or humiliating another toward the goal of getting what he/she wants at the expense of what the other person wants, needs or is in his/her best interest. Abuse is sometimes an inordinate response (physically, verbally or emotionally) to a problem of life. For example, a person forgets to take out the garbage and their partner throws the garbage all over the kitchen.

How common is abuse in intimate relationships?

When we define abuse as one partner intentionally using physical force, words or psychological manipulation to hurt, demean, humiliate or harmfully control the other person, abuse is quite common in relationships. We do not keep statistical information on verbal, psychological and emotional abuse so it is difficult to specifically say how common it is.

How can someone recognize the presence of abuse in a relationship?

Often there is evidence of the abuser's need to control. In the beginning of a relationship the behavior can be mistaken for caring. The person can present as just wanting to take care of his/her partner. Since all abuse is not the same, warning signs other than being controlling might be, when one partner becomes confused by the seeming meanness of the words and actions of the other. Yet the person being unkind insists they are being misunderstood or are only teasing. Another sign is when you notice that your partner seems to feel better about him/herself while pointing out his/her perception of your mistakes or weaknesses. If you notice you seem to be the object of humor and you find it embarrassing or hurtful and not funny, that can be a sign of an abusive person. When it feels that you do little right, or your partner indicates that he/she is doing you a favor by putting up with you, that is warning sign of abuse. When one partner is enhancing or attempting to enhance the perception of him/herself and/or life circumstances at the expense of and at detriment to his/her partner, that is abuse.

What can the church do?

The Church needs to adopt a policy of zero tolerance for domestic violence. Recognize the problem of domestic violence, be curious about understanding the issue and be active in finding solutions to eliminate domestic abuse. To accomplish this, the church can begin by educating the members and supporting abuse prevention and intervention agencies with volunteers and finances. When a church family shows evidence of domestic abuse, refer them to professional services.

What help is available for women victims?

Lane County offers many services for victims. The Victim Services Program through the Lane County District Attorney's office is a good resource for legal help. Lane County has both faith based (CAFA) and secular support groups (WomenSpace). CAFA offers classes for parenting after violence and groups for women.

Why don't women leave?

Many women do leave. To leave safely can be a long process, causing many people to think the woman is prolonging the abuse. Financial realities, faith beliefs, the desire for an intact family, hope that the relationship will improve and fear that leaving will increase the abuse, all play into a woman's decision to stay. Having children with the abuser often slows down women's leave-taking. The woman sometimes feels that she will be less able to protect her children if she leaves and her children would have a relationship with their father without her as a buffer. Leaving may heighten the abuser's anxiety and anger making him potentially more violent and dangerous. Most of the partner homicides come at the time the woman leaves.

Why do men hurt the women they claim to love?

There are many possible explanations. Experts in domestic violence don't agree on an answer to that question. One answer is the same reason anyone hurts another person. They want to teach them a lesson. They want to punish them for the pain they feel the other has caused them. They want to scare them into doing what they want them to do. Some abusers are bullies and get satisfaction out of feeling strong by exploiting another's perceived or actual weakness. Some believe that only one person can be in charge and they are willing to hurt the other in whatever way will work for them to have the "misguided" perception that they are right, strong, smart and totally in charge. Some men have a twisted faith system that causes them to believe that it is their duty to hurt their partner if that is what is necessary to bring her "into submission".

How are the children impacted?

Research has shown that it is more impactful to a child to see their parent physically abused than to be abused themselves. Each child is an individual and experiences the impact uniquely. Some ways in which the children are impacted are: higher likelihood of abusing drugs and alcohol, higher likelihood of suicide, higher likelihood of running away, higher likelihood of sexual promiscuity, higher likelihood of committing crime, higher likelihood of doing poorly in school, higher likelihood of perpetrating violence themselves, higher likelihood of being the victim of violence, higher likelihood of having physical problems and higher likelihood of having relational problems.

Can abusers change?

Yes, abusers can change but not all do. Each person who has been abusive is a unique person and their story is unique. It is the experience of our Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) that everyone wants to be successful in life. It is true there are widely varying ideas of what success is. Most want to love and be loved, to understand and to be understood. There is not agreement among the experts on batterer intervention what changes people. In CAFA's BIP, we use a motivational approach. We believe that the relationship between the facilitators of the groups and the group members creates the setting from which the clients have the choice and the opportunity to change. We view the clients as people who have a number of strengths but who have also engaged in abusive behavior. We present material in a positive, respectful manner, encouraging the clients to use new tools to achieve their personal life and relational goals. We support their attempts at change, complimenting them on their achievements and applauding their increases in self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-esteem and the resulting empathy and compassion. To the degree we are able to track the statistics in our county, less than 10% of the clients who complete our program re-offend.