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Help for Battered Men

Domestic violence befalls mostly women, but men are victims, too.

WebMD Feature

More than 830,000 men fall victim to [domestic violence](#) every year, which means every 37.8 seconds, somewhere in America a man is battered, according to the National Violence Against Women Survey. While more than 1.5 million women are also victims, everyone -- no matter their sex --deserves help.

"Domestic violence is not about size, gender, or strength," says Jan Brown, executive director and founder of the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men. "It's about abuse, control, and power, and getting out of dangerous situations and getting help, whether you are a woman being abused, or a man."

There are more than 4,000 domestic violence programs in the U.S., but Brown says very few actually offer the same services to men as they do women. So where can a man turn for support when he is being abused? Domestic violence experts offer advice for men who may be falling through the cracks.

Abuse Against Men

"Domestic violence against men is very similar to domestic violence against women," says Brown. "It can come in the form of physical abuse, emotional, verbal, or financial."

As with abuse against women, Brown explains that abuse against men can mean a partner or spouse will:

Withhold approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment

- Criticize, name call, or shout

- Take away your car keys or money

- Regularly threaten to leave or to make you leave

- Threaten to hurt you or a family member

- Punish or deprive your children when angry at you

- Threaten to kidnap the children if you leave

- Abuse or hurt your pets

- Harass you about affairs your spouse imagines you are having

- Manipulate you with lies and contradictions

- Destroy furniture, punch holes in walls, break appliances

- Wield a gun/knife in a threatening way

- Hit, kick, shove, punch, bite, spit, or throw things when upset

In one instance, Brown received a letter from a woman who said her brother was being abused by his wife, who would scratch him, throw things at him, point a gun at him, break his eyeglasses, and flush his [medications](#) down the toilet -- among other things.

"The sister said in her letter that her brother stitched a cut on his arm himself, with a thread and needle, because his wife had cut him and he didn't want to go to the hospital," says Brown. "Can you imagine being so embarrassed that your wife hits you that you do that?"

Distinguishing Factors

That is a distinguishing factor between battered women and battered men, explains Brown: Men -- like this one -- are more likely to be embarrassed by their abuse, making them less likely to report it, according to the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men web site, which states men often worry, "What will people think if they knew I let a woman beat up on me?" and "I don't want to be laughed at; no one would believe me."

Distinguishing Factors continued...

Another distinguishing factor is that while women who are abused are more likely to be pushed or shoved, beat up, or threatened with a gun, the women who do the abusing are more likely to throw something, kick or bite, hit with an object, threaten with a knife, or actually use a knife, according to the National Violence Against Women Survey.

And perhaps the most important difference is that women who batter may have a greater ability to use the "system" to their advantage.

"Systemic abuse can occur when a woman who is abusing her husband or boyfriend threatens that he will never see his children again if he leaves or reports the abuse," says Philip Cook, program director of Stop Abuse for Everyone. "A man caught in this situation believes that no matter what his wife or girlfriend does, the court is going to give her custody, and this greatly limits his ability to leave. While this can occur when a woman is being abused, it is more likely to happen when a woman is abusing."

Women, explains Cook, who is author of *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence*, may also be able to use the system to their advantage in that they are less likely to be arrested if police are called as a result of a domestic dispute.

"There is no national data on average arrest rates for women in domestic disputes," says Cook. "My best guess is that it's about 20%. But we do know anecdotally that there are many men who, when the police arrive, clearly have the most serious injury, clearly when interviewed separately indicate the female started it, and nonetheless, the man gets arrested. This does indeed happen."

So where can men who are being abused turn for support, and what steps should they take to get out of dangerous situations?

Getting Help

The first step in getting help is reaching out.

"The Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men is the only one in the nation that offers support and help in finding resources specifically for men," says Brown, of the not-for-profit helpline. "We'll provide options and support and help a man understand that the abuse is not his fault and it is not acceptable. The Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men can be reached from anywhere in the nation, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by calling (877) 643-1120 and entering PIN number 0757."

Other helplines, such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline, can also offer support to men but aren't as tailored to do so as the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men.

"What people should know is that abuse is about power and control, and regardless of whether the victim is a man or a woman, it is never OK," says Havilah Tower-Perkins, media relations coordinator for the National Domestic Violence Hotline. "We urge anyone whose relationship scares them to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or the TTY line for the deaf: (800) 787-3224. The Hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, year round with live advocates who can answer questions, discuss safety options, and connect callers to resources in their local area. Every call to NDVH is anonymous."

Stopping the Abuse

Other steps for men who are being abused to take include:

"Never allow yourself to be provoked into any kind of retaliation," says Brown. "We tell men if they have to be in an argument, do it in a room with two doors so they can leave; a lot of times a woman will block the door, the man will try to move her, and that will be enough for him to get arrested."

"Document everything," says Cook. "Go to your doctor and tell him what happened, even if he doesn't ask how you were injured. Take photographs of your injuries, and make sure if the police are called that they take a report, and get a copy of the report for yourself."

"Work with an advocate from a domestic violence program to get a restraining order," says Brown. "Not only will this help protect you from an abusive partner, but it will also allow you to ask for temporary custody of your children in order to protect them from the domestic violence."

Get counseling so you can start healing, and get legal advice, says Cook.

Talk with your family and friends who can help support you. "They will understand," says Brown.

"Abusers are good at making you feel isolated and alone, but you're not," says Brown. "We get calls from all types of people --

doctors, lawyers, laborers, people in the military. The biggest hurdle they face is finding someone who believes them. If they are believed, they can get help, and that's why we're here."

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SOURCES: Jan Brown, executive director and founder, Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men. Philip Cook, program director, Stop Abuse For Everyone; author, *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence*. Havilah Tower-Perkins, media relations coordinator, National Domestic Violence Hotline. National Violence Against Women survey, sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the CDC.

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