

#### IV. Myths about Domestic Violence

**Myth #1:** Domestic Violence is a private problem. People should not interfere with another person's relationship.

**Truth:** Domestic Violence is society's problem. Everyone is responsible for making sure that abuse is not tolerated in his or her community. As a country, we **MUST** begin to recognize and acknowledge that hitting, choking, pushing, scaring and threatening your partner is a crime.

**Myth #2:** If she really wanted the abuse to end, she would leave.

**Truth:** The reasons why women stay in abusive relationships are very complex and are usually rooted in fear. It is easy for many people who have not lived with this type of fear to pass judgment. This is so damaging to survivors because it perpetuates the message that the abuser has already instilled; that she is weak and incapable of making decisions on her own.

She may stay because she is afraid to leave. Leaving an abusive relationship can be a dangerous time. Domestic violence is about power and control. When the abuser feels that he is losing the control he may threaten to hurt or even kill his partner or her children. His threats to hurt her or to find her wherever she tries to hide can be very real.

She may stay because she has no place to go. Many times, it is not easy to find or afford safe housing. It may be difficult for her to find a place to stay where he will not find her and she may be concerned about putting her family in jeopardy.

She may stay because of her children. Many women feel that they should stay and "try to work it out" in order to keep their family together. Leaving may mean that the children will have to leave behind their neighborhood, their friends and their home. This is an extremely difficult decision to make especially if you are living in fear of your partner.

**Myth #3:** People who experience domestic violence should go to couples counseling.

**Truth:** Couples counseling assumes that there is a problem with the "relationship" and that both partners are responsible for making the situation change. The survivor may feel that couples counseling will help him change his behavior and stop the abuse. This is rarely the case. This approach once again reinforces blaming the survivor and does not hold the abuser accountable for his behavior. Couples counseling may even be dangerous for the survivor. She may be afraid to talk openly about the abuse in front of the person who has abused her for fear of later retaliation.

**Myth #4:** Abusers become violent because they cannot control their temper.

**Truth:** Abusers are often very good at controlling their anger. Men who assault women do so because they know that they can. They know that there is little or no consequence for terrorizing their partner in their own home. Abusers do not batter their bosses, they do not threaten to kidnap the police officer's children and they do not beat up the clerk at the bank. Men know that these are not socially acceptable behaviors and that they could go to jail for these crimes. Abusers are often very skilled at controlling their anger until they are in the privacy of their own homes where they know that their victim is defenseless.

Battering is a conscious decision to control another person.

**Myth #5:** Domestic violence only happens to people who are poor.

**Truth:** Domestic Violence can happen to anyone. Women from all economic and educational backgrounds have been survivors of domestic violence relationships. Domestic Violence happens all over the world to all kinds of people.