

Love Shouldn't Hurt

Everyone Deserves To Be Safe
In Their Relationship





OHIO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NETWORK

The comprehensive resource on domestic violence

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Introduction

All of us have rights when we are in a relationship. We have the right to be loved, to be respected, to say what we are thinking, to be in contact with whomever we want to be in contact with, to make our own choices about what we do and where we go, to wear what we want, and to make our own decisions. We have the right to express our own opinions and think for ourselves. We deserve to be trusted and to have support. And we deserve to be safe.

Relationships between adults can take lots of different forms. There is a wide range of healthy ways to relate to one another, to deal with conflict and disagreements, to assert your needs, take care of children, and live a life together. But there are also times when relationships can be challenging and difficult. You could have been hurt by your partner—either physically, emotionally, or sexually. You might feel isolated and alone, or feel trapped in your relationship.

Sometimes our partners hurt us, control us, or make us feel bad about ourselves. Sometimes couples argue and say and do hurtful things that end up having little or no effect on either partner. On the other hand, vicious words used to be purposely harmful can take a huge toll, especially if your partner has hurt you in other ways. While you might be afraid your partner might hurt you physically, sometimes your fears and worries about what is happening are related to other things. Instead, you might find yourself afraid of ending up homeless, afraid of losing a support system that is important to you, worrying about what will happen to your partner who you love, or wondering if your children will be okay.

You are probably reading this guide because you feel like something isn't right in your relationship. While we can't answer all of your questions because each person's experience is so unique, we hope that this will give you a starting point to help you think through what is happening. You might have a lot of questions, and we hope this booklet can help you think through some answers. Maybe your partner is abusing you and maybe they aren't, but it is important for you to have access to information and support as you deal with whatever is happening with your partner. Remember that everyone deserves to be safe in their relationship. If anything in this guide resonates with you, now might be a good time to contact your local domestic violence program or talk to someone you trust about what is happening.

- Ask yourself:**
- Do I feel safe in my relationship?
 - Do I feel that something is wrong with my relationship, but I don't know how to describe it?
 - Do I feel like my partner is controlling my life?

What is domestic violence and what are some signs I might be in an abusive relationship?

Domestic violence can look different in every relationship.

Domestic violence is about a pattern of coercion and control that happens in many different ways. Many people who experience abuse describe coercion as feeling like they are often facing pressure to act a certain way or do certain things, feel restricted from doing things they want to do, or don't feel like they can freely make decisions and choices because there are consequences for whatever they do. Your partner might physically or sexually hurt you, intimidate or scare you, emotionally manipulate you, or make you feel sorry for them or like everything is your fault. While every relationship has its ups and downs, what makes a relationship abusive is the repeated behavior by your partner that attempts to control aspects of your life through manipulation, fear, bullying, and in multiple other ways. In some abusive relationships, your partner physically or sexually assaults you, though this is not always the case.

Each individual's experience with domestic violence is unique. There is no "one way" an abusive relationship looks. But what we do know is that it can be very difficult to identify exactly what is happening. Often people who have been in abusive relationships report that the beginning of the relationship was wonderful—maybe the best relationship they have ever been in. Their partner paid attention to them, treated them kindly, was extremely concerned for them, and was very romantic. Maybe your partner wanted to be with you all the time, and wanted to get serious with you very quickly.

Once you have made a commitment, your partner might still have times where they are very nice, loving, and kind, but other times where you partner really hurts you—it could be physical or sexual abuse, but also could be your partner really hurting your feelings and emotionally abusing you. If your partner hurts you, your partner might blame you for it and say you did something or said something that made them upset, and "forced" them to respond in a hurtful manner. This can be extremely confusing for you, as you remember the wonderful person you fell in love with, and might wonder why things can't be good all the time. But know that even if your partner blames you, you did nothing wrong, and that your partner is the one who decides how they are going to treat you. It is their responsibility to treat you respectfully and not harm you.

Relationships can leave you feeling unhappy for many reasons. But a relationship that involves domestic violence is very different than a bad relationship. Domestic violence isn't a bad day or something that happens one time or the normal ups and downs in a relationship. You feel stress and tension all the time, even when your partner is being nice to you--because something could change, and suddenly your partner becomes mean or hurtful or scary. But often your partner also has a great side to them—sometimes they are warm and caring, attentive and concerned about you, which makes this all very confusing.

Many of the tactics that abusive people use are similar, due to the fact that they are very effective tools to control and dominate others. Many victims of abuse talk about different things their partner did to gain control over them and they include:

Isolation (such as wanting to be with you all the time, insisting you quit your job, not wanting you to see friends or family, controlling transportation so you can't go where you want to),

Verbal and emotional abuse (such as name calling, yelling at you, insulting you, making you feel bad about yourself),

Intimidation (such as threats, scary looks, throwing things, or invading personal space to scare you),

Economic Abuse (such as controlling money, not providing proper economic support for children, not giving you access to funds, destroying your credit),

Using coercion and threats (such as threatening or bullying you to do things that you don't want to do, or telling you about what will happen if you don't do what they want),

Using the children (such as talking badly about you in front of the children, interfering with your parenting, threatening to take them away or threatening to keep you from seeing them if you do leave),

Minimizing, denying and blaming you for their actions (such as by saying whatever happened was your fault and you caused it to happen, blaming work or other stresses for their actions),

Controlling aspects of your life by restricting choices and options (such as suggesting you shouldn't do things you want to do because you are making a wrong choice),

Using reproductive coercion (such as messing with your birth control or trying to get you pregnant when you don't want to be pregnant).

Often one of the first abusive tactics that your partner uses is beginning to isolate you from others. You might find yourself no longer seeing or talking to your friends and family like you used to. You might realize that you are deciding to stay at home instead of seeing people who are important to you because you don't want to make your partner mad or hurt your partner's feelings. You may feel as if you can only respond to your partner in certain ways to keep peace. Often when you resist the ways your partner tries to control you, the abuse gets worse, and your partner gets more and more controlling, forcing you into really hard situations, with difficult choices and no easy solutions.

Remember if your partner treats you abusively, IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT. Your partner is the one who is responsible for his/her actions, even if they try to blame it on you. Many women in abusive relationships want the relationship to end and hope to move on with their lives without their partner, while others want the violence to stop but do not want to end the relationship. It also can be difficult to truly leave an abusive relationship, because there are multiple ways in which your partner can continue to be involved in your life (especially if you have children) and often it isn't realistic that you can just walk away from everything and never see your partner again.

- Ask yourself:**
- Do I feel that my partner does not value my thoughts or feelings?
 - Am I able to go where I want to go, do what I want to do, and see the people I want to see without my partner being upset or angry?
 - Have I ever feared that my partner will hurt me?

What are some of my options?

There are things you can do to increase your well-being.

Find Spaces Where You Feel Free

One of the most difficult realities of being with an abusive partner is that often you feel like you don't have any freedom or space to breathe. One of the ways that can help you regain some control of your life and your sanity is by finding spaces and places where you feel free to do what you want to do, think what you want to think, feel what you want to feel, and say what you want to say. These spaces might occur when you are a part of a group, such as a support group or a group at your place of worship, or by connecting with friends. It might be at your work or your school or your children's school. It might be in your car when you are driving alone. They might be places in your house or in your yard, where you can feel more at peace and think your own thoughts. They might be internal places, where you can take your mind to a place that gives you peace when your partner is treating you badly. Think creatively about how to find ways to make you feel free, and this might change your perspective on your life and situation and help you come up with some new ideas to move you forward on your journey toward safety.

Talk to a Friend or Family Member

Talking to others can be an important step, but can also be a challenging one. Think about choosing someone you trust who will be supportive of you and will validate your feelings. Sometimes people around you may already have a sense of what's happening and be ready to help. Often two heads are better than one, and another person may be able to point out an option or resource you haven't thought of or didn't know about. When you are isolated, your partner is in a better position to control you and the way you feel about yourself, as well as your perceptions about the abuse and your options. The more you can talk with others, the less power your partner is likely to have.

Develop Other Supports or Interests

Developing other interests can be difficult if your partner controls much of your life, but if you can do this safely, it helps you increase your independence and lessens your partner's control over you. Many survivors of abuse have said that developing outside interests was important in feeling better about themselves, helping them see things that were happening more clearly, and expanded their support system. Some ideas might be taking an adult education class through your school system, joining the local YWCA or a health club, volunteering somewhere, or becoming involved in your religious community. Remember, you are the best expert on your situation, and you are the only one who can determine whether any of these activities are safe for you to pursue.

See a Counselor or a Therapist Individually

Individual counseling can be very helpful to some victims of domestic violence. If you choose to get individual counseling, it is important that your counselor understand the dynamics of domestic violence. You have the right to ask a counselor questions about his/her attitudes and experience or training in this area before you decide to begin counseling with that person. It can be unproductive and even dangerous to be working with a counselor who doesn't understand the dynamics of domestic violence. You can contact a domestic violence hotline to get some names of counselors who are experienced with issues of abuse.

Go Back To School and/or Get a Job

Regardless of whether you are currently in your relationship or plan to leave, having job experience and job skills is extremely important. If you are not employed and feel like it is safe for you to begin investigating options to go to school to learn a skill that can help you get a job later, or want to begin looking for work, this can help you in multiple ways. There may be organizations in your community who assist with job readiness, training and assistance with finding employment. You can contact your local domestic violence program and see if they might be able to refer you to some of these organizations.

Explore your Legal Options

The legal system is extremely complex. While laws exist to protect domestic violence victims, the application and implementation of these laws can vary widely from county to county, city to city, and even from courtroom to courtroom. **If you are considering using the legal system to help you increase your safety, contacting your local domestic violence program is critically important.** Many domestic violence programs can provide legal advocates who can walk you through the processes involved, link you to an attorney, go to court with you, provide additional resources to you, and explain in detail your options and the way courts work in your area. The services of a legal domestic violence advocate can be invaluable whether or not you choose to pursue legal action.

The legal system has two main components, the criminal system and the civil system. The criminal system comes into play when someone breaks a law and the government (usually the State of Ohio) charges them with a crime. If you feel in danger you can call the police. This may result in the arrest of your partner and they could be charged and convicted of a crime. The punishment for domestic violence and related acts such as making threats and stalking depends on many factors, including what charges were filed, the history of your partner, and how severe the incident was. It can result in fines, restitution, probation, being ordered to receive batterers intervention programming, or jail time. In criminal cases, the prosecutor files the case, but they are not your attorney. They represent the State of Ohio, or whatever entity filed the case. It is important to know that once criminal charges are filed, you may not have control over whether the case goes forward or how it proceeds. Still, criminal sanctions can be helpful in reducing violence for some abusers.

The civil system can be used by anyone to seek protection and remedies through court orders, even if no crime was committed. These options include petitioning for a civil protection order, getting a divorce, or filing for custody of children. Before filing any civil action, it is very important that you speak to an attorney. Your local domestic violence program may be able to connect you with an attorney or you can call ODVN if you cannot find an attorney through your local program.

Legal action is not for everyone. Taking legal action can increase safety but it can also have negative consequences. There is no guarantee that you will get what you need or are hoping for out of using the legal system. It is important for you to have a good understanding of how things work locally and to evaluate the potential benefits and consequences of pursuing legal options as a response to domestic violence. This is why it is so important to consult with an attorney and to contact a domestic violence program.

To learn more about legal options and attorney resources throughout Ohio, go to www.odvn.org and click on the *Self Help Legal Manual for Survivors*.

Ask yourself:
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- What supportive people can I talk to about my situation?
- How can I reach out to build my support network?
- What are some of the interests, talents, and skills I can build upon that can help me gain my independence?
- What resources are available in my community?
- Am I ready to take any legal actions?

Making a plan on what to do in dangerous situations can make you safer.

A safety plan is a practical, personalized plan that you create to help you be safer in any situation that feels dangerous. Safety planning can include how to cope with emotions, tell friends and family about the abuse, take legal action if you want to, keep your children and/or pets safe, possible legal options, and other things related to your unique situation. If you have ever felt in danger and responded to protect yourself, what you did was a part of your safety plan. You might have done what you were told to do, run into another room, escaped the situation, fought back, or called someone you know for help. These are all important strategies to help you be as safe as you can in your relationship.

Developing a safety plan can help you plan what to do in the future. When creating a safety plan, you can think through how you can respond if you feel like you are in danger. In moments of crisis your brain doesn't function in the same way as when you are calm, so designing a safety plan when you are not in danger is important. You have been trying many different ways to be safe when you feel threatened, and sometimes what you have done has worked, and sometimes it might not have worked so well. Think about the strategies you have used that have been helpful and what hasn't been helpful in the past. You are the expert in your own life and know your partner better than anybody, so your knowledge and instincts are critically important in developing a plan.

A safety plan should include a few important pieces, including thinking about how to stay as safe as you can when living with your partner, what to do if you are afraid your partner is going to hurt you, how you can talk to your partner about getting help for their behavior, what to do if you decide to leave your partner, how to keep your children and/or any pets safe, and safety planning for your emotional health and well-being. A good place to start is by thinking about your partner's past behaviors during tense, frightening or violent moments. For example, if your partner typically corners you and throws your phone across the room, how could you plan for your safety in that situation? In addition, think about your daily routine and predictable activities; consider how your partner might disrupt these and how you can be safer in those situations. You should continue safety planning even after leaving a relationship if your partner is still involved in your life through sharing custody or visitation of your children or you are still in contact for any reason. If you have children in your home, you can include strategies for them in your safety plan.

A safety plan is critically important because sometimes domestic violence situations can become very dangerous very quickly and someone can end up being seriously injured or even killed by their abusive partner. This is not meant to scare you, but often the most dangerous time for a victim of abuse is when they are considering ending the relationship or taking steps to leave the relationship. If you think your partner is depressed or suicidal, has access to weapons or has hurt you with weapons in the past, is stalking you, has ever strangled or choked you, or is making threats to you, those are possible signs your partner might be really dangerous. Even if the person abusing you has never done any of these things, if you feel afraid they will seriously hurt or kill you, listen to your intuition. There is no specific pattern when violence starts to get worse. Listen to your gut and connect with support.

Because your life situation changes often, your safety plan will change, and an advocate at a domestic violence program can help you with that. You can develop a safety plan on your own, with the help of friends or family, or call your local domestic violence program and they can help you develop one.



Ask yourself:

- In what situations do I feel unsafe and at risk?
- What have I done in the past that has helped increase my safety when I felt in danger?
- What concerns me about my partner?
- Who can I trust to help me? Will they be available?

Domestic violence programs offer many different resources and support, in addition to safe shelter.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, it is important to know that there are places where you can get help. Because we know that domestic violence impacts everyone, domestic violence programs work with all victims of domestic violence, regardless of your gender, age, economic circumstances, race, religion, or immigration status. Programs also work with people who have mental health challenges or are using substances. People often think that domestic violence programs are places that only offer shelter. While most domestic violence programs do offer safe shelter, programs have many additional resources for those who may not need shelter.

There are approximately 72 domestic violence programs in Ohio that offer a wide variety of services. They may have a 24 hour crisis hotline, advocacy services, community outreach programs, support groups, legal advocacy services, assistance with safety planning, programming for children, counseling services, safe shelter for pets, and much more. In addition, they often can connect you to other services in your local community that may be helpful in your specific situation.

Often, one of the first steps to take to connect to a domestic violence program is to call their 24 hour hotline. These hotlines are confidential and you do not need to give any information that you're uncomfortable sharing. You don't even have to give your name. The job of the people who answer hotline calls is to provide support and information to you as you consider your situation. They can listen to what is going on, discuss what is happening to you, make you aware of a variety of options and resources available, and help you map out a plan. They will talk with you about your safety and can assist you in developing a safety plan.

You may want to get information about shelter and what it's like, just in case you need it. If you're not comfortable at any point during the hotline call, you can hang up. Many different people answer hotline calls, so be prepared to talk with different people when you call at different times. Some people call a hotline just once and get the information or support they need. For others, the hotline becomes part of their support system, and they may continue to call regularly.

When Considering Shelter

Leaving an abusive partner is a dangerous time for survivors and their children. Domestic violence shelters provide a safe place for victims of abuse to stay, and they often become a place where survivors can begin to regain control over their lives and figure out what to do next. All shelters are free and you will not be charged. The shelter will provide for all of your basic necessities, like food, clothing, toiletries, and linens. Your children can come with you and stay with you. Usually you are responsible for childcare but some programs might have assistance with childcare. Shelters can also help you figure out what to do with any pets you have if you need to flee an abusive situation. Most shelters have some kind of timeframe for how long you can stay, but often that is flexible and depends on your situation.

Usually the location of the shelter is secret. Normally, there will be an advocate who will help you and your children develop a plan for your safety and work with you to meet your specific needs and assisting you with whatever next steps and goals you have. Advocates can help you in many ways, including assisting you with finding ways to be able to meet your financial needs, helping you get access to anything you might have needed to leave behind when you left (such as documents or medication) and making plans for the future. All programs have a set of guidelines which residents are expected to follow (such as shared living responsibilities, keeping the shelter location private, not sharing information about other residents, policies on curfew, etc.). Check with your local shelter for individual program policies.

Ask yourself:

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- Is there a domestic violence program in my area?
- Do I have a safe way to connect to the domestic violence program?
- What program services are available and best fit my situation at this time?

You are extremely important in helping your children heal from their experiences of abuse and harm.

How your child or teenager has been affected by the harshness, intimidation and abuse is as unique and individual as your child is. Thinking through your children's responses might be difficult, because none of us want our children to have hard experiences. You are the most important person to help them understand what is going on, deal with any troubling issues, and move on to live a happy and healthy life. Young people of all ages are strong and designed to bounce back from stress and hard situations, but they need your help and support to do this.

As you know better than anyone, all children have different strengths, challenges, resources, and face different risks. To understand how your child is doing, you can look at things like their behaviors, feelings, and their relationships with others, both in your family and in their lives. If you have more than one child, each of them will respond differently, and it depends on a lot of different things. Their age, their personality, how they react to stress, and their individual strengths and gifts play a role. Sometimes how kids respond have to do more with how much they saw and heard, how often abuse happened, if they tried to stop you from being hurt, or if your partner or other people have hurt them. Your child's relationship with your partner will also impact how they understand and are affected by what is happening.

What we know about what helps protect kids often has to do with their support system and their connection to caring adults that listen to them, let them know their feelings are okay, and help them find ways to cope with and talk about what happened.

Some kids have a lot of problems and others do fine. But we do know that children know a lot about what is happening at home, whether or not they have directly seen or gotten in the middle when your partner has been cruel or harmed you. They know and learn about the abuse in many different ways, whether it is through seeing or hearing abuse or being aware of the fallout after it happens (such as seeing you hurt, seeing things broken at home, or your partner being arrested), worrying about you and your safety, or someone talking with them about what happened. Sometimes children end up dangerously close when your partner is abusing you. Especially as children get older, many kids often actively try to protect you, and might get hurt themselves, either accidentally or on purpose.

We also know that children are not little adults. They see and understand things differently than adults do. They are often trying to figure out what happened and why, even if no one talks to them about it. Talking directly with your child about what is going on inside their head can be helpful, so you know how they are trying to make sense of things. Children see a lot but often misunderstand what they see, and sometimes what happens is twisted in many different ways when they live in a home that may be filled with fear and risk. Children often respond to domestic violence and other stressful events in a couple of ways, either by acting out or by bottling it in. Children sometimes respond by "acting out" or with challenging behaviors that could create problems in relationships with others. They might have a hard time behaving in school. Some parents report that their children copy some of the abusive behaviors they have seen. Your children might be more aggressive or hostile towards others or you.

On the other hand, some children respond by keeping all of their emotions in and become anxious, withdrawn, sad or depressed. They might lose interest in things they used to enjoy. Sometimes children and teens will be able to disconnect from the situation, which helps them escape in the moment. Your children might have trouble at school, because it's hard for them to concentrate and they might be worried about what is happening to you. Domestic violence can mess with nightly homework, regular mealtimes, bedtime routines, and social activities.

Here are some really important things you can do for your children:

Work to stay connected to your children. Make sure to provide them with opportunities to get physical affection from you, do fun things together, and be in activities that they like and do well. Singing songs, playing clapping games, rocking and humming are actually known to help people soothe and manage their feelings. You can sing, quote your favorite story or hum a tune together when it is safe to do so. This repetitive experience can help them calm down and provide them with tools to handle stressful situations.

Help your children feel safe. You play a really important role in reducing the impact of domestic violence on your children. It helps children a lot when children feel emotionally and physically safe, having a nurturing, caring parent that protects them, and providing

children with many opportunities to talk about their experiences and feelings. There are many things you can do to help once you understand how your children may be affected, including learning more about traumatic stress reactions in children and teens. You might figure out how to get your children to counseling if that would be helpful, or contact a domestic violence program to see if they provide services to children who have witnessed harm and abuse. Also consider ways in which you can help children stay connected to people, places and activities that are important to them.

Keep on the lookout for signs that your child is struggling with what is happening. You know your child best, so ask yourself if you see any changes in your children and whether they are doing okay or not. You could notice behavior issues, impact on physical development such as changes in potty habits, eating, grooming, and sleeping habits, thinking skills, language development, impacts on family and social relationships, stress, anxiety, and/or depression. You may see them develop healthy or unhealthy coping responses.

Listen to them. Expect your children to have mixed feelings about what is happening. They might be angry at you for what they see as you not stopping the abuse or upset by necessary changes you are making in your lives for more safety. Children who have been abused by a caretaker might feel like grown-ups aren't safe, or might learn that violence equals strength. They may feel the violence is their fault, your fault, or something they need to fix. Let them know all their feelings are okay and they can always share with you and other people they trust.

Believe your child and give them important messages, like it isn't their fault, you love them, that their feelings are okay, and that you will always be there for them. Children often don't express what happened as clearly as adults can, but their experiences are real, valid, and important to them. Even if they don't talk about what is happening, make sure to share with them regularly how much you love them, how you are doing your best to keep them safe, and that they are important, and that you will do everything you can to help them.

Act to help them stay physically safe. Helping your child plan with you and practice safety measures (such as running to a certain part of the house to hide, teaching your child to call 911, or coming up with a place to go and meet if you need to escape) is a great way to feel more hopeful and in control. Depending on the child's situation and their experiences with abuse, you might want to find a way to keep your partner from being alone with your children. You might need to come up with ways for your children to be out of the house at certain times, or maybe consider contacting the police or obtaining a protection order to keep your partner away from your children.

Consider how your partner's behavior might have changed your parenting. Think about how it impacted how you talk to your kids, how you punished your children, and how you felt connected to them. You may want to talk with your domestic violence program, a parenting resource, or a counselor or friend to think about what kind of parent you want to be with your children. Safely reviewing Lundy Bancroft's book, *When Dad Hurts Mom*, may also provide you with more understanding of how an abusive partner has undermined your role as a parent and how the partner's abuse impacts children and teens.

Ask yourself:



- How have my children been exposed to coercion and violence?
- Have there been changes in my children that I have seen? How have they changed?
- What are my child's strengths and what helps them in difficult situations?
- How has my partner's harshness and violence impacted my relationship with my children?
- What are some of the ways that I have protected and stayed connected to my children?
- What steps or actions can I take to promote healing and emotional and physical safety for my child and/or teen?

You are strong and designed to survive your experiences.

It is important to think of healing from your experiences as a process, not something that will magically happen one day. It takes time for our bodies and minds to grasp what has happened to us, so it is important to understand what you are feeling, thinking, and doing as ways that you are attempting to cope with and process your experience. Sometimes just having the knowledge that some of the ways our bodies and brains react to stress and trauma are normal and expected can help survivors of abuse understand what is happening to them.

Think about situations where you feel safe, both physically and emotionally. This begins by focusing on control of your body. Pay attention to your body and the ways in which you can help calm your body down from the traumatic experience. Often survivors have not been sleeping well nor eating regularly, have basic health needs that need to be taken care of, have been extremely anxious for a long time, or not had opportunities to use large muscle groups and exercise. Taking care of your body and getting regular sleep will help you feel better.

Establishing as much control as you can over your environment is the next step to healing from trauma. This is something you cannot do by yourself. Healing occurs in the context of making new, safe connections with others, which understandably might be difficult for you right now. But think about people that you have been connected to, or groups that might have been helpful to you in the past. Maybe you feel connected to your children or others in your life. Making safe connections with others can be enormously healing and will help as you look forward to the future.

Establishing control over your environment also includes figuring out a way to make your living situation as safe as possible, finding a way to meet your economic needs, and establishing a plan for self-protection that involves all of your daily activities. If you need assistance with this, there are many people you can talk to, including a domestic violence advocate at your local domestic violence program, someone at a job planning or readiness organization in your community, or other social service providers that can assist you. Sometimes calling your local helpline (which in most communities you can get by dialing 211 from a phone) can help connect you with local resources to assist you.

Telling your story to those who care about you is essential to healing. Breaking the silence about your experiences can be an important means of coping. In addition, recognizing that you were not at fault for any of the abuse you experienced and that your reactions to that abuse are understandable and make sense is very helpful to many trauma survivors. Remember that domestic violence programs often offer support groups that can help you connect with other survivors and give you safe space to process through what happened to you.

Thinking about the different strategies you are using to cope and deal with the stress and trauma in your life and how those strategies are working for you is really important. Developing or using healthy coping strategies is vital for your long term health and safety. Think through things that have helped you feel better in the past or try some new ideas. Often people report that exercising, relaxation such as yoga, journaling about the trauma, prayer, crying, reading, taking time for yourself daily, and keeping objects around you that feel safe are helpful. People have also found new or rediscovered hobbies they enjoy.

Will I ever feel normal again?

A question that many people ask about trauma is whether after experiencing trauma, people ever go back to “normal.” Generally, the best way to answer this question is that people absolutely do go on to lead productive, fulfilling and exciting lives. Often people who have experienced trauma comment that while they never would have wished to experience something like this, they did learn new things about themselves, learned new coping skills, and learned how strong and resilient they are. At the same time, after trauma, people generally have a new “normal,” because their belief system is impacted and changed by the traumatic experience. Therefore, thinking about what your new “normal” is might be helpful as you heal from your experiences.



Ask yourself:

- What are some things that make me feel good?
- Who are safe people I enjoy being around?
- What are things that have helped me cope with my experiences?

You are not responsible for your partner's behavior, and it is up to them to change.

If your partner is abusive to you in anyway, they are not likely to stop on their own. It usually takes a significant event to get someone who is abusive to recognize that they need to change. For example, your partner might have realized if they don't change they will lose something important to them, like their relationship with you or the children, or their freedom if they could go to jail. That reality can be what opens their eyes and helps them along their path of change. The change process takes time, considering your partner has established a habit of getting their way by using abuse. This abuse could be physical, or might be something more subtle and coercive (like emotional abuse) which can be just as controlling and damaging to your overall well-being. For example, if your partner uses tactics to try to isolate you from people, places or things, you may find yourself avoiding anything that may cause a problem; you try not to "rock the boat" in an effort to keep the peace. That might work for a while, but the odds are that your partner will continue to use controlling tactics that have gotten them what they want. It has become almost second nature to them. So it is best to be prepared for a slow process of change, if it occurs at all.

A Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) may be an option for your partner if they are committed to getting help. Batterer intervention programs are available in some communities to help abusers address and change their behavior. The goal of a good BIP is to help your partner understand that their abuse is a choice they have been making and not something they can continue to blame on you or something else. Generally, programs require weekly meetings and charge on a sliding fee scale. Most BIPs are court-ordered through the criminal process. It is important to know that in Ohio, BIPs are not licensed or regulated by anybody. It is a good idea to talk to an advocate to find out what programs are available in your community and how they work.

Sometimes these programs help batterers change and sometimes they don't. It is common for an abuser to attend a program to stay out of trouble even if they are not committed to changing. It is important to understand there is no guarantee the program will work or change your partner for the better. Your partner has to be the one that wants to change.

You might also hear about anger management, which are programs for people who have trouble controlling their anger. Anger management programs help a lot of people, but they are not equipped to deal with the deep rooted issues related to domestic violence. They tend to be a general overview with some self-control techniques built in. They are a good resource for people who get angry in a variety of circumstances and tend to lose their tempers or fly off the handle. As such, it might seem reasonable to you that if your partner could just control their anger, the problem would be resolved. But a bad temper coupled with domestic violence indicates strongly that they are in need of something more in depth than just controlling their anger. Most experts agree a batterer intervention program is necessary in order to truly help the abuser change their behavior.

You might wonder if couples or family counseling might help. Couples and family counseling are not a good idea in cases where domestic violence exists. While the abuse certainly affects you and the entire family, the abuser is solely responsible for their actions; it cannot be a shared experience in counseling. All too often, counselors operate from an assumption that both partners contribute to the problems and should be willing to compromise or negotiate to solve them. However, that is simply not true when it comes to domestic violence. Victims have reported being assaulted after a couples counseling session when something was said that the abuser did not like. Crime statistics have shown that some victims and/or children have been fatally attacked after going home from a counseling session. Therefore it is imperative to wait at least one year after the last occurrence of abuse to decide whether it is an option for you to participate in couples and family counseling.

Q

Ask yourself:

- What is the likelihood my partner will change?
- Do I have a safe place to live if my partner's behavior doesn't change right away or at all?

Conclusion

If you found yourself answering “yes” to any of the questions in this booklet, your partner might be trying to coerce or control you. If you are worried that your partner might hurt you physically or sexually, it is important to think about you and your children's safety and develop a safety plan on your own or with an advocate at a domestic violence program.

At the end of this booklet, there is a list of all of the domestic violence programs in Ohio listed in order by county. When you are ready to talk to someone about your situation, find the number to the domestic violence program in your county and give them a call.

You can also find more information about domestic violence on our website at www.odvn.org or by calling our toll free Information and Referral line at 1-800-934-9840.

Ohio Domestic Violence Programs

Counties Served	City	Organization	Phone number
Adams	Batavia	YWCA House of Peace . . . . .	.800-540-4764
	Manchester	Reach Out, Inc.. . . . .	.937-217-5072
Allen	Lima	Crossroads Crisis Center . . . . .	.877-228-4357
	Lima	Crime Victims Services . . . . .	.877-867-7273
Ashland	Ashland	Rape Crisis Domestic Violence Safe Haven . . . . .	.419-289-8085
Ashtabula	Ashtabula	HomeSafe. . . . .	.800-952-2873
Athens	Athens	My Sister's Place . . . . .	.800-443-3402
Auglaize	Wapakoneta	Auglaize County Crisis Center . . . . .	.419-738-5511
Belmont	St. Clairsville	Tri-County Help Center . . . . .	.800-695-1639
Brown	Batavia	YWCA House of Peace . . . . .	.800-540-4764
Butler	Hamilton	Dove House, YWCA. . . . .	.800-618-6523
	Cincinnati	Women Helping Women . . . . .	.513-381-5610
Carroll	Carrollton	Caritas House . . . . .	.330-627-5765
	New Philadelphia	Harbor House, Inc.. . . . .	.330-364-1374
Champaign	Springfield	Project Woman. . . . .	.800-634-9893
	Bellefontaine	New Directions of CCI – Soteria House . . . . .	.877-394-1046
Clark	Springfield	Project Woman. . . . .	.800-634-9893
Clermont	Batavia	YWCA House of Peace . . . . .	.800-540-4764
Clinton	Wilmington	Alternatives to Violence Center . . . . .	.888-816-1146
	Xenia	Family Violence Prevention Center of Greene County . . . . .	.937-372-4552
Columbiana	Lisbon	Christina House . . . . .	.330-420-0036
Coshocton	Coshocton	First Step Family Violence Intervention. . . . .	.740-622-9533
Crawford	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505
Cuyahoga	Cleveland	Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center . . . . .	.216-391-4357
	Cleveland	Jewish Family Services Association . . . . .	.216-292-3999
	Cleveland	Asian Services In Action, Inc. (ASIA, Inc.) . . . . .	.216-881-0330
Darke	Greenville	Shelter from Violence, Inc. . . . .	.937-548-4679
Defiance	Defiance	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
Delaware	Columbus	CHOICES . . . . .	.614-224-4663
	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505
Erie	Sandusky	Safe Harbour DV Shelter . . . . .	.800-953-2207
Fairfield	Lancaster	The Lighthouse. . . . .	.740-687-4423
Fayette	Washington C.H.	My Sister's House . . . . .	.740-572-2919
Franklin	Columbus	CHOICES . . . . .	.614-224-4663
	Columbus	The Center for Family Safety and Healing . . . . .	.614-722-8293
	Columbus	Asha Ray of Hope (serving South Asians) . . . . .	.614-565-2918
	Columbus	Asian American Community Services. . . . .	.614-220-4023
	Columbus	BRAVO (LGBTQ) . . . . .	.866-862-7286
	Columbus	Ohio Hispanic Coalition (Latino communities) . . . . .	.614-840-9934
	Columbus	Deaf World Against Violence Everywhere (DWAVE) . . . . .	.614-678-5476
	Columbus	DeafPhoenix . . . . .	.614-450-1262
	Columbus	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
Fulton	Defiance	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
Gallia	Gallipolis	Serenity House, Inc. . . . .	.800-942-9577
Geauga	Chardon	WomenSafe. . . . .	.888-285-5665
Greene	Xenia	Family Violence Prevention Center of Greene County . . . . .	.937-372-4552
Guernsey	Cambridge	Haven of Hope. . . . .	.800-304-4673
Hamilton	Cincinnati	Women Helping Women . . . . .	.513-381-5610
	Cincinnati	YWCA of Greater Cincinnati Battered Women's Shelter . . . . .	.888-872-9259
Hancock	Findlay	Open Arms DV & Rape Crisis Services. . . . .	.419-422-4766
Hardin	Lima	Crossroads Crisis Center . . . . .	.877-228-4357
Harrison	St. Clairsville	Tri-County Help Center . . . . .	.800-695-1639
Henry	Defiance	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
Highland	Hillsboro	Alternatives to Violence Center . . . . .	.800-816-1146
Hocking	Athens	My Sister's Place . . . . .	.800-443-3402
Holmes	Wooster	One Eighty (formerly Every Woman's House) . . . . .	.800-686-1122

Counties Served	City	Organization	Phone number
Huron	Sandusky	Safe Harbour DV Shelter . . . . .	.419-626-2200
Jackson	Gallipolis	Serenity House, Inc. . . . .	.800-942-9577
Jefferson	Steubenville	A.L.I.V.E., Inc. . . . .	.888-611-7233
Knox	Mt. Vernon	New Directions . . . . .	.740-397-4357
Lake	Painesville	Forbes House. . . . .	.440-357-1018
Lawrence	Ironton	Lawrence County DV Task Force . . . . .	.888-372-7433
Licking	Newark	Center for New Beginnings. . . . .	.800-686-2760
Logan	Springfield	Project Woman. . . . .	.800-634-9893
	Bellefontaine	Soteria House . . . . .	.877-394-1046
Lorain	Elyria	Genesis House . . . . .	.866-213-1188
Lucas	Toledo	YWCA of Northwest Ohio . . . . .	.888-341-7386
	Toledo	Family & Child Abuse Prevention Center. . . . .	.419-244-3053
	Toledo	Bethany House. . . . .	.419-727-4948
Madison	London	A Friend's House. . . . .	.740-852-7761
Mahoning	Youngstown	Sojourner House. . . . .	.330-747-4040
Marion	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505
Medina	Akron	Battered Women's Shelter . . . . .	.877-414-1344
Meigs	Gallipolis	Serenity House, Inc. . . . .	.800-942-9577
Mercer	Celina	Family Crisis Network . . . . .	.419-586-1133
Miami	Troy	Family Abuse Shelter of Miami County. . . . .	.800-351-7347
Monroe	St. Clairsville	Tri-County Help Center . . . . .	.800-695-1639
Montgomery	Dayton	Artemis Center. . . . .	.937-222-7233
	Dayton	YWCA Dayton-Shelter & Housing Network . . . . .	.937-222-7233
Morgan	Zanesville	Transitions . . . . .	.740-454-3213
Morrow	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505
Muskingum	Zanesville	Transitions . . . . .	.740-454-3213
Noble	Cambridge	Haven of Hope. . . . .	.800-304-4673
Ottawa	Sandusky	Safe Harbour DV Shelter . . . . .	.419-626-2200
Paulding	Defiance	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
Perry	Zanesville	Transitions . . . . .	.740-454-3213
Pickaway	Circleville	Haven House of Pickaway County. . . . .	.740-477-9113
Pike	Waverly	Pike County Partnership Against DV . . . . .	.740-947-1611
Portage	Kent	Safer Futures . . . . .	.330-673-2500
Preble	Eaton	YWCA Preble County DV Shelter Services. . . . .	.937-456-6891
Putnam	Ottawa	Crime Victim Services . . . . .	.877-274-7471
Richland	Mansfield	The Domestic Violence Shelter, Inc. . . . .	.800-931-7233
Ross	Chillicothe	Ross County Coalition/Phoenix House. . . . .	.866-828-2273
Scioto	Portsmouth	Southern Ohio Task Force on DV . . . . .	.800-570-1819
Shelby	Sidney	New Choices . . . . .	.937-498-7261
Stark	Alliance	Alliance Area DV Shelter/PACE . . . . .	.330-823-7223
	Canton	Domestic Violence Project, Inc. . . . .	.330-453-7233
Summit	Akron	Battered Women's Shelter . . . . .	.888-395-4357
	Akron	Asian Services In Action, Inc. (ASIA, Inc.) . . . . .	.330-535-3263
Trumbull	Warren	Someplace Safe. . . . .	.330-393-3005
Tuscarawas	New Philadelphia	Harbor House, Inc.. . . . .	.330-364-1374
Union	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505
Van Wert	Van Wert	Crisis Care Line . . . . .	.419-238-4357
	Van Wert	YWCA of Van Wert County . . . . .	.567-259-9501
Vinton	McArthur	Shepherd's House . . . . .	.866-596-9271
Warren	Lebanon	Abuse and Rape Crisis Shelter of Warren County . . . . .	.888-860-4084
Washington	Marietta	EVE, Inc. . . . .	.800-974-3111
Wayne	Wooster	OneEighty (formerly Every Woman's House). . . . .	.800-686-1122
Williams	Defiance	House of Ruth . . . . .	.800-782-8555
	Bryan	Sarah's House. . . . .	.419-636-7272
Wood	Bowling Green	The Cocoon Shelter . . . . .	.800-472-9411
Wyandot	Marion	Turning Point . . . . .	.800-232-6505

