

Domestic Violence – Break the Silence

Anyone can become a victim of domestic violence. Abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, economic, religious and age groups across the lifespan. Victims are primarily female, although men can also be harmed. Abusers can include spouses, partners, adult children or other family members and some caregivers. Abusers use power and control to manipulate their victims.

Domestic abuse is a pattern of coercive tactics that are used to gain and maintain power and control in an ongoing, familiar relationship. Generally, several forms of abuse, such as psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and/or economic, are used in combination. Abusers believe they are entitled to control how their victims think, feel and behave. This control extends to the entire household, and children in the home are harmed by the behavior and parenting tactics of the abuser. Physical and sexual violence may be a component of the abuse but some victims are controlled through intimidation, threats, emotional and psychological abuse and isolation – **no physical abuse is necessary.** In an abusive relationship, one party fears the other and attempts to comply with the other's wishes to avoid harm. The abuser may even hurt or threaten family pets.

In the state:

- Wisconsin prosecutors reported 25,531 domestic abuse incidents referred to their offices by law enforcement during 2006.
- The typical victim was an 18-29 year old female battered by a spouse or ex-spouse.
- There were forty domestic homicides reported in 19 Wisconsin counties during 2006. Victims of these homicides were most often females killed in their residence by a family member who used a firearm or a knife.
- One-fourth of all domestic homicide victims were children, the majority of whom were killed by a parent or someone their parent was dating.

Local Facts: 2006 Law Enforcement Response and Comparison by County

County	Population	# Incidents	Arrest Rate
Crawford	17,060	29	NA (*22 arrests)
La Crosse	109,404	435	85.7%
Monroe	43,028	289	83.7%
Vernon	29,188	81	NA (*41 arrests)

* Arrest "rates" are not meaningful in counties with low number of incidents and/or arrests. For that reason, arrests are presented as totals, not rates.

Why Does Abuse Occur?

Abuse happens when an individual chooses manipulative, threatening or physically violent behavior to gain power and control over another individual. Even though abusers can be angry at times it is never okay to abuse. Anger is a normal and healthy emotion and does not cause abuse. Abusive tactics may occur without any anger evident in the abuser.

While stress is a commonly used rationale for abuse, stress does not cause abuse. Everyone experiences stress. Most stressed people do not hurt others. Most abusers under stress do not hit their bosses or law enforcement officers because they would be arrested, fired and/or prosecuted. The behavior will not be tolerated. Abusers choose victims (such as family members) who have less power.

Some mental illnesses may have challenging or violent behaviors as one of their symptoms. Contact a mental health expert or doctor to find out more information about specific mental illnesses and combinations of medications to learn if violent behavior is likely or possible. Keep in mind that some abusers have used mental illness as an excuse to continue with their abusive behavior, just ahead of alcohol and drug use.

Many people use drugs and/or alcohol and are never abusive. Drugs and alcohol do not cause abuse or violence; however, the violence may intensify when using drugs or alcohol. Sometimes abusers will use drugs and alcohol as an excuse for their behavior. Abusers who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol have two separate problems – abusive behavior and substance abuse. Drug and alcohol treatment programs are designed to help an individual stay sober, not to eliminate the abusive behavior.

Why do victims stay with an abuser or return after they have left?

There are numerous reasons why victims maintain contact with abusers or feel they cannot leave an abusive relationship. Victims of abuse often love the people who hurt them. Keeping the family together may be very important to the victim for many reasons, including for the sake of the children, religious and cultural beliefs, and fear the family pet may be harmed. Victims often fear they may be seriously hurt or killed if they leave their abusers. Others do not have the financial resources and/or housing they need to leave. Medical conditions and disability may make living on their own difficult or impossible or the abusive individual may need the victims care.

What can someone do if they see or hear abuse/violence?

If you see someone being physically hurt or threatened with a weapon, call a law enforcement emergency line such as 911. If you suspect an adult you know is being abused try to talk to them. Tell them you are concerned for their safety and that you are there to help. Offer to accompany them to speak with an advocate at a domestic violence program or a social worker at an abuse agency. Be part of their “safety plan”. A safety plan is created by the victim with the help of a professional. The intent is to plan for a victim’s safety needs before another violent episode erupts. Again, if you believe someone is in immediate danger call 911.

Resources

Great Rivers 2-1-1 provides free, confidential community information, referrals and crisis line services 24 hours a day; dial 2-1-1 or 1-800-362-8255. For the nearest domestic abuse hotline in your area, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-779-7233; for the nearest sexual assault hotline in your area, call the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network at 1-800-656-HOPE or 1-800-656-4673. Other resources include:

Location	Program	Phone
Crawford County	Catholic Charities Domestic Violence Program Passages, Inc. Victim/Witness Assistance Program	888-200-8426 800-236-4325 608-326-0299
La Crosse County	La Crosse Police Crime Victim Advocate New Horizons Shelter Victim/Witness Assistance Program	608-789-8040 608-791-2600 608-785-9608
Monroe County	Brighter Tomorrows Monroe Domestic Abuse Project New Horizons Shelter Victim/Witness Assistance Program	608-269-7853 or 608-374-6975 608-346-0374 608-791-2600 608-269-8779
Vernon County	Domestic Abuse Project New Horizons Shelter Passages, Inc. Victim/Witness Assistance Program	608-637-7007 608-791-2600 800-236-4325 608-637-5357

Couleecap, Inc. is a private, non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization created in 1966. Our mission is to fight poverty and promote self-sufficiency for people in the Coulee Region. Our four-county service area includes Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties in Wisconsin. For more than 42 years, we have been helping low-income people build on their strengths and become more self-sufficient. We currently operate over 40 programs in the areas of housing, family and youth services, and emergency services. Each year, Couleecap helps more than 10,000 people work towards self-sufficiency. For more information about our People Helping People Initiative or to make a donation, contact Couleecap’s Development Coordinator, Kadie Brueggen, at 608-634-7363 or Kadie.Brueggen@couleecap.org, or go to www.couleecap.org.

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 References: Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence www.wcadv.org; Wisconsin Department of Justice 2006 Domestic Abuse Incident Report www.doj.state.wi.us/news/2007; Wisconsin Domestic Violence Resources www.aardvarc.org; Vernon County District Attorney Office
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