



## Stopping the vicious cycle of domestic violence

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Did you know that one out of every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1.3 million women each year are physically assaulted by an intimate partner. This is not to say that men can't be victims of domestic violence as well; however, the large majority of victims are female.

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used to gain power and control over another individual. These behaviors may include emotional, psychological, physical, sexual and financial abuse.

Abuse often begins in subtle ways, such as isolating one's partner from friends and family. Emotional abuse might include putting your partner down, embarrassing her in front of others or making her feel stupid or incompetent.

Financial abuse includes preventing your partner from getting or keeping a job, making her ask for money or not allowing her to have access to family finances. People who use violence as a means of gaining control over another often use intimidation and coercion, threatening to hurt themselves, their partners, the family pets and even the children.

Domestic violence often occurs in a cycle, starting with a tension-building phase. During this time, the victim may feel like she is "walking on eggshells," afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. This phase culminates in an explosive incident that includes emotional, physical or sexual abuse. The third phase of the cycle is often referred to as the "honeymoon phase." During this time, the abuser may apologize and

promise that it will never happen again while simultaneously blaming the victim for causing the abuse.

In the honeymoon phase the victim hopes the abuse is over and that the abuser is truly going to change. This cycle can happen hundreds of times in an abusive relationship, taking anywhere from a few hours to a year or more to complete. Over time the tension-building and explosive stages tend to get longer while the honeymoon stage shortens, perhaps disappearing altogether.

"Why doesn't she just leave?" is a question often heard when abusive relationships are discussed. It's not as easy as it might appear to those of us on the outside. The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when the woman chooses to leave. The FBI reports that more than 30 percent of female homicide victims are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.

Women often stay out of fear for themselves, their children and other loved ones. Many women have become socially isolated and financially dependent as a result of their partners' abusive and controlling behaviors.

What can you do to help? You can be there as a friend by listening to what she has to say, letting her know you are concerned for her safety, and never blaming her for what is happening. Let her know that she is not alone and that there are places she can go for help — such as Albion Fellows Bacon Center, a local domestic violence and sexual assault center that can provide shelter and information on how to leave an

abusive relationship safely. The YWCA is another option.

As always, if a situation arises that is more than you can handle, seek the help of a professional. Local help is available in your time of need.