

## October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary “domestic” has to do with household or family and “violence” has to do with the use of “physical force to injure or abuse”. Interestingly enough there is a second part to this definition of “violence” that is frequently ignored or not used – that is “injury by infringement or profanation”. In other words violating the rights of another person, (denying them money and/or denying them contact with family and friends), and by treating them with irreverence and disrespect – (put downs and name calling). The person who perpetrates domestic violence, (DV), is also referred to as the “batterer” which Webster’s defines as “to beat or damage with repeated blows”; referring to physical, verbal or mental blows.

1. “Why do people batter (or abuse)?” This question does not have a simple or easy answer. People batter for a variety of reasons and usually a combination rather than a single reason. Battering is a learned behavior for many people; it is learned by observing the interactions within the family. Chances are if one or more parent was a batterer, the children will in turn become batterers or victims themselves as this is the only way they know how to resolve conflicts. Most batterers are insecure, have low self-worth, a low frustration tolerance, and few problem-solving skills within a relationship. Not all batterers have chemical dependency problems but the battering escalates when alcohol or other drugs are added. Battering is a form of controlling behavior; the batterer can only feel good about him/herself if the victim complies completely. Striking out at another person, verbally, emotionally or physically, is also a way some batterers deal with their frustration and anger at their life situations.

2. “How does DV impact a person’s emotional health?” DV can completely destroy a person’s sense of self-worth and self-esteem. It leaves the victim feeling isolated, abandoned, hopeless and helpless. The abuse can also leave victims with ongoing PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. There is a lot of depression, chemical dependency, compulsive over eating, and obesity or just the opposite, very thin and anorexic individuals where the food may be withheld by the batterer or used for a sense of control by the victim. Victims frequently have many stress related medical complaints and seem to be sick more often than others. Respiratory problems, stomach problems including irritable bowel syndrome and ulcers as well as headaches are quite common.

3. “What are the effects on children?” In children you may see symptoms that mimic ADHD, acting out behaviors, poor performance in school or children who are withdrawn and have few friends. They see the world as a painful and unsafe place to be and they have a high rate of chemical dependency, running away and suicide. They may also begin to mimic the behaviors perpetrated on them and begin to batter their friends, parents or siblings or they will choose partners who batter and abuse them. These children tend to have a lot of stress related physical problems as well; respiratory problems including asthma are quite common.

4. “Do batterers ever change?” The good news is that batterers can change. With intense therapy and a willingness on their part, they can learn appropriate ways to deal with their rage and learn how to resolve conflicts and deal with frustration. They can learn how to engage in an emotionally healthy relationship and become caring and nurturing parents.

5. “Why do victims stay?” This is probably the most frequently asked question of all. Very few emotionally healthy people truly understand the inner world of the victim. They have learned to identify with the perpetrator and have internalized the message that they are somehow responsible for the abuse they receive. They have no self confidence, believe themselves to be helpless and hopeless. Victims believe that they have *no options!* They believe they or their children or families will be harmed or killed if they do not comply with the batterer. There is also an identification or sympathy with the batterer which develops as the batterer tells a sad story to justify his/her violent behaviors. They may offer small kindnesses to the victim to encourage the idea that they are not all bad. Victims frequently say “I can’t leave him/her; I love him/her.” When confronted by the inconsistencies and the violent behaviors pointed out, victims will respond “You just don’t understand.”

The victims need intensive therapy as well. If they do not receive help they will continue to engage in unhealthy relationships with other batterers until they are completely destroyed emotionally or murdered or they will become batterers themselves, the final act of identifying with the perpetrator.

If you or someone you know are in an abusive relationship, you can contact the following agencies for help:

USAFV – 581-1500

IFHS Clinic – 581-1202

APIA Clinic – 581-2751

UPD – 581-1233 or 911

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IFHS Behavioral Health Program

(This program is partially funded by the citizens of the City of Unalaska)