

# Creating Allies in Safety: Tips and Tools for Domestic Violence Victims' Friends and Family

## Society's typical response to victims:

- "You just need to leave."
- "You need to go to a shelter."
- "Call the police!"

## 5 Tools for Friends and Family:

- Understand the cycle of domestic violence
- Understand power and control techniques
- Understand what influences a victim to stay in or leave an abusive relationship
- Understand the abuser's façade and manipulation
- Recognize post-separation risks

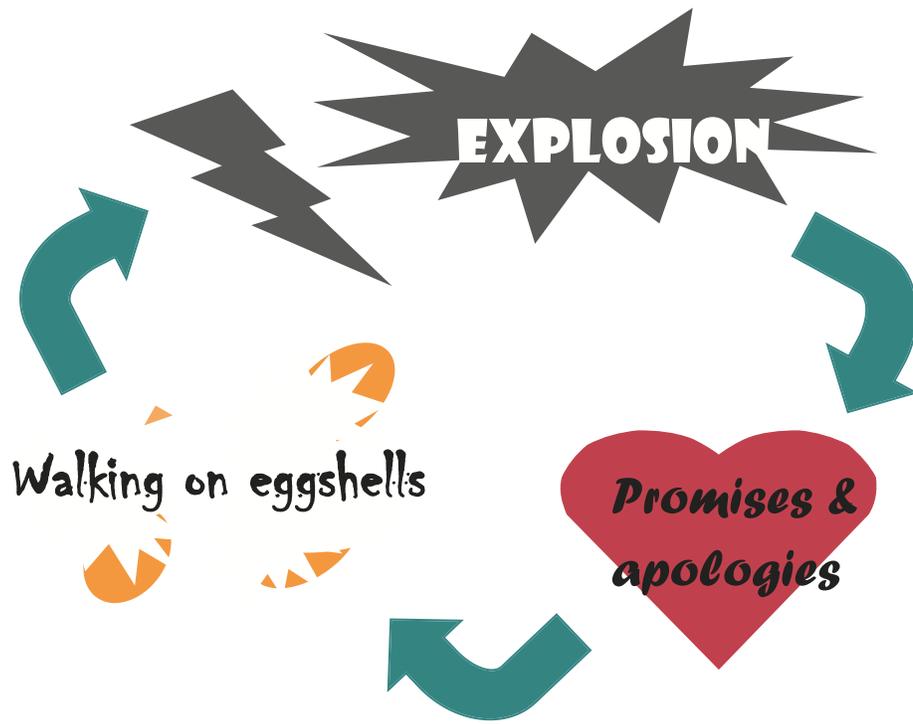
## #1: The Cycle of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a **pattern** of behavior used to gain and maintain **power and control** over an **intimate partner**. The pattern is punctuated by acts of physical and sexual violence.

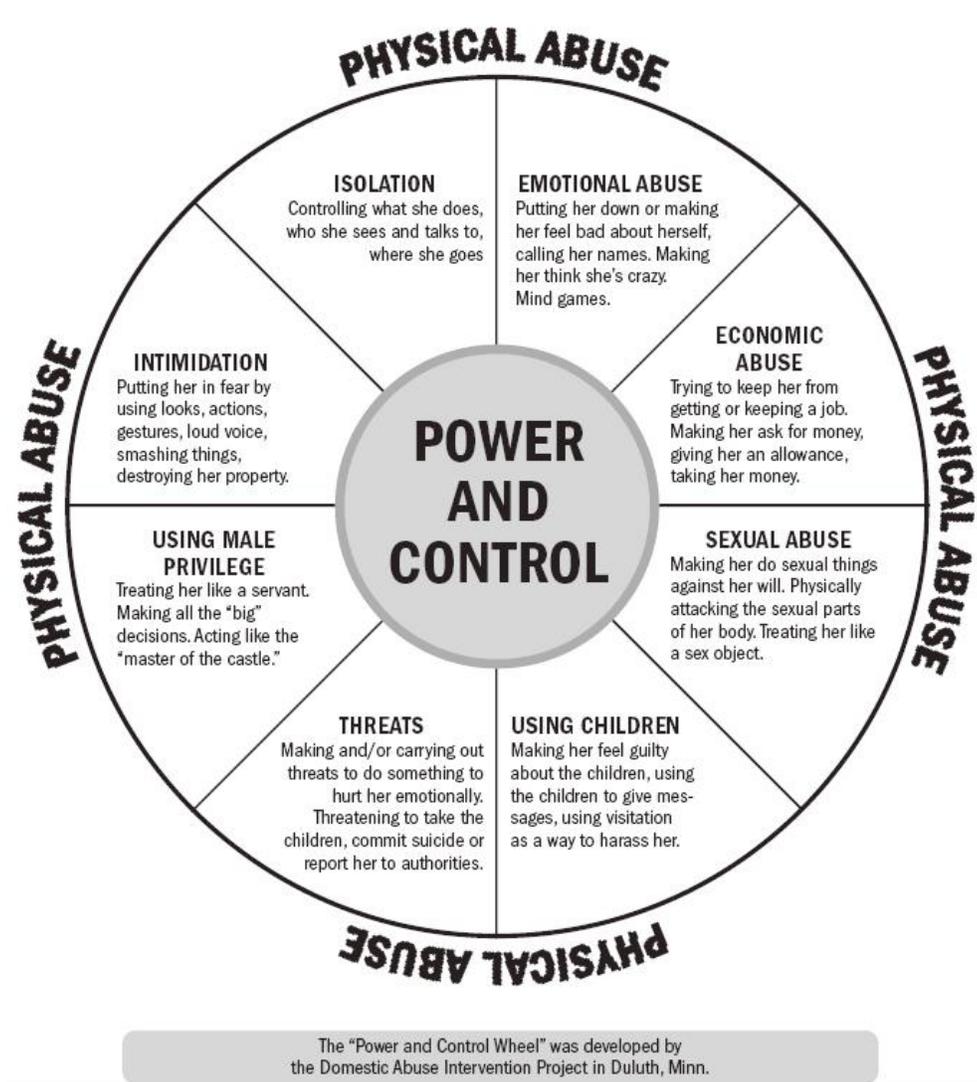
Domestic violence can also be found in dating relationships that have not yet become sexually intimate. Over time, the cycle become shorter; that is, the acts of physical assault become more frequent. They also become more severe.

Forms of abuse include:

- Emotional, psychological
- Economic/financial
- Verbal
- Sexual
- Physical
- Threats and intimidation, including via social media



## #2: Power and Control Techniques



## #3: Barriers to Leaving

- **Logistical Barriers:** Financial, legal, transportation, medical, housing, employment, children's issues, issues related to aging.
- **Safety Barriers:** Stalking, threats, separation violence, etc.
- **Emotional Barriers:** The "Checklist Theory:" We all have checklists when making a major decision: what checklist is the victim working from?

- **Using the list to help victims:**

- Give the victim credit for what s/he has already tried; acknowledge how exhausting that has been.
- Find out where s/he is on the checklist now: is the person stuck?
- Ask what the person would like to try next.
- Ask if s/he wants help with that next step.

#### **#4: The Batterer's Facade**

- **Why talk about batterers?**

- The capacity to understand abusers increases one's level of support for victims.
- Understanding how abusers act makes it harder for them to manipulate you.
- The helper's challenge is to bring the abuser back into focus: abusers choose controlling, abusive behaviors and are responsible for their abusive actions.

- **Batterers Facades**

- The polished façade: charming, ingratiating, "good parent," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"
- Diversion tactics: "It's the alcohol, steroids, etc."
- Denial & minimization; sharing responsibility means dodging accountability
- The "art of lying:"
  - They can tell the story better than the victim can tell the facts.
  - They will start the story where it suits them.
  - They will tell just enough of the facts to be believed.
- Hooks: Playing the victim, promises to change, claiming circumstantial hardship
- Anyone can be manipulated by an abuser.

## #5: Post-Separation Risks

- Threats to harm victim, children, others
- Stalking
- Risk of homicide, suicide
- Use of children as pawns and/or monitors
- Protracted divorce proceedings
- Contesting parenting time
- Pleading innocent to criminal charges

## 10 Helpful Things To Do For Victims

1. Open a dialogue.
2. Express your concern.
3. Appreciate the danger.
4. Commit to unconditional support.
5. Listen.
6. Tell the victim the abuse is not her/his fault.
7. Compliment the victim.
8. Make non-judgmental observations.
9. Offer help and set clear boundaries.
10. Ask questions about her/his feelings.

## 5 Things NOT To Do Or Say To Victims

1. "Just leave."
2. Give an ultimatum.
3. Bad-mouth the batterer.
4. Disbelieve, interrogate or look for proof.
5. Give advice.

## A Challenge to Family and Friends

- ▶ As you try to help a victim, ask yourself: “Are you angrier at the victim or the person abusing her?”
- ▶ Could your feelings be hindering your ability to help?
- ▶ Could your feelings be affecting the victim’s ability to trust you as a helper?

## 10 Things To Do To Help Someone Who Is Abusive

1. Express empathy for the difficulties experienced by this person WITHOUT believing excuses for the abusive behaviors.
2. Advise the batterer to stop the violence.
3. Maintain that there is no excuse for abuse or violence.
4. Remind the person that only he/she controls his/her behavior. No one and no thing makes him/her “lose control.”
5. Remind the person that stalking is frightening, abusive, and a crime.
6. Say, “I’m concerned. It’s clear you feel a lot of anger/pain over this. What can we do to make sure nobody gets hurt?” or, “I feel uncomfortable with the way you treat your partner,” or, “What will you do to make sure your partner and children are safe?”
7. Help the person understand how acceptable it is to seek professional help.
8. Refer the individual to a counselor who has been trained on domestic violence. Provide referral numbers to detox, mental health hotlines, parenting classes, etc., as needed.
9. Take the initiative to stay in touch with this person. His isolation can increase her risk of harm.
10. Take all threats and signs of escalation seriously. This includes:
  - ▶ threats of suicide,
  - ▶ threats to harm the victim,
  - ▶ a sudden obsession with weapons,
  - ▶ comments about disappearing with the children.

**Call law enforcement for help!**

## 8 Things NOT To Do When Helping Someone Who Is Abusive

1. Do not blame the victim.
2. Do not be taken in by excuses.
3. Do not say, “Your partner told me. . .” or, “Your children said. . .”
4. Do not align with complaints about the victim.
5. Do not assume the victim is safe, even if the abusive person is remorseful or promises it won’t happen again.
6. Do not deliberately or inadvertently help the abuser stalk the victim.
7. Do not recommend couple’s counseling.
8. Do not try to physically intervene. Rather, call the police.

## Remember To Help YOU

- Know your limitations
- Develop a network of reliable referral sources and community partners.
  - Shelters
  - Law enforcement officers
  - Transitional housing options
  - Legal advocates
  - CA/DA/police advocates
  - Batterer intervention providers

## Resources

Marley Bordovsky, Denver City Attorney’s Office, Prosecution and Code Enforcement  
[Marley.Bordovsky@denvergov.org](mailto:Marley.Bordovsky@denvergov.org) 720.913.8057

Linda Loflin Pettit, Denver City Attorney’s Office, Prosecution and Code Enforcement  
[Linda.LoflinPettit@denvergov.org](mailto:Linda.LoflinPettit@denvergov.org) 720.913.5777

Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence [www.violencefreecolorado.org](http://www.violencefreecolorado.org)