

Domestic Violence Safety Tips:

*Safety Tips for you
and Your Family*
(<http://www.andvsa.org>)

**If you are in danger, call 911 or
your local police emergency number**

To find out about help in your area, call
National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

An Introduction to the Problem of Domestic Violence and Alaska Natives

As we look at restoring family wellness for our Alaska Native families, it is important to realize that Native American women experience the highest rate of violence of any group in the United States (National Organization for Women, 2001). In fact, Alaska ranks among the top 5 states in the nation for per capita rates of domestic violence and the rate of Alaskan women being killed by a partner is 1.5 times the national average (AK Dept of Health & Social Services Website – AK Family Violence Prevention Project).

What do these statistics mean for our children? First, if the mother is not safe, neither are the children. Domestic violence is the NUMBER ONE indicator for child abuse, with child abuse being 15 times more likely to occur in a household where adult domestic violence is also present. 91% of abused women indicate that their children witnessed their beatings. In 1994, 4 of 16 domestic violence related deaths were children. (US Dept. Of Justice; Bureau of Justice Statistics)

Why do Alaskan Native Women stay with their abuser?

1. Fear of being murdered or beaten
2. Village social pressure or Tribal cultural belief
3. Former Tribal Council/Court responses
4. Unable to get restraining order or protective orders enforced
5. Unable to stop the stalking or harassment
6. Negative response from the community
7. Historical Oppression, violation and discrimination factors
8. Familiarity with subsistence lifestyle
9. Unable to survive in industrious regions
10. They have nowhere safe to go
11. They are often restricted in gaining access to services, in receiving emotional support from friends/relatives, and in taking part in public life
12. No money, food, or transportation
13. Fear of partner committing suicide
14. Fear of getting in trouble with social services
15. Abused women often experience depression, anxiety and low self esteem
16. Caring about their partner
17. Fear of change
18. No Voice
19. A Learned silence
20. Helpless

Indicators of Abusive Relationships

The more signs the person has, the more likely he is an abuser. In some cases the batterer may only have a few recognizable signs, but they are very exaggerated; for example, extreme jealousy over ridiculous things.

Initially the abuser tries to explain his behavior as a sign of his love or concern. The partner may be flattered at first, but as time goes on, these behaviors become more severe and serve to dominate the woman. Behaviors of an abuser may include:

- Put downs
- Treating you like a servant
- Threats to take the children
- Smashing things or making you afraid
- Controlling what you do, who you see or talk to and where you go
- Destroying your support system
- Making you do illegal things
- Preventing you from getting a job
- Blaming you for their anger or abuse
- Denying any wrongdoing

Common Characteristics Of An Abuser

- *Quick involvement* - He comes on like a whirlwind: "You're the only person I've ever really been able to talk to. I've never felt loved like this before." He needs someone desperately and pressures you to commit to him. Many women believe that this is a sign of his love.
- *Unrealistic expectations* - He is very dependent on you for all his needs, expects you to be the perfect wife, partner, mother, lover, friend.
- *Rigid sex roles* - He sees women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship. He expects you to obey him, to serve him, to stay home.
- *Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde* - He has "sudden" changes in mood. One minute he's nice, the next minute he explodes. Anything can set him off on a rampage.
- *Blames others for his problems* - Almost anything that goes wrong in his life is someone else's fault. For example, if he lost his job or is chronically unemployed, he may say, "They did me in."

- *Blames others for his feelings* - When he becomes angry and abusive it's because "You made me mad. You're hurting me by not doing what I ask. I can't help being angry." He uses his feelings to manipulate you. Hard to catch are his claims, "You make me happy. You control how I feel."
- *Poor or negative self-image* - Research has found that abusers have lower self-esteem and masculinity scores than other men tested. One researcher calls this a "failed macho complex." These men appear to over-compensate for what they see as their failure to live up to the masculine sex role stereotype.
- *Hypersensitivity* - He is easily insulted, or takes the slightest set-back as a personal attack. He claims his feelings are "hurt" when he's really very mad. He rants and raves about the injustice of things that have happened to him - things that are really just part of living - like being asked to work over-time, getting a traffic ticket, being asked to help around the house.
- *Verbal abuse* -He says cruel and hurtful things, uses foul and degrading language to describe you or parts of your body, attacks your self-esteem by criticizing your looks, running down your family, friends or accomplishments. He tells you are stupid and unable to function without him.
- *Jealousy* - At the beginning of the relationship, he says that his jealousy is a sign of his love. In reality, jealousy has nothing to do with love - it is a sign of his insecurity and possessiveness. He's constantly suspicious of any contact you have with other men at work or in social situations. He questions you about who you talk to, accuses you of flirting, or is jealous of time you spend with family, friends or children. As his jealousy and possessiveness increase, he may call you frequently or drop by unexpectedly to check on you. He may refuse to let you work for fear you'll meet someone else, or even check your car mileage or ask friends to watch you.
- *Controlling behavior* - At first, he says he's just concerned about you. He may throw a tantrum if you are a few minutes late coming home from work or the store, or question you closely about where you went, who you spoke to. He may not let you make personal decisions about the house, your clothing, going out with friends. He may keep control over all the money, making you ask him for anything you need.
- *Isolation* - He tries to cut you off from friends and family. If you have men friends, you're a "whore"; if you have women friends, you're a lesbian; if you have close family ties, you're "tied to the apron strings." He accuses people who are your supports of "causing trouble." He may restrict your

use of the phone, limit your use of the car or prevent you from going to work or school.

- *"Playful" use of force in sex* - He may like throwing you down, holding your wrists, jumping on top of you or holding you up against a wall or door to have intercourse. He may want to act out fantasies where you are helpless. He's letting you know that the idea of rape excites him. He may show little concern about whether you want to have sex, and use sulking or anger to manipulate you into compliance. He may start having sex with you while you are sleeping, or when you are ill or tired. 34% to 59% of battered women report they were forced to have sexual intercourse. Although people usually associate rape with the use of great physical force or weapons, it is still rape if you agree to have sex simply because you are afraid of what he will do if you refuse.
- *Cruelty to children and animals* - Studies of battering men have found that between 40% to 70% physically abuse their children. He may expect a child to be capable of doing things far beyond her ability, like whipping a 2 year old for wetting a diaper, or may tease a child until he cries. He may not want to eat at the table with the children. He may punish animals brutally, insensitive to their pain or suffering, or deliberately abuse animals in front of you and the children in order to use the animal's anguish to terrorize or manipulate you. Between 71% and 80% of battered women have reported that their abuser also abused animals.
- *Has witnessed abuse* - Many abusers were themselves abused as children or saw their mothers abused by their fathers. In one study, 57% of male batterers were exposed to one form or another of domestic violence as children - either as victims of child abuse or as witnesses of spousal violence. Almost one-third were both victims and witnesses. Source: www.vtnetwork.org/fact_sheets/signs

Potential For Change

Surface Level Indicators (*Talking The Talk*)

1. Admitting a Need to Change
 - "My temper gets out of control."
 - "I shouldn't hit a woman."
 - "I don't want to go to jail."
 - "I will lose my family if I don't change."
2. Sees Himself In a Way He Doesn't Like
 - "I wish I didn't do it."
 - "I'm just like my father."
 - "I don't want my kids to be afraid of me."
 - "I've got a problem with my temper."

Deeper Level Indicators (*Walking The Walk*)

1. Taking Responsibility for His Behavior
 - "It was my fault, not hers."
 - "This is what I did to her."
 - "I am controlling and abusive."
2. Ability to Understand the Effects of Abuse on Others
 - "I saw fear in my kids' eyes."
 - "She has no reason to trust me."
 - "If I was her, I'd leave me too."
 - "I'll never be a good father if my kids are afraid of me."

http://www.endingviolence.com/Potential_Change.htm

How Can You Support a Woman Being Harmed by Domestic Violence?

First of all, if you are trying to support a woman in a domestic violence situation, be patient! You should be aware that leaving an abuser is a dangerous time for them. Research shows that women who leave their abuser are at a 75% greater risk of being killed than those who stay. (www.awaic.org/education). Therefore, the timing and safety of how domestic violence is handled is critical.

You can:

- Listen! Do not place blame on her by asking her why she stays.
- Support! You can help by providing childcare or resources.
- Inform! Giving information that she can have available such as support groups, housing information, safe places, or community advocates.

- Provide Information on Safety Plans (www.andvsa.org/safety.htm)
Sample plans included in appendix.
- Give Words! Let her know it is not her fault and that you are there for her.
Let her know she does not deserve to be treated that way.

Remember that a woman who has experienced domestic violence may struggle with depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem. They can be at an increased risk for suicide or substance abuse. Pressuring, attempting to control her, or tell her what to do, may be tempting, but is not helpful. Leaving is her decision to make when she is ready. She needs your encouragement both now and then.