How to Strengthen Your Community Against Domestic Violence

Objectives

This Fearless Act Kit will help you:

- Learn more about intimate-partner violence
- Get involved to reduce the incidence of abuse in your community

Many people prefer not to think about domestic violence: "It won't happen to me," or "It's a private matter," or "It couldn't happen here." The truth is, at least 25 percent of women are physically abused at some point in their lives. Everyone knows someone who has lived — or is living — with violence.

Here are some steps you can take now to combat domestic violence where you live.

Step 1: Promote Awareness

- The Clothesline Project features T-shirts decorated by abuse and assault survivors (and those who love them) to raise awareness of the issue and help survivors heal. Bring a Clothesline display to your neighborhood, or organize a shirt making session. Contact mspourch@aol.com or go to www.clothesline.org to learn more.
- Design and print folding cards ("table tents") with hot line numbers and information about other services. Ask restaurants and workplace cafeterias to put them out in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. For help,
contact the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

- In New London, CT and Washington, DC, hairdressers are learning to recognize and talk to their clients about signs of abuse. Working with a local shelter or domestic violence program, you can start a hairdresser program in your community. For a how-to booklet, call the New London area crisis center (860) 447-0366, during business hours, eastern time. For information on the Washington-area program, contact mspoutrch@aol.com. Consider expanding the program to other "natural helpers," such as bartenders and veterinarians.
- Distribute brochures and other materials from local domestic violence programs for display anywhere women go: your library, police station, supermarket, health club, clinic, church, or synagogue. Ask places with public restrooms (like restaurants and bars) if you can put brochures in the women's room or stencil a hotline number on the insides of the stalls.
- Ask your clergy member to address the issue in a sermon, in marriage-preparation classes and in pre-nuptual counseling. Write about domestic violence for the newsletter.
- Talk to the health, English, or physical-education teachers in your local high school. Help them put on an essay contest for teens about dating violence. Organize a self-defense and assertiveness workshop for teen girls.

Before you take a step, check in with local services for battered women: shelters, crisis programs, domestic violence agencies and medical and legal clinics. They will have more ideas for you.

Step 2: Organize Your Friends and Neighbors

Neighbors often gather to talk about preventing crime and violence. Try raising a discussion about the crime that neighborhoods can experience: family violence. Or arrange to have a staff member of a domestic violence program speak at a regular community gathering. Getting to know one another better can create the support that may prevent violence or help a woman reach out for help.

At such a meeting, you can:

- Provide speakers, printed materials, or videos.
- Ask neighbors to pledge to call police if they
think they witness abuse.
• Give everyone an opportunity to talk and ask questions.
• Pass around a sign-in sheet. Decide whether to take further action. (For a kit on how to organize a neighborhood meeting and more on what neighbors can do together, contact the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Ask your friends to pitch in:

• For your birthday, ask guests to make a donation to a local shelter or other domestic violence program instead of bringing you gifts.
• Read fiction or non-fiction about family violence in your book club. Invite your friends over for a video night on the subject. Contact www.fvpf.org for a list of discussion points.

Step 3: Speak Up

• Reach out: Talk with women you think may be abused. If you hear anyone putting women down, blaming women for abuse or joking about violence, let them know it's not OK. Teach others in your life to do the same.
• Urge your local news media to run thoughtful and accurate coverage of violence against women. Protest coverage that excuses abusive behavior, blames the victim, or trivializes abuse (go to www.fvpf.org for a sample letter). Organizing a letter writing party at your home. If you are a survivor, speak out: Write an article or commentary.
• Vote, and let your representatives know you care about violence against women.

Next Steps and Resources

Books

• When Violence Begins at Home: A

Resources

- Get referrals to shelters and programs across the United States — or a safety plan that you can personalize, from the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](1-800-799-SAFE) or [787-3224 (TTY)].
- Get free "take action" kits, to help stop domestic violence, from the [Family Violence Prevention Fund: 1-800-END-ABUSE]().
- Get a free booklet, "Every Home a Safe Home," including a quiz to identify abuse, models for equality-based relationships, and a safety plan, from the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence]().
- See what you can do to protect yourself or someone you know against domestic violence.
- Feel smarter? Check your [domestic violence IQ]() on Thriveonline.
- Learn about the [Silent Witness]() program, seeking to end domestic murders.
- Gain insight from Thriveonline's relationship expert, [Delilah]().
- And see how [strength in numbers]() can build a powerful organization in a few short years.
- More resources, from [Moms Online]().
- Read a [Doghouse]() column to see how men's ideas about relationships can be shaped — the wrong way.
- Connect to just about any organization — including many local groups — working on domestic violence.