

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Recognizing An Abusive Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

It's an unfortunate situation, and one that happens all too frequently, that people get trapped in an unhealthy and abusive relationship. And while it sometimes is the man who is being abused, in over 90 percent of reported cases it is the woman who is being victimized.

Abusive relationships aren't always about physical abuse. It also includes sexual and emotional abuse. And while it's pretty clear that if someone hits, pushes, slaps or shakes the other person that abuse is taking place, abuse in other forms is just as real, often more damaging, and actually more frequent than physical abuse. Signs of such abuse include:

- forcing sex when it's not wanted
- name calling and constant put-downs
- frequently checking up on what the person is doing
- maintaining total control over money
- making threats to kill you if you leave, threatening the children, threatening pets
- keeping you isolated from your family and friends.

Experts report that these forms of sexual and emotional abuse are more common than physical abuse, and can even be much more damaging as they destroy the victim's self-esteem.

While correcting or leaving such a relationship can be difficult, and even sometimes dangerous, there is help available. Today, battered women's shelters are available in many communities. Staffed by caring volunteers and professionals, such shelters work hard to help victims find safety and peace in their lives. Shelters provide temporary housing, meals, clothing, and safety. Many shelters also provide medical care, childcare, counseling, job training, and transitional housing.

Fortunately, today there is a much wider recognition of the abuse problem. A starting point for many victims of abuse is a phone call to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233. They can offer confidential information, support and resources for victims of abuse. They also offer assistance for someone who recognizes that his or her behaviors may be harmful to a partner.

No one should stay in an abusive relationship. If you're in such a relationship, call the Hotline or contact a shelter if there is one in your town. If you know of a friend or relative who may be the victim of an abusive relationship, let her or him know that you're there to listen and be supportive without being judgmental. Let them know there are options and encourage them to get help before their situation becomes worse.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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