

We're listening. We believe.

end violence
wise
share hope ♦ change lives

Surviving Domestic Violence
information, tips and resources

Getting started

You have the right to be treated with respect and to feel safe emotionally and physically. If someone makes you feel unsafe in any way, it is not okay. Your relationships, especially the closest ones, should support and nurture you exactly as you are. No one deserves to be treated disrespectfully or in a way that takes away choice, power or control. If someone is doing this to you, it is not your fault.

This booklet is designed to offer information and resources that may be hard to get otherwise. It can help you make informed decisions and move towards making your life what you want and deserve. With information about domestic violence, you will see that the dynamics are remarkably similar from situation to situation, but only you know the details of what is happening to you. You are the expert in your own life and with information and support you can make the decisions that are best for you and your family.

**You are worthy
of love, respect, and support.**

**You deserve
safe and healthy relationships.**

You are not alone...

- In the U.S., **1 in 4** women and **1 in 9** men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime and have reported negative impacts such as injury, fear, concern for safety, needing services (IPSVS, CDC, 2017).
- LGBTQ+ people experience higher rates of domestic violence than heterosexual and cisgender men and women. Bisexual women (**74.9%**) and transgender people (**80%**) experience some of the highest rates of violence (CDC, 2013; Roch et al., 2010).
- More than **50%** of Native American and multiracial women and more than **40%** Black women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetimes. These rates are higher than for women from other racial and ethnic groups, including White women (**30.5%**), Hispanic women (**29.7%**), and Asian/Pacific Islander women (**15.3%**) (Breiding et al. 2014).

- African American women are less likely than white women to use social services, receive support from domestic violence programs, or go to the hospital because of domestic violence. (Feminist Majority Foundation's Choices Campus Campaign, "Women of Color and Reproductive Justice: African American Women.").
- Immigrant women often suffer higher rates of domestic violence than U.S. citizens because they have less access to legal and social services than U.S. citizens (Orloff et al., 1995. "With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women.").
- **31%** of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend (Roark, 2011).
- Women are **7-14** times more likely to be injured by a partner than men (Chen et al., 2007).
- On average, more than **3** women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2016).

What is domestic violence?

When people think about domestic violence, they often think of physically violent acts like hitting. Physical violence can be a part of domestic violence, but it is much more than that. For many, the emotional violence has a bigger impact.

Domestic violence, dating violence, relationship violence, and intimate partner violence are different terms that describe the same thing: **a pattern of behaviors that one partner uses to gain power and control over the other.** Abusers are often not violent with anyone other than their partner and/or their children.

While the most prevalent gender dynamic is men controlling women, there are exceptions. There are instances when women abuse men, although it is not common. Even though domestic violence is often thought of as happening only in heterosexual relationships, this is not the case. Perpetrators can be any gender identity or sexual orientation.

Domestic violence is a type of **gender-based violence**. No matter who the perpetrators or victims are, the violence reflects a history of men being expected to have power over others. Domestic violence is one tool that is used to maintain this power imbalance.

Gender-based violence is any harm perpetrated against a person based on power inequalities resulting from gender roles. It includes all identities who are so often impacted by violence: women, children, LGBTQ+, people of color, immigrants, refugees and people with disabilities, among others. The term recognizes how people with these identities are connected by oppression, which means that they all experience some form of inequality in society.

The pattern

At the beginning of a relationship, perpetrators tend to be very nice. They use romance that is often over-the-top as a way to make the other person feel good and fall in love. With time, the relationship slowly begins to change as the perpetrator's behavior changes.

Abusers start to put down their partners to diminish their self-esteem. You may have shared your vulnerabilities with this person. In a healthy relationship, this is safe and an important step. But your abuser uses the information to hurt and belittle you. By making you feel less self-worth you are made to believe that you do not deserve anything better. Your abuser will try to blame you for their abusive behavior.

As you begin to believe the untrue and hurtful things, you may feel lucky to be in any relationship at all. You may believe that you deserve to be treated poorly or that no one could possibly love you. This is not true. No matter what you do - even if you lie or cheat - you do not deserve to be hurt physically or emotionally.

Jealousy can seem normal and even sweet at first. But it becomes a way to control where you go, what you do and who you see. The perpetrator makes it very challenging for you to have friends and family in your life. Abusers will say that they are bad influences, trying to ruin your relationship or that they cannot be trusted. After a while, friends and family may stop trying to be in touch, or you may be forced by your partner to not be in touch with them. Without a support system, it is easier for your abuser to do whatever they want. The perpetrator has complete control.

Violent behaviors in abusive relationships tend to escalate. An abuser might start with breaking things around you. Maybe destroying possessions that are important to you. Usually, perpetrators use only as much violence as necessary to be in control. As the violence escalates, it becomes more dangerous. It is common for victims to become desensitized to how they are treated. Often, victims do not think it is as dangerous as it might be.

It is never okay for someone to intimidate you or physically hurt you. If this is happening, it is not your fault.

Perpetrators are so good at manipulation that anyone can be a victim. It can be hard to see what is really happening.

WISE advocates can help by talking with you about the dynamics of abuse, brainstorming options and supporting you in whatever way makes sense for you.

This is your life. You are worth it.

The tactics

Perpetrators of domestic violence use many different tactics to have power over their partners. It can be confusing, especially when you remember what your partner was like at the beginning of the relationship. The control escalates and by the time you see what is happening, it can seem overwhelming for you to get away. Not having a support system can make it much harder because there may be no one to point out that the behaviors are not okay.

Targeting vulnerability. One of the most destructive things that perpetrators do is use what they know about their partner to cause harm. For example, you may share your vulnerabilities with the realistic expectation that your partner will be supportive and helpful. Instead, someone who is abusive will use your vulnerabilities as a way to hurt you. This is a powerful tool for manipulation and is a huge betrayal of your trust.

Psychological or emotional abuse. This type of abuse can be one of the hardest tactics to deal with. It is also very hard for others to recognize. Psychological abuse can include any behavior that makes you feel guilty, humiliated, or bad about yourself. The perpetrator denies or minimizes their behavior to you and others. Psychological or emotional abuse can make you feel like you are crazy. The abuser does such a good job manipulating situations that you may not know what is real anymore. This is sometimes called gaslighting.

Creating isolation. This tactic takes away your support system. You find yourself without your friends and family because of it. Your abuser might physically isolate you by convincing you to move away, or act jealous any time you are with other people. You may give up socializing. It may be embarrassing to spend time with other people because of how your partner acts around them. Sometimes abusers act like the perfect partner in public, making it seem as though the victim is the problem.

Isolation can also include controlling what you read, watch, or your access to information. Your partner wants their voice

to be the only one you hear, creating an alternative reality for you. Isolation can also keep you from reaching out for help.

Financial abuse. Financial or economic abuse is when the perpetrator controls access to money. You may be kept from going to work or school or your partner makes it impossible for you to succeed. When victims are “allowed” to work, the abuser might take control of the income. Victims are often not allowed to have a credit card or build credit, or for their name to be added to any financial documents. This makes it difficult to apply for loans, get housing, or even open a bank account.

It is also common for perpetrators to ruin their victims’ credit. Your abuser may have convinced you to take on debt or put a bill or asset in your name. Your partner may refuse to pay bills, not pay what was agreed to, or make it impossible to save money.

Sexual violence. Abusers use sex as a tool of violence. Your abuser may have made you feel guilty for not wanting to engage in certain sexual acts or may have manipulated you

to do things that were uncomfortable. Your abuser may have emotionally or physically threatened you to make you do something sexual or used force. It is never okay for someone to make you do anything sexual that you do not want to do even if you are in a relationship.

Physical violence. Any unwanted physical contact is not okay. Pushing, pinching, hitting, restraining, and choking are all part of the pattern of control. Sometimes abusers blame their violent behaviors on drugs or alcohol that they have consumed. Your abuser may say that you are the one who caused them to react that way. The only reason perpetrators use violence is because they choose to use it.

Legal manipulation. Perpetrators use court systems to control their partners. Your abuser may call the police when you try to defend yourself. Perpetrators are master manipulators and try to convince law enforcement that their partners are dangerous, crazy, or out of control. If you are married or have children in common, your abuser may use the divorce or custody process to continue to control and harass you.

Using children. Perpetrators know how important children are to their victims. You may experience your abuser trying to make it seem like you are a bad parent. Some examples of this include saying negative things about you to your children, forcing you to punish or use physical force against your children, or disagreeing with your parenting decisions in front of the children.

It is also common for abusers to use custody arrangements as a way to maintain access to and have control over their partners. Your partner may not have shown any interest in parenting while you are together, but asks for more time with your kids when you are separated. Abusers will fail to follow through with your visitation agreement or use your need to communicate about the children as an opportunity to continue to harass, intimidate, and control.

Using public opinion. Perpetrators will often act like perfect partners and community members in public to make it impossible for others to believe the violence. They want people to think, “no, they would never do that!” so it will seem like their partner is the problem.

Perpetrators often tell their victims that their previous partners were crazy or tried to hurt them. Your abuser may even have past protective orders or domestic violence charges against them. Perpetrators will claim that the information is false and that they are actually the victim. This is your abuser using manipulative skills and the ignorance of the public to control you.

Using pets. Perpetrators may threaten to or actually abuse animals. Your abuser knows that you love your pets and want to protect and care for them, and uses that to hurt and control you. You may have found your pet injured or even missing. Your abuser might claim that the pet's injury was caused by an accident or that the animal ran away.

Leaving the relationship can be harder when you have animals. The animal may belong to both of you, or it might be hard to find a place to live that allows pets. This can be particularly difficult if you have large animals. You may not want to leave the relationship because you do not want to leave the animal with the abuser. You can talk with a **WISE** advocate about options for keeping your pets safe.

Controlling your body. Abusers prevent their victims from taking care of themselves. This can include not allowing you to see a health care provider, or insisting that they go with you. Your abuser might steal your medications or keep you from refilling prescriptions. Reproductive control is a common tactic in abusive relationships as well. Your partner may not let you use birth control or may pressure you to have a baby. Your abuser may have made you get an abortion, or use your desire to have a baby against you.

Your partner may try to control you by making you feel uncomfortable or insecure about your body. Your abuser might have complimented you on your looks at the beginning of your relationship, but now tells you that you have let yourself go. It may seem like you are never attractive enough, or that you are trying too hard. You may be accused of trying to get attention from others and shamed for trying to look nice. It may feel like no matter what you do, it is not the right thing. Your partner may make comments about something they know you are insecure. Often abusers will use the excuse that they are just trying to help. You may start

to feel like your body is an enemy rather than a source of strength and comfort.

Using alcohol, medications, and other drugs. Alcohol and other drugs can make someone less inhibited and more physically violent, but they do not cause violence. Perpetrators use alcohol, medications, and other drugs as an excuse for their behavior. They say things like, “I would never have done that if I hadn’t been drinking.” In fact, controlling and manipulative behaviors (insults, isolation, intimidation, etc.) are present whether or not someone is using. Your abuser may have a substance problem but it is not the reason for the abusive behavior.

Perpetrators often encourage or force their victims to drink or use other drugs in order to increase vulnerability. If the drug use is illegal, your partner may threaten to report you. You may develop a physical dependence on substances, which your abuser will use against you. When you are using substances you may not feel like you can leave the relationship or get help. Abusers know that their victims will not call the police if they are using.

Alcohol and other drugs make it easier for him to maintain power and control. You can talk with a **WISE** advocate about how substances may be impacting you.

Using LGBTQ+ identity. Abusers who are LGBTQ+ use the same behaviors of power, control, entitlement and ownership over their partners as heterosexual or cis abusers. Abusers use our society's biases to create additional layers of shame, depression, fear, powerlessness and silence. It may not feel safe to look for support from families, friends or communities who had previously excluded you because of your LGBTQ+ identity.

If you or your partner are part of the LGBTQ+ community it may feel extra hard to reach out because of pressure from the group or fear of additional criticism from the outside world. **WISE** advocates support anyone affected by violence, no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity may be. You deserve support.

Blaming you. Perpetrators use these tactics to make it feel as though everything is their victims' fault. There may be things that your partner has used against you that are not captured in this booklet. You have probably tried - very hard - to do what you think will make your partner happy and avoid them getting mad at you. It is likely that no matter what you did, your abuser got mad or blamed you. An abuser's behavior is not a reflection of what you do, or do not do. It is a choice - and only the abuser's choice - to behave this way.

It is not your fault.



The impact

Your abuser can injure you physically, but there are lots of ways you might be affected that are not physical. They can be harder to identify and might have more of an impact.

Feeling crazy. Your abuser may make you feel as though you are somehow to blame for the violence. Perpetrators try to make other people believe that their partners are the problem or that they are crazy. This alone may make you feel unstable or confused about the truth. Sometimes it is called crazy-making for that reason. It is particularly difficult because the perpetrator is the person who you should be able to trust and care for more than anyone else. Without your support system or other people reinforcing the truth, you may be more likely to believe the lies.

Confusion. It is normal to try to make sense of what is happening, but there is no good reason for the controlling and abusive behavior. The only reason abusers act this way is because they choose to and our society allows it.

Fear. We all react to dangerous situations in different ways. Sometimes our reactions are subconscious or we react in ways that surprise us. Our bodies do what is necessary to keep us as safe as possible. You may find that your senses are heightened, or that you react with fear to situations that were not scary before the abuse. Your body is reacting to keep you safe. You are not crazy. You are surviving.

Drug and alcohol use. Sometimes substance use is a part of one's experience of violence and sometimes it is used as a way of coping in the aftermath of trauma. Using may offer a temporary escape and a way to relax and feel less anxious. Drug and alcohol use may also have risks. Some substances have high rates of physical and emotional dependency. Illegal drug use may make people more vulnerable to exploitation or arrest.

You may feel that your substance use is isolating you from the support you deserve and is having other negative impacts on your life. You can talk to a **WISE** advocate about what you need. Advocates will not judge you for using substances and can help you think of additional ways to

cope if you want to reduce and quit using substances. You might find help with groups, drugs that may treat symptoms of trauma, relaxation and other mind-body techniques such as Somatic Experiencing, meditation and yoga.

Violence. Sometimes victims yell at or use physical violence against their abusers. This is not mutual abuse because the abuser still has power and control. Victims may feel like they have no other options, they have had enough and that they can no longer take the torment. Abusers may provoke violence and use it as an excuse for their own pattern of violent behavior, saying “you hit me first.”

Sometimes victims fight back in self-defense. This is a normal response to being hurt. You may react to your partner in ways that surprise you, and you may feel guilty for losing control or starting it. Your abuser may try to convince you that your behavior is as bad as or even worse than their abuse. Sometimes abusers call the police saying the victim is abusing them.

There is a big difference between using violence in self-defense and how abusers use a pattern of behavior to take away power and control. Just because you used violence to protect yourself does not mean that you are abusive.

Trauma. When we are in danger, our bodies get ready to protect ourselves by going into the “fight or flight” response. Our bodies release adrenaline and our heart rate goes up to help us survive. In domestic violence, running away or fighting back are usually not real options. Instead we freeze or give in to stay safe.

Domestic violence is particularly traumatizing for a number of reasons. The danger is ongoing and is often happening in your home, which is where you should be able to go and be safe. The threat is coming from a person who you are supposed to be able to trust, depend on, and even go to for help. Isolation is a form of being held hostage when there is no escape.

Our bodies are designed to respond to danger in certain ways, but domestic violence does not allow for that response

to fully happen. When we are threatened, our bodies get us ready for action but the kind of danger we are experiencing forces us to submit. It can be extremely overwhelming. You may continually feel trapped and powerless. You might feel constantly on edge, because the danger is always there. When situations remind our bodies of past frightening experiences we react as if we are in danger, even if we are not. Your body might respond to a smell, or other sensory cues that may seem unrelated, but are connected to previous traumatic events. For example, you might notice that you become anxious when you enter a certain room, but it may be because something frightening happened to you in that room before and your body is remembering it.

This ongoing trauma response can lead to anxiety, stomach problems, headaches and many other health issues. Your body and mind are connected. Trauma impacts all parts of a person.

**You are a survivor.
You can take back your life.**

Children

Children are one of the most powerful tools that abusers use for control. Children are also a major reason that victims feel they can and must do something to change the situation. Some parents stay with abusers because they want to keep the family together, or they think they cannot provide for their children financially. Others leave abusive relationships because they see the impact of abuse on the children. You know what is best for you and your children. You know how to keep you and your children the safest. Whatever your choice may be, you can remind your children that the behavior their abusive parent is using is never okay.

Leaving an abusive relationship

Leaving can be dangerous because it is the ultimate loss of power for the abuser. This is a time when violence tends to escalate. When people are murdered, it most often happens after they leave. Safety planning with a **WISE** advocate can be a helpful way for you to explore your options to keep you and your children as safe as possible.

Safety planning

Keeping you and your children safe is something you are probably very focused on already. Safety planning is all of the things you do to avoid more violence. You know more than anyone else how the perpetrator might act or respond to the strategies you may use. **You are the expert in your situation.** WISE advocates can brainstorm strategies with you but only you know what ideas are going to work. Here are some things to consider:

Support. Are there friends, family, or coworkers who might be able to help? Are there people who your abuser would not think of who could be supportive? Does your abuser know where they are, or would the abuser think to go there?

Money. Can you have money separate from your abuser? It is common for abusers to empty bank accounts once victims leave. If you plan to leave the relationship, it is reasonable to withdraw 50% of the money from any shared accounts. Withdraw 75% if you have children in common. You do not have to spend the money if you do not feel comfortable.

Documents. Is there a safe place to keep important documents (identification, financial records, etc.) accessible?

Children. Can you safety plan with your children? Perhaps you can inform their school or care providers of the situation. Are there other people your kids can talk to about how they are feeling? You may want to come up with a safe word that your children can use if they are feeling unsafe. If your children have visitation with your abuser you can talk about how that feels and what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Access. Are there ways to make yourself less accessible to your abuser? You might consider changing your locks, getting a new phone number, or changing passwords to email and social media accounts.

Remember. It is common to become desensitized to the danger an abuser poses when you are in an abusive relationship. We minimize in order to survive. While it is normal, it is good to recognize if this is happening so you can identify everything you can do to keep yourself safe.

Restraining/protective orders

A restraining or protective order is a civil order, meaning that it is between two people. In most cases a judge decides whether or not to grant an order based on past physical harm, or the threat of physical violence. It limits how your perpetrator can have contact with you. Often it specifies that there can be no contact: physical, electronic, or by a third party. This means that family or friends cannot deliver messages from your abuser. You do not need a lawyer to get a restraining order. **WISE** advocates can help you with the restraining order process.

Restraining orders do not go on criminal records, unless the perpetrator chooses to violate the order and is arrested.

Restraining orders can be helpful for many people, but not for everyone. Each situation is unique and you are the only person who knows if it could work for you. You can get more information about how to apply for an order from a **WISE** advocate.

Laws/law enforcement

Threats to cause physical harm or actually causing injury are crimes. Other tactics that abusers use may not be illegal, but it can still be helpful to talk to police about them. Involving the police is a decision you should make based on your own situation and with as much information as possible. A **WISE** advocate can talk about the pros and cons with you. If you want a criminal case to be opened, the first step is to give police a statement about what happened or what is happening. A **WISE** advocate can go with you. Once you give your statement, police can investigate the report and possibly charge a crime if they think a law was broken.

Sometimes the police are called by someone else, like a neighbor or friend. If law enforcement thinks a crime was committed, they might make an arrest even if you do not want them to do it. Talking to a **WISE** advocate or a lawyer about your choices can be helpful. A **WISE** advocate may be able to connect you with a lawyer at a reduced fee.

Health and healthcare

Ongoing abuse can affect your health in many ways beyond physical injuries. The health impacts can be present even after leaving an abusive relationship. Fear and survival responses flood our bodies with stress hormones, tighten muscles, and cause other changes. Our bodies bounce back when this happens occasionally, but in domestic violence, it can be happening on a regular basis because of the ongoing danger. You may have noticed changes in your body. The changes may be a result of the ongoing stress from the abuse. This stress affects digestion, muscle tension, mental health and much more. Your abuser may have prevented you from accessing medical care for injuries or illness. Without care, the impact might be even greater.

All healthcare facilities should have a policy outlining the care for victims of domestic violence. It is best practice to ask all women about violence in their lives because it is so common and affects health in so many ways. Sometimes

health professionals are not able to make the connections between your current health and past abuse, and do not properly diagnose what is happening to your body.

They may suggest mental health treatment or prescribe medications that do not address your concerns. Sometimes a mental health diagnosis can be helpful because it means that you can get the medications or support you need. Other times it can be limiting. It is very common for victims of domestic violence to be prescribed mood altering medications. Medications can be helpful for some people. Other people have said that it makes them feel different or numb. Numbness can make it difficult to process what has happened and make plans for your future. You may have had difficult experiences with doctors in the past and now have a hard time trusting them.

It is important to know that you are not the problem. There are real and physical impacts of trauma and abuse, even if they are not diagnosed. You know your body best. A **WISE** advocate can help you to access what you need to be healthy.

Mental healthcare

Counseling can be helpful if you are talking to someone who understands the dynamics of domestic violence and trauma. There are body/mind approaches that can be helpful as well.

Couple's counseling is **never** recommended when domestic violence is present. Even an experienced counselor cannot make it safe for victims to talk about the reality of abuse with their abuser present. The counselor also may not see or understand the abusive dynamics because perpetrators are so good at manipulation. You deserve to have support from professionals who understand the complicated realities of domestic violence.

A **WISE** advocate or your healthcare provider can make referrals to counselors with whom other survivors have had a good experience.

Domestic violence and PTSD

When people experience trauma, are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or a traumatic brain injury (TBI), they might act in ways that they did not before. PTSD or TBI can sometimes lead to outbursts or violence, but do not cause the pattern of controlling behavior that defines domestic violence. Using the controlling tactics described in this booklet is a choice, not the result of injury or disease.

Sometimes abusers try to use past experiences, diagnoses of trauma or a brain injury as an excuse for their behavior. A **WISE** advocate can be helpful in clarifying the distinctions between a pattern of abuse and other behaviors.

If your abuser is struggling with issues - whether they are physical or mental - you might feel bad and as though you should be supportive, even if you are being hurt. While this is a reasonable feeling, it does not mean that you should give up your safety because your partner is having a difficult time. You can talk to a **WISE** advocate about how to care for your partner and keep yourself and your children safe.

For providers

Ask about domestic violence. Victims will not necessarily know that they can bring it up unless you ask. Asking tells your patients that they can talk to you. Ask every time so they can plan on being asked when they visit their provider.

Document. Properly document your observations, what you do with your patient, any history of violence that you are aware of, the medical relevancy to the patient's health, and their health history. Use the patient's words as much as possible in quotation marks. Use body maps to graphically represent injuries and take photographs with the patient's consent. Note the size, shape and color of injuries. Encourage follow-up as bruising changes. Do not use the words "allege" or "story" or insert your opinions about the abuse. Documentation can have a huge impact in court.

Give survivors as much control as you can. Let the patient know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Explain the limits of your confidentiality (i.e., if you are concerned about child abuse).

Make connections. WISE advocates respond to all hospital departments in the Upper Valley every hour of every day when you call 866-348-9473. You do not have to do this alone, WISE advocates can continue to support survivors after their appointments end.

**No one can do everything,
everyone can do something.**

Supporting survivors of domestic violence

Supporting a friend or loved one who is in an abusive relationship can feel frustrating, overwhelming, scary and it is also very important. One of the best things you can do is simply ask how you can be helpful.

Listen and believe. It is hard to believe that someone could actually treat another person this way. If someone is telling you about domestic violence it is probably true. Abusers intentionally make their victims feel guilty, embarrassed, crazy, and confused. Listen openly and without judgment.

Stay in touch. Abusers frequently isolate their victims from friends and family. Do not take it personally if your friend is unable to see you. Do your best to stay in your loved one's life. Check in often, and let them know that you care.

Focus on the abuse. Talk about the behaviors that are abusive, controlling, or coercive instead of criticizing the abuser. If your loved one feels defensive about their partner they may not feel comfortable coming to you for help.

Put blame where it belongs. Abusers do everything they can to make their victims feel as though they are responsible for the abuse. Remember that abuse is never the survivor's fault. No one wants or deserves to be treated like this. Sometimes people think, "why don't they just leave?" There are many possible reasons. Sometimes it is more dangerous to leave or they are in love with their abuser. Instead of being angry at the survivor, be angry at how the abuser behaves.

Safety plan. Survivors work hard to stay safe. Ask how you can be helpful, and offer what you can without putting yourself in harm's way. The abuse may be directed at your friend, but you should also consider your own safety. Confronting the abuser may be unsafe. This is particularly important if the perpetrator thinks that you have a relationship with the survivor.

Offer more choices. Domestic violence strips people of power and control over their own lives. It does not help for us to tell survivors what to do, because then we maintain the power and control. Support your loved ones to make decisions and have agency over their lives.

Ending domestic violence

To ultimately end violence we have to change the cultures that support and create it. It can be as simple as calling attention to behaviors and comments that reinforce gendered norms and power imbalances in relationships. It can also be more systemic, like lobbying legislative systems to better address domestic violence.

One critical way we can end violence is by working with and supporting young people to believe that equality and respect are fundamental expectations of them and their peers. We can talk to the children in our lives early and often. We can encourage schools to include violence prevention education across all grade levels.

There are people in our lives and communities who are abusive, and do not see anything wrong with their behavior because it is how they were taught. It is important to hold people accountable. Instead of using excuses like “boys will be boys,” we can respond to insults, violence, aggression and lack of empathy by pointing out the problem and offering

alternatives. We can give people the chance to learn from their mistakes and make amends.

If boys have role models that normalize violence, manipulation, and dominance, they learn that these are the expectations for them. Men who see their fathers and other men abuse women are more likely to be abusive. We see men using violence in our media so often that it seems normal. Using violence, manipulation, and dominance is a learned behavior and a choice. Many men who are exposed to the violent messages in our culture pledge to act differently in their own lives. It is essential that we have role models that show a wide range of ways to be caring, authentic, and responsible.

We must shift the culture that supports domestic violence. Many stereotypes about masculinity and femininity normalize gender-based violence against women, LGBTQ+ people, children and other men. As we become more aware of how power dynamics are learned, we are better able as individuals and communities to notice, point out, and do the work to eliminate the underpinnings of violence.

We can all demand accountability and equality to end domestic violence. Call **WISE** to learn how you can help.

**We all have a part to play
in ending violence.**

It is the policy of WISE to provide services to victims/survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence and stalking regardless of age, health status (including HIV-positive), physical, mental or emotional ability, sexual orientation/identity, gender identity/expression, socioeconomic status, race, national origin, parental responsibility, language, immigration status, or religious or political affiliation.

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