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Family Violence



Objectives:

- Discuss the estimated numbers of reported family violence
- Define the cycle of violence
- List common symptoms that may be apparent in the various forms of family violence to include children, partners and elder abuse
- Outline the screening procedures that may be available to victims.
- Recognize some common characteristics of perpetrators of violence
- Identify important advocacy and support groups that are available to victims of family violence

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CHILD ABUSE

It is estimated that 5 children die every day in the United States as a result of abuse and neglect. These deaths represent the most tragic consequences of mistreatment of our youngest populations. Child abuse fatalities are widely recognized as being under-reported; current research suggests that 70-85% of child deaths that occur secondary to maltreatment are not recorded as abuse or neglect on the death certificate. In addition to child fatalities, many other children are the victims of ongoing physical, sexual or emotional abuse. All types of abuse to children leave deep and lasting scars and the earlier an abused child can get help, the greater chance they have to heal and break the cycle of abuse. You can make a huge difference in a child's life by knowing what signs to look for and how to intervene.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), recognizes that there are 4 major categories of child abuse:

1. Neglect
2. Physical abuse
3. Psychological or emotional abuse
4. Sexual abuse

This abuse can occur in a child's home, school or community environment. There are several myths that surround the issue of child abuse that need to be brought into the light and clarified so that people can increase their awareness of these situations and respond to a potential child in need.

CHILD NEGLECT

Child neglect is a form of child abuse that occurs when someone, intentionally does not provide a child with necessary age appropriate care such as food, shelter, supervision, affection, proper education, medical care or support. Child neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment in the United States. In fact more children suffer from neglect than from physical and sexual abuse combined. According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, (NCANDS), in 2007 - 900,000 cases of abuse were reported in the United States and 68% of the children suffered from neglect alone, including medical neglect. 16% were physically abused, 10% suffered sexual abuse, and 6% were reported as emotional abuse.

In spite of the high numbers of reported neglect, significantly less attention is placed on neglect and much more emphasis is given to the cases of physical and sexual abuse. It has been suggested that this is due to neglect being more difficult to identify than physical abuse. Neglect has been often described as an act of omission that is characterized by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care. Those individuals who have close contact with the child are often the ones who identify the signs of inadequate care. Infants and toddler neglect is most often reported by physicians, nurses and day care workers. When the child is older, school personnel are the ones who notice the signs of poor hygiene, lack of appropriate weight gain, frequent absences from school and inadequate medical care.

The following signs may indicate physical neglect:

- Inappropriately dressed for the weather
- Soiled, stained clothing often worn for days at a time
- Persistent hunger, often begs for or steals food
- Poor hygiene, body odor, teeth never brushed
- Children who are left alone or not supervised for long periods of time
- Lack of medical or dental care
- Arrives early to school and stays late to avoid going home
- Failure to thrive and malnutrition

Physical neglect can adversely affect a child's development by causing failure to thrive, serious illness, self-inflicted cuts, burns and bruises due to lack of supervision as well as a lifetime of low self-esteem.



EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

Emotional neglect includes verbal belittling, withholding affection, initiating spousal or animal abuse in the presence of a child or allowing a child to drink alcohol or use drugs at an early age. Common traits that are found in the behavior of emotionally abusive parents or caregivers include:

- Actively refusing to respond to a child or show affection
- Failure to acknowledge the child's presence
- Belittling or name calling in a deliberately cruel manner
- Terrorizing a child by playing on or intensifying their fears
- Preventing a child from having social contacts with other children or adults
- Encouraging the child to participate in illegal or destructive behavior.

Emotional neglect does not have scars that can be viewed from the outside but the feelings of low self-esteem are often expressed through depression, alcohol and drug misuse, and the failure to acquire the basic life skills, which can lead to destructive behavior and even suicide.

Children who are exposed to emotional neglect may display:

- An extreme willingness to please
- Older children may try to "parent" their younger siblings
- Trouble concentrating or learning
- Always watchful, waiting for something bad to happen

Case Study-

Seven-year-old Marcus often wore the same clothes to school and had a foul body odor. On winter days, he was never dressed warmly and sometimes had wet shoes on if he had to walk through the snow. At lunchtime he would only eat a small amount of food and put the rest in his backpack to take home. He frequently asked the cafeteria staff if they had any extra food. When the teacher asked why he was not eating his lunch, he said he was saving it for when he went home as he rarely got dinner at his house. He seemed to be very shy and withdrawn around other students and had trouble looking people in the eyes. Finally on the fourth day of coming to school with a fever and a severe earache, the teacher called child protective services. An investigator was sent to the home and discovered that Marcus's mother was selling her food stamps for drugs. The home was dirty, scattered with cat feces and the electricity had been turned off for weeks. At that point child services placed Marcus with a relative while his mother sought treatment for addiction.

Fortunately for Marcus, his teacher had the good sense to follow through on an apparent neglect situation. Not all children have the same luck. Marcus's teacher had received training and learned that children often communicate their needs through behavior. Children are dependent on the adults in their lives to provide them with their needs. When adults fail to do this, children learn they can't trust the adults in their lives and will find other ways to get their needs met. The best way to help these children heal is not to shame or punish them due to their appearance or odd behaviors but rather to reinforce good behaviors with patience

and acceptance. Marcus's teacher told him that he could take his food home and even provided him with a container to keep in. She also discovered he had artistic talent and gave him extra time to complete arts and crafts projects that he enjoyed. Eventually Marcus was able to stay after school and help with the cleaning and reorganization of the art supply closet. These consistent practices, along with counseling and oversight by child protective services, helped Marcus to develop a routine that fortified a sense of security and helped him to rebuild a sense of trust and stability.

If you suspect a child is being neglected it is important to remain calm and be as supportive as you can while you attempt to uncover the facts of the situation. If you become upset, the child may be afraid to tell you what is going on. Don't interrogate: instead let him/her explain the situation in their-own words. Do not try to lead the conversation towards a certain answer. Be sure to reassure the child that he has not done anything wrong and that you believe what he is telling you. Keep in mind that it takes a lot of courage for a child to come forward and speak about a situation that seems very uncomfortable to discuss.

Finally, do not attempt to handle this issue alone. Call your local child protective agency and file a report. Keep in mind that professionals who work with children are required by law to report reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect. And in most states, citizens who suspect abuse or neglect are also required to report. The term 'reasonable suspicion' is based on objective evidence, which might be observed behaviors or statements that are made by a child.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Another form of child abuse is physical in origin. Previously this was called battered child syndrome and it involves physical harm or injury to the child. It may be the result of intentionally wanting to harm a child, but not always. It may also result from disciplining a child with a belt or any physical punishment that is not appropriate for a child's age or strength. Regardless of how the abuse occurs, it's still abuse and must be taken very seriously.

The debate still exists over how a parent may discipline their child and when it crosses the line from correcting behavior to abuse. The principal motivation of discipline is to teach children right from wrong and to establish boundaries for a lifelong pattern of acceptable behavior, not to make the child live in fear of a parent or caregiver. Parents need to think before acting and consider the outcome of their behavior as well as the example they set as role models by clearly communicating their concerns, standards and expectations. Positive discipline also encourages parents to recognize positive and responsible actions from their children and when the child misbehaves-the child should be taught to reflect on their behavior to encourage a sense of conscience and standards. Removal of privileges, time out, and grounding a child are far more effective measures to discipline a child than hitting or spanking them while angry. If a parent feels unable to provide adequate humane discipline they should seek outside support as soon as possible.

Physical abuse has the following common characteristics:

- ✓ Unpredictability- the child never knows what is going to trigger the parent into a rage. There are no consistent rules or boundaries in the house. The child has a feeling of walking on eggshells, unsure of when the next assault will occur.
- ✓ Lashing out in anger- Parents who abuse their children often respond out of anger and the need to assert control over the child, instead of motivation to lovingly teach the child. It goes without saying that the angrier the parent is, the more intense the punishment will be.
- ✓ Using fear to control behavior- many parents use abuse as a measure to "keep the kid in line" because they believe the children need to fear them in order to behave.

Children who are physically abused may have the following signs:

- Broken bones that are unusual or poorly explained
- Bruises in the pattern of a hand or belt
- Bruises in areas where normal activities would not result in bruising
- Burns or scald marks, usually seen on the hands, arms or buttocks
- Cigarette burns on exposed areas or the genitals
- Choking marks around the neck
- Human bite marks
- Unexplained unconsciousness in an infant
- Black eyes

Typically, if a medical facility suspects physical abuse they will order a total body x-ray because they are looking for old fractures that may be in various stages of healing. This is one of the most definitive means available to healthcare personnel to uncover the layers of abuse that often go undetected until medical treatment is sought. Other tests such as MRI or CT scans may also be ordered to evaluate skull fractures, bleeding in the eyes, unexplained vomiting or severe bruising of the face, skull or abdomen. It is up to the medical team to analyze these findings in order to come up with a diagnosis of child abuse as other disorders may also present with similar symptoms. Bleeding disorders such as hemophilia, Von Willebrand's disease and liver disease can also be the cause of abnormal bleeding patterns. A condition known as, osteogenesis imperfecta, may produce spontaneous fractures in children or cause bones to break with very minimal activity that would not cause harm in normal children. Remember to keep in mind that different cultures may practice alternative healing practices, which may also leave marks, not intended for harm. An example of this is Oriental medicine practices such as coin rubbing, cupping, and burning herbs on the skin over acupuncture sites, called moxibustion. Healthcare personnel should always ask about alternative healing practices. Remember that it is important to report all suspected cases of child abuse or neglect and leave the evaluation to the professionals.

SEXUAL ABUSE

The definition for child sexual abuse is varied but the dominant theme involves forcing or coercing a child into sexual activity. At the extreme end of the spectrum the sexual abuse includes intercourse but all forms of sexually touching a child, as well as non-contact offenses and sexual exploitation are all harmful and devastating to a child. Simply exposing a child to sexual situations or sexual materials is abusive, whether or not touching is involved.

The sexual abuse of child can occur at the hands of a parent, stepparent, a sibling or other relative. Outside of the home this abuse can be found in schools, daycare centers, and even church environments. The long term emotional and psychological consequences can be devastating to a child as they are never prepared to cope with repeated sexual stimulation. The long-term effects of this abuse include depression, anxiety, guilt, fear, withdrawal and acting out inappropriately.

Younger children may experience regressive behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb sucking as well as sleep disturbances and eating disorders. Negative effects can be carried over into adulthood often manifesting in depression, anxiety attacks, insomnia and self-destructive habits such as alcoholism and drug abuse. As you can see, sexual abuse robs children of their childhood and the effects often extend well into their adult lives.

Sexual offenses include:

Touching –

- Fondling
- Touching or fondling a child's genitals
- Penetrating a child's vagina or anus, no matter how slight with a penis or instrument that does not have a medical purpose
- Oral-genital contact

Non-touching sexual offenses –

- Exposing children to pornographic material
- Masturbating in front of child
- Intentionally exposing a child to sexual intercourse

There is a common myth that girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys and this has not been found to be true. It is thought that boys may be less likely to speak up about this issue due to shame and stigma attached to sexual abuse. Another common misconception is that homosexual men are more likely to sexually abuse children than heterosexual men. This has not been found to be the case.

According to the statistics men are more likely to perpetrate this crime but women have been known to be the offenders as well.

It is important that we teach children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse. The following guidelines are suggested to cover information that could benefit a child when placed in inappropriate situations:

- ✓ Never insist that children give out hugs and kisses to relatives or close family friends. Allow them to express affection on their own terms.
- ✓ Instruct children on the basics of sexual health. Teach them the proper names of their genitals and let them know that no one should touch the “private parts” of their body.
- ✓ Cultivate strong communication skills with your children. Let them know from an early age that they can come to you to talk about their experiences and that you will not be mad at them for telling you things that make them uncomfortable.
- ✓ Teach your children that sexual play or other advances from an adult are wrong and against the law. Give them confidence to speak up if they are ever placed in that situation.
- ✓ Make every effort to get to know whom your child is hanging out with and who their families are.
- ✓ Insist that the child never get into a car with anyone that you have not given them permission to be with.
- ✓ Observe your children when they interact with others to see if they seem uncomfortable or hesitant around certain adults.
- ✓ Always provide adequate supervision for your children and never leave them in the company of someone that you don't know or trust.

Despite our best efforts, child sexual abuse continues to occur at an alarming rate. It has been reported up to 80,000 times a year but the number is thought to be actually much higher because children are very hesitant to tell what has happened. The goal is to identify and stop the abuse and to get the child professional help. If you suspect a child is being sexually abused it is important to give the child a safe environment to talk to a trusted adult regarding the circumstances. Try not to lead a child or suggest events that may or may not have happened. Reassure the child that they did nothing wrong. This disclosure must be reported to the proper authority, as the child will need to be examined by a medical provider who has experience in examining children who may have experienced sexual trauma. Furthermore, in all 50 states, medical personnel, teachers, mental health professionals and law enforcement are required by law to report suspected child abuse.

Further information and resources regarding this topic may be found at:

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

407 South Dearborn
Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 554-0166
<http://www.apsac.org/>

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407 South Dearborn
Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 554-0166
<http://www.apsac.org/>

Prevent Child Abuse America

332 S. Michigan Ave
Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604-4357
(800) CHILDREN
<http://www.preventchildabuse.org/index.shtml>

Child Welfare Information Gateway (formerly National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information)

Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
(800) 394-3366
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

Shaken baby syndrome is also a form of child abuse that is caused by violently shaking an infant. Shaken baby injuries are usually seen in children younger than 2 years old but may occur in children up to 5 years of age. The damage can happen in as little of 5 seconds of shaking. The mechanism of injury is based on the motion of the brain bouncing back and forth against the skull. This causes bruising and swelling of the brain that could in turn, lead to pressure and bleeding. The large veins outside the brain may also tear which can easily cause permanent brain damage or death. Shaking a baby may cause other serious injuries to the neck, spine and eyes.

In most instances, the caregiver did not mean to harm the baby but rather loses control when trying to deal with the frustration of a baby who is crying inconsolably, but it is still a form of child abuse. Injuries are most likely to ensue when a baby is first shaken and then the baby's head hits something. Even a soft item such as a mattress or pillow can cause serious injury to a newborn or a small infant. This is because the brain of an infant is softer and their supporting structures (neck muscles & ligaments) are weak. Additionally, their heads are larger and heavier, in proportion to their bodies.

Gentle bouncing, playful swinging or jogging with an infant does not result in shaken baby syndrome. The symptoms of shaken baby syndrome can vary from mild to severe. They may include:

- Loss of consciousness
- Convulsions
- Extreme irritability
- Loss of vision
- Respiratory arrest
- Excessive vomiting

If you suspect a shaken baby injury has occurred, call 911, immediate emergency treatment is necessary.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against women remains a worldwide concern. The United Nations estimates that globally at least one in three women will be abused, beaten or raped during their lifetime. Sadly, it appears true that most of these cases of abuse are by the hands of a close family member. The range of women affected also varies by cultural settings. For example, in Japan the reported rate of violence against women is 15 percent while in Ethiopia the reported rate is over 70 percent.

In the United States, it is estimated that 1 in 4 women will have at least one violent encounter by a current or former spouse or boyfriend in their lifetime. Additionally, a spouse or boyfriend in this country murders more than three women a day. In 2008, the center for Disease Control (CDC) published data that confirmed women experience over two million injuries a year from partner violence. It remains the leading cause of injury to American women. A woman is battered every 15 seconds and these injuries account for more hospital emergency room visits than car accidents, rapes and muggings combined. The dollar cost of partner violence is staggering. The average annual cost of domestic violence is estimated to be over 8 billion dollars. Approximately 85 percent of intimate partner violence is directed towards women although female partners have also victimized men as well. It is estimated that the statistics for men is underreported due to the shame and humiliation that men often feel for being victimized in this manner.

Domestic violence is now widely known as intimate partner violence or IPV. It has many accepted definitions and for this discussion we will use the Florida Statute 741.28 version which defines domestic violence as "any physical assault, battery, sexual assault or any criminal offense that results in physical injury or death of one family member by another who is, or was, residing in the same dwelling." More than 9 out of every 10 Floridians, or 91.5%, feel that domestic violence is a widespread problem in our communities.

Furthermore, the Florida Task Force on Domestic and Sexual Violence estimates that only about one-seventh of all domestic assaults are reported to the police.

The patterns of domestic violence may vary from family to family, but one thing is certain – it always escalates. It usually happens in cycles, rarely goes away and is likely to get worse as time goes on.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE:

Also called emotional abuse, in which a pattern of name-calling, humiliation, blaming, stalking and threats occur on a regular, sometimes daily basis. Often included in emotional abuse is intimidation and isolation from close friends and family members. This abuse destroys the victim's sense of self-worth and leads to anxiety and depression. Often over time, the victim will actually start to believe what her partner is telling her. This further destroys confidence and makes the victim feel helpless and alone. The bottom line is even relationships without direct physical abuse can still be unhealthy. Your partner is supposed to be the one person in life in which you get to choose to spend your life with and when constant emotional battering is present in a relationship, the "sense of well-being" that allows a person to thrive is shattered.

PHYSICAL ABUSE:

An aggressive physical attack on another individual, it ranges from leaving a bruise or other mark on a person to murder. It is never good, and the 2 hallmarks of this type of battering are: 1) it is always *intentional* on the part of the abuser and 2) always *unwanted* physical contact for the victim. It includes all types of physical handling such as hitting, punching, kicking, strangling, pushing and grabbing a person to prevent them from leaving. It's ALL about power and control at this point. It also becomes obvious that physical battering is frequently accompanied by emotional abuse. Regrettably each year 30% of all women murdered in the United States are killed by their husbands (current or ex) or boyfriends. The cycle of violence is often apparent in physical abuse syndromes. This behavior in a pattern was first noted in a classic study conducted by psychologist Lenore Walker, Ed.D. After extensively interviewing battered victims she concluded that violent episodes are likely to occur with the following three phases:

1. Tension Building Phase-

Vague feelings of tension start to be displayed through irritable, challenging behaviors. The batterer starts name-calling and blaming the victim in an attempt to entice her into an argument. The woman is often going out of her way to appear agreeable and nurturing in an effort to displace some of the abuser's anger. This, of course, rarely works because *really* nothing is going to stop the episode from happening once the anger starts to escalate. This is also the time when the batterer feels very threatened by the notion that the woman may reject him by leaving and those strong feelings to control her become unmanageable.

2. The Battering Incident-

The batterer loses control of the rage that has been building and simmering during the tension-building phase. Physical violence ensues in which the victim may, or may not try to fight back. The usual recourse is for the victim to try to call for help or attempt to escape. This is a very dangerous time and often leaves the victim in a state of psychological shock in which she may minimize the seriousness of her injuries, or not even be aware of the extent of the physical damage that has occurred. The batterer will try to diminish the obvious damage of the episode and may refuse to call for help even when the injuries are life threatening. Oddly, it is now that the victim will start to blame herself and feel ashamed of her failure to make her partner happy. She is convinced that others would blame her too if they knew what a terrible person she must be to keep causing these episodes.



3. The Loving “honeymoon” Phase –

Usually ensues rapidly following the acute battering incident. The batterer feels extreme remorse and is petrified the victim will leave.

The victim is showered with love, affection, profuse apologies and gifts. The batterer becomes a romantic nurturer that provides a gentle and loving attitude while offering hope and extreme promises for a better tomorrow. Outside help is rarely sought as the victim, once again, believes that these promises are true and a strong bond develops between the two. This is an isolating time for the couple who now shun the family or friends who have attempted to support the victim in the past. Eventually the victim has fewer people she can call on when times get bad which further cements her to the dysfunctional relationship.

And then, at some seemingly random time, the cycle will repeat.

SEXUAL BATTERING:

Sexual abuse refers to any unwanted action that pressures or forces someone to take part in intercourse or other sexual activity. This includes sexual contact with someone who is clearly drunk, drugged or otherwise unable to consent to sexual activity with a clear “yes” or “no”. Refusing to allow a woman to utilize protection against unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases are examples of sexual abuse while uninvited rough, violent sexual acts, including rape, are examples of sexual assault. It is not uncommon for victims of physical abuse to also be victims of sexual battering with the same partner. Physical abuse combined with sexual battering significantly increases the risk of being seriously injured or killed. These aggressive violent acts need to be reported and the victim should have medical treatment from an emergency room or other medical facility than can document the injuries.

FINANCIAL ABUSE:

Signs of financial abuse may be subtle but they include denying a person’s access to bank accounts, monitoring spending, having to provide receipts to show proof of spending and not allowing the victim to work or have any outside sources of income. This is often one of the main reasons that people feel they are unable to leave unhealthy relationships. They have been under a tight financial control for so long that they feel unable to provide for themselves or their children without financial support.

DIGITAL ABUSE:

This type of abuse is new to the spectrum but it is basically a reflection of the increased availability of multi net media in our society. Through the use of cell phones, computers and public Internet access, the incidences of cyber bullying and threats have made their way into main stream communication. Many



relationships end; yet the whereabouts and actions of the individuals can be easily monitored through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and others. In many cases harassment and bullying has occurred online to the extreme of the victim committing suicide to escape the public humiliation. Other patterns that may emerge as symptoms of digital abuse include a person who insists on knowing all the passwords of their partner, and

demanding she ALWAYS reply to excessive phone calls or texts, or risk punishment. This is in direct contrast to the communication style of a healthy relationship in which respectful dialogue is expected in person, on the phone and via text or e-mail.

The World Health Organization is recognized as being a leader in the movement to stop violence against women. Research conducted globally has shown the following traits to be universal risk factors often found in abusive relationships:

- Witnessing parental violence (perpetrators and victims);
- Past history of violence (perpetrator or victim);
- Lower levels of education (perpetrators and victims);
- Exposure to child maltreatment (perpetrators and victims);
- Antisocial personality disorder (perpetrators);
- Harmful use of alcohol (perpetrators and victims);
- Suspicion of infidelity (perpetrators and victims)
- Attitudes that are accepting of violence (perpetrators and victims).
- Marital discord and dissatisfaction (perpetrators and victims).
- Ideologies of male sexual entitlement (perpetrators)
- Extreme jealousy (perpetrators)
- Lack of impulse control (perpetrators)
- Animal cruelty (perpetrators)
- Low self-esteem, insecure, emotionally dependent (victim)

Abusers were often raised in homes where they witnessed violent behaviors and learned to cope with common stressors and anger in a violent manner. Batters have mastered the art of manipulation and often turn on the charm in an attempt to minimize the effects of aggressive behavior. Most batterers refuse to acknowledge they have an issue with explosive anger and rarely seek help unless the victim is able to successfully leave him and seek a life of her own. **Basically abusers continue to terrorize their partners because they can get away with it as long as the victim stays and the abuse does not get reported.** The batterer has learned that violence serves as an effective tool to maintain power and control over another person. Unfortunately the abuse is not taken seriously in many communities and often outsiders feel it is inappropriate to intervene in such personal business. There are still many cultures that believe it is the man's right to punish their spouse by beating them. The old saying "the rule of thumb" actually refers to the custom of not using anything larger than the diameter of your thumb to beat your wife with. The widely utilized domestic wheel of violence helps to illustrate the variety of tactics that abusers use to gain power and control over another.



Equally disturbing is the long list of complicated reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. Many stay because of financial constraints that restrict cash or bank account access. Often these women are not permitted to work, which further increases their dependency on the abuser. If children are living in the household the woman may fear losing custody to the breadwinner or face a serious decline in living conditions for her and the children. The abuser is diligent about reminding the victim that she does not have the financial resources to survive without him. Another reason that people stay is lack of social services available to assist victims through the process of leaving. Law enforcement tends to treat domestic violence as a nuisance crime and often talks women out of filing charges due to the amount of paperwork involved and apathy on the part of the prosecution team. There is limited availability of battered women's shelters and restraining orders have been found to be of little value in preventing a batterer from contacting or stalking a victim.

Additionally, society still holds a woman responsible for keeping the family together at all cost. The clergy members, who feel that divorce is not an option, even in unhealthy relationships, further reinforce this view. All these factors work together to isolate a victim and make her feel as though she has no other recourse except to stay.



Getting out of an abusive situation is never easy and there is not a one-size fits' all plan to help victims obtain their freedom. It is important to speak privately to a person you suspect may need help. Let them know you are concerned and specifically point out the things that have raised your suspicions. Don't hesitate because you think it is none of your business. Expressing concern lets a person know you care and may even save a life.

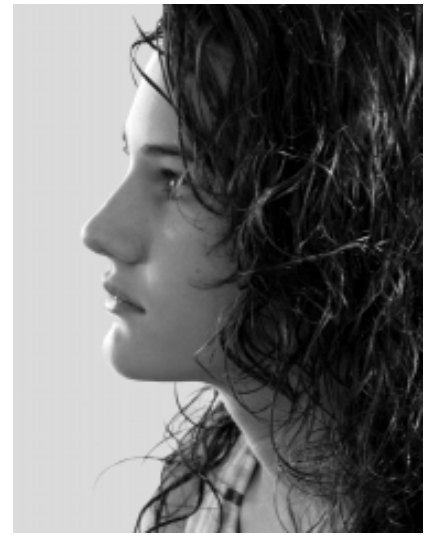
Healthcare providers are required by law to recognize the signs and symptoms of family violence and also to screen all individuals through questioning about the safety of their home environment. And, not surprisingly, the majority of people who are at risk for violence in the home do not readily admit to dangerous or abusive situations. Therefore the healthcare provider must rely on strong assessment skills and sometimes a gut feeling when things do not seem to add up. Medical personnel look for the following frequently observed injury patterns:

- Centrally located injuries
 - Injury distribution is in a “bathing suit” pattern; primarily involving the breasts, body, buttocks, and genitals
 - These areas are usually covered by clothing, concealing obvious signs of injury
 - Another central location is the head and neck, which is the site of up to 50% of abusive injuries
- Bilateral injuries:
Injuries involving both sides of the body, usually the arms and legs
- Defensive posture injuries:
 - These injuries are to the parts of the body used to fend off an attack:
 - The small finger side of the forearm or the palms when used to block blows to the head and chest
 - The bottoms of the feet when used to kick away an assailant
 - The back, legs, buttocks, and back of the head when the woman is crouched on the floor
- Injuries inconsistent with the explanation given:
 - The injury type or severity does not fit with the reported cause

- The mechanism of injury reported would not produce the signs of injury found on physical examination

Healthcare providers should always screen for abuse potential in a private area. Remember that battered women are often scared, ashamed, confused and depressed. They have been isolated from family and friends and they need help to successfully break away from an abusive relationship.

Florida is one of the states that require healthcare professionals to receive domestic violence training as part of the licensing and re-credentialing process. The goal of this training is to focus on early identification and offer timely intervention strategies to assist the victim with resources. Ultimately, it is up to the victim to make the changes in her life that will be necessary to assure her safety.



The manner in which you direct your questioning can also influence the response that you receive from the victim. Having a non-judgmental, caring attitude is essential to develop a sense of trust with the battered woman. If you suspect abuse issues the following tips are helpful to provide to the client:

- Seek out professional help, a counselor, a women's shelter or police.
- Call the local crisis intervention center to be directed to a safe place.
- Call a friend or family member and talk about it, never keep silent, silence kills.
- Set up an intervention meeting for the entire family in a neutral safe place. If hurt, call 911; go to the local hospital.
- Remove herself from the situation by going to friend, family or safe house.
- Ask someone come and stay, make sure this person is not going to make the situation worse.
- Do not confront the abusing person alone, they often look at this as a threat and will strike out. Bring in a family or friend when it's time to talk.
- Stand firm in the decision to break the cycle, often women will allow the abuser to "scare" them into "not telling", the abuser may say such comments as, "they will take the kids away", or "they will put me in jail" or "how can you do this to our family?"
- Have a "safety plan" which includes putting some money away in a safe place in the event that she needs it to flee with.
- Refer to Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)

ELDER ABUSE

Americans are living longer and better than ever before. They are remaining active, independent and are enjoying better health than previous generations.

Elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or trusted individual that causes harm, or may cause harm to an older adult. As with child and domestic abuse there can be many forms of elder abuse including:

Physical Abuse- Includes the use of force to threaten or physically injure an elderly individual. Typical injuries result from shoving, slapping, pinching, kicking, burning or beating of the individual.

Signs of physical abuse include:

- ✓ Patches of missing hair or a bleeding scalp
- ✓ Bruises or grip marks on the arms or neck
- ✓ Slap or pressure marks
- ✓ Scratches, blisters, lacerations or pinch marks
- ✓ Burns that appear to be from cigarettes, ropes or scalding water
- ✓ Poor hygiene
- ✓ Untreated medical conditions
- ✓ Broken bones, sprains or dislocations
- ✓ Torn or bloody clothing
- ✓ Broken eyeglasses
- ✓ Malnourished or dehydrated
- ✓ Any injury that is incompatible with the stated explanation
- ✓ Caregiver's refusal to let you examine or speak with the elder alone



Emotional Abuse-Indications of emotional abuse of an elderly person includes verbal attacks, belittling, and intimidation through yelling or threats, humiliation, ridicule and even giving the “silent treatment”. When a family member or caregiver treats an elder in a manner that causes mental anguish or emotional pain, they are inflicting abuse on the individual. Emotional abuse is also evident when the senior is treated like a child or isolated from family, regular social activities or friends.

Neglect- Neglect is more subtle than the other overt signs of abuse but it can be equally as damaging and it constitutes over half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It involves withholding appropriate care in the forms of food, clothing, medications, personal hygiene or assistance with activities of daily living. Seniors living in neglectful conditions are more likely to have bedsores and suffer from malnutrition and dehydration. Elders often harm themselves through self-neglect habits such as not eating in a regular manner or going to the doctor when they need medical care or monitoring. It is also at this point where episodes of alcohol or drug abuse may become contributing factors to self-neglect situations. This can become a touchy issue for family members who are trying to strike a balance between allowing an older person to continue to live independently while observing a steady decline in their quality of life. At times, family members will need to intervene if the living situation becomes too dangerous for the senior to remain independent of outside assistance.

Sexual Abuse- Defined as physical sexual contact without an elderly person's consent. It can range from exhibition to rape and may include inappropriate touching, rape, sodomy or forced nudity.

Signs to look for include:

- ✓ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ✓ Vaginal infections
- ✓ Unexplained vaginal or rectal bleeding
- ✓ Bruising of the breasts or genitals
- ✓ Torn or bloody underwear

Sexual abuse is the least often reported form of elder abuse.

Financial Abuse- Also called financial exploitation; this issue can range from misuse of a senior's funds for personal gain to outright embezzlement of money. It is clearly the unauthorized use of an elderly person's money or property and occurs through the use of undue influence to gain control over the individual's money. Sudden changes in account information, unusual bank withdrawals, checks that are noted as "gifts" and altered wills or trusts can be suspicious behavior indicative of financial abuse. The elder may be denied access to his own funds. Salespeople, healthcare practitioners, financial managers and even family members or friends may carry out fraudulent scams.

Warning signs include:

- Unusual bank account activity, such as withdrawals from automatic teller machines when the individual cannot get to the bank.
- Signatures on checks and other documents that do not resemble the elder's signature. Checks or other documents signed when the elder cannot write or understand what he or she is signing.
- Lack of personal amenities – appropriate clothing and grooming items.
- Numerous unpaid bills when someone else has been designated to pay the bills.
- Change in spending patterns, such as buying items he or she does not need or can't use
- The appearance of a stranger who begins a new close relationship and offers to manage the elder's finances and assets.



While financial elder abuse can take many forms, the most widespread abuses include telemarketing fraud, identity theft, predatory lending and home improvement or estate planning scams.

The following information is intended to familiarize you with how these crimes commonly are perpetrated and what you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Telemarketing Fraud:



Americans lose an estimated \$40 billion each year due to the fraudulent sales of goods and services over the telephone.

AARP discovered that 56% of telemarketer calls are directed at those age 50 years and older. Often is difficult to tell if a telemarketing call is legitimate or not. Suspensions should be high when the caller urges you to make an instant decision over the phone; for example to send money right away to claim a prize or travel package.

It is wise to advise elders to ask for and write down the name and address of the company that is calling to solicit information. It is also a good idea to ask the caller to send you written information to review before you make a purchase or donate to a charity. Furthermore, a senior should always get advice from someone

they trust before making any large purchase or investment. They should also be counseled to never give out personal information or credit card numbers over the phone. Seniors, or anyone else, should never let a caller intimidate them and be instructed to simply hang up if they feel the call is not legitimate.

Identity Theft:

Identity theft is a rapidly growing crime. There are over a half million new victims every year. It is a fairly easy crime to carry out because individual credit cards, driver's licenses and Social Security numbers contain a wide range of information that can be used to gain access to a person's accounts. Accessing this information can be obtained through theft of a wallet, taking mail out of mailboxes, rummaging through trash and even by watching personal transactions at an ATM.

Social Security numbers can even be purchased on the Internet for as little as twenty dollars each.

A senior should be advised to tear up paperwork that contains personal information such as bank statements and credit card information before disposing of it. Social Security numbers should NEVER be printed on checks and that information should not be given out unless the elder has initiated the contact, and is familiar with the organization that will be on the receiving end of the information.

Home Improvement Scams:



Home improvement scams are often committed by groups of individuals who go door to door in an effort to sell home improvement services. The “scammers” often come into communities and offer to make repairs on roofs or siding that they claim are in immediate need of service. The elder considers these offers because the repairs are offered at cheap or highly discounted rates. If the senior

agrees to the presented deal, they often end up paying higher rates when the work is completed or discover that inferior materials have been utilized to complete the repairs.

Seniors should be aware of the following tips to avoid becoming a victim of home improvement scams: *(really...these tips apply to anyone)*

- ✓ Get bids for work that needs to be done from more than one source
- ✓ Be suspicious of workers who come to your door with offers to repair or improve their home
- ✓ Insist on referrals and check them out
- ✓ Always obtain the contractor's license number and confirm this information with the State Licensing Board
- ✓ Check the Better Business Bureau for consumer complaints
- ✓ Do not rush into making a decision that does *not feel right*
- ✓ Always obtain a written contract before services are started
- ✓ Limit the down payment to 1,000 dollars or 10% of the contract price; whichever is less

Predatory Lending:

It is estimated that 80% of Americans who are age 50 years or older are homeowners. This makes them an easy target for unscrupulous lenders who try to pressure them into obtaining high interest loans for home repairs, debt consolidation or to pay health care costs. The loan terms are often vague and homeowners can be devastated when they eventually realize they cannot repay the high interest loans due to excessive fees, pre-payment penalties, and balloon payments. The resulting legal fees and rulings can lead to the loss of their home and other assets.

Estate Planning:

Estate planning refers to making advance arrangements for the disposition of a person's assets upon death. Estate planning tools include wills, trusts, powers of attorney and health care directives. Elders need to be very careful when granting a relative or other individual with power of attorney as this designated individual

can take money from their accounts, transfer property and even have the elder involuntarily placed into a long term care facility.

The best remedy to prevent financial abuse is for the elder to carefully choose trustworthy people to act as their agents or conservators when preparing estate-planning documents.

Reporting Abuse:

Seniors are easy targets for financial abuse because they tend to be the ones with the savings and cash. Furthermore seniors are often embarrassed by being a victim of fraud and are hesitant to speak up about their concerns.

It is estimated that 2.1 million older Americans are victims of abuse annually. Included in this estimate are all the forms of elder abuse that have been discussed in this article. For every abuse and neglect case reported, there are, as many as five cases that have not been. It is a complex problem that most people associate with elders who live in a nursing home. However, most instances of elder abuse do not occur in a nursing home but instead happens in their homes at the hands of family members or paid caregivers. Elder abuse does not necessarily follow a single pattern and can be subtle and difficult to distinguish between interpersonal stress among family members and actual abuse. Seniors often experience abuse secondary to changes in living accommodations and the stressors brought about by their dependence on others to meet their basic needs. Family members often lack the knowledge or care giving skills to care for the physical needs of the elder. Compounding the situation are factors such as living in crowded homes and lack of financial resources. This level of care is difficult under the best of circumstances but when a family member/caregiver feels they have been thrust into a situation without adequate training and resource information on how to balance the needs of the elder and themselves; they can experience extreme frustration and anger which can lead to explosive situations. Even if the abuse is secondary to good people trying to do the right thing – it's still abuse and needs to be reported. Sadly, in America today, older people are often regarded as disposable and although more than a half a million cases of elderly abuse are reported each year, it is estimated that millions more remain unreported. Florida law **requires** that any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect that a vulnerable adult has been or is being abused, neglected or exploited shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline via the following toll-free telephone number: 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-926-2873). The TDD, telephone device for the deaf, number for reporting is 1-800-955-8770. The Florida Abuse Hotline accepts calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Abuse Hotline counselor is required to let the person who is calling know whether the information has been accepted for investigation.

Have the following information ready when you call the Abuse Hotline to make a report:

- Victim's name, address or location, approximate age, race and sex.
- A brief description of any disability or infirmity the victim may have.
- Signs or indications of harm or injury, including a physical description if possible.
- Name, address and telephone number of the person thought to be causing the abuse or neglect.
- Relationship, if known, of the victim to the perpetrator.
- Your name, address and telephone number as the reporting individual. This information is never given out and the reporter may remain anonymous, if they wish.

If the elder is in a life-threatening situation, or immediate severe danger, contact 911 or other law enforcement agencies. The reporting individual is protected from both criminal and civil liability.

The following online resources are available for further eldercare reference:

Alzheimer's Association – www.alz.org

Nonprofit organization that provides support, education training and resources for families and caregivers affected by Alzheimer's and other related disorders.

AARP – www.aarp.org

Nationwide advocacy organization for people aged 50 and older. AARP provides information and educational resources on an extensive range of subjects ranging from long term health care to consumer counseling.

Better Business Bureau – www.bbb.org

Provides reports on business and charities. Also helps to resolve consumer complaints and provides consumer counseling.

Eldercare Locator – www.elder.org

Nationwide information and resource center for seniors and caregivers.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman – www.aging.state.fl.us/html/programs/ombudsman.htm

Trained individuals who advocate for the protection and rights of residents in 24 hour long term care facilities. The primary responsibility of the Ombudsman program is to investigate and resolve complaints made by, or on behalf of individual residents.

National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse – www.preventelderabuse.org

Association of researchers, medical practitioners and advocates dedicated to the safety and security of the elderly. It serves as the nation's clearinghouse on information and materials regarding elder abuse and neglect.

National Family Caregivers' Association - www.nfcacares.org

Grassroots organization dedicated to improving life for family caregivers, or those caring for loved ones with a chronic illness or disability.

National Hispanic Council on Aging – www.nhcoa.org

This agency provides information on issues critical to Latino seniors such as health, income, education, employment and housing.

National Institute on Aging – www.nia.nih.gov

Information and consumer information on health and research advances regarding aging issues.

National Senior Citizens' Law Center – www.nscic.org

This organization provides information for elder and dependent adults on issues such as Medicare, SSI and pensions.

Nursing Home Compare – www.medicare.gov

This site is designed to help individuals choose a nursing home and includes comprehensive inspection results for all nursing homes.

Conclusion: In Search of Solutions

Family violence is the most reported violent crime in America. The family unit is a complicated system and abuse in any part may lead to issues that affect the family as a whole. Every person, young and old deserves to be treated with respect and to be safe from harm. This is especially true of the very people we call our family and other trusted individuals that we are in daily contact with. Unfortunately, family violence (the abuse of a child, intimate partner or elder) occurs throughout our country every day. Unlike most other crimes, family violence is not usually a sudden one-time event. It progresses over years, which are tormented by physical, emotional or sexual trauma. It is a cycle that, over time, tends to become not only well hidden, but also "normal" for the families involved in the abuse. This further perpetuates the cycle of abuse as it is passed from generation to generation. The National Institute of Justice describes the process in which today's abused children become tomorrow's violent offenders. They are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile for a crime. As an adult, witnesses of childhood abuse are 30% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime. The old saying "violence begets violence" seems especially true in families who have lived within the abusive household. Approximately 5-6 million children witness some form of

domestic violence each year and eventually many of these children learn to accept this abuse as normal. Adults who have learned as a child that violence is an acceptable behavior further perpetuate the intergenerational cycle by becoming either a victim of abuse or an abuser because that is what feels normal to them.

The focus needs to shift from any acceptance of family violence to one that empowers families and communities through education and advocacy programs that support a zero tolerance for abuse of any form. This can be achieved by a change in family and cultural attitudes, which carry a strong message that violence is never acceptable and often has lifelong negative consequences.

With dedicated effort, the cycle of violence can be stopped. Victims need to be encouraged to seek help, advice and protection from their local shelters or a trusted friend or counselor. Once the victim of abuse makes positive healthy changes it opens the door for the abuser to learn to change the pattern of anger that has dominated their limited coping skills. It is possible for an abuser to learn how to express anger and disappointment in other ways that do not damage the family. These changes are often brought about through active participation in anger management and other counseling programs that seek to strengthen the bond of a healthy family. Couples can engage in programs designed to heal and nurture their fragile relationships through the use of healthy and respectful communication tools. These changes involve a process and do not happen overnight but dedication to the effort has many rewards that reach far outside the boundaries of the family.

Elder abuse or neglect can often occur because of exhaustion and frustration on the part of family members who are ill prepared to act as caregivers and can become overwhelmed with seemingly simple tasks of daily living. Community members, friends or extended family can lend support by offering a helping hand, bringing a meal over or simply asking how the caregiver is doing - are things that can make a big difference in the overall ability to cope with the often harsh realities of caregiving.

Breaking the patterns of family violence can only be accomplished when people are willing to speak up and plant the seeds for change as a society. If you know of someone who is being abused or suffering from neglect, and you do not report it then you are enabling and supporting these actions and the cycle will never be broken. Speak up – someone's health, dignity or life may depend on it. As Martin Luther King once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." One by one we can be *that* light.

