

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGAL NETWORK OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY (D.V.L.N.)**  
**THE EDUCATION & AWARENESS COMMITTEE**  
**THE EDUCATION/ AWARENESS/COMMUNICATION/HEALTH (T.E.A.C.H) NEWSLETTER**  
**VOLUME III: ISSUE 1: Winter 2016**

**OUR HISTORY:** *The Domestic Violence Legal Network of Montgomery County (DVLN) was formed in 1986 by professionals from law enforcement, the court system, and agencies working with victims of domestic violence (DV), for the purpose of sharing resources and expertise to serve victims more effectively.*

**OUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:** *DVLN strives to eliminate Domestic Violence (DV) in the community by whatever means available including, enhanced communications between victim of (DV) and county services in an effort to secure safety and relief; to work with DV victims to remove stumbling blocks in their path to a more secure future; to keep the community informed by providing a clear profile of available services; to take action on behalf of DV victims through policy reform.*

**SERIES OF ARTICLES:** *So that we may reach more victims of DV, DVLN 's Education and Awareness Committee (TEACH) have created a series of articles to offer a better understanding of DV; which impacts the lives of 1 in 4 woman and 1 in 7 men. For previous articles go to: [www.montcopa.org/dvln](http://www.montcopa.org/dvln)*

### **HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (OVERVIEW):** by Jan Biresch

Often people don't realize that being in an abusive relationship can have an overwhelming impact on their health and the health of others living in an abusive household; mainly the children. You go about your daily life doing all that you can to stay calm, make things better, care for your children, go to work, run a household and more. What you may not realize is that the pressure of being in an abusive relationship, whether it be emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse, is tearing you down. While you are trying to stay afloat, your brain and body are working overtime to help create an emotional and physical balance. This work is using up your internal resources leaving you open to illness, infection, disease and mental illness.

### **Emotional Abuse Can Impact Your Health**

By Lillian G Sulliman

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** manifests itself in different aspects of our lives. If we use the power and control wheel (Duluth Model), we see that emotional abuse is a very real aspect of it. Within the Domestic Violence arena there are those displaying abusive behaviors, who pride themselves on not expressing outward violence toward their significant partner, thereby being considered non-abusive by outsiders (family, friends, co-workers, etc.); from that outsider's observation point this may seem to be true: a Prince Charming, "nice" "sweet" "thoughtful" "kind" "generous", etc. but to the victim, that same person is anything but, for "behind closed doors" these partners are mean-spirited, threatening, cold-hearted, hurtful, and abrasive in word, thought and deed.

Emotional abuse is perhaps as traumatic as physical abuse if not more so. Bruises disappear over time, but the mind holds the darkness of emotional, verbal and mental abuse forever, a fact nothing can erase; there can be no comfort zone established within such a relationship. Within that darkness may be found many variations of trauma, often responsible for physical and mental health issues, such as depression, physical discomfort expressing itself in severe headaches, or a variety of body aches and pains, dysfunction within, presence of inner body infections, changes in sleep patterns, diet and/or the feeling of "losing" self-control, along with loss of an ability to cope on a daily level; all these downers within the self, allow the abuser a larger canvas on

which to paint his darkness while continuing to make the partner feel "crazy", "dumb", incapable of caring for self.

There are professionals who reference emotional abuse as "blackmail", for constantly experiencing this type of devastation to well-being destroys one's value of self, resulting in self-degradation and worthlessness, thereby allowing silent victimization to continue over time; the reaction to feeling this way often leaves the victim fearsome of losing the partner, creating an obligation to carry out wishes/demands in order to "keep the peace", not realizing that this action is feeding directly into the abuser's plan for if the victim is unresponsive, the abuser creates a feeling of guilt whereby another layer of self-worthiness becomes destroyed, keeping the abused individual in a "fog" while the vicious cycle continues, the person being abused falling further into an abyss..

Emotional abuse expresses itself in the same patterns whether the victim is female or male. Tactics include put downs; name calling; constant criticism of actions; verbal attacks on self-esteem, making the partner feel bad about self, physical appearance, parenting skills, career choices, lack of education, or even using education as a negative, attacking family relationships or dependence upon others, increasing innate fears.

How then do we approach this type of abusiveness in a healthy manner to repair damage; it is not an easy task, even when searching out professional help, (medical team members, service providers, personal counseling) although

## Emotional Abuse cont.

that would be the most viable place to go; additionally reaching out within your friendship base to find support, those who will believe you and stand by you, can be helpful. Concentrate on basic safety measures: first and foremost ~ know your partner, the characteristics, assets and liabilities, does he or she anger easily; is there an issue with alcohol or drugs, prescription or street drugs; is he or she controlling, needing everything in accordance with personal wants and needs; does he or she need to know your every move, who what when and where, to the point of calling you several times a day from morning to night, phone stalking or physically stalking; are household rules discussed openly, or simply carried out one way only; is the partner incapable of accepting responsibility for any problematic behavior patterns or results thereof; the blame game is consistently on the table and you're 'IT'. If your response to any or all of these questions is yes, you are in an emotionally abusive relationship; think thoroughly about the possibilities entailed before entering into a full-time, long-term relationship with this individual.

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## How Physical Abuse Impacts Your Health

Jan Biresch

*Abusive relationships often start with making you the brunt of jokes, name calling, humiliating, limiting personal and economic freedom, and blaming you for all that goes wrong. Many times this emotional abuse leads to physical abuse when the emotional abuse is met with little or no resistance. Abusers look for cues to know it is safe for them to move to the next step in abusive patterns of behavior.*

Just like emotional abuse, physical abuse may start at a low level and escalate as time goes on (*see power and control wheel in previous article*).

It may start with a shove, or block your ability to move around freely; and afterwards the perpetrator of this type of assault may say something like "Oh, get over it, I was just playing around" or, "No harm was meant" or "Can't you take a joke" or "Why don't you lighten-up". This type of response from a person hurting or frightening you is to test your reaction; one to make you feel badly for overreacting when in fact they are just looking to see how far they can go.

If the perpetrator of such behavior is not met with resistance they may heighten their physical assault as they get away with simple assault. This is a worrisome sign because physical assault is usually escalating in nature and may lead to permanent damage and even death.

At first, bruises may be confined to what is called "the bathing suit area of the body" where injuries often go outwardly unnoticed. The problem is that as things escalate injuries will appear where they are visible to others. Leaving you embarrassed, and making up stories as to how bruises occur; escalating the ongoing humiliation that you already feel.

Physical abuse may include but not limited to the following: shoving; pushing; slapping; punching; pinching, hair pulling; biting; kicking; burning; stabbing; shooting; strangling

Understandably this may not be as easy as the words make it seem, but for your own peace and sense of comfort within, it is a "must" consideration. Do not hesitate to reach out to avail yourself of help/support/resources.

Finally understand that there will never be a magic formula – only the full acknowledgement of equality as the primary value within a healthy relationship; as long as each individual within the relationship is allowed freedom of self within the togetherness will there be a chance of healthfulness within any long-term relationship. No one individual can "own" another; entitlement is not acceptable one over another. Be ever true to yourself while recognizing the same should exist within one's partner. If you value yourself as you value your partner, your relationship will ever be journeying toward that ultimate goal. Believe firmly in your own self-worth and you will never lose that power of self. (Please see a connective article within this issue referencing "SELF-CARE")

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***In the words of a beloved lady, the great Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent".***

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(choking); throwing objects at you; or attempt to block your freedom of movement. Sexual assault is also considered a form of physical abuse and will be discussed in another article as it brings with it a unique responses, reactions, and legal ramifications.

One of the biggest by-products of physical assaults is that while your body is working hard to heal from the injuries, your immune system is working overtime to help in the healing process. If you are a victim of ongoing physical abuse, and your immune system is focused on the healing process, you are now open to opportunistic infections and other health issues due to being compromised.

The impact of ongoing physical abuse may create long term health issues that don't appear until later life.

## Safety Measures You Can Take If Assault is Eminent

**First and foremost** A SAFETY Plan should be put into place as soon as possible; including age appropriate children. Some of them include the following:

**Teach** age appropriate children to dial 911 and set the phone down so the operator can hear what is going on; or run to a pre-determined neighbor's house.

**Create** a code with adjoining neighbor if you bang on the wall or ceiling, or scream they are to call 911.

**Get out** of rooms that may contain weapons like the kitchen, bathroom, or garage.

**Run from** rooms with no way out. Get between your abuser and an exit and back up toward the exit (abuser things you are moving in fear) and then run.

**Fighting back** is discouraged as this may insight the attacker to heighten the assault. Don't antagonize your abuser..

## Physical Abuse cont.

**Create a history** by taking and hiding photographs of injuries showing your face when possible and save date, time, and location of assault for historical purposes.

### **Confide in your Doctor or Nurse-A Related Story:**

A victim of domestic violence thinks she is having a heart attack while driving. She pulls off the road and calls her doctor and because she never shared her abusive marriage, the doctor immediately called her husband; who ran to the hospital and would not leave her alone so that she could not be screened and have the ability to share her story with medical staff who could have used this important information

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## **An Abusive Relationship Can Impact your Sexual Health** - Annelise Bloch & Jan Biresch

*An active health sex life is part of a loving relationship. All of that changes when you are being emotionally, physically, and economically abused. Your partner may feel that he has the right to sex whenever or however he wants. Many victims of domestic violence are afraid to not have sex with an abusive partner because it is their duty, or they are afraid of a physical confrontation.*

### **The following sexual abuses can have lasting and damaging impact on your health:**

**Abuse:** Birth control sabotage where your partner tampers or hides your means of birth control. He may put a hole in a condom to make you pregnant against your will or not allow you to see a medical professional and obtain prescription birth control.

**Impact on health:** A wanted or unwanted pregnancy is a huge impact on women's health. Birth control sabotage can also lead to transmission of a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

**Abuse:** Knowingly giving you an (STD) that you now have it. This can also occur when you are pregnancy risking the health of the fetus.

**Impact on health:** This abuse can serve as a form of control, keeping you in the relationship out of fear that another partner won't want you know that you have an STD.

**Abuse:** Pressuring or forcing you to have sexual contact. Making you feel afraid if you do not consent. Some people believe that the man in a relationship should be able to have sexual contact as he desires. **Rape occurs between married and unmarried people alike.**

**Impact on health:** The emotional and physical impact of rape is many and great. Emotional impact can include PTSD with symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, difficulty trusting others and anxiety. Rape can often be violent and cause several physical injuries.

**Abuse:** Using inanimate objects during sex to degrade, hurt, and, humiliate you.

during the patient's evaluation.

If her personal doctor had knowledge of the abuse he would not have immediately called the husband but first would have had a domestic violence assessment done by staff so plans could be made for her before her husband arrived at the hospital.

**Doctors, nurses, and social service professionals can be your first line of defense and will do what they are trained to do to help you get to safety.**

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**Impact on health:** These things not only affect you emotionally but can do permanent damage to your body and reproductive organs.

More than 50% of victims of domestic violence are sexually humiliated and raped. For you talking about this subject may make you uncomfortable but it is important to share this information with a medical professional so that they may forward you to an appropriate resource to help you get the support you need and deserve.

## **How an Abusive Relationship Can Impact you During Pregnancy – Jan Biresch**

*Being pregnancy can be a dreamed about miracle or a decent into the depths. It is the hope for a brighter future and a jail sentence; sometimes both at the same time if you have an abusive partner.*

Many victims of domestic violence feel trapped when they are pregnancy and hormonal shifts don't help some of the overwhelming emotions that come to be.

Historically 50-70 % of women who are abused before they are pregnant are abused during pregnancy. One in four women who were never physically assaulted before becoming pregnancy are done so after they are pregnancy. This seems odd but, if you think about a woman whose life focus is to keep herself safe by keeping her partner happy, it is not a stretch to understand that when she is pregnancy her first focus becomes, as it should, on her health and the health of her fetus. To an abusive partner this refocusing of his pregnant partner makes him angry and frustrated and in some instances will be the first of many physical assaults. He may also deny her routine health screenings and prenatal vitamins as a form of punishment.

**REMEMBER:** what happens to you also happens to your unborn baby.

**A new life can be a new beginning, don't feel embarrassed ask for help as there are many woman in your situation and support is available.**

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## Impact of Domestic Violence on the Health of our Children

By Michele Kristofco

*Some people think that domestic violence is a problem among adult spouses or intimate partners, but did you know that domestic violence is a problem for children too?*

Children who are exposed to domestic violence can suffer great consequences as a result of the domestic violence in their homes. Some children are direct victims of physical abuse or emotional injury when there is a violent adult in the home. Even children who are not direct targets, but who feel afraid, live in chaos, witness violence, or are neglected by a violent adult in the home can suffer great life-long consequences.

According to Futures Without Violence; Safe, Healthy and Ready to Learn Report, May 2015:

- Students traumatized by exposure to violence have been shown to have lower grade-point averages, more negative remarks in their cumulative records, and more reported absences from school than other students.
- Children with two or more ACEs were 2.67 times more likely to repeat a grade, even when adjusting for demographic characteristics and health factors.
- Trauma can affect sustained and focused attention, making it difficult for a student to remain engaged in school.
- Chronic stress can have a permanent negative effect on the chemical and physical structures of a child's brain, causing trouble with attention, concentration, memory, and creativity.
- Individuals who have experienced six or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) die 20 years earlier on average than those who have experienced none.

**MAKE THE CALL  
TO  
STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

## Consequences of Adverse Childhood Experience



The pyramid above provided by Felitti V., Anda R. et al. 1998, demonstrates that when children suffer adverse childhood experiences, there is an increased risk for:

- Disrupted neurodevelopment
- Social, emotional & cognitive impairment
- Adoption of health-risk behaviors
- Disease, disability & social problems
- Early death

Clearly, domestic violence impacts the health of children. We must take steps to protect our children from violence now and from potential future consequences.

There are steps you can take to protect your children from domestic violence:

- Make a plan
- Gather resources
- Seek out community supports and the assistance of family and friends
- Consider whether formal child protection services are needed

If formal child protection services are needed, contact ChildLine, the statewide resource for child protection, at 1-800-932-0313 or [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis)

**What we do for our children today helps them develop into healthy adults tomorrow.**



## STRANGULATION: THE NEW LETHAL WEAPON

By Stacy Sweinhart

It takes eight pounds of pressure to pull the trigger on a handgun. It takes twenty-two pounds of pressure to open a can of soda. It takes eleven pounds of pressure to strangle someone to death.

Strangulation is becoming one of the most dangerous acts of domestic abuse. At least 10% of women who experience domestic abuse have been strangled by their partner. This may not seem like a large number but victims who have been previously strangled by their abusers are 7 times more likely to be murdered than victims who have never been strangled. That is because there is no other intent to strangulation than to kill someone. Strangulation results in a loss of consciousness within 5-10 seconds and death can occur within 4-5 minutes. All a person needs is their hands, a forearm, or a belt to inflict serious physical injury or even death.

As if strangulation wasn't dangerous enough, it is very difficult to detect. Unfortunately, the physical effects of strangulation are often unseen. While sometimes there will be scratches to the neck or redness around the throat, the worst damage occurs internally. Little bones in the throat can be fractured, arteries can be damaged, and lung injuries are common. Often times, victims will not experience any problems related to the strangulation until a few days after the incident. Strangulation presents an added danger to victims of domestic abuse who are pregnant. When blood and oxygen are deprived from mother, the fetus often loses blood and oxygen as well. This leads to many pregnant women to have miscarriages after a strangulation incident.

Strangulation is the ultimate form of power and control (dynamics that make up the very foundation of domestic abuse). Abusers seek to exert control over their partners, how much more control can someone get then controlling when someone can breathe. This has led to increased attention in the criminal justice field to strangulation. Law enforcement are trained on how to screen for strangulation and how to get appropriate help. Additionally, the Montgomery County District Attorney's office has begun to charge strangulation as a felonious assault. Even though many times no visible injuries are left as a result of strangulation, death can result days or weeks after an attack. That is why awareness of the dangers of strangulation is so important. The more people who understand the fatality of this act, the more lives can be saved as a result.

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**NO ONE DESERVES TO BE HURT  
EMOTIONALLY OR PHYSICALLY**

## USING YOUR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL AS A RESOURCE

by Tina Quinci

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has adopted guidelines for women's preventative health services which will help ensure that women can receive, without cost-sharing, a comprehensive set of recommended preventive health services, including screening and counseling for interpersonal and domestic violence.

Providers do not need to be experts on domestic violence to conduct screenings. Just as providers routinely screen patients for diabetes or high blood pressure and refer them to specialist as needed, providers can also screen for domestic violence and provide a referral to a local domestic violence agency.

### **Don't have insurance? Did you know that survivors of Domestic Violence may enroll in healthcare.gov at ANY TIME?**

As of April 29, 2015, survivors of domestic violence may apply for health insurance through healthcare.gov at ANY TIME. They do not need to wait for Open Enrollment. They qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) because they are survivors of domestic violence. This important policy was released on May 6, 2015 by the Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (CCIIO).

To enroll, individuals should call the Marketplace Call Center and share that they were a "survivor of DV". It is important to use the phrase "survivor of DV" as it will help the Call Center initiate the appropriate process. The Call Center representative will be able to grant a SEP.

The SEP allows individuals 60 days to pick a plan and get enrolled. Note that this policy applies to the federal Marketplace (healthcare.gov); some state-based Marketplaces may vary (check with your state).

#### **To get a SEP, consumers should:**

Call the Call Center at 1-800-318-2596

Explain the situation by stating "I am a survivor of DV. I want a Special Enrollment to apply for health care."

The Call Center will grant a SEP and then consumers will have 60 days to pick and enroll in a plan.

To learn more about the Special Enrollment Period for survivors of domestic violence, please visit

[HealthCaresAboutIPV.org](http://HealthCaresAboutIPV.org).

*Adapted from [www.healthcaresaboutipv.org](http://www.healthcaresaboutipv.org)*

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**YOU DON'T HAVE TO SUFFER IN  
SILENCE**

## SELF-HEALTH BY Denise Flynn

SELF HEALTH is a very real issue for victims of domestic violence and an important part of moving past domestic violence and abusive relationships. It is also important to know why you need to heal yourselves. You may have experienced being blamed for EVERYTHING that goes wrong in your relationship with your partner/spouse ("it's your fault that..."). Aside from the physical, mental, verbal, emotional & psychological assaults you have experienced from your partner or spouse, it's also worth mentioning what you do to yourself. You begin to "own" what is said about you and you repeat it over and over, until you finally believe it or it becomes true. You believe nobody wants you but him; you can't do anything right, you are ugly and worthless; to name a few things you may have heard in your relationship. You speak so negatively about yourself, your circumstances, just about everything, it becomes harder and harder to see the "light at the end of the tunnel." Making mistakes is a normal part of living life; don't stay stuck on those mistakes and past experiences. We learn from our mistakes as much as we learn from our successes. All that has occurred is not your fault or responsibility! Your responsibility is to take care of you!

You have a lot of work to do in self-care and healing. Taking that first step, that baby step is important in your self-empowerment & self-improvement.

Self-Health begins with rebuilding your self-esteem. Rebuilding your self-esteem requires certain considerations. As care-givers, female and male, we take care of so many others and put others in front of ourselves, putting ourselves last. We don't give ourselves the gift of yearly check-ups and doctor visits, we don't monitor our health, body signals. Our negative self-talk prevents us from moving forward with our goals and we do not embrace our positive attributes and areas of positive growth.

**1) Self-awareness.** You have to do inventory, self-talk, self-evaluation as to where you are physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, to understand how life has impacted you, your decisions, and your way of life. One of the ways to do this is to journal your feelings, including, the wealth of feelings bottled up including feelings this may open up. Another way is to speak to a counselor or therapist who can help you process these feelings. If you have spiritual beliefs, let them also guide you in your self-care.

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**2) Self-acceptance.** This requires you to examine your different emotions and accept them. Become aware of your emotions, good and bad attitudes, demeanor and feelings, recognize where you are overly critical of yourself and others, and adopt a more loving and caring attitude. It's okay to LOVE YOU!! CELEBRATE YOU!!! (and your strengths), while you work on your weaknesses. You have to forgive yourself for the mistakes you feel bad about; from decisions, occurrences, and life issues.

**3) Self-assertiveness. "Closed mouth does not get fed!"** In order to receive all that you need to move forward, including basic needs met, you have to speak up, ask for what you want/need. It's important to do so in an assertive, non-aggressive way. Set boundaries, especially when it comes to your partner, children, family members, friends and others who may not support your moving forward in a positive way/direction. It's important to speak up, be firm, not abusive or negatively demanding. The goal is to develop a sense of self-control over your life and trust in yourself and your decisions.

**4) Self-integrity.** Learn what is true for you and live your life accordingly. Step back, listen carefully to your inner self, determine what is best for you and trust your decisions to positively impact you and others. Live your life according to healthy, moral principles, and believe in yourself.

**5) Self-Growth.** We all have areas of growth that we can improve upon. Don't stay stuck in the "Blame Game" meaning, whose fault it is and why circumstances turned out the way they did. Move forward from that and strive to grow in a positive direction. This is an important benefit for everyone whose life you effect. Positive change in you creates a positive change agent (you), that affect others around you. The Ripple Effect! Change you – change the world!

**It is important to take care of you, health-wise,  
physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually!  
Taking care of the needs of others is fine; it is just  
as important to take care of you!**

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## MAKE THE CALL TO STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



For confidential domestic violence, sexual assault, or child abuse help or resources:

*Do Not Hesitate to CALL 911 In Case of an Emergency or Dangerous Situation!*

*Laurel House Hotline: 800-642-3150*

*Women's Center Hotline: 800-773-2424*

*Victim Services Center: 888-521-0983*

*Office of Children and Youth: 610-278-5800*

*PA Child Abuse Hotline: 800-932-0313*

*Montgomery County Domestic Relations: 610-278-3646  
(Child support issues)*

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### Contributors are all members of the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Legal Network/T.E.A.C.H.

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#### *This is Article III*

*New articles and resources will be published each quarter by The Domestic Violence Legal Network and can be accessed at: [www.montcopa.org/DVLN](http://www.montcopa.org/DVLN)*

*See newsletter at bottom of DVLN home page for previous articles*