

Getting Support

Choosing to stay in an abusive relationship is very difficult. Often, the victim feels isolated from friends and family members who do not understand the victim's situation. Those friends and family may not know about the abuse, or they may know about it and may have given up on supporting and helping the victim. Further, they may be aware but refuse to recognize the problem.

A victim of abuse needs support, during and after the relationship. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, consider getting support from a victim advocate who understands what you are going through. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is open 24 hours a day, and available for anyone who needs information about resources in their area, or just needs to talk.

Benefits of Counseling

If it is safe to do so, consider seeking help from a counselor. Family violence and sexual assault crisis centers often provide free counseling to victims of abuse. Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing and processing the situation can help you clarify what is happening
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative psychological, physical, and emotional effects that often result from abuse
- Safety planning and options for the future can be discussed in a confidential setting

The experience can be utilized to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills and reduce isolation.

Who can help?

The Victim Services Unit within the Travis County Sheriff's Office can provide assistance with information about your case status, Crime Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

SAFE Alliance:

(512) 267-7233 (SAFE) 24hrs
Travis County Family Violence and Sexual Assault Shelter and Crisis Center
www.safeaustin.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1 (800) 799-7233 (SAFE)
www.thehotline.org

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network

1-800-656-HOPE(4673)
www.rainn.org

2-1-1 Texas - Resource Directory

2-1-1 or 1-877-541-7905
www.211texas.org

Office for Victims of Crime

1-800-851-3420
www.ovc.gov

Choosing to Stay in an Abusive Relationship

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

Why do they stay?

People often ask the question, “If it’s so bad, why doesn’t s/he leave?” There is no simple answer to this question. The reasons for staying in an abusive relationship are many and often complicated. Some examples of reasons victims stay include:

- The children (needing help with child care or not wanting them to lose a parent)
- Knowing that abuser will carry out threats
- Conflicts with religious/cultural values or family upbringing
- Lack of financial/social resources to leave
- Nowhere to go, literally (isolated by abuser)
- Fear of retaliation for reporting to law enforcement or outside persons/agencies
- Fear that the “system” won’t work (or worse, experience with it not working)
- Fear of losing immigration status
- Hope that the situation will change
- Genuine love for the abuser
- Severe lack of self esteem due to abuse

...JUST TO NAME A FEW

Perhaps the single most important reason that victims stay is:

The fatality risk is *highest* when s/he attempts to leave or successfully leaves the relationship.

Remember:

Victims know their abusers better than anyone – and therefore know when it is and is not safe to leave.

The question we *should* be asking is, “Why does the abuser do this to the victim?”

Safety with an Abuser

If you are in an abusive relationship and choose to stay, think about your safety and the safety of your children at all times. Even if you are not ready to leave an abusive relationship, you can take some of the following steps to promote safety:

- Identify your partner’s use and level of force so that you can assess danger to you and your children before it occurs.
- Try to avoid an abusive incident by leaving.
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and there are ways to escape. When arguments occur, try to move to those areas.
- Don’t run to where the children are—your partner may hurt them as well.
- If violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target; dive into a corner and curl up into a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know what numbers to call for help. Know where the nearest pay phone is located. Know the phone number to your local battered women’s shelter. Don’t be afraid to call the police.
- Let trusted friends and neighbors know of your situation and develop a plan and visual signal for when you need help.
- Teach your children how to get help. Instruct them not to get involved in the violence between you and your partner. Plan a code word to signal to them that they should get help or leave the house.
- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that neither you, nor they, are at fault or are the cause of the violence, and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to stay safe.
- Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.
- Plan for what you will do if your children tell your partner of your plan or if your partner otherwise finds out about your plan.

- Keep weapons like guns and knives locked away and as inaccessible as possible.
- Make a habit of backing the car into the driveway and keeping it fueled. Keep the driver’s door unlocked and others locked — for a quick escape.
- Try not to wear scarves or long jewelry that could be used to strangle you.
- Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times of the day or night.
- Call a domestic violence hotline periodically to assess your options and get a supportive understanding ear.

Planning to Leave

If you think you might leave in the future:

- Keep evidence of physical abuse (records or pictures) in a safe location or with a trusted person.
- Know where you can go to get help; tell someone what is happening to you.
- If you are injured, go to a doctor/emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask them to document your visit.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them, like a room with a lock or a friend’s house where they can go for help. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- Contact your local battered women’s shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events and threats made, if possible.
- If possible, acquire job skills or take courses at a community college.
- Try to set money aside or ask trusted people to hold money for you.