



THE SURVIVOR'S REPORT

Taking the First Step

In 2009, the evening before the Grammy Awards, Chris Brown was arrested for physically assaulting his girlfriend, Rihanna. Although originally pleading not guilty to the felony, he later admitted his guilt and was sentenced to 5 years of probation.

This case made headlines and served to exemplify physical domestic violence; however, there are many forms of domestic violence, physical and otherwise, that are prevalent in today's society.

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior, in the context of an intimate or family relationship, used by one individual to assert power or maintain control over another. There are four kinds of domestic violence: ver-

bal, sexual, physical, and economic. Verbal violence can include threats, criticism, name calling, humiliation, and manipulation. Sexual violence can include unwanted or forced sexual contact and sexual harassment. Physical

violence can include hitting, choking, shoving, destruction of property, and

sometimes stalking. Economic violence can include restricted access to money, the sabotaging of job opportunities, or restriction of success. Abuse happens when one person seeks to hold power over another using any of these methods.

While men experience domestic violence too, one third of American woman and one quarter of woman

worldwide will experience domestic or dating violence in their lifetime. Females ages 20-24 are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence. Given these statistics, it is likely someone you know will be involved in domestic violence. Being familiar with local resources is one way to help individuals trying to escape violent relationships. *First Step* is a local Harrisonburg domestic violence shelter for individuals of all ages, ethnicities, religions and nationalities. *First Step* is dedicated to empowering survivors of domestic violence through support and education. They are a nonprofit shelter staffed 24 hours a day offering an emergency temporary shelter, 24-hour hotline, legal advocacy and support groups. *First Step* believes that no one should ever have to live a life of violence.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



Resources

- **In case of emergency dial 911**
- **JMU Public Safety: 540.568.6911**
- **First Step: 540.434.0295**
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233; thehotline.org**
- **Safe Place: www.safeplace.org**
- **Counseling and Student Development Center STEP services: 540.568.6552**

Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program

The Counseling and Student Development Center has reorganized services for survivors of sexual violence and harassment. Services are now available through the Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program (STEP), coordinated by Patricia Crocker, PhD.

The Counseling and Student Development Center welcomes Daniel Pratt, MA. Daniel is currently engaged in his full-time doctoral internship and is specializing in counseling services for survivors of sexual trauma.



STEP services include short- and long-term individual counseling, group counseling, advocacy/referrals, and consultation for survivors of sexual trauma and family/friends who want to support survivors.

STATS:

- ◆ Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States - more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. ("Violence Against Women, A Majority Staff Report," Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 102nd Congress, October 1992, p.3.)
- ◆ One woman is beaten by her husband or partner every 15 seconds in the United States. (Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991).

Myths about Domestic Violence:

- **Domestic violence only happens to poor women and women of color.**
Domestic violence happens in all kinds of families and relationships. Persons of any class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, age, and sex can be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.
- **Alcohol, drug abuse, stress, and mental illness cause domestic violence.**
Domestic violence often stems from learned attitudes, but ultimately, the abuser chooses to abuse. It is the abuser, not the substance use, stress, or mental illness that is responsible for perpetrating abuse.
- **If it were that bad, the survivor would just leave.**
There are many reasons why survivors may not leave a relationship even in the face of domestic violence. Not leaving does not mean that the situation is okay or that the survivor wants to be abused. Leaving can be dangerous and is, in fact, the most dangerous time for someone who is being abused.
- **Men cannot be abused.**
While it is true most abuse survivors are women, up to 13% of all reported domestic assaults are perpetrated against men.
- **Batterers are violent in all of their relationships.**
Perpetrators of domestic abuse choose to be violent, and they choose with whom they will be violent. They hurt their partners in ways they would never choose to hurt someone else. Their violence is about control of the person.

SafePlace: ending sexual and domestic violence: www.safeplace.org

You Ask, She Answers

My friend recently confided in me that she is currently in an abusive domestic relationship. She has been dating her boyfriend for three years and they have lived together for the last two. Recently, she noticed her boyfriend becoming more verbally and physically aggressive. Whenever he is dissatisfied with the friends she spends time with or the outfit she has on, he demeans her with ridiculing statements or intentionally breaks her stuff, like her cell-phone. Fortunately, he has never hit her. She feels like she has to be careful whenever she talks to him because the slightest remark could provoke him; however, she recognizes that this is an unhealthy relationship and that she is living in fear. Although

she is unhappy with the current state of her relationship, she doesn't know if she can leave. She doesn't have a job, so she doesn't know how she would be able to support herself, and she doesn't want to make him mad. What advice can I give her?

--Anonymous

Dear Anonymous,

First and foremost, it's important to let your friend know you believe her and support her without judgment. Clearly she is in a very difficult position, and what she may need most is someone who will listen. Encourage her to create a safety plan - a list of ideas to help her through this situation or for moments when her boyfriend is

being abusive. This could include always having her gas tank full so she can leave if needed, keeping some cash and a change of clothes at a friend's place, and having phone numbers on hand if she needs support or emergency response.

You could also help her by researching local domestic violence shelters such as *First Step* or sharing with her available online services like the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Help her get connected with other professional services like counseling if she needs additional support through this difficult time, but always remember to respect her wishes.

Sincerely,

Answer Annie