

Three Ways to Help Men Stop Violence Against Women

It's Natural to Help Your Neighbor or Family It's Hard to Know What to Do

Number One

Think of her safety and your safety.

Women who have been battered say that, at the time, they wanted someone to do something. However, aggressive or hostile interventions with batterers often backfire on women.

- ♦ *When people confronted him, he always turned on me. He is such a good manipulator. He felt like he had to make all of our friends and family believe that it was my fault. In my case, I think only a legal professional could have intervened.*
- ♦ *When my friend confronted him, he called us lesbians, and when my Dad confronted him, he accused us of incest.*
- ♦ *It might not have made a difference, but I wish someone could have told him that what he was doing is not acceptable.*

This warning doesn't mean that no approach can work, but you should know that a harsh or confrontational approach—while making us feel better about not being silent—might just give him another reason to hurt her.* Approach abusers with compassion and clarity. When you know a relative, teammate, coworker, or roommate—someone you're close to—is hurting his partner, find a private moment to talk and find a way to open a conversation.

- ♦ *It seems like you're having a rough time, Jack, can we talk?* If he agrees, he'll probably want to tell you how horrible she is. Keep the conversation focused on him. *I don't really feel right talking about Janet, I'm more worried about you. I assume you don't want to be hurting her or scaring the kids.*
- ♦ If your friend has kids, recognize how much he loves his children, and that he wants the best for them. Make sure that he understands that they watch and learn from everything he does. They are not only learning bad lessons about male roles, female roles, and acceptable behavior, but they are also hurt every time their mother is hurt.
- ♦ Let your friend know that you're afraid that he's going to get into trouble. Encourage him to do something to change before that happens.
- ♦ Reiterate—over and over—that it is his choice, and that he doesn't need to do this. Emphasize that his partner does not need to change in order for him to stop being abusive. She may need to change some things for the relationship to succeed, but not for his violence to end. While you acknowledge how hard it is to change, and that he can't do it alone, remind him that he has alternatives.
- ♦ Do not become indignant, patronizing, or blaming. Let him know that even though you cannot condone or excuse his behavior, you are on his side and will support him in making changes. You have probably made bad choices in your life, too—if you can, use those as examples of accountability.
- ♦ Do not let the conversation turn to a discussion of her faults. *No matter what* his partner has done, she does not deserve to be beaten, kicked, pinched—or abused in any way.
- ♦ Research shows that he is unlikely to stop being violent on his own. In fact, the violence will probably increase in frequency and severity. Leave him with the resources in your community for batterer's education groups and offer to go with him the first time to check it out.

Number Two

Remember that a batterer counts on you to NOT act. Disappoint him.

If you see an assault in progress, take immediate action. Find the nearest phone and call 911. Don't assume that someone else has done so. If you are in your car, honk your horn until a group gathers, he stops beating her, or the police come. These situations can be dangerous, so whatever you do, be sure to keep yourself safe. But **do** take action. At the very least, watch them. By being a witness in a way that lets him know that you see him, you may reduce the level of violence.

Number Three

Battering starts long before the first blow is ever struck—change the climate of tolerance.

We need to think of the more subtle ways we collude with abusers. We need to ask ourselves, *Why are most men who batter only violent toward their wives or partners? They don't hit their bosses, they don't kick a barber for a bad haircut, but instead they choose to hit the woman they profess to love. How have we, as a society, created the notion that the home is a safe place to be violent?* Finally, we need to acknowledge that the man who batters got his hostility toward women from somewhere. He didn't just learn it from his father. In fact, about one third of men who batter never saw their father hit anyone. His hostility came from how he learned to be a man in our neighborhoods, our churches, our schools, our movie theaters, and video arcades.

How can we change the climate of tolerance for this violence and individual abuser's sense of righteousness? We create change by being active in our places of worship; by asking pastors to address this issue from the pulpit; by not allowing parents to call young boys in little league "girls" when they can't throw the ball hard or fast enough; by challenging kids on a playground when they taunt each other or call boys fags or sissies; by not laughing at jokes that belittle women, and saying why we don't find them funny. Perhaps we can't take any of these actions comfortably, but no one ever got hurt from feeling discomfort. **It's hard to know what to do, but if we all do something, maybe a woman won't get beaten tonight.**

Specifically For Men

In many ways, violence against women is a men's issue. As men, we need to speak out against the violence done to our sisters, and mothers, our aunties and cousins. We cannot continue to feel defensive because we don't use violence, or act as if all women who speak out are man-haters and that all men who speak out are dupes of the women's movement. Defensiveness produce inaction, which produces more violence, which brings us back to our defensiveness. There are more than two groups of men—those who batter and those who don't. There are also those who do nothing to stop it. Our relatives, friends, and neighbors cannot afford for us to be bystanders any longer.

Adapted from "10 THINGS MEN CAN DO TO PREVENT GENDER VIOLENCE," Jackson Katz, 1999. See www.jacksonkatz.com for more information.

- ◆ If a brother, friend, classmate, or teammate is disrespectful or abusive to girls and women in general, don't look the other way. When you see signs of this, DON'T REMAIN SILENT.
- ◆ Have the courage to look inward. Question your own attitudes. Don't be defensive when something you do or say ends up hurting someone else. Try hard to understand how your own attitudes and actions might inadvertently perpetuate negative or patronizing attitudes toward women. That's where the stage gets set for the violence.
- ◆ If you are emotionally, psychologically, physically, or sexually abusive to women, or have been in the past, seek professional help NOW.
- ◆ Be an ally to women who are working to end all forms of gender violence. Support the work of campus-based women's centers. Attend "Take Back the Night" rallies and other public events. Raise money for community-based rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters. If you belong to a team, fraternity, or another student group, organize a fundraiser. Bring in speakers and open the doors to places these messages seldom reach.
- ◆ Gay bashing and calling men fags is really a sign of extreme insecurity. Don't feel pressure to go along with it. Find the courage to say, "it's wrong." Hyper-masculinity is not helping to stop the violence.
- ◆ Don't give money to companies that encourage men to disrespect women. It's that simple. Most of us have bought or read porn and none of us can say it didn't have any impact on how we think about women. It won't be easy, but talk about it with your friends who are on the pornographic web sites, your boy children who wish they could be, and anyone else you can think of.

- ◆ Mentor and teach young boys about how to be men in ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women. Volunteer to work with gender violence prevention programs.

For crisis help or more information, call: Umbrella at 748-8645, 748-8141, 800-916-8645 or 676-3920 in Essex County. Ask to speak with an advocate.