

Domestic Violence is Not About Anger

Some people think that anger or stress causes domestic violence, or that batterers simply “lose control of their temper”. Domestic violence is defined as **a pattern of intentional coercive behavior used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner**. Therefore, battering is not about a loss of control, but rather about the exertion of power and control. Batterers are no angrier or more stressed than the rest of us—these are just more excuses and justifications for the abusive behavior. Batterers who are stressed or angry at work do not attack their bosses or co-workers. All of us experience stress and anger, but do not take it out on those around us with violence.

Additionally, when physical abuse is occurring, batterers often only batter parts of the body that are hidden by clothing, or inflict injuries that rarely leave obvious marks, such as pulling hair. If a batterer were truly "out of control" he would not be able to direct or limit where his kicks or punches land.

As you administer the Peace Begins at Home Council Patch Program, please keep in mind that domestic violence is not about anger; rather, it is about a pattern of intentional behaviors used by the batterer to maintain power and control in a relationship.

Disclosure of Information

Physical abuse is the most visible type of domestic violence, but it is only part of the story. Verbal and sexual abuse are often considered the most permanently damaging, and verbal abuse is the most prevalent form of domestic violence. The battered woman’s fear of serious injury or death for herself or her family, and her fear of being unable to support her family economically continue to trap women in extremely violent and dangerous situations, particularly when children are involved.

It is possible that a youth may disclose information about abuse in her family while completing the Peace Begins at Home Council Patch Program. Girl Scouts group leaders are mandated reporters of child abuse in the state of Nevada. If a child self-discloses any kind of abuse, believe her and take her seriously. If possible, comfort the child—tell her that the abuse taking place in her home is not her fault and she cannot control it. Tell her that, while the abuse and violence need to stop, it is not her responsibility to protect her parent and/or siblings from the abuse, and her first concern should be for her own safety. (Please note: witnessing abuse in the home is not considered child abuse; child abuse occurs when the abusive behaviors are directly perpetrated on the child.) Let the child know that you will get the information to someone who can help deal with the situation; then report the incident immediately to either your group director or headquarters. If you, your group director, or headquarters decide to make a report to Child Protective Services, you must be sure to tell the child that that is what you’re going to do. If you don’t inform the child that you’ll be making a report, and the authorities subsequently show up at her home, this could cause the child to feel betrayed and could severely limit her willingness to seek help in the future.

It is also possible that a group leader or other adult involved in the Peace Begins at Home Council Patch Program may disclose information about domestic violence taking place in her life. Again, tell the adult that the abuse is not her fault and that she cannot control it. Tell her that she's not alone, and that there are options available to her to help stop the violence in her home (shelters for battered women can provide safety for her and her children, courts can provide help with an Order for Protection against domestic violence, etc.). Respect the danger of her situation and keep what she says confidential. There is no mandatory reporting law for domestic violence in Nevada (unless the victim is a child or elder); you must respect the battered woman's autonomy and her right to make her own decisions about her situation. Tell the adult victim that she can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-800-799-SAFE/7233 or 1-800-787-3224 for TTY) or the Nevada Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline (also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-800-500-1556) to speak with an advocate about her situation and to get referrals for community resources.

Please see *Appendix?* of this curriculum for further resources to help a victim of domestic violence, including a listing of all the domestic violence programs in Nevada. You will also find in *Appendix?* listings of the many resources available from the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence Resource Center—we offer free brochures, posters, topical information packets, and other written materials to anyone interested; we also maintain a resource lending library of over 800 books, videos, and manuals that are available on loan to individuals/organizations across Nevada.