

Week 2: Activity A
MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

(Cut Out Sentences for Check-In Activity)

- **Most domestic violence incidents are caused by alcohol or drug abuse or addiction.**

- **Domestic violence is often triggered by stress; for example, the loss of a job or some financial or marital problem.**

- **Most domestic violence occurs in lower class or minority communities.**

- **The victim did something to provoke the violence.**

- **Abuse is temporary because most perpetrators simply lose control during violent incidents and do not know what they're doing.**

- **Men are victims of domestic violence as often as women, even if these incidents are not as often reported.**

- **Domestic violence is a less serious problem - less lethal - than "real" violence, like street crimes.**

- **Battering occurs only in heterosexual relationships.**

- **Fighting between partners is natural and private. Society shouldn't interfere in families.**
- **“Real” domestic violence is about physical threats and abuse.**
- **Mental illness, or a psychological problem, is to blame for domestic violence.**
- **A person being abused stays in the relationship because he/she wants to...but could leave any time if she/he chose to.**
- **If a criminal history is not found, this must be the first time the batterer has been violent.**
- **Domestic violence does not affect children unless they themselves are physically injured.**
- **People involved in abusive relationships are masochistic.**
- **Once an abusive, violent person, always an abusive, violent person.**

Week 2: Handout A
MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Myth: Most domestic violence incidents are caused by alcohol or drug abuse.

Fact: A lot of people have alcohol and/or drug problems but are not violent; similarly, many perpetrators are not substance abusers. Addiction is a separate issue from intimate partner violence. There is some evidence abuse may intensify when perpetrators are sober. How people behave when they are "under the influence" of alcohol and/or drugs depends on a complex combination of personal, social, physical and emotional factors. And like many other types of behavior, alcohol or drug-affected behavior patterns are influenced by culture.

It is often easier to blame an alcohol or drug abuse problem than to face the issue of violence in a relationship. Episodes of problem drinking and incidents of domestic violence often occur separately and must be treated as two distinct issues. Neither alcoholism nor drugs can explain or excuse domestic violence.

Myth: Domestic violence is often triggered by stress; for example, the loss of a job or some financial or marital problem.

Fact: Daily life is full of frustrations that may be associated with money or work, our families, or friendships. Everyone experiences stress, and everyone responds to it differently.

Violence is a specific learned and chosen response to stress, whether real or imagined. While social problems such as unemployment may increase the intensity of domestic violence in an abusive relationship, circumstances are not the cause of abusive power and control. Typically, the pattern of power and control is present throughout the relationship regardless of particular circumstances or the environment.

Myth: Most domestic violence occurs in lower class or minority communities.

Fact: Domestic violence is an epidemic in the United States and happens across all social, economic, education, racial or cultural backgrounds. Centers for Disease Control estimates as many as a third of all adults have experienced violence from an intimate partner.

Researchers and service providers have found, however, that economic and social factors can have an impact on what kind of help victims will seek. Affluent people can usually afford private help from doctors or lawyers, for instance, while others may have to seek help in emergency rooms or through public-service agencies. Urban and apartment dwelling may lead to more calls to police by neighbors. Now that law enforcement and criminal courts are not the only social services reporting

intimate partner abuse, we are discovering that domestic violence is an equal-opportunity-crime and penetrates every sector of our society. Research being done by the Centers for Disease Control also discovered that domestic violence remains the most unreported crime in the nation.

Myth: The victim did something to provoke the violence.

Fact: No one deserves to be beaten, battered, threatened or in any way victimized by violence. Perpetrators will rarely admit that they are the cause of the problem. In fact, putting the blame for the violence on the victim is a way to manipulate the victim and other people. Abusive people will tell the victim, "You made me mad" or "You made me jealous" or will try to shift the burden by saying "Everyone acts like I do." Most victims try to placate and please their abusive partners in order to calm the abuse. The perpetrator chooses to abuse, and is fully responsible.

Myth: Abuse is temporary because most perpetrators simply lose control during violent incidents and do not know what they're doing.

Fact: If perpetrators were truly out of control, as many claim to be during violent incidents, there would be many more domestic violence homicides. In fact, many abusive people do "control" their violence, abusing their victims in less visible places on their bodies, such as under the hairline or on the torso. Furthermore, researchers have found that domestic violence often occurs in cycles, and every episode is preceded by a predictable, repeated pattern of behavior and decisions made by the person who abuses.

Myth: Men are victims of domestic violence as often as women, even if these incidents are not as often reported.

Fact: The bottom line is that domestic violence is a crime -- regardless of the gender of the abuser or of the victim. It is a crime in both heterosexual and same-gender relationships. Current data (CDC) reports that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been the victim of intimate partner violence at some time in their life. It is important to know that both men and women can be victims and that "power and control over" thinking by either men or women leads to abusive behavior.

Myth: Domestic violence is a less serious problem - less lethal - than "real" violence, like street crimes.

Fact: It is a terrible and unrecognized fact that for many people, home is the least safe place. Domestic violence accounts for a significant proportion of all serious crimes - aggravated assault, rape and homicide. Furthermore, when compared with stranger-to-stranger crime, rate of occurrence and levels of severity are still under-reported for domestic violence. Abusive people who are violent "only in the family home" make up at least 50% of all abusive partners.

Myth: Battering occurs only in heterosexual relationships.

Fact: While it is not clear just how common it is, battering does happen in lesbian and gay relationships. The abuse is similar to that in heterosexual couples, but it is far more invisible in our society. Many domestic violence programs are only just beginning to address this issue, or are insensitive to the needs of battered lesbians and gays, because of ignorance and/or homophobia. However, more groups which support victims of abuse are recognizing this issue and working to become as welcoming to lesbian and gay survivors as heterosexual survivors. DVRC welcomes both female and male victims of abuse, no matter the gender of the abusive partner.

Myth: Fighting between partners is natural and private. Society shouldn't interfere in families.

Fact: Disagreements occur in all relationships, but what distinguishes a disagreement, or "heated argument," from abuse is emotional and physical abuse that is an attempt to control or keep "power over" a partner. Intimate partner violence occurs between dating partners, co-habiting partners, married partners and divorced partners. Assault, whether by a stranger or by a partner, is a crime and causes emotional harm as well as physical harm.

MYTH: "Real" domestic violence is about physical threats and abuse.

Fact: Being abused may not ever include physical violence, but a victim may be abused verbally, emotionally, and/or psychologically. Verbal abusers may use critical, insulting, or humiliating remarks and undermine the victim's sense of self worth, ideals, opinions and beliefs. Emotional and psychological abuse can be more subtle without physical scars or bruising. However it can seriously damage the victim's self esteem and wear the victim down over a long period of time. These forms of abuse can be terrifying and debilitating and often result in feelings of low self-esteem, depression, and loneliness/isolation for the victim.

MYTH: Mental illness, or a psychological problem, is to blame for domestic violence.

Fact: Violence is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. Sometimes abusers' experiences as children, and often the messages they get from society in general, tell them that violence is an effective means to achieve power and control over their partners. However, perpetrators are always responsible for their choice of actions.

MYTH: A person being abused stays in the relationship because he/she wants to...but could leave any time if she/he chose to.

Fact: There are many, many reasons why it is difficult for a victim to leave:

- Studies show that the victim is at the greatest physical risk when she/he attempts to leave an abusive relationship.
- The abusive partner may have used violence when the victim tried to leave in the past.

- The victim may not know about available resources to assist her/him in leaving.
- If the victim is financially dependent upon the perpetrator and leaves with their children, she/he will likely face severe hardships.
- Social and justice systems may have been unresponsive, insensitive or ineffective in the past.
- Religious, cultural, or familial pressures may make the victim believe that it is her/his duty to keep the marriage/relationship together at all costs.
- The victim's emotional ties to the abusive partner may still be strong, supporting the hope that the violence will end.
- For most of us, the decision to end a relationship is not an easy one.

MYTH: If a criminal history is not found, this must be the first time the batterer has been violent.

FACT: By the time the police are called, the abuse is usually well into an escalating pattern. Because domestic violence is reported to the police less than half-the-time, it can easily be that the abuser has no criminal history.

MYTH: Domestic violence does not affect children unless they themselves are physically injured.

FACT: By definition, children who are exposed to violence between parents are emotionally abused and become at greater risk for perpetuating the cycle.

MYTH: People involved in abusive relationships are masochistic.

FACT: People involved in abusive relationships do not want to be beaten. People who label survivors of domestic violence as masochistic are discounting the ways the survivor has tried to stop the violence and threats. They do not understand that the abusive partner is the only one responsible for the violence and even if the survivor cannot stop the violence, it is not the survivor's fault.

MYTH: Once an abusive, violent person, always an abusive, violent person.

FACT: Although the prognosis for change is dim, some abusive people do stop their violent behavior. Perpetrators have more success at stopping the physical violence than they do at stopping verbal and emotional violence. Abusive partners need to not only change their behaviors, but change their thinking and beliefs.