

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE

[Note: While this handout refers to perpetrators as male, and victims as female, it is important to note that a perpetrator may be male or female, that a victim may be male or female, and that domestic abuse occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.]

Domestic abuse is **not** caused by...

- **Mental illness:** Personality disorders, mental illness, poor impulse control, and generational abuse do not cause domestic abuse. Even in cases where a particular mental illness may cause a person to be violent, the abuse is not specifically targeted at one person but is generally violent to those around during the episode.
- **Genetics:** Domestic abuse is not something that is passed on through DNA. Research has not shown any genetic abnormality causing a person to target abuse toward one individual.
- **Alcohol and drugs:** Perpetrators blame their abuse on the effects of drugs and alcohol, and many battered women may believe that drugs and alcohol cause the abuse. The two behaviors may be related, making the abuse more severe or frequent, BUT they do NOT cause the pattern of domestic abuse to exist. Addiction and abuse are two different problems, which need two different methods of treatment.
- **Out-of-control behavior:** The common misconception is that a perpetrator is so angry that he is out of control. This is completely misguided. Abuse is a choice and solely the responsibility of the abuser. Most people have a difficult time thinking of abuse as a choice and describe abusers as “losing it.” But try to remember how we all make decisions to meet our own needs. We identify what we want and all the possible ways we can accomplish our goals. We decide how to reach our goals based on what we believe is OK or what we are willing to do. Abuse is no different.
- **Anger:** People get angry all of the time; you yourself are probably not free from this assumption. However, not everyone chooses to be violent. Anger does not cause abuse; abuse is a conscious choice made by the abuser. Perpetrators of domestic abuse often show their ability to control their anger by becoming very

calm and “reasonable” when explaining an abuse incident to others such as law enforcement.

- **Stress:** It’s the abuser’s choice to abuse. Abuse will not happen unless someone is willing to use it, regardless of what else is factored in.
- **Behavior of the victim or problems in the relationship:** Batterers strongly defend their abuse by denying, minimizing, justifying, and rationalizing their behavior. Nothing a victim does causes a person to be violent. Perpetrators will be abusive to their victim regardless of any outside factor.
- Battering involves choices made by the batterer, although it may appear to be a habitual reaction done without thought. To illustrate this, think about what he destroys. He most likely destroys only items, that mean something to the victim, and not his favorite belongings.

Source:
“Cut It Out” Participant’s Guide
Domestic Violence Education Program
Salons Against Domestic Violence Abuse Fund
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