



1045 10th Street
Port Townsend, WA 98368
dovehousejc.org
Office: 360-385-5292 Crisis Line:
360-385-5291

Port Ludlow Voice, September 2018
Domestic Violence - Myths and Realities

We are all aware that domestic violence happens in our world, but we often find it hard to believe that it happens in our own communities. How does it happen? Who does it happen to? And, what can families and friends do to support those who are seeking safety and working through the trauma. Look around the café you're sitting in or around your neighborhood. Almost a third of the women and 10% of the men you see are likely to have experienced, or will experience, domestic violence during their lifetime.¹ Last year, Dove House provided domestic violence services to 462 individuals in Jefferson County.

First it's really important to broaden the scope of what is widely understood to be domestic violence or abuse. You might be thinking or have heard someone say, "**I never saw any bruises!**" While physical battering gets a lot of press, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse is more common and the effects are traumatic and long-lasting. Domestic violence is about an imbalance of power and control, and abusers use many tactics including destruction of self-esteem, the threat of violence, harassment via the internet, and control of resources to intimidate and isolate victims. Non-physical violence leaves no visual marks, making it invisible to outsiders and confusing for the victim.

As you read through these myths, watch for the ways in which they blame the victim. We all want to feel safe, so we have a tendency to look for reasons why someone is experiencing domestic violence. When we think we've found a way the victim could have prevented or escaped from the situation, we feel better because we believe we too can avoid the danger. The reality is that domestic violence happens because of abusers' actions which are often very insidious. Blaming victims leads to deepened feelings of shame and fear, causing people to further isolate themselves.

"How did they fall for this?"

The myth is that only "stupid" people end up in abusive relationships. Domestic violence happens to everyone across religions, income brackets, and levels of education. In her Ted Talk, "Why Domestic Violence Victims Don't Leave," Leslie Morgan Steiner talks about falling in love with a man who showed no evidence of violence, control, or even anger but who later threatened her at gunpoint. She points to the stages of domestic violence beginning with seduction and charming and moving through the isolation stage, followed by the threat of violence.²

"I don't know anyone who does that."

Someone can be a loving family member to you or a helpful and popular community member and be abusive at home, behind closed doors. The victim statistics (1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men)⁴ give us an idea of how likely we are to know someone who is an abuser. And, since domestic violence takes many forms, abuse can remain "hidden" from our view.

Why doesn't she just leave?

There are many reasons. 75% of domestic violence murders occur after the victim has ended the relationship.³ Victims often lack resources when their financial lives have been controlled. Mothers

fear that their children will be forced to spend unsupervised time with the man who beat their mother because of abusers manipulation of court systems.

“There’s nothing I can do.”

Often the best way to help is simply to listen and not judge. Survivors need caring and support regardless of whether they leave or not. If you think someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, don’t wait until the “next time” you notice something. By saying something now you are letting your friend know that they are not alone, someone cares, and help is available. Don’t be surprised if your friend denies experiencing harm; survivors will tell you when they are ready. Trust survivors and believe them. Talking about domestic violence helps end the stigma. Dove House is here for victims of any kind of crime.

1. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2018.
2. https://www.ted.com/talks/leslie_morgan_steiner_why_domestic_violence_victims_don_t_leave/up-next#t-624475
3. Domesticabuseshelter.org (for the 75% murdered after leaving)
4. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Website