

Will My Abuser Change?

It's natural to hope your partner will change, or the abuse will go away. It is possible for an abuser to stop abusing but please remember it is very rare. Usually domestic violence gets worse over time. The first step for an abusive man is to face the truth:

- He must admit his behavior is unacceptable and take responsibility for his actions.
- He must stop blaming you for what happens and alcohol, drugs, stress or unemployment - these are excuses for violence not causes
- He must accept you have a right to live your life without being dominated and controlled.
- He must learn to respect you.
- He must recognize that violence is a choice. What if he says he is sorry? The abuser may promise to end the violence, go to counseling, stop drinking, start/go back to church, AA, anything to get back to "normal." Yet when things return to a state of "normal," the abuser begins the same patterns of abuse and control again. The way the abuser can change is if he/she takes full responsibility for the violence, stops the abuse, and seeks a long-term treatment program. Counseling of any kind will not work unless a man accepts the basic fact that his behavior is about control. You are not to blame; it is not the relationship or you that must change, but his behavior. There are perpetrator programs for men who need help to change their behavior but participation is futile unless he accepts that his behavior is wrong and must stop.

How do I know if he is changing?

Trust your gut feelings regardless of other signs. Here are some things to look for:

- Has he completely stopped saying and doing things that frighten you?
- Can you express anger toward him without being punished for it?
- Does it feel safe to bring up topics that you know upset him?
- Can he listen to your opinion and respect it, even when he disagrees?
- Can he argue without being abusive or domineering?
- Does he respect your wishes about sex and physical contact?
- Can you spend time with your friends/family without being afraid of retaliation?
- Can you do other things that are important to you, such as go to school or get a job?
- Do you feel safe leaving your children alone with him?
- Does he listen to you?
- Does he do his share of housework and childcare?
- Do you have equal access to money/finances? Should I stay with him? Only you can answer this question. Your first consideration should be safety for you and your children. Your partner may pressure you to stay with him while he attends treatment. Be careful, this can be a tactic of abuse and control designed to keep you from making up your own mind. If he's serious about changing, he'll respect your wishes about the relationship. If you decide you want to leave the relationship, it is very important to plan for your safety, as leaving can be a very dangerous time. Work out a safety plan with your DV advocate.