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24 Hour Crisis Line: 407-886-2856 TDD
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www.harborhousefl.com

*Sponsored by the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence
and the State of Florida, Department of Children and Families.*

A black and white close-up profile of a woman's face, looking towards the left. Her hair is dark and shoulder-length. The image is partially obscured by a white rectangular box containing text.

**DOMESTIC ABUSE &
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**



WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse is defined as a pattern of controlling behaviors that one person uses to establish power over an intimate partner in order to control their actions and activities. Domestic abuse is not a disagreement, a marital spat or an anger management problem. Domestic abuse consists of disrespectful and hurtful behaviors that one intimate partner chooses to use against the other partner. You may be in an abusive relationship if your partner does any of these or other unwanted behaviors:

- Hurts you physically
- Uses your children against you
- Harms your pets
- Calls you names or hurts you emotionally
- Acts with extreme possessiveness or jealousy
- Isolates you from family or friends
- Threatens to commit suicide or kill you
- Controls your money
- Withholds medication or medical help
- Stalks you
- Demands sex or unwanted sex practices
- Hides assistive devices
- Minimizes the destructive behavior
- Threatens to "out" you if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgendered
- Controls you with "a look in his/her eyes" or certain other gestures

IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING COUNSELING

Many survivors of domestic abuse may experience symptoms of trauma, including depression, post traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. Survivors often use drugs and alcohol to cope with the pain of abuse. These are common responses to living with abuse that is both emotional and physical. Many survivors are told by their abusers that they are "crazy," and often are forced to seek mental health counseling in an effort to further trap their victim with a diagnosis that will give the abuser even greater power over their victim.

If you feel that you are in an abusive relationship, and you do not know where to seek help, the first step may be to contact a local certified domestic abuse shelter. These shelters are there specifically for survivors of domestic abuse and are highly experienced in helping individuals escape abuse. Services may include:

- Free counseling to help you identify your hopes and needs so you can begin to work toward a happy, peaceful future
- Crisis hotlines to provide resources, options and support
- Emergency shelter to provide safe refuge from abusers
- Court services to assist with legal processes to further help protect you and your family

HOW TO SAFELY SEEK COUNSELING

If you are struggling with an abusive relationship, some people may advise you to go to marriage counseling or couples' counseling. While this can be good advice in some relationships, it is not good in relationships where abuse is occurring, and it can actually increase the danger.

- Couples counseling places the responsibility of change on both partners.
- Domestic abuse is the sole responsibility of the abuser.
- Abusers minimize, deny and blame and are therefore not truthful in counseling.

A victim of abuse is in a dangerous situation in couples' counseling: if the abuse is disclosed to the counselor, the batterer may retaliate as a tactic to sustain power and control. Abuse is not a couples' problem; it is the abuser's problem.

The abuser needs to attend a **Batterers Intervention Program**, which can be court-mandated or entered voluntarily, but it is important to note that there is no guarantee of change with this program. If you think you will benefit from joint therapy, go only after a Batterer's Intervention Program has been completed.

CHOOSING A COUNSELOR

It is important that your therapist is trained in domestic abuse and that his or her training is updated regularly. Before selecting a therapist, have a conversation over the phone, and ask these important questions:

- Do you work with a domestic abuse center?
- How much experience do you have with survivors of domestic abuse?
- Are you comfortable discussing diagnoses?
- How long ago was your last domestic abuse training?
- How often do you update your domestic abuse training?

When speaking with your therapist, you need to beware of certain behaviors that could compromise your safety and well-being:

- Trivializing and minimizing abuse
- Blaming you for the abuse
- Not respecting your autonomy
- Ignoring your need for safety
- Normalizing victimization
- Violating confidentiality



CONFIDENTIALITY & DIAGNOSIS

As a patient, you have a right to confidentiality. This means that anything discussed with your therapist is private information that is not to be shared with anyone else.

- Licensed therapists cannot disclose anything you discuss without your written consent.
- Be cautious of forms that list your abuser as a contact; this may allow your abuser access to your private records.
- Be sure to discuss record safety and security with your therapist.

It is very important to discuss a diagnosis before it is placed in your file or medical records. Due to medical insurance requirements, your therapist will want to give you a diagnosis in order to be reimbursed, but be cautious of this.

- Once a diagnosis is given, it is very difficult to undo.
- Abusers often use a mental health diagnosis against their partner in court and custody hearings.

RESOURCES

These resources can help you find a counselor who is right for you:

Harbor House of Central Florida
24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 407-886-2856 TDD
www.HarborHouseFL.com

Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Crisis Hotline: 1-800-500-1119
TDD: (800) 621-4202
Legal Hotline: 1-800-500-1119, Prompt #3
www.FCADV.org

Lakeside Behavioral Healthcare
407-875-3700 ext. 6186
www.LakesideCares.org

Orange County Sheriff's Office Victim Advocates
407-836-4357

The Healing Tree
407-317-7430 ext. 2160
www.OrlandoHealth.com

Help NOW Osceola
Hotline: 407-847-8562 TDD
www.HelpNowShelter.org

Safe House of Seminole
Hotline: 407-330-3933 TDD
www.SafeHouseofSeminole.org

Victim Service Center of Central Florida
Sexual Assault Hotline: 407-497-6701
www.VictimServiceCenter.com

Family Resource Program
407-836-6534 or 407-836-8466
www.ocfl.net/FamiliesHealthSocialSvcs/FamilyResourceProgram.aspx

Batterers' Intervention Program
www.AIM.org

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