

Family Shelter Service

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➤ REACTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ◀

The first time a person is abused, they often experience:

- Shock, amazement
 - Confusion: “how could this happen to me?”
 - Excusing the behavior, rationalizing it, accepting the abuser’s promise that this will never happen again
 - Keeping the incident a secret, feeling ashamed
 - Outrage
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Victims/survivors of repeated abuse often experience:

- FEAR, TERROR:** fear of reprisals if they leave or resist, of death, of pain; terror because of the unpredictable nature of the attacks.
- SHAME, GUILT:** the abuser attacks the partner’s sense of accomplishment in various roles (being a good partner, parent, student, etc.) leaving the partner to feel they are failures.
- EMBARRASSMENT:** the partner believes that anyone who discovers the abuse will blame them for causing it or remaining in the relationship.
- ALONE, HELPLESS, ISOLATED:** talking to friends/family is a difficult decision, especially if the partner does not believe they have the resources necessary to leave the relationship.
- HELPLESSNESS:** sets in when the partner realizes they can not fight back or stop the violence.
- AMBIVALENT LOVE/HATE FEELINGS:** leave the partner in a state of suspended animation and prevents effective action. Most abusers manipulate their partners with loving words and actions. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile these good qualities with the violence.
- TRAPPED:** due to the abuser’s effective use of isolation, the partner may have an extremely limited ability to financially support themselves. When children are involved, the burden is multiplied. In addition, the abuser may have greater resources to impact the outcome of any legal procedures like divorce, property settlements, child custody, etc. Partners often have no access to the family wealth. Bank accounts and credit cards are usually in the abuser’s name, and the only money provided is an allowance.
- IGNORANT:** if the partner has been prevented from making major decisions in the relationship, they may have no knowledge about dealing with agencies, landlords or other “official” personnel.
- BETRAYED:** by the helping services who did not help, by police who were condescending, by friends who turned away.
- CONFUSION:** the partner receives mixed messages from the abuser. After an abusive episode, things return to an almost idyllic state. The abuser is generally calm, loving, attentive, supportive, etc.
- THE BELIEF THAT THE ABUSER CAN AND WILL CHANGE:** because the batter is not always violent, the partner maintains hope that therapy, religion, etc. will bring about change. Unfortunately, the abuser knows the abuse is effective and has little incentive to stop.