

Why Doesn't She Just Leave?

When people hear about domestic violence happening in a home, the question asked most often is “why doesn't she just leave?” Asking this places the blame on the victim and insinuates that the domestic violence is her fault because she stayed. Abuse is never the victim's fault. Reasons that a woman stays in an abusive relationship vary in each situation.

One of the reasons that women stay in an abusive relationship is the lack of resources available. Many victims have very little or no cash, no housing, may have children in common, no vehicle/transportation, no job or a low paying one, and possible day care issues if she is working and relied upon this person to care for the children.

Another reason is the community response to her leaving. There are very few housing options available, shelter stay may be an option but they are out of the area, which makes it difficult to re-build with no family/friends support and a shortage of housing and resources in those areas as well. Shelter stay is also a short term answer. Family may tell a victim that she is better off staying with the abuser and are not supportive of the victim leaving the situation. Some helping professions may persuade a victim to “save” the relationship/marriage rather than stop the violence. Some believe that a single parent family is unacceptable. Many victims believe that they are responsible for making their relationship work and failure in a relationship is failure as a person and many do love the abusive partner (and want to make things work) they just want the violence to stop.

Domestic violence is often treated as a “disagreement” or “dispute” instead of a crime. To some victims obtaining an order for protection is not enough for them to feel safe. Fear of retaliation toward them or their children is another reason a victim may stay in an abusive relationship. Many victims rationalize the abusers behavior by blaming it on drugs, alcohol, stress, or other factors. For some victims it is easier to live with the abuser because they know the pattern of abuse. When they are separated there is little way of knowing when an incident could occur or the extent of the violence. The risk of being seriously injured or murdered increases by 75 percent when a domestic abuse victim leaves the relationship.

If you had to leave your home right at this very moment with only the clothes on your back, what would you do and where would you turn? Would you have the resources to find a new place to live and pay the rent, deposit, utilities, buy groceries, gas for your vehicle (if you have one), find a job (if you aren't employed), find and be able to afford daycare for your children (if needed), buy clothing for yourself and your children, buy toiletries and other necessities, etc. or if you had to go to a shelter would you plan to relocate away from family and friends and the community you call home? Remember a shelter is short term, would you have everything you need to move on in 30 days? These are issues a domestic violence victim has to deal with when they leave.

Instead of blaming the victim, we should be asking “why does he abuse her?” and “why does the community allow the battering/violence to continue?” These questions place the blame on the abuser where it belongs because abuse is never the victims fault. We understand that men are also victims of abuse (around 5 percent) but the larger percentage are women (95 percent). The DOVE program offers services to anyone that is facing the issue of abuse.

If you would like more information, confidential services, or support please call the DOVE program at (218) 935-5554 or the 24 hour crisis line at 1-877-830-DOVE(3683).