Why We Blame Victims for Domestic Violence
And how to respond to victim-blaming when it’s directed at you
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By domesticshelters.org

How many times have you read a news story about a woman accusing someone of abuse only to scroll down to read the comments? Most likely, nestled among a few well-meaning comments of support, you found a bevy of judgment and shaming directed at the survivor. And, they’re coming from both men and women.

“This happened years ago and she’s just talking about it now? Sounds like someone needs attention.”

“If it was so bad, why didn’t she leave? I would walk out the door the second a man hit me.”

“She didn’t even report it to the police. She’s probably just making this up.”

“She only wants money.”

Why do some people jump to blame the victim? At its core, says Elise Lopez, a researcher in sexual and domestic violence prevention and response at the University of Arizona, victim-blaming is about self-preservation.

Compare these reactions to how some people respond to seeing a photo of an overweight person, says Lopez. “People think, ‘If I were overweight, I’d go to the gym everyday and I would lose that weight.’ They don’t think about how hard that would be,” she says.

The same mindset often comes into play when people read about domestic violence. “A lot of people have a gut reaction to violence. It’s emotionally charged. They think if somebody is being abused, they probably did something to incite it.” In essence, if people can find a reason why abuse is the victim’s fault, then abuse is something that can not only be controlled but prevented. And, in turn, it won’t happen to them.

Victim-Blaming Makes Survivors Afraid

It took Donna Kaz 12 years after leaving her abuser to identify as a survivor. It took her 35 years to come out publically about it. Her memoir, UN/MASKED, Memoirs of a Guerrilla Girl On Tour, was published last year.

Disclosure is a process, she says, and one that took her a long time because of fear.

“I was afraid of being shamed and judged,” she says. “There’s still this stigma … a reluctance to believe women’s stories. And I think that hasn’t changed. We need to believe women when they tell their story.”

Kaz’s abuser was the actor William Hurt. Their relationship occurred in the ‘70s, back before domestic violence was really on the radar as a widespread epidemic. Kaz never told anyone she was being abused and she never called the police. She blamed herself.

“You do a sort of self-blaming because there’s so much guilt involved when you’re with an abuser. You blame yourself for staying, you’re embarrassed and it’s shameful. Therefore you don’t talk about it. I think that’s why a lot of women don’t express themselves. They’re sort of trying to figure it out themselves.”

Kaz says that when she did decide to make her story public, she hoped it might help change things.

“You’re led to believe every single person who has come out as being abused by someone, famous or
TAKE ACTION!
We are looking for YOU! That’s right...YOU!!
Look at the ways you could make a difference in your community:

24-Hour Crisis Line: Listen, Help, Refer
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Emergency Shelter: Groups, Babysitting
Legal Advocacy: Assist, File, Organize
Special Projects: Silent Witness Vigil, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Folding & Labeling Newsletters
Thrift Store: Sorting, Organizing, Pickups

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Jamie Hughes at 864.583.9803.

OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH!

SAFE Homes-Rape Crisis Coalition, Seventh Circuit Solicitor’s Office, Spartanburg County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Spartanburg County Department of Social Services, Spartanburg County Sheriff’s Office, and Spartanburg Police Department invite you to attend.

THE 20TH ANNUAL SILENT WITNESS VIGIL
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2017
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Daniel Morgan Square (Main Street)

Please join us as we gather together to honor past and present domestic violence victims and survivors.

We need to remember their stories.
We need to remember their names.

SHRCC 2016 STATISTICS
Assisted 3,787 adults and 1,817 children traumatized by domestic violence and sheltered 316 adults and children
§ Assisted 438 victims of sexual assault
§ Provided 4,759 individual and 1,602 family therapy sessions for 701 people
§ Provided 239 therapy/support groups which were attended by 265 individuals
§ Accompanied 99 victims of sexual assault to the hospital
§ Assisted 347 victims with filing order of protection petitions and attended 2,075 hearings with domestic violence and sexual assault victims
§ We provided 486 education/prevention programs reaching 77,687 individuals
§ 670 volunteers contributed 21,168 hours this year
People often think that domestic violence means physical hostility - fistfights, shoving matches, hair-pulling, strangulation, or using weapons - injuries that result in visible signs like bruises and broken bones. But that’s not always the case. Abusers aim to control their partners and they can use a range of other behaviors to try to gain this control. They often turn to emotional abuse tactics such as bullying, degradation, name-calling, gas lighting, coercive control and threats of physical abuse.

Even repetitive lying to a partner can be a form of abuse, since a survivor may begin to doubt their own experiences and instincts, becoming brainwashed into believing anything their abuser says. These abuse tactics often fall under the category of emotional abuse, and hinge on inflicting confusion and self-doubt onto the

“You quit believing in yourself - you believe the other person,” says Lucy Papillon, PhD, a California-based psychologist who specializes in emotional, physical and spiritual abuse. “You don’t tune into your intuition and you deny your own signals. You keep hoping this is a one-time thing. You think, ‘He’s not going to call me a name again or lie again.’ But it’s like hoping an alcoholic won’t drink again.”

Victims Blame Themselves

Partners of emotional abusers often try hard to make the relationship work, and they become more deeply invested in it and more deeply involved with their partners.

“You’ve put so much energy and time into this other person, you begin to believe that you are crazy and that there is something wrong with you. You believe [the abuser] more than you believe yourself. When you don’t believe yourself, [the abuser has] much better control over you,” Papillon says.

Often, instead of doubting or challenging the abuser, people who are emotionally abused look inward for signs of problems. They blame themselves. “They’ll think, ‘Well, he called me names because I wore the wrong dress, or didn’t cook the right meal, or I must have said something I didn’t remember I said.’ They go down the list of possibilities,” Papillon says.

And emotional abusers find ways to make their behavior seem acceptable. They are often skilled at remorse and apologies. “They might say this terrible, mean thing and then bring flowers the next day and say it won’t happen again,” Papillon says.

Papillon uses the phrase “soul mugging” to describe what happens to survivors of emotional abuse. She says. “When you allow someone to call you names, to gaslight you, to lie to you, and you keep staying, you’re mugging your own soul. You’re letting someone else tell you who you are and how to think. They design who you are as long as you stay in that relationship.

‘Red Flags for Emotional Abuse

It can sometimes be difficult to spot emotional abuse happening to you because you don’t want to believe it’s true, especially when you still love your partner and are hoping things will get better. WomensHealth.gov says the following are red flags that indicate you may be emotionally abused:

Your partner …

- Keeps tabs on what you’re doing at all times
- Accuses you of being unfaithful without basis
- Prevents you from seeing friends or family
- Tries to prevent you from going to work or school
- Loses their temper in a way that’s frightening
- Humiliates you in front of others
- Controls how you spend money
- Threatens to hurt you or people you care about
- Threatens to harm himself/herself when upset
- Makes decisions for you that you should decide, such as what to wear or eat

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not, is lying," says Kaz. "I noticed in some interviews [for her book] people don’t even want to talk about the abuse. I hope by telling my story it changes this."

What Victim-Blaming Looks Like
Following are a selection of real comments underneath several news stories concerning accusations of abuse.

The Washington Post reported that a photo of Aroldis Chapman of the NY Yankees was featured in the team’s 2017 calendar as October’s player, which also happens to be Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Chapman was suspended for 30 days from the MLB in 2016 after he was accused of strangling his girlfriend. Commenters quickly dismissed the story.

"Wife beating? Meh. As long as he beats Boston, too, it's just collateral damage."

"…all this stuff about Chapman has been way overblown. Media just love having an easy villain to stomp on, even if his case doesn’t in fact fit their narrative."

"He just signed a contract upwards of $100 million and he abused a woman. I really wish people would stop making such a big deal about it."

When USA Today reported that former Spice Girl Mel B had accused her estranged husband of years of domestic abuse, one woman commented, “Why is it that everyone saw this coming but her? Then she pops out two kids for him? Let’s see what idiot she hooks up with next.”

In a Huffington Post article on the same story, another woman commented, “Not to disclaim her accusations, but where is the paper trail to back up these allegations? There wasn't any mention of police reports being filed.”

Responses You Can Use When Victim-Blaming Occurs
Whether the words come from a friend or family member you trust, or a complete stranger who feels the need to share his or her opinion on your situation, experiencing victim-blaming as a victim can be shocking and demoralizing.

Kaz says she had nightmares about telling her story of abuse.

“I had to go through a lot of legal counsel and present my story as truthful as I could from my point of view.” In the end, Hurt never responded to her book and overall, Kaz says she feels empowered by coming out, making her who she is today, which she says is a feminist activist.

But other victims are still hiding, afraid of the consequences if they speak up. In turn, Lopez says society has “an ethical and moral responsibility to correct myths about violence.”

Below are some suggested responses for three common victim-blaming statements:

1. Why didn’t she just leave if she was really being abused?
   "Well, it's actually kind of hard for victims to leave," Lopez says. “It can be hard for a victim to leave if they do not have financial resources, if the abuser is the primary breadwinner. Many abusers will also threaten to harm children or pets if the victim leaves. Victims often need time and support from family and friends to develop a safety plan for leaving.”

   She suggests adding in a personal antidote to demonstrate this. For example, you could say something like, “I had a friend who was being abused, but her abuser was leaving their children alone. Yet, her partner said he would hurt her children if she tried to leave. Just the thought of putting them in harm’s way paralyzed her from trying to escape.”

   Says Lopez, “I think using a scenario like that can be a way to enlighten someone without causing the situation to escalate. It’s likely that they haven’t thought it through.” Adding to that, instead of telling a
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Please make checks payable to SAFE Homes-Rape Crisis Coalition
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Therapy Team Wish List:
- Adult Coloring Books
- Canvas Panels
- Colored Pencils
- Crayons
- Fine Tip Magic Markers
- Individual Snack Packs
- Kleenex
- Paint (Acrylics, Oil, Water Colors)
- Paint Brushes
- Play-Doh
- Play Sand

Shelter Wish List:
- Activity Balls
- Baby Bottles
- Baby Wipes
- Bowls
- Boys & Girls Underwear
- Brown Rice
- Canned Vegetables
- Cleaning Products
- Coffee
- Combs & Brushes
- Cooking Oil
- Cornmeal
- Deodorant
- Dish Detergent
- Dish Washer Detergent
- Flour
- Forks & Spoons
- Fruits (in 100% juice)
- Ladies Panties (size 7-12)
- Laundry Detergent
- Paper towels
- Plastic Cups
- Plates
- Pots and Pans
- Standard Pillow Cases
- Standard Pillows
- Sugar
- Tea
- Toilet Paper
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Towels
- Twin Bed Linens
- Wash Cloths

Sexual Assault Closet Wish List:
- New Children's, Women's & Men's Underwear (All Sizes)
- Rubbermaid/ Sterilite Clear Containers w/Lids
- Socks (All Sizes)
- White Butcher Block Paper
- Women's & Men's Lightweight Draw-string Type Pants (S-XXL)

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victim to “just leave,” a more helpful response would be to figure out what resources need to be in place for her to do so safely.

2. Why didn’t she report it to the police?
Many survivors don’t report abuse to the police because they’re afraid of retributions from the abuser. They may also be ashamed, embarrassed or reluctant to let others know what’s going on. Also, many times, abuse is not physical—it’s psychological, emotional, verbal or financial, and these types of abuses are not often seen in the eyes of the law as “illegal.” Survivors may also blame themselves for the abuse—if she fought back, she may fear she is partially to blame (she isn’t, agree experts), or that she could be charged as well.

Finally, if the survivor is dependent on the abuser financially, she may be afraid that by calling the police, he could be sent to jail or lose his job, an especially fearful situation if there is no second income.

3. She’s obviously looking for attention/fame/money/retaliation.
Survivors and advocates alike wholeheartedly agree that it is not easy coming forward to report abuse or assault and few women would want to bring that type of attention on herself without a good reason. As demonstrated by the above examples of victim-blaming, survivors often fear no one will believe them when or if they report abuse. Furthermore, studies show that false allegations of spouse abuse are far less prevalent than the problem of survivors who don’t report the abuse at all.

Additionally, abusers often craft a situation ahead of time to paint the survivor as troubled and the abuser as the competent hero trying to help her, according to domestic violence expert Stephanie Angelo. It’s all part of the power and control that abusers try to exert over victims, even after she reports abuse.

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When Survivors Break Free

Often, people who are emotionally abused stay in the relationship until something happens they can’t ignore—some line is crossed that makes them trust and believe themselves more than they trust and believe the abuser. A survivor may also see the signs of emotional abuse in someone else’s relationship, and their distance from that relationship makes them see things clearly. “Sometimes it takes a jarring experience, like meeting up with somebody else who is being treated like you’re being treated,” Papillon says.

Emotional abuse may also cross the line into physical abuse. Experts have found that emotional abuse is often a precursor to physical abuse, and that verbal abuse early in a relationship predicts physical abuse later on, usually after partners marry.

Talking to supportive friends and family or reaching out to a domestic violence advocate can help emotional abuse survivors build the strength they need to leave the relationship and recover. With counseling, survivors can feel reaffirmed to trust their own instincts again, as well as be reminded that their feelings have importance and are valid. They can begin to value what they think versus what their partner tells them to think. “You have to build that sense of self,” Papillon says.

Healing Can Take Time

The scars of emotional abuse can sometimes last longer than the injuries of physical abuse. “The worst impact has to do with your own sense of self. How can you have a good sense of who you are when you’ve given power to another person to define who you are?” Papillon says.

“When you let somebody else define you and they define you in negative terms, you feel like you’re nobody.”
By definition, human trafficking is the act of recruiting, transporting, transferring or keeping and receiving an individual against his or her will. Traffickers, sometimes also known as pimps, use coercion, manipulation, threats of violence, and exert financial control over their victims in order to keep them trapped in a lifestyle of being bought and sold.

This is why trafficking has been called modern-day slavery.

Globally, there are an estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labor, and out of those, 4.5 million individuals are trapped in forced sexual exploitation, according to the International Labour Organization.

Victims often know their perpetrators—they can be a spouse, boyfriend or family member - meaning human trafficking overlaps with domestic violence on a regular basis. Traffickers also use tactics that abusers use to control survivors—coercion, threats of violence or outright violence, threats of harm to a survivor’s children or family, gas lighting, alienation from support persons and financial control.

“As we know in domestic violence, where victims are abused, [a survivor] may be manipulated, forced, deceived or coerced by her abuser to indulge in sex for money. She is forced to have sex for money with a threat of harm to her, her children or her loved ones if she fails to do it. She believes the proceeds would be used for the benefit of the family. And so she indulges in sex for money to help her family or boyfriend, who professes to love her dearly,” Edith Okupa with Restoration Project International, told DomesticShelters.org last December.

**How You Can Spot Trafficking**

The following is a list of 23 signs from the National Human Trafficking Hotline that may indicate someone is being trafficked. It could be happening in your very own community, and recognizing the signs could save someone’s life. If you suspect human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888.

**Work and Living Conditions:**

- Is restricted from coming and going as he or she wishes
- Is under 18 and is providing sex acts for money or trade
- Is in the commercial sex industry and has someone who manages him or her, such as a pimp
- Is unpaid, paid very little or paid only through tips
- Works excessively long or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work
- High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations (e.g. opaque windows, boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, security cameras, etc.)
- Abnormal Behaviors: Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up law enforcement
- Avoids eye contact
- Has no access to health care
- Appears malnourished

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- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement or torture
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of his/her own money and has no financial records or bank accounts
- Is not in control of his/her own ID or passport
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or translating)
- Claims he or she is just visiting but is unable to clarify where he or she is staying
- Lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or does not know what city he/she is in
- Lost of sense of time
- Has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story

Something Simple You Can Do

DoSomething.org urges people to write the phone number of the National Human Trafficking Hotline inside clothes they donate. It may be the only way to reach a victim of human trafficking who is otherwise cut off from the outside world. The National Human Trafficking Hotline is 888-373-7888.

United We Stand...Putting the Pieces Together

13th Annual Interpersonal Violence Conference

Friday, October 13, 2017
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Registration: 8:00 a.m.
Program: 9:00 a.m.

Family Life Center ~ First Presbyterian Church
393 East Main Street, Spartanburg

Featured Speaker: Olga Trujillo, JD
Director of Education & Advocacy
Casa de Esperanza (House of Hope)
Star Prairie, Wisconsin

Registration Fee is $100.00;
$25.00 Additional fee after September 29, 2017;
$50.00 for Undergraduate, Full-time students.

On-line Registration:
www.spartanburgrgional.com/CEEvents

On-line registration closes on September 29, 2017
Fee includes on-line conference materials, refreshments, lunch, and certificate of attendance.
Deadline for registration is September 29, 2017
No refunds, but substitutions are accepted.

United We Stand Topics Include:

Stalking & Stalking Behaviors
Domestic Violence Laws
Suicide Prevention
The School Rampage Shooter
Resources for Domestic Violence Victims
Pediatric Forensics & Strangulation
Domestic/Sexual Abuse & Elders
Guiding Victims through the Court System
Domestic Violence Initiative
Impact of Corporal Punishment
Trauma & Brain Development in Children
Self Defense or Aggression
Human Trafficking in the Upstate
Mental Illness/A&D Abuse & Vulnerability
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CE Credits Approved Include: Nurses, Social Workers, Therapists, Victim Service Providers, Attorneys, Judges, Law Enforcement Officers & Others.

Limited numbers of scholarships are available.
Contact Marlene Evans at 864.583.9803 for more information.

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SAFE Homes-Rape Crisis Coalition (SHRCC) provides services to victims of domestic violence in Spartanburg, Cherokee and Union Counties and victims of sexual assault in Spartanburg and Cherokee Counties.

SAFE Homes-Rape Crisis Coalition Mission

Our mission is to use our collective voice to address the impact of domestic and sexual violence by providing quality services to those affected and to create social change through education, training, and activism.

VISION:

We envision a community liberated from all forms of domestic violence and sexual assault.

For more information or assistance, please call 864.583.9803 or 1.800.273.5066 shrcc@aol.com ~ www.shrcc.org Facebook: SHRCC Spartanburg Twitter: SHRCC ~ Pinterest.com/shrcc ~ Instagram.com/shrcc

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