

# Domestic violence: What you can do to help

**By Sharon Hall  
The Nugget**  
(October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is the third in a series on the topic in The Nugget. Hopefully the articles will help bring light to the problem.)

With one in four women experiencing domestic abuse—either physical or emotional or both—at the hands of her partner, chances are good you know someone who is a victim. Perhaps you have witnessed verbal or emotional abuse. Maybe you only suspect abuse.

As a family member or friend, you can't make someone leave an abusive relationship, but there are ways you can help.

The first way you can help is probably the most difficult. Be honest with your family member or friend. Tell her you have seen the bruises. Tell her you are concerned for her safety.

It is likely the victim will be reluctant to admit to the abuse or hesitant to talk about it. Tell her you will keep her secret; that you will not intervene without her consent.

Listen to everything she has to say without being judgmental. Don't make her feel ashamed about her situation. Don't lecture. Even though she is being abused, she probably still loves her partner. Obviously, there was something in the beginning that drew this woman to the man who later became her abuser. In addition, the couple may have children together, which further tightens the original ties.

All relationships are complex. The relationship between a victim and her abuser is even more so. Let the victim know that you love her, and will be there for her even if she decides to stay with her abuser.

The decision to leave an abusive relationship must come from the victim, and there are many reasons women choose not to leave. It could be a lack of resources—not having their own money or access to the household bank account, or no transportation.

Or it could be that the victim knows it would not be safe to leave. Safety is one of the biggest issues victims of domestic violence face.

"Victims are at their most vulnerable and at risk for death when they have left or plan to leave the abuser," says Cara Ledford, Executive Director of NOA (No One Alone).

According to Ledford, in 81 percent of cases of domestic homicides reviewed by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, the couple was either separated or in the process of separating.

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”  
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NOA is Lumpkin County's shelter program for victims of domestic violence.

"Leaving," Ledford says, "requires strategic planning and legal intervention measures to safeguard victims and their children. Our staff can help devise a safety plan—a safe way for the woman and her children to escape the home—and arrange for transport from local law enforcement if necessary."

NOA offers a 24-hour crisis line that is handled by trained staff to provide immediate crisis intervention, confidential emotional support and information about the shelter and support services. It can help victims plan a safe way to escape an abusive relationship.

"But if there is an imminent threat of violence," Ledford says, "do not hesitate to call 9-1-1 to have law enforcement help you escape and file a police report."

And remember, as much as you may love this person and be concerned for her safety, you cannot tell them what to do. If you do, you are doing the exact same thing as their abuser. Do give positive feedback for any changes your family member/friend makes. The one thing she needs is someone on the sidelines cheering her on.

You could also suggest the victim begin keeping a log of their experiences. Domestic violence usually involves a cycle of abuse, with tension building over a period of time until an explosion of verbal and/or physical abuse erupts. The there is the "honeymoon" period, when the abuser apologizes, promising it will never happen again and showing the victim with gifts and special attention. Your friend/family member may be totally unaware of this cycle. Keeping a log or journal could give her some perspective and help her see a pattern.

You might also become familiar with local resources, so that if and when the time comes the victim is ready to take a step in getting out of an abusive relationship you will be able to help.

**Business**

There are actions businesses can, and should take

to create a safe, secure workplace as well. Employers can make a difference.

Be proactive. Raise awareness company wide. There are pamphlets and posters that can be placed in break rooms. (Contact the National Workplace Resource Center on Domestic Violence or the National Domestic Violence Hotline for information on materials. There is a PBS documentary, *Breaking the Silence: Journeys of Hope*, that could be shown at a company-wide meeting.

Learn to recognize the signs of domestic abuse and educate yourself on resources for the victim. Physical warning signs can include bruises, black eyes and broken bones the victim attributes to "just being clumsy" or an accident; inappropriate clothes, such as long sleeves and turtle necks in hot weather; or unusually heavy makeup.

Actions also often indicate abuse. If someone is repeatedly late or absent and cannot explain why; changes in job performance; the person seems unusually anxious or afraid; she is quieter than usual and keeps away from others; she gets an unusual number of phone calls or text messages; she often asks to leave early, especially after a phone call; she may talk about her partner's bad moods or temper, drug abuse or drinking.

Develop policies and programs to help employees who are victims of domestic abuse.

The American Bar Association Commission on

Domestic Violence advises companies to train at least one employee about domestic violence. Make that person responsible for responding to domestic violence issues, such as safety and confidentiality.

Provide security and reception staff with instructions on how to respond should an abuser show up at the workplace—how to call for emergency help, whom to notify within the company and what to do if an employee has a protective order (TPO). Provide staff and receptionists with a photo of the person who is under a TPO.

Should an incident occurs, work with the employee to ensure their safety. She may need an escort to and from the building, or a new phone extension or email within the company. Consider allowing the employee to telecommute or allow a flexible schedule. Allow them to have time off to take care of legal matters or appear in court.

Maintain the victim's confidentiality. Divulge details on a need-to-know basis.

In addition, businesses can support the local domestic violence shelter. In Lumpkin County, that is NOA.

**NOA is there to help**

In addition to its crisis line and safety planning for when a victim decides to leave a violent situation, NOA provides legal assistance in obtaining a TPO (temporary protection order), information about victims' legal rights and

options. Its advocates will accompany the victim to court and provide legal representation and referrals. In 2012, NOA served 458 victims with legal advocacy services.

NOA also provides shelter for women and their children who are victims of domestic violence. It can tap into community services to provide medical care and educational opportunities to help a victim become independent. It provides financial assistance for relocation expenses, utilities, car repairs and helps victims establish a new household.

NOA also provides support and counseling through licensed, professional counselors to help overcome post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety and to gain back their self-esteem and understand the effects of domestic violence.

Counseling and support are not only given to the woman, but are also provided for her children.

Physical, psychological and emotional healing is possible, Ledford says.

"A young woman with two small children came to NOA seeking help. She had experienced abuse her entire life and had been on the run from her last husband for three years," Ledford says. "He beat her, called her names and threatened to kill her on many occasions. When she got pregnant with

her second child, he left her and abandoned the family. Since he had controlled all the finances, she was left with nothing and forced into homelessness with her two children.

"When she came to NOA she was at her wit's end—tired and hopeless. At NOA, she was able to heal. She committed completely to the 90-day program, taking advantage of all counseling opportunities, life skills classes and support groups. She and her children thrived. We could see a significant, positive change in all of them."

NOA worked with Ninth District to find a new home for the woman where she and her children still live. She still takes part in NOA's women's support group and counseling weekly.

"Her story is like so many we help," Ledford says. "It's a story of tremendous personal growth, healing and success."

NOA could not successfully help victims without the generous help of the community. To learn more about how you can help, contact NOA at 706-864-0030 extension 4 and speak with volunteer coordinator Brenda Twitty or visit their website at [www.noonealone.org](http://www.noonealone.org).

If you are a victim and want to learn more about NOA's services or are a victim in crisis, call NOA's 24-hour crisis line at 706-864-1986.

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**DAHLONEGA**

**TENTATIVE AGENDA CITY OF DAHLONEGA COUNCIL MEETING November 4, 2013 6:00 p.m.**

1. Call to Order
2. Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance – American Flag
3. Agenda Approval
4. Announcements – Public Comments (Please Limit to Three Minutes)
5. Citizens:
  - A. ARAMARK – David John Manson, Registered Agent – Consumption on Premises Alcohol License Approval
6. Consent Agenda - Minute Approval:
  - A. October 7, 2013
  - B. October 11, 2013
  - C. October 16, 2013
7. Department Reports:
  - A. Planning Department and Code Enforcement Reports
  - B. Chamber of Commerce Report
  - C. Historic Preservation Commission Report
  - D. Monthly Financial Report
  - E. Projects Update
  - F. DDA Report
8. City Manager Comments:
9. Mayor Comments:
  - A. Approval of Recyclable Bins
  - B. Approval of Revisions - Yard Trimming Ordinance 96-4 Amendment #1
  - C. Approval of Water Deposit Increase – Ordinance 75-1 Amendment #37
  - D. Approval of Probation Contract
  - E. Appointment of Historic Preservation Commission Member
10. City Attorney Comments:
11. City Council Comments:
12. Adjournment

\*\*Please read our "City Limits Newsletter" that is available on the City of Dahlonega website\*\* [www.dahlonega-ga.gov](http://www.dahlonega-ga.gov)