



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

The common social definition of adult domestic violence (wife beating, woman battering, family violence, intimate partner violence) includes a pattern of coercion and control exercised by one intimate partner over another. Domestic violence is an equal opportunity destroyer that knows no religion, race, economic or educational status.

Victims of domestic violence do not cause the violence and should not be expected to be able to stop the violence without help. Generally females are the intended targets of the violence. Most agree that more than 90% of victims of domestic violence are female. Female perpetrators are most likely to be violent towards female intimate partners. Male victims are most likely targets of their male partners and much less likely to be victims of female partners.

Children, the unintentional victims of domestic violence, are vulnerable and dependent on parents so the best way to make children safe is to also make their mothers safe. Children learn from their parents. Boys who grow up witnessing violence are more likely to become violent. Girls think violence is normal and may think even think violence symbolizes love.

### ISSUES TO CONSIDER:

- Custody of children should not be awarded to the abusive parent. Family court judges become confused because the batterer may appear to be more physically and financially stable. When victims leave home with children to live in a shelter, they become homeless. Mothers must not be penalized by losing custody when trying to keep themselves and their children safe.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Training on domestic violence should be required of all judges. Laws on domestic violence have changed significantly in the past 5-10 years. Long-time judges may not have been trained on new laws and may not comprehend the dynamics of domestic violence.

- Batterers use the courts to fight around custody issues as a way to continue to harass and control their victims. Fighting around custody is a tactic to coercively control and remain in contact with adult victims. Repeated motions require the victim to hire attorneys they can ill afford, miss days of work and lose jobs.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The same judge or a small group of judges who coordinate their cases should hear custody issues where domestic violence is involved. Repeated demands for court hearings should be addressed and limited.

- Domestic violence courts are usually limited to criminal cases. In Pinellas the domestic violence courts only hear misdemeanor cases.

RECOMMENDATION: Funding is needed for a comprehensive domestic violence court to be expanded to include felony and civil cases.

- Batterers often have the legal right to visit their children. Courts have no safe places for this to occur.

RECOMMENDATION: Visitation Centers are a cost-effective way to keep children safe. In Pinellas CASA operates such a center that needs to be expanded to serve the entire county.

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