



# DV NEWS

*A Newsletter of the Domestic Violence Program  
of*

**Catholic Charities  
of Delaware, Otsego and Schoharie Counties**

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## **Understanding Victim Behavior**

Imagine if you will that you are walking through a forest at night and you hear footsteps behind you. You want to turn and look to see who it is but you are being forced to look ahead by something beyond your control. Every one of your senses is on high alert and you feel danger is lurking all around you. You have instincts to run but your feet feel like they aren't touching the ground, you have a gut reaction to scream for help but your voice has been silenced, you have thoughts of just stopping but something is propelling you forward. Even though you see the cliff ahead, you are powerless to stop the force that is propelling you toward it. For victims of Domestic Violence, this nightmare is a reality. Even if the world perceives the person as having control, in situations where abuse is a factor, the victim's decisions are most often not their own. Abusers are keen at learning what makes their victims tick, how to push their buttons, and therefore how to control them often with just a look, a gesture, or a tone that would fall deaf on any ears other than those of the victim. This article strives to answer the question often asked about victims, **"Why don't they just leave?"**

Victims often have no control over what happens in their environment. This includes how and when money is accrued and spent, what meals will be, what time they go to sleep or if they are allowed to sleep at all, how often they can bathe, whether or not they are allowed to leave the house, whether or not they are allowed to work or go to school, what they should value, what they should believe, who they should be allowed to communicate with, if they can have knowledge of current events or not, and much more. Victims can be beaten down in many ways. Financial constraints, physical assault, caustic verbal onslaughts, demeaning and belittling gestures or other forms of public and private humiliation, being drugged, and the use of their loved ones being turned against them are only some examples. Fear and coercion are tools most used to control victims. Ensuring they have no doubt in their minds that they are in danger and that the abuser is all powerful and all connected makes this fear a reality for the victim. The more people an abuser can groom to be on his/her side, to unwittingly believe them, and to doubt the victim, the easier it is to control the victim. If the victim takes legal action they do so at a tremendous risk. What if the victim loses their court case? This is not only a blow to their self-esteem, but it further empowers the abuser. To the abuser, this vindication feels as if they have been given permission to continue abusing and often, to escalate it. If the abuser has managed to file paperwork at court before the victim can file, they may use the system against the victim.

I am sure you have heard the expression, "The devil you know is better than the one you don't know." The way this thought process plays out for an abuse victim might be, "I can't afford to leave. He tells me I'm stupid and can't survive alone. No one will ever believe me. He said I'll never get to be with my kids. I have pets and nowhere to take them." These are beliefs that have been drilled into the victim's head by the abuser and now may be the only known truths for the victim. This doesn't deplete the desire for change or the hope for change but it depletes the belief that it is possible and often, deserved. Victims frequently wonder how to make a life for themselves. It is extremely difficult to go from an environment of having no control to suddenly having to control everything. "Where will I live? Where will I work? How long can I and the kids be safe? How will I pay for food?" The questions may go on and on. Very often, families leave their abuser with only the clothes on their back. Depending on the situation returning home to obtain their personal effects may be too great a risk. When a victim is escaping with her/his life, there isn't always time to think about clothing, money, or other resources.

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In cases where victims have been able to work and socialize, it is even harder for outsiders to believe that they are being controlled. People naturally assume that they have control over their comings and goings. What others don't see is how often victims of abuse show signs that could be easily misconstrued. Checking their phones constantly might look to some like slacking off but many victims have to check in with their abuser every few minutes or they will "get in trouble." If they miss work, this may not be by their own choice. They may be injured or bruised, and trying to hide that. It may be that they are being isolated and lack access to transportation. Or, they simply may be experiencing a guilt trip from their abuser about prioritizing work over spending time with and catering to the abuser. In whatever form abuse transpires, one thing is constant and that is abusers are very good at manipulation. This allows them to convince the person they are abusive to and anyone else who will listen, about all they have to put up with for this relationship. In this way, grooming is not reserved solely for the victim. However, abusers have a real talent for making victims feel grateful to be with them, indebted to them, and loyal to them. This happens in both cases of situational violence and generational violence.

Victim shaming and blaming can make it difficult for some people to leave. To make others aware of their situation causes them great embarrassment and humiliation. If children are involved the fear is often how they may be treated by other kids at school, their friends, their teachers, their church community, etc. Some people may not identify themselves as domestic violence victims because cultural stereotypes depict people in abusive drug fueled, lower economic, and something they chose. Abuse crosses all socioeconomic levels; the only difference is that people with more resources may be able to hide it better. Abuse is never a choice the abuser makes. It is always the choice of the abuser.

When thinking about survival 'leaving' may not always be the safest solution. Consider that 75% of all domestic violence related homicides took place at separation, or after separation. Also, if a victim has no friends or family to turn to because of being isolated by their abuser, and they have no financial resources because they have been financially abused, leaving could mean homelessness and hunger. No single victim has the same reason to stay or go as another. Every situation is unique because every victim is unique and every abuser is unique. The patterns of behavior may seem familiar, but the reasons behind them are always unique.

Lastly, I want to talk about coping behaviors. Many victims who are in abusive relationships may exhibit signs of outward release of emotion in an effort to keep themselves sane. In order to protect themselves they may develop coping behaviors that may be associated with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder such as counting, constantly checking to make sure everything is in its place, seemingly obsessive cleaning, or rearranging furniture every month or so. Another missed sign, predominantly in children, is daydreaming or disassociation. Not connecting with reality provides them temporary solitude to live in a safe world if for only a few moments. Daydreaming also happens with adults. Other signs to watch for include depression, anxiety, and the lost ability to concentrate for long periods of time or inconsistent short term memory. These can all be signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions. Other behaviors that can be associated with victimization are substance abuse, overspending, abundant efforts to seem on top of the world all of the time, changes in friendships, concerning changes in appearance, distancing oneself from family and friends and other changes in behavior patterns. Some of these coping behaviors may be seen after a person has left their abuser; they may help the victim feel safe or in control.

There is hope for every survivor of domestic violence. To feel safe in seeking help survivors need unwavering community support. We can help by opening our minds and opening the conversation when we see something concerning in a friend, family member, community member. Simply saying "I'm here if you need me and I will not judge you" is one of the most powerful things that we can do. Then, ask them what they need.

*Pat MacLeod  
Domestic Violence Program and Crime Victims' Advocate*



**FREE  
FIVE SESSION EDUCATION SERIES  
ON  
FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

**DATES:**  
THURSDAY, **FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>**  
THURSDAY, **FEBRUARY 21<sup>ST</sup>**  
THURSDAY, **MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>**  
THURSDAY, **MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup>**  
THURSDAY, **APRIL 4<sup>TH</sup>**

**\*ALL SESSIONS WILL BE HELD FROM 2:00 – 3:00 P.M.\***

**CATHOLIC CHARITIES, 489 WEST MAIN STREET, COBLESKILL N.Y.**

**REGISTRATION REQUIRED, CALL 518-234-3581 (PAT OR ANGIE)**

This course is specifically for victims of financial abuse due to domestic violence, elder abuse, and identify theft. Using the Allstate Foundation “**Purple Purse**” curriculum we will be learning about the effects of financial abuse, keeping safe and starting over. We will discuss financial fundamentals, credit basics, understanding and improving your credit. Other topics covered will include building a financial foundation, creating budgeting strategies, saving, investing, insurance and education. All participants will receive a workbook. Gifts will be given to each person completing all 5 modules.

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### **New Attorney Service for Schoharie County**

The New York State Office of Victim Services has awarded Catholic Charities of Delaware, Otsego, and Schoharie Counties a 5-year grant to fund a full-time attorney to serve people that have been victimized by domestic violence.

The attorney will serve on family court and matrimonial issues as well as housing and employment issues that victim/survivors are facing as a result of their status as a victim of domestic violence.

Catholic Charities will be contracting with Legal Aid Society of Northeast New York to provide this service, building on their already successful partnership. The attorney will be able to assist victims regardless of their income.

For more information call 518-234-3581



**Domestic Violence Program**

489 West Main Street  
Cobleskill, NY 12043

Phone: 518-234-3581  
Fax: 518-234-8423

**24 Hour Crisis Hotline:**  
**(518) 234-2231**  
**Collect Calls Accepted**



CharitiesCCDOS.org



CatholicCharitiesDOS



CharitiesDOS



CharitiesDOS



**Living  
Independently  
Workshops**

February 14, 28  
March 7, 21, 28  
April 11

2:00 PM

Catholic Charities  
489 West Main Street  
Cobleskill, NY

Participants can register by calling  
Sue at (518) 234-3581



**Domestic Violence Program for Men**

Based on the New York Model  
Batterer Intervention Program

Serving Schoharie County court-referred men

Beginning in February 2019

For more information call  
Angie Smith at (518) 234-3581