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## WHEN LOVE HURTS TOO MUCH TO STAY

In these turbulent times of COVID-19 wretchedness, it warms our hearts to hear the stories of neighborly love; appreciation for the working people who remain out there; donations to food banks and families hunkered down together. We join hands and pray for the salvation of our families, neighbors and the world at large. However, for many, it's challenging to supplement children's school lessons when no computer is available; to provide food or entertainment when money is scarce; or to find work when businesses are shuttered. For many, the family togetherness is stressful when temperamental differences between the primary partners of a household are at great odds – when the arguments are too loud and the fear of being harmed is too great to make being at home feel 'safe.'

Abuse in relationships can take many forms. Verbal abuse when one is being put-down or degraded, is hurtful and demeaning. Intimidation, or the threat that you will be harmed, left or stuck in a situation that is not good for your person, personhood or soul is debilitating. Financial abuse when someone else holds the purse strings and one is mandated to do what they want with the threat that you will not have enough cash to feed your family, obtain needed personal items or be able to leave if you need to is demoralizing. Emotional abuse when one is subject to withdrawal of wanted affection, partner cheating or put-downs of one's physical appearance and/or attitudes and beliefs is devastating. However, physical abuse, where one is afraid of being hit, harmed or killed has the potential to be deadly.

From the vantage point of never having had to endure any of these indignities, it's easy to say "Why don't they just leave?" Unfortunately, there are many reasons why people stay in abusive relationships. These include wanting to maintain the family unit, hoping that the abusing partner will go back to being the charmer they were in the beginning of the relationship. Some people have never had the advantage of having had, or observed, a healthier relationship, and will tend to think that this kind of behavior is 'normal.' Wanting the partner to love them again, thinking that 'if only I do what they want, they will then be more kind/loving' suggests that one's personhood has been demoralized to the point that their sense of themselves as 'lovable' has diminished. Concern about shaming the family by going against traditional, cultural or religious definitions of marriage may be a factor. Fear of being outed for their immigration status and possibly being reported can affect a person's ability to leave. Worrying about being judged by family or friends may have the abused partner hiding the fact or extent of the abuse. And wondering how they and any children might survive financially once leaving the relationship will keep some people rooted. Because abuse is about power and control, there can be real implications when resuming one's own power. Thus, leaving an abusive relationship can be the most dangerous thing to do - the abuser will want to re-assert their power and control, often in very destructive ways.

Being cooped up, especially in smaller quarters, or with several persons in the household, may provide the soil for domestic violence incidents to escalate. There are several ways to prepare and protect yourself if in a potentially dangerous situation. Consider the following:

1. One may need to share concerns about violence with family members or neighbors so they know when to alert authorities.
2. Discuss and practice safety plans with any children who might be affected if you must leave – devise a code word to signal that you want them to call the police.
3. If arguing, avoid rooms with potential weapons – like kitchen knives.
4. Pack and hide a bag with necessities either in your home or with a trusted neighbor or friend in case you must leave suddenly.
5. Plan for your safety if you are at the job or in public places.
6. Let your children's' school know who is authorized to pick them up.
7. If you have the luxury of being able to plan before leaving, plan where you will go once you leave.
8. Maintain in a safe place your important papers – restraining order, divorce or custody papers, car registration, rental agreement, health and life insurance cards, medications, children's birth certificates, cash.
9. Contact area resources for support in creating a safety plan, obtaining a protective order, finding a support group and identifying safe housing.

The following resource sites would be able to assist you in creating a safety plan that makes sense for you and your particular circumstances:

National Hotline/DV Resource Center: (800) 799-7233

DC Safe and DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence: (202) 299 1181; [info@dccodv.org](mailto:info@dccodv.org)

MD Network Against Domestic Violence: (800) 634-3577; [www.mnadv.org](http://www.mnadv.org)

VA Sexual Domestic Violence Action Alliance: (804) 377-0335; [www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org)