



Preventing Family Violence

Family Violence & Safety

Violence within the home is a significant problem in communities across the country. Burlington is no exception. Family, or “domestic” violence includes abuse – physical or mental – of children, adults, the elderly, roommates, spouses or partners (current or former), and other family or household members. In this section you will find information on the following topics:

- [What is Domestic Violence?](#)
- [What should I do if I suspect someone is being abused?](#)
- [What will the police do if I call?](#)
- [Where else can I get help?](#)
- [BPD’s response to Domestic Violence](#)

What is Domestic Violence?

First of all, domestic violence is more than just a family problem. In many cases, it is a crime. Generally, domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used by someone to establish and maintain power and control over an intimate partner and/or family member. Domestic violence includes child abuse. It is rarely an isolated incident. Abusers use a series of tactics to hold power and control over their victims. Abuse may include isolating the victim from family and friends, intimidation and threats, along with economic or pet abuse. It is not uncommon for a batterer to threaten to take the children away.

The State of Vermont has specific laws that prevent a person from attempting to cause or wilfully or recklessly causing bodily injury to a family or household member, or wilfully causing a family or household member to fear imminent serious bodily injury. A first offense of domestic violence is generally a misdemeanor, unless the person used

a weapon during the incident or caused serious bodily injury. The laws have specific provisions for stiffer penalties for repeat offenders or for persons who have previously been court ordered not to harm the victim. Using a deadly weapon during a domestic assault is considered a felony.

The State of Vermont takes Domestic Violence very seriously. In addition to stiff penalties, both in terms of incarceration and fines, the State regularly requires the offender to attend intensive counseling to prevent reoccurrences. Local and State Police work closely with the State's Attorney's Office, the Department of Corrections, and others to address this problem.

[TOP](#)

What should I do if I suspect someone is being abused?

If you hear a physical fight in progress you should contact the police immediately. If you suspect that a person is being abuse you can first offer emotional support and a willing ear. When the time is right, you might offer suggestions that they reach out to community services such as the police, or VT Family Court for information on a protection order. Or, you could refer the person to a local domestic violence program such as Women Helping Battered Women which is confidential and also serves battered men. There are many resources in our community to assist victims of domestic violence.

Unfortunately, victims frequently do not avail themselves of the help that is out there. Do not be surprised if the person you are "helping" refuses to report the abuse to police. It is not uncommon for victims of domestic violence to return to the abusive relationship time and time again. The reasons for this are complex and often hard for someone outside of the relationship to understand. Do not let this discourage you from continuing to offer support and gentle reminders of appropriate resources.

[TOP](#)

What will the police do if I call?

If you make a 911 or emergency call to the police department to report a domestic in progress the dispatcher will ask for your name and location of the incident. They will also ask if the suspect is present and if you or anyone else has been injured. All of this information is needed for the responding police officers. The dispatcher will keep you

on the phone until the officers speak to you directly. If you call the police with a complaint of a late reported domestic and you want to speak with a police officer directly they will have an officer respond to your residence or you can choose to speak with an officer over the phone.

[TOP](#)

Where else can I get help?

In the State of Vermont each county has a courthouse where you may obtain information and file for a Relief from Abuse Order which is a civil protection order issued out of the Family Court. The temporary Relief from Abuse Order is good for up to 10 days and would restrict a defendant's contact with the plaintiff. There is no charge for the Relief from Abuse Order and you do not need a lawyer to apply.

Also in the State of Vermont you may contact your local domestic violence or sexual assault program which are confidential.

[TOP](#)

BPD's response to Domestic Violence

The Burlington Police consider domestic violence to be a top priority. Each police officer receives specialized training on an annual basis to ensure that officers are prepared for whatever situation arises. Long gone are the days when an officer would arrive at a "family dispute" and send one party away "to cool down for the night." These days, in all domestic violence investigations, the officers will attempt to determine who the primary aggressor is. If sufficient information is developed to indicate that a person has committed the crime of domestic assault, we adhere to the "mandatory arrest" model. Statistics have shown that a mandatory arrest policy reduces the number of reoccurrences of domestic violence. To assist victims of domestic violence, the Burlington Police Department employs two full-time Domestic Violence Victim Advocates. These specialists offer a wide-range of support to victims and other parties affected by domestic violence. They provide support, safety planning, complaint information, assistance with relief from abuse orders, and referrals to other agencies. If you are involved in a domestic violence related court case or complaint in Burlington, an Advocate will assist you in filling out statement forms and other paperwork. In the days and weeks following the incident, the Advocate will continue to stay in touch to

provide information on the court case, contact numbers for victim service providers, or assist with other needs. The degree of involvement that you have with a Victim Advocate is up to you! They are here for you, but will not require you to do anything that creates discomfort for you. Their job is to help you restore a sense of safety and order in your life in the wake of a domestic violence episode. If your case winds up in court, the advocates are available to attend relief from abuse order hearings, depositions or court hearings. They can explain each step of the process to you and ensure that your rights as a victim are a top priority during the resolution of the case. If you would like to find out more about how a Domestic Violence Victim Advocate can help, please contact [Mary McAllister at 658-2704 x154](tel:658-2704x154).