

Resource Guide for Victims of Domestic Violence In Okaloosa and Walton County

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DEDICATION

This Resource Guide is dedicated to the many battered women and men in Okaloosa and Walton Counties who seek to make a safe life for themselves and their children.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Resource Guide is to provide you with information on community resources available if you are being physically, mentally, or emotionally hurt by someone in your life. This Guide is intended to be a source of information only; decisions about your situation can only be made by you.

Remember, you have a right to be safe. You are not alone with the problems you face and help is always available. For assistance with issues related to domestic violence, call Shelter House at (850) 863-4777 or 800-44-ABUSE / 800-442-2873.

NOTE: In this Resource Guide you may see gender specific language and/or gender inclusive language (i.e. she/he). For purposes of simplicity, some resources adopt the use of the pronoun "she" for the victim and "he" for the abuser. While these gender identifications do reflect the majority of domestic violence cases, they are not intended to imply that all victims are women and all abusers are men. Although the patterns of domestic violence are often experienced differently by women and men, men can also be victims (see section titled: Gender and Domestic Violence). Additionally, we recognize that domestic violence occurs in a significant number Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) relationships, where unique dynamics of battering may occur. We encourage sensitivity to all who define themselves as victims of abuse.

NOTE: Throughout this Guide you may see words such as *abuser*, *batterer*, *abusive partner*, etc. These words are meant to refer to someone who uses violence to exert power and/or control over his/her partner.

NOTE: Throughout this Guide you will read the word *advocate*. An advocate is a trained supporter who can help you recognize and assert your rights. Advocates also provide encouragement, ideas and information to assist you with evaluating your options and making your own decisions.

NOTE: Victim advocates from your local domestic violence center, Shelter House, are required by law to keep any communication with you confidential. If you access services from other types of victim advocates in the community, you can discuss their confidentiality policies with them.

NOTE: This booklet is not intended to dispense legal advice; only a licensed attorney can do that.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence affects all people. Women, men, teens and children across all lines of race, ethnicity, geography, spirituality, economic status, and sexual/relationship orientation are affected by domestic violence. It knows no boundaries. Domestic violence happens because one person in a relationship is

trying to control his/her partner. This control can take many forms (see the “Types of Domestic Violence” list below). It is often physical, but it can also be sexual, emotional, spiritual, economic, and verbal. One person (the abuser) can use one or a mix of several different forms of violence (i.e. those listed or others that are not listed) to control his/her partner. Usually the abuser is trying to establish control of his/her partner during the first incident of domestic violence. Over time, the violence usually escalates so that the abuser can maintain the established power and control of his/her victim.

Under the Florida Law, Statute 741.28-741.31, domestic violence is defined as: any assault, aggravated assault, battery, aggravated battery, sexual assault, sexual battery, stalking, aggravated stalking, kidnapping, false imprisonment, or any criminal offense resulting in physical injury or death of one family or household member by another family or household member. You can access the Florida Domestic Violence Legislation at the following web address: http://leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=Ch0741/titl0741.htm. The definition of domestic violence in the Florida Statutes is much narrower than the definition held by Domestic violence victim advocates. See the list entitled “Types of Domestic Violence” below. If you have experienced any controlling or abusive behaviors at the hands of your partner that are on this list, but are not listed in the legal definition, you may still be a victim of domestic violence and are able to receive support from a victim advocate.

Listed below are various types of domestic violence. This list is by no means exhaustive. If you are in a situation and you feel that you may be a victim of domestic violence, you can contact a victim advocate for more information.

NOTE: you can access the Internet at your local public library or with the help of a victim advocate at Shelter House. Also, make sure you are accessing the Internet from a safe location where your batterer cannot track your activities/history on the computer.

Types of Domestic Violence

Emotional/Psychological

Isolation (keeping you from family/ friends), assaults against your self esteem, calling you crazy or telling others that you are crazy, stalking you, indicating weapons that could be used to hurt you, the children or the pets, threatening to commit suicide if you leave, threatening to “out” you to your family if you are LGBT or HIV positive, threatening to give you an STD or HIV/AIDS, threatening to turn you in to immigration if you are an undocumented immigrant, threatening to call Child Protective Services to have your children unfairly removed, threatening to hurt your friends and/or family members, accusing you of having affairs, being extremely jealous, trying to control your daily activities.

Financial

Controlling or manipulating your access to finances or credit records, giving you an “allowance”, not providing for basic needs for you, your children or pets, trying to discourage you or keep you from working, trying to discourage or keep you from furthering your education.

Physical

Kicking, punching, shoving, slapping, restraining, pushing, attempting strangulation, attempting to limit your physical freedom, knowingly giving you a sexually transmitted disease or HIV/AIDS, or any other act that hurts your body.

Sexual

Pressuring or forcing participation in sexual activities (including rape), criticizing your body parts or sexuality, calling you vulgar (sexualized) names (all listed acts of violence are considered sexual assault and illegal, even if the victim and attacker are strangers, dating or married).

Spiritual

Attacking your spiritual or religious beliefs or practices and/or not allowing you to participate in your own spiritual practices.

Verbal

Lying, denial, threatening harm, putting you down, calling you names, interrogating you, making death threats against you, your children, your family, friends and/or pets.

Gender and Domestic Violence

Women are at a significantly greater risk of intimate partner violence than men. Women are 5 to 8 times more likely to experience violence from their intimate partners than men (www.aardvarc.org) By conservative estimates, 1.5 million to 4 million women in the United States are assaulted by their intimate partners every year, and 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime (www.ncadv.org)

In the United States, a woman is more likely to be assaulted, injured, raped or killed by a male partner than by any other type of assault, even assaults by strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: *Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey*, August 1995).

Although both women and men can be victims of domestic violence, women often experience the dynamics of power and control differently than men. Women often experience higher levels of danger or lethality than men. This is often due to the fact that women are relatively smaller in physical size than their male partners, and women sometimes lack access to key resources necessary for safety (i.e. transportation, economic resources, childcare, etc.).

Dynamics of Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Relationships

Although the language used most often when talking about domestic violence implies a relationship between a woman and man, we realize and acknowledge that this is not always the case. People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer are just as vulnerable to being victims of domestic violence as those in heterosexual relationships.

While the physical characteristics of domestic violence in LGBTQ relationships are similar to that of heterosexual relationships (see Types of Domestic Violence List above), the emotional/mental abuse can have very different dynamics. Batterers in these relationships often use threats of “outing” the victim in order to control them. They might tell the victim that no one will believe him or her if they disclose the abuse and seek help because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Support services and legal protection against domestic violence exists in the local community to protect LGBTQ victims just as they do to protect heterosexual victims. Local domestic violence centers do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. There is peer support, safety planning, legal advocacy, and a number of other resources available to victims regardless of gender or sexual/relationship orientation. Victim advocates support all people’s rights to have safe and healthy relationships. If you need support or more information please call your local domestic violence center, Shelter House (850) 863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873).

NOTE: Some individuals who feel that they do not identify with traditional definitions of heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered identities have adopted the term “queer.” Although it has been largely used as a derogatory term, queer has been reclaimed as a term of empowerment and redefined by many to mean an identity outside of traditional sexual and relationship norms. Questioning refers to an individual who is in the process of defining their sexual/relationship identity or an individual who has not chosen to identify with any of the aforementioned terms.

Dynamics of Domestic Violence for Victims with Disabilities

Often batterers whose victims have physical and/or mental disabilities use those disabilities to his/her advantage while attempting to exert power and control over the victim. Ways that batterers can use a disability against a victim include convincing community members and/or service providers that the disabled victim misunderstands what is going on, is making up the abuse, or that it is symptom of her/his mental or physical condition. Also, sometimes a disabled victims' lack of knowledge about domestic violence, lack of available support resources (public and private), and social misunderstanding of persons with disabilities can all work against a victim. She/he may not receive the same support and may not be able to achieve safety in the same way a victim without physical/mental disabilities would.

The parent of a child with disabilities may be controlled by her/his partner through a variety of means including: taunts of inadequacy in caring for the child, lack of financial means to care for the child should they leave the abuser, threats of removal of medical care required by the child, and/or the inability to easily move the child from the home in case violence arises. If the child has siblings, the batterer may attempt to drive a wedge between the siblings and/or between the care giving parent and the siblings without disabilities to better control the victim.

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence with physical and/or mental disabilities, you can contact you local domestic violence agency, Shelter House, at 850-863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873 for more information on resources for victims with disabilities.

Dynamics of Teen Dating Violence (TDV)

Although most people assume domestic violence only happens with adults, it is also present in teenage dating relationships. Teen dating violence (TDV) is a pattern of abusive behaviors that one teen uses to gain power and control over a dating partner or over a former partner. TDV has many of the same dynamics as adult domestic violence; however, not all dynamics are the same. Some dynamics of relationship violence are unique to youth relationships, and may increase danger for them. Examples of dynamics that can affect teens more than adults may include: inexperience (teens are relatively inexperienced at intimate relationships), peer pressure (teens can experience peer pressure to hide dating violence), anger/emotional abuse, using social status as a weapon, intimidation, minimizing/denying/blaming the victim, threatening violence, sexual coercion, and isolation/exclusion from friends and family.

If you are a teen or if you know a teen who may be involved in an abusive relationship, there are resources that can help you understand your relationship and ways that you can be safe. Some of these resources include websites, online chatting with trained victim advocates, and free hotlines. See some resources listed below.

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline

866-331-9474

Live 24 hour hotline for teens. Hotline operators answer teens' questions about violent relationships and help teens think about ways they can be safe (safety planning) or help their friends who may be in danger.

Shelter House Domestic Violence Center

850-863-4777

Dating violence primary prevention program that works directly with youth and the local community to support community-wide change and help youth build skills for healthy relationships, information on resources for teen victims of dating violence, and information for parents or guardians who are seeking Dating Violence Injunctions on behalf of their minor child.

www.loveisrespect.org

Website staffed by trained victim advocates (adult and teen advocates), who are available to instant message with teens to answer questions about dating violence and provide information to support teen victims and how teens can support their friends who are victims

www.thatsnotcool.com

Website with information for teens on dating violence, videos, and tools for teen victims to use to address their partner's abusive behavior

NOTE: In the state of Florida a parent can file a Dating Violence Injunction on behalf of their minor youth who is a victim of teen dating violence or has been in the past (see section labeled "Injunctions").

NOTE: Domestic violence can occur between any two family members or household members, which may include: spouse, former spouse, non cohabitating partners, persons related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently living together as if a family or who have lived together in the past as if a family, and persons who have a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or have lived together at any time (roommates not involved in a romantic relationship do not classify as domestic violence. Please seek police assistance if you have been the victim of violence).

NOTE: No one has the right to threaten or hurt you. If they do, they are breaking the law. There are still people who believe that violence between a couple involved in a relationship is NOT a crime. They may think that it is a private matter between the couple, that you are causing the violence, or that you are not serious about stopping the violence if you choose to remain in the relationship. For this reason, we recommend you use this Resource Guide to learn about your rights and define your own options. Domestic Violence victim advocates are available to make sure you have accurate information to make informed decisions about your life. Contact Shelter House (850-863-4777) for more information.

Remember

- You are not alone. One fourth of all relationships include violence. Over 95% of the cases involve a man battering a woman.
- You are not the cause of someone else's violent behavior. People have the right to get angry, but no one has the right to hit or verbally abuse you because they are angry.
- You have the right to receive help and respect. If you are the victim of a crime, you should be treated accordingly.
- You have the right to protect yourself and your children.
- You have the right not to be blamed for the crimes of your partner against you or your children.
- Someone does not commit domestic violence because they have consumed alcohol or taken drugs. A batterer is responsible for his/her own abusive behavior, whether they were intoxicated or not.

What can I do before violence occurs?

Contact your local domestic violence center, Shelter House, and make them aware of your situation so that they can help you plan for safety by creating a personalized Safety Plan. A Safety Plan is a set of specific strategies that you can use in your home and community to help you and your family remain as safe as possible before, during, and after domestic violence has occurred. If a victim is in a relationship where domestic violence is present, having a safety plan can make a big difference in staying safe. You may want to consider joining a support group with other battered women or men. Let your trusted family and friends know about the violence. Visibility can save your life. Making contact with friends, family members and other people you can trust not only increases your safety, but it will also help you begin to build or strengthen your emotional support system.

If you have neighbors that you trust and have discussed the situation with, you may want to develop a simple alert system with them that lets them know that you are in danger and they should call the police (example: you and your neighbor decided that if you flicker the porch light three times they should know that you are in danger, or if you hang a white t-shirt out the window that is the sign to call the police).

Have quick access to the following items: (photocopies are OK)

- keys

- cash
- identification
- cell phone & charger (disable the Global Positioning System (GPS) or have the phone company help you do it)
- marriage license
- blank checks/credit cards
- Social Security Cards
- medicine/insurance cards
- birth certificates
- important addresses/phone numbers
- savings book
- car title
- records of income
- leases
- immunization records
- a change of clothing
- this handbook

Many people find it helpful to have these items or copies of these items with a change of clothes and a week's supply of any prescription medications stored in a small bag at an outside location (example: trusted friend or family members' house, office, etc.). It is usually best to have this bag stored at a location other than your home or car, in the event that you must leave your home and/or your vehicle.

Plan ahead. Think about how your abuser usually tries to prevent you from leaving or getting assistance, and try to plan ahead for those situations. Learning the local bus schedule and the number to a cab company may be helpful. Keep a charged cell phone with you in case you need to call 911 (Shelter House can provide you with a free 911 cell phone). Keep a copy of important documents at a safe location like a friend's house. Do not keep those items in the car, since you may have to leave without the car. If your partner has ever sabotaged the car so that you cannot leave, you may want to learn how to change a tire or to reconnect battery cables. You may want to purchase and hide extra car parts and keys. If you think your car has a GPS tracking device in it, you may want to leave using public transportation instead.

Trust your intuition. When you think a violent situation may start, try to leave the location before it does. Your children may leave with you; your partner's permission is not required. If you feel you are in danger and want to leave, you can call 911 and get assistance from the police. Usually the police will assist you in taking the children and a few personal items. If it is dangerous to spend time getting your personal belongings and/or documents, leave them. These things may be recovered later. If your intuition tells you that leaving immediately would cause the danger to escalate, wait until it is safe for you to leave.

Look for warning signs that may indicate violence is likely to escalate, including: An abusive partner who threatens to commit suicide, an abusive partner who threatens to or abuses the family pet, an abusive partner who has knowledge of or access to deadly weapons, etc.

NOTE: Even if you are not planning to leave your partner permanently, leaving the location for even 24 hours can help keep you (and your children) safe! Shelter House has a 24-hour shelter in a confidential location. If you and your children need to stay at the shelter, even if only for a short time, call (850) 863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873.

What can I do during an attack?

If you feel that you can safely escape from the situation, do so and call **911**. If leaving immediately would increase your danger, then try to avoid rooms that have weapons (kitchen) or only one exit (bathrooms), instead try to remain in a room with multiple exits. You know your partner better than anyone else, so if leaving immediately would make the situation more dangerous for you, wait until it feels safer to leave.

Go to the nearest phone and call the police or call the **Shelter House Hotline (850) 863-4777, 1-800-44-ABUSE**. Transportation to a shelter can be arranged. If you must leave your children at the house while you go for help, you may want to ask for police assistance to retrieve them. If child abuse is involved in the current episode, the operator on the **DCF Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-96-ABUSE (22873))** can facilitate assistance from law enforcement.

If you call the police, tell the operator what the emergency is, where it is, who you are, and give your phone number. Stay on the line until the operator has all the necessary information.

NOTE: The same safety strategies do not work for all victims. A strategy that can help one victim stay safe may put another victim in different circumstance in greater danger. The best way to plan for safety during a violent incident is to work with a victim advocate to create a safety plan that is made specifically for you and your situation.

What should I do after a violent incident?

If you are injured, seek medical attention. Go to a nearby hospital, doctor's office or clinic. While it is helpful to have your medical insurance information with you if you possess medical insurance, if you do not have your insurance card the hospital staff can often help you access it. Most emergency rooms will provide medical treatment to you, even if you do not have financial resources to pay at the time of treatment. If your injuries are life threatening, call an ambulance. If you incur medical bills as a result of a domestic violence incident, you can apply for Victim's Compensation funds to cover the cost of the bills (if you have reported the incident to law enforcement). You can apply for Victim's Compensation related to domestic violence injuries with Shelter House (see the section titled "Victims' Compensation and Relocation").

Save evidence. Evidence includes copies of medical records, police reports, dated photographs of injuries or damage to the home, torn or bloody clothing, any weapons used, and statements from witnesses who heard or saw the attack. It is wise to write down what happened soon after the attack. Include as many details as you can recall, such as time, location, witnesses, and what was said and done by all persons involved. Include any details you can remember when reporting what happened to medical professionals or law enforcement. If verbal abuse and/or threats have occurred, telephone records, voice mail messages, printed text messages, and printed emails or personal web pages can sometimes be used as evidence.

Call one of the local support services, such as the local domestic violence agency, Shelter House, and talk to a domestic violence victim's advocate about the choices and options you have. A victim advocate can help you access information about legal remedies available through the Domestic Abuse Act, Victim's Compensation and Relocation and VAWA Legislation.

NOTE: Remember, most abusers become more violent over time and the violence often escalates. Most abusers promise to stop the violence, but they rarely stop even with skilled intervention. Even though you may be afraid, having a safety plan can increase your safety and the safety of your family.

How can I obtain emergency assistance and/or shelter?

Calling the local Shelter House Hotline (1-800-44-ABUSE) is a safe way to collect information, create a safety plan for staying in your relationship, or to determine a safe strategy for leaving and arranging shelter. All calls are confidential. In Okaloosa and Walton Counties, Shelter House can provide you and your children with a safe place to stay, emergency transportation to get there, and continued emotional and other types of support while you are there and after you leave. When you call, the victim advocate will ask you a series of questions about your situation to determine if the shelter at Shelter House is the best option for your situation.

If you need to leave home and seek shelter with Shelter House, a victim advocate can help you replace some clothing and other personal items that you may not have been able to take with you when you left. The typical shelter stay is around eight weeks, however sometimes people stay for longer or shorter periods of time. During this time, a victim advocate will be available to help you determine the direction you want to go and create a plan for achieving your goals (example: acquiring a safe permanent residence, finding employment, etc.) One on one victim's peer counseling, support groups, safety planning, court advocacy and child therapy are all available to women staying in the shelter at Shelter House. If a man has been the victim of domestic violence and needs a safe place to stay, he too may contact the Shelter House Hotline (850) 863-4777. A victim advocate will assist him in finding a safe place to stay and offer similar support services.

If you have experienced domestic violence, but you do not want to leave your relationship, you can contact the Shelter House Outreach Program (850) 243-1201. Outreach services are the same as those offered in Shelter, except they are available to women or men who may not need Shelter. Outreach services are available in Fort Walton Beach, Crestview, and DeFuniak Springs.

Another option is to stay in your home and file for an Injunction Order to have your abuser move out. Even if you cannot afford the home on a permanent basis, you might want to ask the judge to allow you to stabilize yourself in the home and have the abuser supply some financial support. If you chose this option, understand that when a victim files for an Injunction, violence can often escalate. An abuser may become angry that the victim is filing an Injunction. If you feel that you need an Injunction Order for your protection, but you are in fear for your safety, you can speak with a victim advocate to help you determine the safest course of action and to develop a safety plan.

NOTE: Domestic violence victim advocates will not tell you what to do or make decisions for you. You will find that domestic violence victim advocates will support whatever decisions you feel are best for you, whether it is to stay in the relationship or leave your abuser.

Emotional Support

Seeking emotional support when one is experiencing domestic violence is vital. Individual counseling helps the person cope with emotional stress in a one on one setting, while group sessions provide support from others who have also experienced violence. Victim's counseling is free and the sessions are educational and provide an informal atmosphere for answering many questions that arise for victims of domestic violence. Individual and group sessions are available for those who wish to stay with or leave their partner.

Individual counseling and group support sessions can include topics like:

- Power and control tactics
- How to identify abusers
- Models of equality (What healthy relationships look like)
- Lethality (Danger level and how it increases over time)
- Safety Planning
- Effects of violence on children
- Legal options
- Community resources
- Healthy coping skills for difficult situations
- Staying in the relationship vs. leaving

Individual and group counseling is available for victims of domestic violence at Shelter House. Shelter House also offers free child therapy through a licensed child therapist for children who have witnessed domestic violence. If you are a military member or spouse, Victim Advocate Services are also available through both Eglin and Hurlburt air force bases. Bridgeway Center victims services include: individual, group and family therapy, assistance in filing victim's compensation claims, and a 24 hour rape crisis

hotline. COPE Center in Walton County offers similar services as Bridgeway Center in Okaloosa County. All organizations can be reached 24 hours a day. Please see their contact numbers below.

Shelter House	24 Hour Hotline	850-863-4777 800-442-2873
	Fort Walton Beach	850-243-1201
	Crestview	850-683-0845
	Defuniak Springs	850-892-5411
Bridgeway Center	Fort Walton Beach	850-833-7400
	24 Hour Crisis Line	850-244-9191
	Crestview	850-689-7810
	24 Hour Crisis Line	850-682-0101
COPE Center	Defuniak Springs	850-892-8045
	24 Hour Crisis Line	850-892-4357
Eglin Air Force Base	Daytime	850-883-8821
	After hours (4pm-7am M-F, 24 hours Sat/Sun)	850-797-4012
Hurlburt Field	Daytime	850-797-5388
	After hours (4pm-7am M-F, 24 hours Sat/Sun)	850-797-4012

LEGAL SYSTEM

Domestic Violence Legal Hotline

The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) works with the Florida Legal Services organization. Together they operate the Domestic Violence Legal Hotline. Victims who reside in Florida can receive free legal advice and referral information by calling 1-800-500-1119 and pressing prompt #3.

There are a number of legal steps you can take to protect yourself, to bring your abuser to justice, or to obtain protection and support for yourself and your children. The following section will explain legal terms, resources, and how the legal system can help you.

Legal Terms (Alphabetical)

Affidavit - A written statement of facts given voluntarily and under oath (ex: "I swear that I left the house at 7pm"). For example, in criminal cases, affidavits are often used by police officers seeking to convince

courts to grant a warrant to make an arrest or a search. In civil cases, affidavits of witnesses are often used to support motions for summary judgment.

Arraignment - The proceeding in criminal cases where an accused individual is brought before a judge to hear the charges filed against him or her and to file a plea of guilty, not guilty, or no contest (also called a preliminary hearing). This is not a trial.

Assault - An "assault" is an intentional, unlawful threat by word or act to do violence to the person of another, coupled with an apparent ability to do so, and doing some act which creates a well-founded fear in such other person that such violence is imminent. (Florida Statute 784.011)

Aggravated Assault - An "aggravated assault" is an assault: (a) with a deadly weapon without intent to kill; or (b) with an intent to commit a felony. Whoever commits an aggravated assault shall be guilty of a felony of the third degree. (Florida Statute 784.021)

Bail - Security given for the release of a criminal defendant or witness from legal custody (usually in the form of money) to secure his or her appearance on the day and time appointed (also called bail bond).

Battery - The offense of battery occurs when a person: (a) actually and intentionally touches or strikes another person against the will of the other; or (b) intentionally causes bodily harm to another person. (Florida Statute 784.03)

Aggravated battery - An "aggravated battery" is a battery: (a) where the offender intentionally or knowingly causes great bodily harm, permanent disability, or permanent disfigurement or (b) uses a deadly weapon or (c) the offender committed battery on a victim who was pregnant at the time of battery or if the offender should have known the victim was pregnant or (d) a person commits domestic battery by strangulation if the person knowingly and intentionally, against the will of another, impedes the normal breathing or circulation of the blood of a family or household member or of a person with whom he or she is in a dating relationship, so as to create a risk of or cause great bodily harm by applying pressure on the throat or neck of the other person or by blocking the nose or mouth of the other person. This paragraph does not apply to any act of medical diagnosis, treatment, or prescription which is authorized under the laws of this state. (Florida Statute 784.041) Whoever commits aggravated battery shall be guilty of a felony of the second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

Civil actions / court - Non-criminal cases in which one private individual or business sues another to protect, enforce, or redress private or civil rights.

Criminal case / court - Case brought by the government against an individual accused of committing a crime. It is the possibility of losing life or liberty that distinguishes criminal from civil penalties.

Defendant - A person accused of committing a crime.

Felony - A serious criminal offense generally punishable by imprisonment of one year or more.

First appearance - The initial appearance of an arrested person before a judge to determine whether or not there is probable cause for his or her arrest. Generally the person comes before a judge within hours of the arrest (also called initial appearance).

Injunction - An Order of the court prohibiting (or compelling) the performance of a specific act to prevent irreparable damage or injury (see section titled "Injunctions for Protection").

Penalty for violating an order for protection / injunction - A person who willfully violates an injunction for protection against repeat violence, sexual violence, or dating violence, issued pursuant to s. [784.046](#), or a foreign protection order accorded full faith and credit pursuant to s. [741.315](#) by: (1) refusing to vacate the dwelling that the parties share; (2) going to the petitioner's residence, school, place of employment, or a specified place frequented regularly by the petitioner and any named family or household member; (3) committing an act of repeat violence, sexual violence, or dating violence against the petitioner; (4) committing any other violation of the injunction through an intentional unlawful threat, word, or act to do violence to the petitioner; or (5) telephoning, contacting, or otherwise communicating with the petitioner directly or indirectly, unless the injunction specifically allows indirect contact through a third party; commits a misdemeanor of the first degree (Florida Statute 784.047)

Misdemeanor - Less serious criminal offense usually punishable by a sentence of one year or less.

Petitioner - Person that files allegations in a civil case.

Plea bargaining - Time during the legal process the defendant will be given an opportunity to plead guilty to the charges, make some bargain to plead guilty to lesser charges or plead guilty in order to receive an agreed upon sentence. You can best effect plea bargaining by making your wants and wishes known to the prosecutor.

Preliminary hearing - Hearing when a judge hears evidence to determine if a crime has been committed and if the person accused of the crime should stand trial. You may need to testify in the preliminary hearing.

Probation - A sentencing alternative to imprisonment in which the court releases convicted defendants under supervision as long as certain conditions are observed. There is a felony probation office and a separate misdemeanor probation office. It is possible to be on both felony and misdemeanor probation at the same time and have two separate probation officers. If a defendant violates a court-ordered contact arrangement (no contact vs. no violent contact), the probation officer can be contacted to begin proceedings to violate the defendant's probation if an affidavit is filed.

Prosecution - You, or the person who represents you, are the **prosecution** when you initiate a charge against someone. You are **prosecuting** when you file a charge against the abuser and when you or the person representing you presents evidence to prove he/she is guilty.

Respondent - Person who has charges/suit filed against them in a civil case.

Sentence - The punishment ordered by a court for a defendant convicted of a crime.

Subpoena - A written notice for you to appear in court at a set time with a penalty for failure to appear.

Testimony - Evidence given by a competent witness, under oath, as distinguished from evidence derived from writings and other sources.

Trial - Final hearing to determine the guilt or innocence of the defendant (you may need to testify in the trial).

Victim Impact Statement - Written statement that a victim can provide to the prosecutor and the court explaining how she/he has been affected by the crime and what she/he wishes to have done about it (see your victim advocate if you would like more information on completing a statement).

The Courts

Civil Courts

Civil court handles cases where one person (the petitioner) files allegations against another person (the respondent). One cannot be arrested or imprisoned for a civil matter. Civil courts usually call for a respondent to right the wrong they committed through compensation (sometimes punitive) to the petitioner. Examples of civil matters may include: civil injunctions for protection against domestic violence, dating, sexual and repeat violence, divorce, child custody, and family law cases.

Criminal Courts

Criminal court handles cases where a crime may have been committed not only against an individual, but also against the State. While the alleged crime has usually been committed by one person (alleged offender) against another person (alleged victim), the case is tried in a criminal court (ex: State of Florida against alleged offender, since offender has been accused of violating state law). Examples of criminal matters may include: domestic violence assault, battery, sexual assault, etc.

Okaloosa County Courthouses

Okaloosa County Court House/Domestic Violence Injunction Dept.
1250 N. Eglin Parkway
Shalimar, FL 32579
Telephone: (850) 651-7200 X 4359

Crestview Court House/Domestic Violence Injunction
101 E James Lee Blvd Room 210
Crestview, FL 32536
Telephone: (850) 689-5000 X 3354

Walton County Courthouses

Walton County Clerk/Civil Dept
571 U.S. Highway 90 East
Defuniak Springs, FL 32433
Telephone: (850) 892-8118

South Walton Courthouse Annex
31 Coastal Center Boulevard
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459
Telephone: (850) 267-3066.

NOTE: If you ever feel unsafe when you are at the courthouse or are leaving the courthouse you can ask a deputy to escort you in the courthouse complex and/or in the parking lot to your transportation.

Divorce

Obtaining a divorce

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage and usually requires an attorney. You will want to tell an attorney if you have been a victim of domestic violence. If you need legal representation, but cannot afford an attorney, advocates can help you find an attorney who will donate time or let you make small payments for services, including assistance from Legal Services of Northwest Florida (www.lsnf.org).

If you cannot afford or chose to not be represented by an attorney, you have the option to represent yourself. This is called "pro se" and the necessary paperwork for this process can be found at the Clerk of Courts Office or online at http://www.flcourts.org/gen_public/family/forms_rules/index.shtml. Representing oneself can be difficult, since the legal system can be complicated and difficult to maneuver if you have

not studied law. If you choose to represent yourself, you can call the Legal Hotline mentioned in The Legal System section, and request legal advice.

Know Your Rights As A Woman Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Violence Against Women Act of 2005: Know Your Rights! The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), passed in 2005, gives survivors of domestic violence several important legal rights. Two of the most important issues addressed by this act include housing and Injunctions (protective orders).

Housing

Victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking and their immediate family members who are residing in Public Housing and Section 8 housing are protected under VAWA. It states that an individual's status as a victim *is not* grounds for denying housing assistance and *is not* grounds to evict a tenant. As a victim, it is your right to keep and maintain your Public or Section 8 housing even if an incident of actual or threatened violence has been committed against you. If your abuser lived in the same housing unit as you, the Public Housing Authority or Section 8 landlord can split the lease, evicting the abuser and allowing you and your family to remain. If the Housing Authority is trying or threatening to evict you because of domestic violence, you can contact a Shelter House victim advocate who can help you assert your housing rights at 1-850-863-4777/1-800-44-ABUSE.

Injunctions for Protection

If you have an Injunction (some states refer to it as a Restraining Order-however they are two different things in the state of Florida), it is valid and enforceable in all 50 states. VAWA makes it so that you do not have to register your injunction each time you enter a new state. If you choose to register the order with law enforcement, that information must be kept confidential and under no circumstances may that state or agency notify the person whom the order is against. If you need help asserting this right, you can contact a victim advocate at Shelter House at 1-850-863-4777/1-800-44-ABUSE.

Immigration

Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the spouses and children of United States citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPR) who have been victims of domestic violence may self-petition to obtain lawful permanent residency, allowing them to live apart from the abuser in the United States. The immigration provisions of VAWA allow certain battered immigrants to file for immigration relief without the abuser's assistance or knowledge. If eligible, abused children may be entitled to some public benefits, and adult petitioning victims may receive employment authorization. If you would like more information, you can contact your victim advocate or Shelter House at 1-850-863-4777/1-800-44-ABUSE.

Victim's Compensation and Relocation Funds

Victim's Compensation is a program that helps victims with medical expenses, loss of wages, etc., through the Office of the Attorney General in Tallahassee, Florida. If someone has been the victim of a felony or misdemeanor crime punishable under state law, they may qualify for Victim's Compensation. If a victim reported the incident to law enforcement within 72 hours of it occurring (sometimes allowances are made in this area if it took someone longer to report the crime), they are willing to fully cooperate with law enforcement's investigation, and they are applying for Victim's Compensation funds within one year of the incident, they may be eligible. Any victim advocate can help a victim file for Victim's compensation. If you would like to learn more about the program or get help filing for Compensation funds, you can contact Shelter House's Outreach Office for assistance (850) 243-1201. To read more about how a person qualifies for Compensation funds, see: <http://sa18.state.fl.us/vicsvcs/viccomp.htm>.

Domestic Violence Relocation funds are funds set aside to help victims of domestic violence relocate to a safer environment (sometimes across the country, other times across town). A victim must apply for

compensation within 30 days of the domestic violence incident (the incident must have been reported to the police), unless they can show good reason for not applying within that 30 day time frame. The only organization that can help a victim apply for Domestic Violence Relocation funds is a certified Domestic Violence Center. In Okaloosa and Walton Counties the only organization that is certified to assist victims with Domestic Violence Relocation funds is Shelter House (850-863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873).

Victims Wrongly Accused of Committing Domestic Violence

Sometimes in abusive relationships the true victim of the situation gets wrongfully accused of a crime. If you feel like you acted in self-defense, your partner forced you to commit a crime, or you were accused of failing to protect your children, there are resources available to help you. The National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women provides legal assistance to wrongly accused victims who are facing trial, considering taking a plea, waiting on a sentence, or even whose case is on appeal. You can contact them directly or have a victims' advocate or your lawyer contact them. If you are incarcerated they also take collect calls from battered women who are in jail or prison.

For more information on this organization or other organizations that can assist battered women who are charged with crimes relating to their abuse, please contact your local victim advocate. You can also call the National Clearinghouse directly at (215) 351-0010 or toll free (800) 903-0111 ext 3. Their website can be accessed at: <http://www.ncdbw.org>.

INJUNCTION FOR PROTECTION ORDERS

An Injunction for Protection (commonly referred to as a "restraining order") may order the abuser to immediately stop the violence or harassment, to leave the shared home, to avoid contact with the victim at home, work or school, to attend batterer's intervention and/or appropriate counseling. The injunction can also provide for temporary custody, visitation, and child or spousal support.

You do not have to file any other civil action (such as divorce) or call the police in order to obtain an Injunction for Protection.

Florida recognizes domestic violence as a serious crime and has created the Injunction for Protection, which specifically addresses domestic violence. There are four types of Injunctions for Protection:

Types of Injunctions

Injunction for Protection Against Domestic Violence

Injunctions for Protection against Domestic Violence protect you against family or household members. You can file a petition for an Injunction for Protection against Domestic Violence if your abuser is your husband or wife, your ex-husband or ex-wife, any person related to you by blood or marriage (such as your aunt, cousin, or brother-in-law), any person who lives or lived in your household as if they were part of the family (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend of another family member), or the mother or father of your child, even if they have never lived with you or been married to you. The law protects you against these people even if they are no longer living with you. You can file for an Injunction for Protection Against Domestic Violence after just one violent occurrence.

Petition for Injunction Against Repeat Violence

You may file for an Injunction against Repeat Violence if the abuser has committed at least two acts of violence (including stalking) against you or a member of your immediate family (your child, your parents, or a sister or brother) and one of those two acts of violence has occurred within the last six months.

Petition for Injunction Against Dating Violence

You may file for an Injunction Against Dating Violence (including stalking) if you and the abuser have or have had a continuing and significant relationship of a romantic or intimate nature within the past six months. Dating violence does not include violence in a casual acquaintanceship or violence between individuals who have only socialized in a business or social context.

Petition for Injunction Against Sexual Violence

You may file for an Injunction against Sexual Violence if you are a victim of sexual violence as it is defined in the Florida Statutes. To be eligible to file a petition for an Injunction against Sexual Violence you must have reported the incident of violence to the police or other law enforcement agency and be cooperating in any criminal proceeding against the abuser. What is an act of sexual violence under the law is defined in several different sections of the Florida Statutes. The law enforcement agency to which you report the incident of violence will help you understand whether an act of sexual violence, as defined in the law, has been committed.

NOTE: An adult parent or guardian of a minor youth who needs an Injunction can file for one on behalf of their minor child. A victim advocate at your local domestic violence center can answer questions that you may have about this.

NOTE: There is NO FEE for filing a petition for an Injunction for Protection in the State of Florida. If the Clerk of Court requests that you pay a fee, contact a victim advocate at Shelter House (850-863-4777/1-800-44-ABUSE).

Where to File for an Injunction

You have three choices of location when filing your petition with the Clerk of Court. You CANNOT file in more than one county. Below are the three options for where you can file an Injunction:

- Where you were living when the violence occurred
- Where you live now, if you are currently or temporarily living in a different county
- In the county where your abuser lives

You can call the Clerk of Court in Okaloosa County (Shalimar 850-651-7200 or Crestview 850-689-5000) or Walton County (DeFuniak Springs 850-892-8115 or Santa Rosa Beach 850-267-3066) for information or questions on where to file.

How to File for an Injunction

BEFORE filing for an injunction, it is VITAL that you have a safety plan in place for you and your children. You are taking a step to protect yourself from your abuser and asking the court to order your abuser NOT to do certain things like come around you and to do certain things like pay child support. These actions will threaten an abuser's sense of control over you and it is vital that you take steps to protect yourself from revengeful actions and repercussions. If possible, contact a victim advocate at your local domestic violence agency, Shelter House (800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873), to help you create a safety plan before filing. If you have already filed for an Injunction, and want to complete a safety plan, please contact a victim advocate at Shelter House.

To file an Injunction for Protection you must appear in person at the Clerk's Office - hours at most locations are weekdays, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. It takes one to two hours to file, so it is important to arrive

early. You can complete the Injunction packet at the Clerk's Office or if you need assistance completing the packet you can contact a victim advocate at Shelter House at 1-800-44-ABUSE. When completing an Injunction packet remember that you, the victim, are the "petitioner" and that your abuser is the "respondent."

If you fear that giving out your address on the Injunction form will put you in danger, tell the clerk and she/he will help you fill out a form to ask the court to allow you to keep your address a secret. This is called a Request for Confidential Filing of Address. You will have to sign the forms in front of a notary or in front of the Clerk of Court at the Courthouse in your area.

NOTE: Do not sign the Injunction forms until you have shown them to a clerk.

Help with Filing and Legal Issues

As with most issues, your best resource is your local domestic violence program, Shelter House. Advocates at Shelter House can answer your questions and help walk you through the filing process. Advocates can also accompany you to Injunction hearings at the courthouse if you need emotional support.

For the petition process, you can go to court with or without a lawyer. Representing yourself is called "pro se". Although people have been successful in getting Injunctions when they have gone pro se, in many situations it would be to your advantage to have an attorney to help you through this process; for instance, if your abuser has an attorney or if child support or custody issues might be involved. You can use a private attorney for representation, or if you are unable to afford a private attorney, Shelter House can refer you to Legal Services of Northwest Florida (www.lsnf.org). If you have been a victim of domestic violence then you can likely obtain free legal representation at the hearing for your Injunction.

What to Expect At An Injunction Hearing

The process for an Injunction Hearing is generally similar at the four courthouses in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. However, there may be small differences between how the hearings proceed in the two counties. Those differences depend on the location and the judge presiding over the hearing. Generally speaking, when you go to the courthouse as a victim seeking an Injunction, you will be called the "Petitioner" and your abuser will be called the "Respondent." You will be directed to wait in a room with other Petitioners, while the Respondents are kept in another room. When you are called to enter the courtroom (people are called in no particular order), you may not bring anyone inside the courtroom/judge's chambers with you, except your attorney and a victim advocate.

While in the courtroom/judge's chambers you will sit apart from your abuser. There are bailiffs in the room to protect you if you need protection. You will be given an opportunity to explain to the judge what you are seeking (if you want an injunction, if you want to modify (change) your current injunction, or if you want to drop an injunction).

Possible actions that you can ask a judge to take regarding Injunctions include:

Grant/Continue a NO CONTACT Injunction- respondent is to have no contact with the petitioner (no in-person, phone, email, written, text, or third party contact).

Grant/Continue a NO VIOLENT CONTACT Injunction- respondent can have contact with the petitioner, as long as the contact is non-violent.

Modify a NO CONTACT injunction to a NO VIOLENCE CONTACT Injunction- the petitioner or respondent can ask the court (during an injunction hearing or through paperwork found at the Clerk of Courts Office) to modify or make changes to an injunction (ex: to have supervised visitation at the Judge Ben Gordon Visitation Center).

Drop NO CONTACT/NO VIOLENT CONTACT Injunction- the petitioner can ask a judge or the court to drop a no contact or no violent contact injunction, so that both parties can have contact.

The judge will give both you and your abuser time to explain your side of the situation. It is important not to interrupt your abuser, no matter what he/she is saying. You will each have a turn to speak. Also, remember that it is important to avoid interrupting the judge, turn your cell phone off before entering the courtroom/judge's chambers, and do not chew gum. If you have evidence (printed out text messages, voice mails, emails, photos, witnesses) that supports your case and demonstrates how your abuser has hurt or threatened you, you may bring those as well.

After an Injunction is Granted

A judge may choose to grant an injunction on a permanent or temporary basis. Injunctions can be "no contact" orders. This is where the abuser is ordered to have no contact at all with the victim (no phone calls, texts, emails, in-person contacts or third party contacts, etc.). The judge can also grant a "no violent contact" injunction. This is different, because the batterer is allowed to have contact with the victim, but he/she is not allowed to physically harm the victim. If you are granted an injunction and receive a certified copy, keep a copy with you at all times. Make extra copies to give to schools, landlords, employers, etc. It is important that you work with a victim advocate to create a personalized safety plan when you get your injunction or update any old safety plans that you have created before you got the injunction. Injunctions are most effective when they are used in conjunction with a safety plan.

NOTE: An injunction does not limit the behavior of the petitioner, it only restricts the behavior of the respondent.

Enforcing an Injunction

Your Final Injunction or Temporary ex parte Injunction is good wherever you go in Florida. Additionally, the federal law provides what is called "Full Faith and Credit," which means that once you have a criminal or civil protection order, it follows you wherever you go, including U.S. Territories and tribal lands. Different states have different rules for enforcing out-of-state protection orders. You can find out about policies in your state by contacting a domestic violence program (check the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.ncadv.org, for a list of organizations near you), the clerk of courts, or the prosecutor in your area.

If you change residences, you can take a copy of your order to the police or sheriffs department in your new area. However, if you are trying to relocate for safety and you are fearful that your partner may try and locate you through connections that he/she may have through law enforcement, you can contact your local domestic violence agency. A victim advocate can work with you on developing a plan for maintaining safety while using your injunction for protection. If you are moving to a new state, you may also call the National Center on Full Faith and Credit (1-800-256-5883, ext. 2) for information on enforcing your order there.

Note: Injunctions may not be enforceable on military bases and military protective orders may not be enforceable off base. Please check with your local police department, court clerk, and/or domestic violence advocate for more details.

Violations of Injunctions

Only the respondent (abuser) can be punished for criminal violations of the Injunction. Keep a journal of all violations and document the nature of the contact, including names of witnesses and dates. Evidence such as threatening messages, emails, or letters should be saved.

If the respondent (abuser) criminally violates the injunction, the police should be called immediately. If the abuser commits a civil violation, such as refusing to obey custody, visitation, or support orders, the Clerk of Courts should be contacted.

Often times abusers do not follow instructions when given Injunction Orders. They will try and make contact with a victim directly (on the phone, showing up at the victim's house, texting on the phone, or leaving emails) or they may try and make what is called "third-party contact" where they will contact a third person and ask them to give messages to the victim. In Florida, a violation of injunction is a first-degree misdemeanor. The maximum possible penalty carries up to a \$1,000.00 fine and as much as 365 days in the County Jail. Violating an injunction is looked upon as a serious offense by the County Court system. It is not unusual for the prosecutor to view a violation of injunction as not just a crime against a particular victim, but also a crime against the peace and dignity of the State of Florida. The prosecutor will argue that a violation of the injunction demonstrated a disregard for the law and a disregard for the authority of the Court to modify or restrict behavior. Likewise, the Court will be concerned about the possibility that continued violation of the injunction could lead to the commission of a violent crime. Accordingly, many Judges who are called on to impose a sentence in a Violation of Injunction case want to send a strong message that violating a court ordered injunction will not be tolerated.

If a person is convicted of violating a domestic related injunction, in certain circumstances a judge can order a batterer to attend a Batterer's Intervention Program, a domestic violence counseling program for batterers (for more information see the section titled Batter's Intervention Program).

Reconciling with Your Partner After Getting an Injunction

Either party (you or your abuser) may request changes to the injunction at any time, but only the Court may modify or dismiss the injunction. If you and the abuser want to reconcile while an Injunction Order is in place, it is possible to go back to court and have the Injunction Order changed. If you and your partner have had a "No Contact" Injunction and you want to change it, requesting a "No Violent Contact" is an option. With a "No Violent Contact" Order, you and your partner may still have contact, but he/she is prohibited from being violent towards you. The law provides for you to have protection from battering even if you live together. Some judges may not be inclined to support a victim if she/he wants to drop an injunction all together, but if you opt for a "No Violent Contact" change and explain to the judge why you have reconciled, it helps the judge understand your circumstances better.

Criminal No Contact Orders

During first appearance during a criminal domestic violence case a defendant (batterer) can be ordered to have no contact with you under a No Contact Order. A batterer is not allowed to contact you under a criminal No Contact Order just as he/she is not allowed to contact you under a civil No Contact Order. Normally a criminal and civil No Contact Order are placed on the batterer by two different judges.

If a civil No Contact Order is dropped or modified, that does not at all change the conditions of the criminal No Contact Order. If you want to have a criminal No Contact Order modified to a No Violent Contact or if you want to drop a criminal No Contact Order completely, you must attend a class at the State's Attorney's Office, and make a request in writing to change the Injunction conditions (sworn statement) that will be notarized. If you would like to modify or drop a criminal No Contact Order, please contact Shelter House (850-863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873) to work with a victim advocate on creating a safety plan.

If you would like to report a violation of a criminal No Contact Order you can do so by contacting Pre-Trial Supervision, and completing a sworn statement of the violation.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Services That May Help:

Education, Housing, Employment, Healthcare, Finances, Childcare

Often a victim finds that she/he needs to access community resources in order to increase her/his safety, including, but not limited to: continuing one's education, finding a safe and affordable place to live, finding a job, affordable healthcare, childcare, and financial assistance. Many community resources exist for victims of domestic violence in each of these areas. Victim advocates can help you learn about, contact, and access local resources for each of these needs. Please contact your victim advocate or Shelter House (850-863-4777) if you would like more information.

If you have tried to access any community services on your own and have been refused their services or resources, you are strongly encouraged to contact Shelter House or a local victim advocate. Domestic violence victim advocates maintain continuous contact with these programs and can guide you in the re-application process.

Pets

Sometimes a person may want to leave a violent relationship for a short time, or permanently, but they do not have anywhere to keep their pet. If this is the case, usually it is not safe for the pet to be left at home with an abusive partner. If you think you may need to stay at Shelter House's Confidential Shelter, or if you are trying to arrange another safe place to stay, you can contact Shelter House (850-863-4777) for more information about places that will temporarily keep and feed your pet free of charge.

Family Visitation Center:

Safe Places for Family Visitation and Child Exchange

A Visitation Center is a place where children separated from one or both of their parents can spend quality time with their parent(s) in a secure, respectful, and pleasant environment. Monitored exchanges (you and your partner can exchange your children at the center) are also available to provide safety for you and your children.

If domestic violence has occurred, the Visitation Center may be a place where you and your partner can safely exchange your children. A history of domestic violence can place you in danger if your partner attempts to intimidate you, control you, or verbally or physically assault you during visitation or exchanging children for court-ordered parenting time. The Visitation Center offers you a safer setting where you do not have to interact with an abusive partner but you are still able to comply with court ordered visitation requirements.

During your court appearance, either you or your lawyer can request that the judge refer your family to the Judge Ben Gordon, Jr. Family Visitation Center (or one of the other two local Visitation Centers; see list below) for either supervised visits or monitored exchanges. If you desire supervised visitation for your children at the Judge Ben Gordon Visitation Center but it was not court-ordered in your injunction, you may request that the injunction be modified. To do this, go to the Clerk of Courts office and fill out a request for modification of the injunction. In that modification form you will need to request use of the Judge Ben Gordon Visitation Center and explain why you feel supervised visitation is best for you and your children. The Judge may grant this request, deny this request, or set the matter for a hearing to decide if this is appropriate.

The cost of service depends upon the referral source (if it was court ordered, etc.) and on your income (based on a sliding scale fee). The non custodial parent pays the fee for visitation center services.

Okaloosa and Walton County Visitation Centers

Shalimar:	The Judge Ben Gordon, Jr. Family Visitation Center	850-609-1850
Crestview:	Judge Keith Brace Family Visitation Center	850-689-0066
DeFuniak Springs:	Friends of the Family Visitation Center	850-951-0177

Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP): Counseling for Abusers

A Batterer's Intervention Program is a comprehensive program that focuses on batterers, by challenging their beliefs in order to hold them accountable for their behavior, provide alternatives for safer behaviors and promote their violence-free behavior towards their partner. The program usually lasts twenty nine weeks, and group sessions are usually held once a week.

The program is intended to provide a consistent community and state-wide model of intervention that will establish a system of monitoring to report compliance and non-compliance to the courts. Batterer's Intervention Programs can only be offered by a certified entity.

Batterers can enter BIP on their own accord, if they seek out batterer's services, are assessed, and deemed a person appropriate to participate in the program. Or, batterers may be court ordered to undergo an assessment to determine if they are an appropriate person to participate. Batterers may also be court ordered directly into BIP.

Although services for victims of domestic violence are free, Batterer's Intervention Programs are not. Contact your local BIP Program to find out prices. Please see the list of local BIP Programs below.

BIP vs. Anger Management

A Batterer's Intervention Program is not the same as an Anger Management Program. An Anger Management Program is a twelve week long educational course that is based on building participants' understanding of alternative behaviors to indiscriminate expressions of anger. This course does not have to be certified, and is not to be used as a substitute for a comprehensive twenty nine week Batterer's Intervention Program. It is important to understand that although an individual uses domestic violence to control his/her partner, he/she does not necessarily have problems with anger management. People who use domestic violence for control often manage their anger towards others well. They are often not violent with their boss, faith leaders, friends, or co-workers; usually they are only violent with their partner. When a person uses domestic violence to maintain power and control over his/her partner, a Batterer's Intervention Program that is set up to deal directly with individuals who use domestic violence may be more effective than an anger management program.

Couples or family counseling with an abusive partner may be dangerous and is not to be a substitute for a Batterer's Intervention Program. If one partner is using domestic violence to maintain power and control over his/her partner, couples' counseling is not a safe avenue to address that, since there is a fundamental imbalance of power between the couple. Batterer's Intervention may be a safer and more appropriate alternative. Because of this it is the policy of the BIP program to prohibit marriage counseling for a couple where domestic violence is present until after the batterer has completed the BIP program.

Batterer's Intervention Programs and Safety Planning

Many victims ask advocates and program providers if Batterer's Intervention Programs (BIP) are effective in reducing batterer's violent behavior. Although studies on BIP effectiveness vary, research shows that many components factor into the batterer's success in stopping his/her own violent behavior. The batterer is responsible for changing his/her own abusive behavior through his/her regular attendance, honest participation and commitment to change.

It is also important that victims know that although her/his partner may be in a BIP program, that does not mean that the violence will stop. Because of this, it is vital that victims whose batterer is participating in BIP work closely with a victim advocate to create a personalized safety plan. You can do this by calling your local domestic violence agency, Shelter House (850-863-4777/ 800-44-ABUSE/ 800-442-2873) and requesting to speak with a victim advocate.

A judge can order a batterer to undergo a BIP Assessment, so that professional program providers can assess the situation to see if BIP is an appropriate program for that individual, or a judge can order a batterer directly to BIP. A victim may request that the judge order a BIP assessment for the batterer. If a victim does this, again it is a good idea to work closely with a victim advocate to create a personalized safety plan. Batterers who are ordered to undergo a BIP assessment or attend BIP may become angry, resentful, and even violent towards his/her partner.

If a batterer enrolls in BIP the victim will be notified within 72 hours of her/his batterer's enrollment. Victims will also be notified when their batterer is terminated from or successfully completes the program.

Batterers Intervention Program Providers

Bridgeway Center Inc.	Fort Walton Beach	850-833-7500
	Crestview	850-689-7810
COPE Center	Defuniak Springs	850-892-8045
Family Advocacy, Hurlburt Field, Florida		850-881-5061
Pattison Professional Counseling		850-863-2873

Important Phone Numbers

Attorney General's Office	Tallahassee, FI	800-226-6667
Emergency 911		
Shelter House	24-Hour Hotline	800-44-ABUSE (22873) 850-863-4777
	Fort Walton Beach	850-243-1201
	Crestview	850-683-0845
	Defuniak Springs	850-892-5411
Bridgeway Center Inc.	Fort Walton Beach, 24-Hour Crisis Line	850-244-9191
	Crestview, 24-Hour Crisis Line	850-682-0101
	Victim Services	850-833-7400
Child Abuse Hotline		800-96-ABUSE (22873)
COPE Center	Defuniak Springs	850-892-8045
	Defuniak Springs Help Line	850-892-4357
	TDD	800-955-8771

COPE Center (Beachside Counseling)	Santa Rosa Beach 24-Hour Crisis Line	850-833-3870 850-892-4357
Eglin Air Force Family Advocacy Hurlburt Field Family Advocacy		850-883-8616 850-881-5061
Legal Services of NWFL		850-862-3279
State Attorney	Shalimar Crestview Defuniak Springs	850-651-7260 850-689-5620 850-892-8080

Important Websites

(You can access the Internet at your local public library).

Note: If you are accessing the internet, make sure it is from a secure location and your batterer cannot track your internet activities.

Shelter House, Inc.		www.shelterhousenwfl.org
An Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection		www.aardvarc.org
Bridgeway Center		www.bridgewaycenter.com
COPE Center		www.copecenter.org
Florida Clerk of Courts	www.flcourts.org/gen_public/family/forms_rules/index.shtml	
Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence		www.fcadv.org
Legal Services of Northwest Florida		www.lsnf.org
LGBTQ Resources	http://www.mkelgbt.org/awareness/index.asp	http://www.ru12.org/safespace.html
Men Stopping Violence		www.MenStoppingViolence.org
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence		www.ncadv.org
National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women		www.ncdbw.org
Teen Dating Violence		www.loveisrespect.org www.thatsnotcool.com

Final Note

Please know that there are many resources, organizations, and individuals who are ready and willing to support you in your situation. It is not anyone's job to judge you and your choices; you know your situation and its dangers better than anyone else. Instead our hope is that with support from a victim advocate, you are able to access all of the support resources you may need, and your (and your children's) safety is maximized in all situations. We are here to support you.

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