

Helping Others Get Help

from **Men's Work** by Paul Kivel

Getting help for ourselves and seeing why sometimes we don't get help when we need to can lead us to more effective strategies for intervening with other men who need help. All of us live with and know male friends, family members, co-workers and neighbors. What can we do when one of them is violent?

Intervention is never easy. In a society in which inter-personal violence is taken for granted, it is risky for us to get involved weren't already involved, as if we didn't already lead lives of fear because of the prevailing levels of violence. Next time it could be one of us who needs help.

Family intervention is most delicate. The privacy and sanctity of the family, the feeling that what they do among themselves is their business. How much is it "their business" when our neighborhoods are disrupted, [the] medical and legal systems are overloaded, people are killed and lives destroyed daily from the results of family violence?

Nevertheless, when interacting with violent men, we must remember that safety comes first! We must be safe from immediate danger and retaliation before we can ask someone to accept responsibility for his violence or offer support to him.

Confronting a man who is violent means letting him know clearly and directly that the violence is unacceptable and cannot continue. Let him hear that violence is illegal, dangerous, will not be allowed to continue. He may also need help seeing the costs to himself in lowered self-esteem, pain, despair, and the brutalization added to his own life and surroundings.

We can provide him with this information through one-to-one dialogue, group discussion, legal intervention, or public confrontation. Since confrontation is always risky, no one can judge how much someone else should say or do. But we become complicit with the violence if we don't take some steps to confront it. This can be done by police, friends, neighbors, and other family members. Effective confrontation decreases the level of violence. Our primary responsibility is to stop the immediate violence and to support the people attacked.

Support

Individual men who are violent need our support to make positive changes. Support should not be confused with collusion; the violent situation cannot be allowed to continue. Support must be conditional on the violence stopping.

To support a violent man we must:

- confront his violence;
- separate his violence from his worth as a person;
- help him understand that his violence comes from his hurt, pain and powerlessness;
- help him see that violence is dangerous, self-defeating, and ineffective in getting his needs met;
- make a commitment to caring for him over time, providing a compassionate and empathetic ear to his experiences of violence, hostility, anger and despair;
- recognize his training to be male and his unique place in the power hierarchies of our society, including those based on class, race, sexual orientation and cultural background;
- help him understand that violence is learned and an unnecessary behavior that can be changed;
- address that part of the man that does not want to be violent and does not want to hurt others;
- help him admit he has a problem;
- help him ask for help man to do.

Personal Clarity

In order to confront another man's violence and to support his changing, we must also have some clarity.

We need to:

- acknowledge, understand, and at least partially heal from our own past experiences of violence;
- feel confident enough to make ourselves be vulnerable to another man's violence;
- acknowledge our fear of further violence;
- acknowledge and understand our own gender-based training to be violent;
- recognize our anger at his violence colluding with him.

Nearly everyone in this society has been bullied and been the object of violence. Nearly everyone has bullied someone else. Acknowledge this commonality of experience with a violent man and use it to talk with him effectively.

Alternatives and Resources

We know that a violent man needs to:

- know change is possible and that he does have alternatives;

- know specifically what those alternatives are and where to find out about them resources are available;
- learn other ways to deal with anger;
- learn how to express other emotions, including pain, hurt, sadness and frustration;
- learn to get his needs met and to resolve conflicts without resorting to hitting, intimidation or abuse;
- get help in examining his gender training;
- get help in more deeply understanding his personal and family history;
- be shown the resources for dealing with other issues such as drug abuse, health problems and unemployment;
- know that we expect him to use these resources to eliminate his violence.

We don't have to be crusaders or self-righteous missionaries. We can make our presence felt by intervening in safe ways and completely respecting the people involved.

It becomes safer for all of us when we recognize men's violence is a community problem and support each other in dealing with it.

Exercise 16 Getting Help for Others

1. Do you know of any situations in your family or among your friends in which a man is beating, controlling, molesting or otherwise hurting someone else?
2. What is dangerous about this situation for the people involved?
3. How might it be dangerous for you to intervene?
4. Besides the danger, what reasons have you used for not getting more involved?
5. How could you caringly confront the person who is abusive?
6. What kind of support can you give the person being abused?
7. Who can you talk with to get support for intervening more strongly?
8. Do you know any men who have a problem with violence and refuse to get help?
9. How can you be a friend to them and support their stopping the violence?
10. What are three things you could do if you see a man hit a woman in public or a group of people attack another person?
11. Why would doing these things be scary or dangerous for you?
12. Why is it important for you to intervene?
13. How will you feel about yourself if you don't do anything?
14. What are some things you could say when you see a parent abusing his or her child?
15. What are some ways to interrupt harassment of women, gays, lesbians, bisexual people, or people of different ethnic groups?
16. What do you gain if our communities are safer for women?

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