Letter to Survivors

To those who have experienced abuse in their homes from someone who was supposed to be loving, kind and respectful:

You do not deserve to be mistreated. You deserve to be treated with dignity because God created all human beings with dignity (17:70) (1).

You may have been suffering in silence. You may not have found someone to respond to your pain in a way that feels helpful. You may have been blamed for bringing this abuse upon yourself. The only one to blame is the person who has caused the abuse.

We believe you. Living in a home where you don’t know when you might be insulted, ignored, pushed, hit, threatened or cursed could make anyone feel anxious, depressed, angry or hopeless. Many people who have experienced abuse may even start to lose faith in themselves, their relatives, their leaders and even God. Especially if you have tried to reach out for help and have been told to be patient, to pray more, to be a better Muslim, or to forgive the person who is abusing you. It’s even worse if you have been told you should not seek help or seek safety.

No one signs up for being abused. No matter what you may have ever done in your life, no one has the right to mistreat you, humiliate you or demean you.

We hope that this toolkit will be a step towards helping you move towards safety, first and foremost by recognizing that you do not deserve to be abused. There are many people around the country who are trained and who have experience working with people who have experienced abuse. These people may be domestic violence advocates, social workers, therapists, chaplains, imams, or other professionals. Please check the Directory of Domestic Violence Programs or contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline to get connected to someone who can help and support you.

Sincerely,
The Peaceful Families Project Team
For Survivors:
What is Domestic Violence
Healthy Relationships
Types of Abuse
Impact of Abuse
Impact on Children
Warning Signs of Domestic Violence
Domestic Violence and Islam
Domestic Violence Factsheet
Safety Planning
Intersectionality
Making Sense of Abuse in Your Relationship
Journey Toward Healing

For Communities:
Talking to Survivors
Supporting Survivors
Preventing DV in Our Communities
Survivor-Centered Practice

Resources:
Services for Survivors
Legal Resources
Additional Resources
Footnotes
WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

A pattern of abusive behaviors used by one person to gain and maintain power and control over another person in the household.

Domestic violence (DV) and Intimate partner violence (IPV) are not interchangeable.

Intimate partner violence is any form of physical and sexual violence caused by a current or former partner, regardless of whether the individuals are living together.

Domestic violence can encompass abuse by any member of the household, not just a partner.
Healthy Relationships for Muslim Families

Islamic teachings from the Quran and Hadith provide a model for healthy relationships and families in which the objective is a tranquil environment for all family members. Islamic teachings promote treating other people in general, and family members in particular, with kindness, justice, gentleness and respect.

Relationship Spectrum
Adapted from National Domestic Violence Hotline (2)
TYPES OF ABUSE

Different types of abuse are used to exert power and control over another individual

Common Types: Emotional Verbal Sexual Financial Religious/Spiritual Legal

Invisible Forms of Abuse:
- Isolation
- Withholding Affection
- Ignoring
- Monitoring and/or Restricting Behavior
IMPACT OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL
- Serious injury (bruises, sprains, fractures), miscarriage, and in severe cases death
- Chronic health problems due to the stress caused by abuse compromising the immune system
- High blood pressure
- Chronic fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Shortness of breath
- Vaginal bleeding or pelvic pain in cases of marital rape

MENTAL
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which includes symptoms of flashbacks, hypervigilance, numbness, avoidance, nightmares
- Low self esteem
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Insomnia
- Self-destructive or sabotaging thoughts or behaviors.

SPIRITUAL
- Questioning and doubting faith (Especially when the abuser is using religion as a control tactic)
- Feeling abandoned by God (For example, praying for the abuse to stop and it doesn’t)
- Feeling betrayed when religious leaders don’t hold perpetrators accountable and blame the victim
- Feeling unworthy
- Inability to trust
- Hopelessness
- Interpreting the abuse as punishment or as a sign of being a “bad” Muslim
Impact on Children

In families where one parent is abusing another, 50% of their children are also physically abused.

A child witnessed violence in 22% of intimate partner violence cases filed in state courts.

More than 15 million children in the US live in homes in which DV has happened at least once.

Children who are in households where DV takes place have the same symptoms as children who are abused themselves.

Externalized Impacts
- Aggression
- Lower social competences
- Lower verbal, cognitive and motor skills
- Restlessness
- Behavioral and academic difficulties
- Delays in development and regression
- Risky behaviors (substances/legal trouble)

Internalized Impacts
- Depression, anxiety and hyper-vigilance
- Fearful, withdrawn and inhibited behavior
- Lower self esteem
- Shame and feeling responsible for the abuse
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Greater risk for repeating the cycle as adults by entering abusive relationships or becoming abusive themselves
IMPACT ON CHILDREN BY AGE GROUP

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR BY PARENT TOWARDS OTHER PARENT

PRENATAL

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT, PREMATURE BIRTH, EXCESSIVE BLEEDING→ AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE PHYSICAL TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL STRESS ON THE MOTHER

INFANTS

INCONSOLABLE, IRRITABLE, BED WETTING, ATTACHMENT ISSUES** IMPORTANT AGE FOR ATTACHMENT**

SCHOOL AGE

HEIGHTENED SENSE OF THEIR OWN EMOTIONS AND THE EMOTIONS OF OTHERS. LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS DUE TO HEIGHTENED SENSES/STRESS RESPONSES

ADOLESCENTS

SUBSTANCE ABUSE, RISK TAKING, SELF DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR
### WARNING SIGNS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive or Jealous Behavior</th>
<th>Controlling Behavior</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using Force to Resolve Problems</td>
<td>Severe Mood Swings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing Rigid Ideas about Gender Roles</td>
<td>Minimizing Abusive Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing you from Seeing Friends/Family</td>
<td>Taking your Money or Refusing to Give Money for Expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly Criticizing or Demeaning your Parenting Skills</td>
<td>Threatening to Take Away your Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing you from working, going to school or doing activities you enjoy</td>
<td>Gaslighting: manipulating someone psychologically to question their own sanity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Domestic violence is a form of oppression that occurs in the household, and all forms of oppression are prohibited in Islam. Oppression (injustice and mistreatment of others) is clearly prohibited in many verses of the Qur'an and in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims are encouraged to do what they can to stop violence from occurring. This may look like speaking out against it, spreading information about resources, reporting abuse, or leaving an abusive situation.

“A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands others are safe”
-Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

“Help your brother or sister, whether they are an oppressor or the oppressed.”

“O Messenger of Allah, we help the oppressed, but how do we help an oppressor?”

“By stopping him or her from oppressing.”
(Bukhari & Muslim)

“Never beat Allah’s handmaidens (female believers)”
-Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

The status of Muslim women in Islam:

Men and women were created from a single soul (4:1, 49:13)

Men and women were both created to serve God (2:30; 51:56)

Husbands and wives are garments for one another (2:187)


**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ISLAM**

_Sabr (patience) in the face of calamities_ does not mean that a victim of abuse should put up with violence and not leave the abusive home/relationship. Patience and forgiveness have often been used to pressure women to remain in abusive relationships. Practicing patience in the face of calamities means patience in resistance and in seeking safety and well-being. “Patience does not mean accepting oppression.” (Imam Magid, Spiritual Counseling for Stress Management Webinar, April 15, 2020).

**What is Marital Rape?**

Marital rape is nonconsensual sexual intercourse between spouses. Any time a spouse is forced to have intercourse without their consent, it is considered rape. Marital rape is illegal and punishable by law in the United States. Forced intercourse violates many Islamic teachings, including the Qur’anic verse advising men to treat their wives with kindness (4:19). Sexual intimacy in Islam is described in the Qur’an using the metaphor of men and women as garments for one another (30:21). This metaphor illustrates the rahma (mercy) and mutual protection that spouses should provide to each other. It suggests not only physical protection, but also emotional care, protection, and intimacy.

For Further Analysis, see:

- “Debunking the Myth that Angels Curse the Woman Who Rejects Her Husband's Sexual Demands”
  - Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyer's for Human Rights (3)

- “Can your wife reject sexual intercourse in Islam?”
  - Shaykh Yasir Qadhi (4)
Miscoined as the "hitting verse" or the "wife beating verse," verse 4:34 outlines the responsibilities that a man has towards his wife, as well as the responsibilities of a woman towards her husband. Men are required to lead their families in the manner which is modeled by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by engaging in shura (mutual consultation), being gentle, respectful, kind, and just. In addition, men are required to support the family financially. Women are required to protect the privacy and boundaries of the home. Both are required to be mindful and conscious of God in their relationship with each other.

The verse provides a remedy for the very specific problem of nushuz of the wife (any behavior that threatens the integrity of the marriage). Verse 4:135 addresses the nushuz of the husband. The suggested remedy outlines a process intended to prevent the common abusive practices of pre-Islamic Arabia, and to bring about repair and reconciliation. The process begins with verbally addressing the serious behavior impacting the relationship, then if that does not work, behaviorally addressing it by sleeping separately, then finally if the problem persists, to use darb. This word has a wide range of interpretations (tapping, hitting, leaving), as well as a consensus that however it is interpreted, there can be no violation of other clear injunctions to avoid harm or injury to any other person. If these steps are unsuccessful in resolving the problem, and the spouses wish to remain married, the second part of the remedy is in the verse that follows (4:35), which suggests bringing a mediator to represent each partner to help bring about reconciliation if they both want that.

Regardless of the interpretation or translation of this verse, it is not conceivable that any verse in the Qur’an could intend to promote domestic violence when the whole framework of Islam is grounded in justice, and when Qur’anic verses and hadith specific to family relationships highlight mercy, compassion, and justice.
General American Population

- More than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. (4)
- Nearly half of all women and men in the United States have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime (48.4% and 48.8%, respectively). (4)

American Muslims

- 31% reported experiencing abuse within an intimate partner relationship. (5)
- 53% reported experiencing some form of DV by a family member during their lifetime. (5)
- 56% of women and 44% of men reported having experienced some type of abuse during their lifetime. (5)
- 66% of respondents knew someone who was a victim of physical abuse. (5)
SAFETY PLANNING

TELEPHONE NUMBERS I NEED TO KNOW:
National Domestic Violence Hotline:
800-799-SAFE (7233)
800-787-3224 (TTY)

- Change my phone number to avoid being tracked
- Change my door locks
- Try to stay with others
- Notify school, work, & other important contacts
- Contact a shelter or domestic violence services
  
If I have to meet the abuser, do it in public & have someone with me

Are you still in an abusive relationship?

- Yes
- No
  
  Use my judgment & intuition & give my partner what he/she wants temporarily to calm down & to protect myself
  
  Make a list of important numbers for help
  
  Printing$
  
  Call 911 if I am in danger
  
  Use a code with my children or my friends so they can call for help

Can you leave the house?

- Yes
- No
  
  What will I use to escape safely? (Doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, fire escapes?)
  
  What transportation am I using? Where will I keep the car keys, or the bus tickets or change? If walking, what route am I taking?
  
  Where will I go after leaving the house?
  
  What important documents do I need & where will I keep them?
  
  Open a bank account to increase my independence. How much money can I save?
  
  Pack a bag and hide it in an accessible place
  
  Think about how I can take my children with me safely
  
  Practice my escape plan

When I leave, I should take:

- Identification
  - (e.g. passport, driver’s license)
- Children’s birth certificate
- Social Security cards
- School and vaccination records
- Money, checkbook, ATM cards, credit cards
- Keys
  - for the house, car, office
- Car registration
- Medications
- Copy of protection order
- Divorce papers
- Welfare identification, work permits, green cards
- Medical records
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage records
- Insurance papers
- Address book
- Pictures, jewelry
- Items of sentimental value
  - (e.g. children’s favorite toys, blankets)

Depending on your race, gender, ability, class, language, and immigration status, consider if contacting law enforcement may threaten your safety. If possible, identify non-law enforcement service providers such as local organizations, mosques, networks of trusted friends and neighbors, or other groups working towards transformative justice solutions.
You are a complex human being. Your situation is unique and all of your identities influence how you experience domestic violence and how you seek help. Someone that has faced years of oppression from the government may be reluctant to go to institutions for assistance, while others with good experiences with institutions will be more comfortable calling the police and seeking services. Intersecting identities shape our experience of domestic violence, how we make sense of it, and what we decide to do with it. There isn't only one right way to address domestic violence, and there isn't only one right solution. Your decisions will depend on all these different factors and will be the right decision for you.
Living in an abusive relationship can be confusing, terrifying and even dangerous. It can be really hard to make sense of why this would happen to you. You may wonder what you have ever done to deserve this?

You may have physical scars, bruises, or sustained broken bones or concussions. You may have emotional scars from all the insults and criticisms. You may have experienced a great deal of anxiety or fear from threats to harm you and from aggressive action taken against you.

In trying to make sense of what is happening to you, you may have questioned your own reality and started to wonder if you are overreacting, exaggerating, or even imagining it. You may even have questioned why God has allowed it to happen, or didn’t intervene to make it stop. These questions are very normal when someone is going through abnormal situations like abuse.

God does not accept that a human being oppresses another human being. In fact, God has prohibited oppression and injustice (zulm) for Himself and for His servants (5). Prophet Muhammad reminded the believers that we each have a responsibility to end oppression and injustice by helping the oppressed (the victim of abuse) and stopping the oppressor (perpetrator of abuse) (6).
Some people may think that God is testing you, as He promises to test all believers. If you believe this is a test from God, it is likely that even in the midst of this test, He is also sending you someone or something to help you. The Qur’an says that “verily, with hardship comes ease. Verily with hardship comes ease” (94: 5–6).

Remember that any test is not an endurance test to see how much abuse you can take. Rather, it is a test for you to discover your internal strengths and to uncover the ways in which God is with you. Life’s challenges may be a way for you to remind yourself that even the best of creation have been tested, as we are reminded by reading the stories of the prophets and messengers, the most pious and righteous people throughout history.

Yes, it’s true. Patience (sabr) and forgiveness are qualities of the believers. And it’s also true that you do not have to remain in the abusive relationship in order to patiently seek God’s guidance, and that you can take your time to forgive the person who has abused you once you are safe and have received some measure of justice.

Healing from the scars of domestic violence is possible and that attaining justice for the harm one experienced is guaranteed by Allah, if not in this world then in the hereafter.
JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING

Abuse can leave many physical, emotional and spiritual scars. It is possible to heal and move from surviving to thriving. Your journey toward healing begins the moment you recognize you are being abused and take steps towards seeking safety.

Seek safety and stability
Work with a domestic violence advocate

Remember that healing is a process
Give yourself time to recover and heal

Be kind to yourself
Talk to yourself as you would talk to a best friend

Identify & use your support systems
Friends, family, support groups

Consider getting professional counseling to facilitate your healing

Take time to get to know yourself again
What brings you joy?
What brings you peace?
What are your strengths?
What are your successes?
What feels nurturing to you?

Take care of your body
Exercise
Practice yoga & mindfulness
Walk outdoors
Eat foods that counter stress

Resources:
Healing the Trauma of Domestic Violence: A Workbook for Women
The Power to Break Free Workbook: For Victims & Survivors of Domestic Violence
Recover and Rebuild Domestic Violence Workbook: Moving On from Partner Abuse
## WHAT NOT TO SAY:

1. **Why don’t you leave the abusive home?**
   Leaving is a complicated and difficult choice for various reasons. Be supportive regardless.

2. **Why did you wait so long to leave?**
   The decision to leave an abusive home isn’t an easy one.

3. **What did you do to provoke the abuse?**
   Abuse is the responsibility of the abuser only.

4. **Is it abuse if he didn’t hit you?**
   Abuse is not only physical. It is also psychological, emotional, verbal, spiritual etc.

5. **Why is it so hard for you to report an assault?**
   Someone experiencing abuse might not know that this is abuse. They could also be scared to talk about it. Reporting can be difficult and complicated.

6. **Why would you let someone treat you this way?**
   Never blame someone being abused for the pain they are going through.

7. **There are two sides of every story.**
   No matter what the other side of the story is, no one deserves to be abused.

8. **You need to move on.**
   Healing is a journey. It can take a lifetime for someone to overcome their pain.

## WHAT TO SAY:

1. **You didn’t deserve what happened to you.** There is no excuse for abuse.

2. **I’m glad you’re safe now that you’re out of that situation.**

3. **I believe you. I’m sorry this happened to you. I appreciate you trusting me.**

4. **You are not alone. I care about you and am here to listen or help in any way I can.**

5. **Whatever reaction you are having is normal. You are not going crazy.**

6. **It is not your fault. You didn’t do anything to deserve this.**

7. **You are not responsible for your partner’s violence.**

8. **I’m here to listen and not judge. What can I do to support you?**
Encourage them to participate in activities that they enjoy with friends and family. Survivors can often feel isolated, so giving them a supportive community can go a long way.

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Be supportive and listen, while validating their experiences.

Be nonjudgmental. Respect their decisions and support them no matter what their decision may be. Remember, you cannot rescue someone!

Reassure them that the abuse is never the fault of the person being abused.

Encourage them to participate in activities that they enjoy with friends and family. Survivors can often feel isolated, so giving them a supportive community can go a long way.

Be compassionate and empathetic.

Connect them to a DV organization for them to develop a safety plan as soon as possible.
PREVENTING DV IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Every person can make a difference in the fight against domestic violence.

_Hadith: Whoever sees an evil action should change it with their hand; and if they are not able to do so, then with their tongue; and if they are not able to do so, then with their heart—and that is the weakest of faith._ (Muslim)

_Do something (this will depend on your role and the situation):_

- Learn about healthy relationships
- Learn about the red flags of abusive relationships
- Identify local resources
- Share what you have learned
- Stop abuse from occurring when you are able to do so safely
- Call 911 when someone is in danger
- Believe the victim’s story
- Hold the person who has behaved abusively accountable

_Say something:_

- Speak out against abusive behavior
- Talk about healthy relationships
- Say NO when someone is mistreating you or someone else
- Pray for people who have been abused

_Feel something (heart):_

- Know in your heart that abuse is wrong
- Feel remorse if you have abused someone
- Feel compassion for those who have been abused
Organizations and service providers working with survivors of domestic violence should be committed to survivor-centered practice. The role of service providers is to target the threatening outcomes that arise from domestic violence (DV). Providing assistance to survivors in order to minimize the harmful consequences of DV and prevent further trauma requires an understanding of the consequences of DV. When helping a survivor, service providers must take survivors' physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual needs into account.

Survivor-centered practice encompasses being respectful of the survivor’s wishes and rights, making their safety your number one priority, keeping information confidential and providing non-discriminatory and non-judgmental support to anyone who needs it. It is a service provider’s job to listen and provide accurate information on services and let the survivor make their own choices, not pressure them or make decisions for them.
Survivors of domestic violence may need many different types of services to assist them in their healing journey. The rest of this toolkit will focus on resources and services that may be useful for them in this journey.

**TYPES OF SERVICES**

- **HOUSING**
- **TRANSPORTATION**
- **FINANCIAL**
- **IMMIGRATION**
- **LEGAL**
- **MENTAL HEALTH**
- **JOB TRAINING**
- **LANGUAGE**
- **CHILD CARE**
LEGAL RESOURCES

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
- National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence http://www.ncdsv.org/
- National Domestic Violence Hotline https://www.thehotline.org/
- Legal Aid Societies (local chapters)
- National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights www.nnirr.org
- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence www.nrcdv.org and www.vawnet.org

PUBLICATIONS
  https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/pfp-publications.html
- *A Legal Guide to Marriage and Divorce for the American Muslim Woman* by Marwa Zeini. In *Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities* (pp. 203-219)
  https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/pfp-publications.html
- *The Divorce Support Toolkit* https://www.thefyi.org/toolkits/
- *Relationships & Safety: Getting a Restraining Order*

INFORMATION & RESOURCES
- Peaceful Families Project DV and Law Panel with Imam Mohamed Magid and Aisha Rahman: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDMUVtIrN4U
- KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights https://karamah.org
- Battered Women’s Justice Project www.bwjp.org
- Legal Momentum www.legalmomentum.org
- Womenslaw.org www.womenslaw.org
- Legal Glossaries
Can an abusive partner really change?

Are you hurting your partner?


Domestic Violence Programs for Muslim Communities: Services, Advocacy and Training Directory
(https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvdirectory.html)


Abuse in the community:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oU1jtaUJYsLife

After abuse:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unTgbzDEhCQ

Gender roles in the community:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRdi65-asIg
“Indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favored them far above most of Our creation.”


4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDaYOIVaNhU


7. “Allah Almighty said: O my servants, I have forbidden injustice for myself and I have forbidden it among you, so do not oppress one another…” Narrated in Sahih Muslim, #2577. https://abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2011/02/05/allah-has-forbidden-oppression/

8. Narrated in Sahih Bukhari & Muslim: https://abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2011/03/14/support-wrongdoers-stop-them/
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