



Jeb Bush  
Governor

M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D.  
Secretary, Department of Health

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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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Monday, October 02, 2006

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Hands are for holding, not hitting*  
**October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month**

**Domestic violence is an epidemic that has an effect on everyone.** It is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to gain power and control over an intimate partner, and it often leads to the threat or use of violence.

Domestic abuse is not a disagreement, a marital spat or an anger management problem. It can occur in long-term or short-term relationships. Domestic abuse affects people of all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels. Domestic abuse takes many forms. Abuse is any controlling, hurtful act, word or gesture that injures another's body or emotions.

Not all domestic violence is physical. Here are examples of abusive behaviors that you may recognize in your own intimate relationship or in a friend's intimate relationship.

**Verbal Abuse** – Partner says things to shame, ridicule or insult you (or your friend), such as:

- You're stupid, fat, ugly, etc.
- You'll never get a job.
- You're an unfit parent.
- You don't deserve anything.
- Who would want you?

**Emotional/Psychological/Mental Abuse** – Partner does any of the following:

- Accuses you of having affairs
- Keeps you from family and friends
- Confuses you with promises and lies
- Takes your keys or damage your car
- Takes or destroys important papers

**Abuse of the Family Pet** – Does your partner alarm you or make you feel uncomfortable by mistreating your pet?

- Doesn't allow the pet to receive care and food
- Intentionally hits, kicks or throws the pet
- Injures pet as a threat to you or your children
- Financial Abuse - Does your partner control your ability to access money?
- Forbids you to work
- Forbids you to have money unless it is for a specific purchase
- Requires that you give up your paycheck

**(MORE)**

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**Sexual Abuse** - Does your partner do the following...?

- Forces you to have sex
- Forces you into unwanted sexual practices
- Criticizes your sexual performance
- Forces you to have sex with others
- Withholds sex and affection as a way to manipulate your behavior

**Ten Things Families and Friends Can Do:**

1. Believe her.\* Most battered women don't lie or exaggerate their abuse.
2. Recognize that emotional abuse is truly abuse.
3. Open ears; shut mouth. You can't be listening when you are talking.
4. Respect her decisions; don't judge her. Don't give advice; giving advice tends to take away her power.
5. Ask open-ended questions. Ask her to clarify what you don't understand. Try to understand not just the words she speaks, but what she is attempting to convey to you – the meaning between the lines.
6. Be a mirror. Reflect her statements back to her. This lets her know you are really listening and trying to understand her.
7. Speak only for yourself, not for her. Express only your feelings and observations, not your beliefs.
8. Support without over-controlling. Control yourself, not her.
9. Be patient. Establishing trust can't be forced.
10. If she lives in South Pinellas County, give her CASA's phone number, 727-895-4912. In North Pinellas, she can call The Haven at 442-4128. Outside Pinellas, call 800-799-SAFE (7233).

From: *To Be and Anchor in the Storm, A Guide for Families and Friends of Abused Women* by Susan Brewster.

\*Note: Female gender is used above because domestic abuse is predominately waged against women. However, domestic abuse affects people of all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels

**Take any fear seriously, and never put yourself in danger. If you witness abuse, call 911 immediately.**

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity. [www.PinellasHealth.com](http://www.PinellasHealth.com)*