

# Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

1821 University Avenue West  
Suite 5-112  
St. Paul, MN 55104

Voice: (651) 646-6177  
Fax: (651) 646-1527  
Email: mcbw@mcbw.org

## Characteristics of Men Who Batter Women

There are some issues to keep in mind as you work with physically abusive men.

### **This is a highly chronic group of offenders.**

You should expect high levels of recidivism in this group. We expect that 75% of men who are on supervision will assault their partners, violate protection orders, or otherwise violate terms of supervision. Also, with such a chronic problem, workers should not expect quick cures. It takes years to change deeply-rooted behaviors. Although many men can stop being violent fairly quickly while they are in a program, lasting change takes a long time.

### **Unlike in random violence, victims have ongoing relationships with offenders.**

When an unknown assailant is arrested, victims have no problems with prosecution. This is very different in domestic violence where the victim may still love and feel loyalty toward the offender. He may be a good father, the only source of support for the family, etc.

### **Offenders are likely to have continuing access to their victims.**

The offender frequently knows where the victim works, where she and her children live, and he has access to the victim when visiting children. There are multiple opportunities for intimidation, threats, and psychological pressure. It is very important to monitor the offender very closely and limit access to his partner.

### **A large number of offenders are alcohol and/or drug abusers.**

Although intoxication due to alcohol or drug use does not cause violence, offenders are prone to becoming more severely violent and more frequently violent when using. It is important to establish sobriety immediately; alcohol or drug abuse treatment should be concurrent with participation in a batterer's program.

### **Many offenders have criminal records, but many do not.**

In customary criminal justice practice, perpetrators with more extensive criminal records receive more intensive and intrusive monitoring; yet many of the most harmful and lethal domestic violence offenders have no criminal records. We advise workers to examine closely the history of violence in the relationship and to be sensitive to threats and other behaviors that suggest heightened dangerousness of the offender.

### **Men who batter are convinced they are victims.**

Although most convicted perpetrators of crime feel they are victims, batterers are particularly insistent about their "victimization." Historically, men who battered were protected by traditions of privacy and the sanctity of marriage and the family; to prosecute a man who abused his partner constituted an invasion of privacy and an assault on the family.

Social values have changed and we are now in the process of creating and enforcing a new taboo about behavior in intimate relationships. Nevertheless, abusive men share a sense of intrusion into their private business and that they have had something taken away from them.

### **Many men who batter are persuasive and logical.**

People often expect offenders to be inarticulate and unreasonable. Instead, the abuser often is a very reasonable, persuasive character who wants someone to understand him and take him at face value. It is always important to go back to police reports, to read court document such as medical reports, and to talk to his victims separately.

*Adapted from a paper by Fernando Mederos, Common Purpose, P.O. Box 88, Jamaica Plain, MA*

# Talking to Men Who Batter Women

## **Offenders will try to “divide and conquer;” they will run a disinformation campaign.**

Men who batter are expert at finding divisions between people and exploiting them. They also tell different versions of the facts to different people. Make sure you (and all the staff) are consistent about the rules. It is important to be in constant communication with the batterer’s program, the offender’s partner, and the victim’s advocate.

## **Expect the offender to continue denying his behavior and blaming his partner.**

Most offenders take months or longer to admit responsibility for their behavior. Instead, many spend much energy trying to enlist you as an ally.

## **Many offenders attempt to get those working with them to back off by being constantly angry and challenging.**

Many men come across as justifiably angry. They tell you their partners are crazy, they launch into long accusatory tirades about them, giving example after example of the wrongs they have committed. Faced with constant “righteous” anger, you may find yourself shifting the discussion toward less volatile ground and listening out of polite sympathy. We advise you structure conversations carefully and to sharply limit complaints about victims. If he manages to shift the focus of the discussion onto her behavior, the offender has succeeded.

## **Other offenders attempt to get those working with them to back off by being super-placating.**

This offender gives the impression of being in complete control. He wants to do everything possible to “clear up this misunderstanding;” he may even suggest he seek help with his partner. If you take calm denials at face value, then you assume the role of judge, requiring that the victim prove she has been abused—a highly dangerous undertaking for battered women. Remember that many abusive men are reasonable and charming with everyone except their partners. Being logical and calm with you doesn’t establish innocence.

## **Intimidating offenders will try to wear you down; super-placating offenders will try to enlist you as an ally; BOTH will try to get you to do as little monitoring as possible.**

This will give the offender room to pressure his partner, ease his way back into the house, convince her that the Court is not serious, etc. We advise you to make decisions about intrusiveness and frequency of monitoring based on your assessment of his dangerousness (derived from information from his partner, police reports, the criminal record, etc.).

Offenders may try to draw you into arguments about their blame.

We recommend that workers not engage in such arguments. If there are legitimate questions about the offender’s abusiveness, the women’s advocate can help with an evaluation.

Do not tell the man anything the woman has told you unless you are completely sure it will not endanger her. Question each person separately; do not share information that may endanger the victim. Even if she gives you permission to share what she has told you, make your own assessment about safety.

State rules in an impersonal fashion; focus on options and consequences.

Men who batter often love arguments and struggles for dominance. You can say, “I can’t argue with you about your supervision or about being sent to a batterer’s program. If you do not go, I will have to report it and I can’t change that.”