

Your Legal Corner: Domestic Violence **Posted by permission of Victoria M. Dalton, Esq.**

Human beings will not thrive when isolated from others. This is the meaning behind the quotation from John Donne (1572-1631), "No man is an island."

In a domestic violence relationship, isolation coupled with fear is a key component used to achieve and maintain control over another. Learning where to get help and how to protect yourself and your loved ones while in a domestic violence relationship is the first step toward safety.

There are two services to review for help in non-emergency situations, SERV and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs website. SERV is the state designated agency for Gloucester and Cumberland Counties. SERV, through profound advocacy and support, will connect the victim with the community. This bridging process ensures that the victim will not stand alone. Rather, he or she will have the benefit of all applicable resources available within the community. SERV can be reached through the 24hour toll free hotline **856-295-SERV (7378)**.

On the N.J. Department of Community Affairs Web page you will be able to view all of the domestic violence programs currently available in each county. It also lists emergency housing. This is important because if you reside in Gloucester County and are involved in a dangerous domestic violence situation, you may wish to initially seek shelter in another county. Obviously there are many difficult choices to make in deciding to leave. Still, when seeking the answer, let safety be your guide.

Protections: The most dangerous time in a domestic violence relationship is when a victim actually does choose to leave. It is important to know there are practical and legal protections offered. I have listed some practical ideas below. Legal protections will be addressed next week.

Safety Plan: Develop a safety plan for you and your children. Note that the plan will vary depending on whether you are in the relationship or have recently left. If you are still in the relationship, consider the following until you leave:

- Have a code word to signal other household members when it is time to leave and call 911. Your first line of protection should always be the police, not a hotline.
- Pack an escape bag and keep it at a friend's house. Include cash, credit card numbers, a copy of your driver's license, any court papers, birth certificates, passports, medicines, medical records, some canned goods, an extra copy of all needed phone numbers, clothes and any special toys for the children.
- Use a computer that your abuser does not have direct or even remote access to. A public library, community center, friend's house or Internet café may be safer than your home. The goal is to eliminate the chances that your Internet use can be traced.

Additionally, you need to know that victims do not cause domestic violence. Drugs, stress, unemployment or a bad relationship are not the causes of domestic violence. In fact, most domestic violence is caused by learning and repeated reinforcement rather than biology or genetics. It is repeated often because there are minimal consequences and it is difficult to prove in a court of law, unless there are visible signs of abuse. Again, if you are in a domestic violence relationship or know someone who is, think of safety as your guide.

Next week, YLC will provide part two, Domestic Violence Legal Procedure. Until next time, God bless, keep smiling and remember who is in Your Legal Corner. *Victoria M. Dalton is a dedicated Family/Elder Attorney, with the Law Firm of Hoffman DiMuzio. To contact her, call 856-845-8243 or 856-863-8776, or email her at vdalton@hdhlaw.com. To view other YLC articles see YLCdirection.com or on TV, MWF, 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Comcast Channel 5. Your Legal Corner was created by Victoria M. Dalton, Esq. to provide educational information regarding the law. The content of Your Legal Corner is not and will not replace legal advice.*