



**rape and abuse
crisis center**

advocacy. counseling. education.

Emotional Reality of Abused Women

Fear

Abused women live with many fears; fear of the abuser, fear of physical harm or injury, and/or fear that she has caused the problem. When a woman decides to leave the abusive situation, her fears only increase; fear that no one will believe her, fear of economic hardship, fear of the criminal justice system or social services, fear of reprisal by the abuser against her, her children, or her friends and loved ones. These fears are based on reality and should **not** be dismissed.

Shame

Our culture has put the responsibility for a successful and happy relationship on the shoulders of women. Most women who are being abused by their partner mistakenly begin to believe they are at fault for the abuser's behavior. Feeling responsible for the abuse and knowing their relationship does not meet the societal ideal of happiness, causes the majority of abused women to feel a great deal of shame.

GUILT

Most battered women believe they have made poor choices or have behaved inappropriately at times. They sometimes feel they should stay with their abusive partner as "penance for their own sins."

ISOLATION

Because of her feelings of shame, fear, and embarrassment, and because her abusive partner has often disrupted her relationships with family members and friends, most abused women have told no one about their situation. As a result, they usually feel very alone.

HELPLESS

Women in abusive relationships have usually done everything they can think of to change the behavior of the abuser. When nothing works to stop the abuse, they begin to feel powerless and lose confidence in their ability to make the relationship work.

EMBARRASSMENT

Most abused women are embarrassed about having been abused. They feel embarrassed for having put up with the abusive behavior, for experiencing fear, for having waited so long for their partner to change, and for doubting their own ability to be strong and self-supporting. Feeling too embarrassed to talk about their experiences becomes a real barrier to many women wanting to leave abusive relationships.

24-hour Crisis Line (701)293-7273

www.raccfm.com

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/Emotional Reality of Abused Women

ANXIETY

No matter how uncomfortable her situation, most abused women experience anxiety when they think about leaving the familiar relationship.

ANGER

Being abused generates anger in most people. Abused women often experience anger at the abuser for his treatment of her, at themselves for not being able to stop the abuse, at society for upholding a traditional family stereotype which teaches men are "in charge," and at family and friends for not recognizing the problem. Most women in abusive situations are not able to express their anger directly. In such instances, the anger may be disguised as depression or physical illness.

HOPE

Many abused women hold out hope that the abuser will change, that each abusive incident will be the last, and that the man she thought she married will return. This keeps women from leaving abusive relationships.

INSANITY

Experiencing all of the above emotions at once is enough to cause most people to feel crazy. Remembering that there were good times and having her reality dismissed by a partner who insists that everything would be okay if she could "just get it together" creates concern for her own sanity in the majority of abused women.