

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES, ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Why does he or she stay?

Most men and women who have not experienced abuse by an intimate partner often proclaim that if their partner ever abused them they would not put up with it and they would make the choice to end the relationship and leave. Furthermore, many of these same people will express confusion and even frustration as to why others in abusive situations don't just leave. A common question we hear from friends and family members of victims of domestic violence is "Why doesn't he/she leave? Why do they stay?"

What we need to do, to enact revolutionary change in our community and help cure the epidemic of violence is to change the question we're asking. We need to change the way we think and speak about the subject of domestic violence.

Asking why an individual stays with an abuser places the burden of guilt and responsibility for the abuse on the victim rather than where it belongs, on the abuser. The question should not be why they stay, but rather why does someone who claims to love and care for their partner hurt them physically and/or emotionally.

It is understandable to feel frustration when it appears that someone you care about stays in a situation that harms them. Reframe that frustration to why this treatment occurs. We all need to take this frustration and change our perspective on the situation and ask the right questions.

Rather than asking why they stay and seemingly submit to the abuse or why they continue to go back, the best option is to be there for that individual, even if from a distance. Telling someone you care about them and you are concerned is the best way to help a victim get to the point where they are ready to leave. Statistics indicate it takes a victim an average of seven times leaving their abuser before they leave for good.

For someone experiencing abuse from their partner, it is never as easy as just leaving when the abuse starts. It is a cycle that grows overtime, often without the victim even realizing it is occurring. As the abuse increases in frequency, severity and type – it tends to become normalized in the traumatized mind of those upon which it is inflicted. When the episodes of abuse are combined with periods of "honeymoon" calmness, the wrongness of the situation is not clear and apparent to the victim.

Furthermore, the questions we need to ask ourselves are "how can I help?", "how can I educate myself on domestic violence?", and "what can I do to change our culture?" When we start to be there as a support system for survivors and as educators spreading awareness around the issue we can help break the cycle and end domestic violence. Changing our perspectives and asking the right questions is a great place to start.

Women's and Children's Alliance http://www.wcaboise.org/changing-perspectives-asking-the-right-questions/?utm_source=September%202015%20Newsletter&utm_campaign=September%20Newsletter&utm_medium=email