

Would you buy a \$100 raffle ticket if there was a 1 in 4 chance you'd win? Would you travel to a country where 1 in 4 tourists were abducted? Would you change your lifestyle if your doctor told you there was a 1 in 4 chance you'd contract cancer if you didn't? In these examples, 1 in 4 seems like significant odds. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), women in the U.S. face a 1 in 4 chance they will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Men also experience domestic violence, but with less frequency, with 1 in 7 men experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime.

These statistics from the CDC should be startling and unsettling. To put this in perspective, in any given year, the average Minnesotan has a 1 in 389 chance of being the victim of violent crime and a 1 in 62 chance of being the victim of a property crime. Domestic violence is far too common an issue in our society, including here in Benton County. Domestic violence calls have consistently been one of the top five most reported crimes to our office. Domestic violence happens in your county, your city or township, your neighborhood, and perhaps even your family.

The solution to our domestic violence problem involves all of us. We, as a society and as individuals, need to be clear in communicating that domestic violence is unacceptable. No excuses, no rationalizing, no looking the other way. Domestic violence cannot be tolerated and must be addressed wherever it happens.

On an individual level, victims must be supported and encouraged to seek help. Domestic violence in a relationship creates complex dynamics that victims must navigate to remain safe. Often that means doing things that, from an outside perspective, are frustrating to watch and appear counterproductive. A victim may return to their abuser over and over, to the frustration of those trying to help end the cycle. Many times, the offender has carefully constructed walls and barriers to keep the victim from breaking free. It may take time and repeated efforts to help a victim see a clear and safe path for them or their children to break free of the abusive relationship. Advocacy groups, like Violence Free Minnesota (<https://vfmn.org>) or Anna Marie's Alliance (<https://annamaries.org>), provide valuable resources to victims seeking a better life. Both of these organizations welcome personal involvement from those hoping to make a difference in the way of financial support or volunteered time.

Help exists for partners who want to stop perpetrating abuse in a relationship. Locally, Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinic (<https://www.ccstcloud.org/>) and Effective Living Center (<https://www.effectivelivingcenter.com/>) offer programs to help people develop better relationships and end the cycle of violence.

Law enforcement and the courts have a place in aiding victims and bringing about change to a violent relationship. All law enforcement agencies in Central Minnesota have policies that require an arrest be made in cases where there is evidence of domestic violence. Often these arrests are the first steps toward change in a violent relationship. Law enforcement agencies also take active steps to connect victims with advocacy programs, sometimes acting as that important first link to

services. Courts make use of tools like no contact orders to help assure the safety of victims and mandated treatment programs for perpetrators to help them create more peaceful relationships in their lives. Access to these tools begins with a call to law enforcement.

Change is difficult, but our status quo is unacceptable when it comes to domestic violence. Be part of the change. Stand against all forms of domestic violence. Be a steady and consistent advocate for victims. Help perpetrators see a better option. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.