

## Family Harmony

In the United States, there are very strict laws regarding family disputes which can cause children to be removed from the home, spouses to be put in jail, or deportation, even if the victims refuses to testify.

**Child Abuse:** Child abuse is defined as the physical injury of a child by any parent, custodian, household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is significantly harmed or at risk of being significantly harmed; or sexual abuse of a child whether physical injuries are sustained or not.



Sexual abuse includes any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child, and includes: fondling (unwanted touching), incest, rape, or sexual offense in any degree, sodomy, and unnatural or perverted sexual practices.

**Child Neglect:** is defined as the failure to give proper care and attention to a child including leaving a child unattended, by the child's parents, guardian, or custodian, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is significantly harmed or placed at risk of significant harm.

**Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence or family violence is the abuse of power or control. It is behavior used by one person to control another through force or threats. A batterer makes a choice to strike, hit, kick, punch or threaten the victim. Domestic violence includes physical and sexual attacks and threats. These violent acts are criminal and the batterer can be prosecuted for committing them. The acts are a means of controlling the victim's thoughts, feelings and behavior. The violence does not lessen over time. The threats and/or beatings generally happen more often with time, last longer and cause greater physical injuries.

Emotional abuse and insulting words are almost always part of the abuse pattern, but are not considered criminal acts. The wounds from these injuries, however, may be more difficult to heal. Domestic violence is not caused by or provoked by the actions or inaction's of the victim. Domestic violence is not directly caused by alcohol or drug abuse, depression, lack of money, lack of job, mental illness or abuse as a child. However, existing problems often create additional stress in a relationship and may increase the risk of violence. Many abusers blame the victim or other things for their violent acts and do not take responsibility for the abusive behavior. There is never an excuse for violence.

If you are a victim of domestic abuse, you can find help through the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at **1-800-799-7233**. Help is available in multiple languages.

The Violence Against Women Act allows abused spouses and children of U.S. citizens and permanent residents to "self-petition," or file their own petition to become a permanent resident.

**Immigration Consequences:** There are serious immigration consequences (including deportation) for people who commit acts of child abuse, child neglect and domestic violence. If you or someone you know is involved in abusing a family member, you can get help and stop the violence. If you think you are about to hurt someone, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-7233**. There are support programs that can help you through individual and group counseling.