

## What is Controlling and Abusive Behavior?

By Willow Wheelock, Coordinator of Children and Youth Services

Domestic violence crosses all cultural and socio-economic boundaries. In every community, some of our sisters, coworkers, friends, and neighbors experience the abusive and controlling behaviors of their partners. Children who live in homes where one parent or parent figure is abusive are also affected, even if they never see an episode of violence. Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or seriously neglected at a rate 1500% higher than the national average in the general population. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse

and neglect fatalities in this country. Also, girls living in homes where their mothers experience abuse are 6.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted by their fathers/father figures than are girls from non-violent homes. Children also suffer from many emotional, physical and psychosomatic symptoms when living with violence perpetrated on their mothers. Domestic violence touches all of us, and it affects our community. No one should feel alone. Resources and support are available for those who experience domestic violence. Below are a few guiding questions that can help determine if you or someone you care about is experiencing domestic violence.

- Do you feel nervous or fearful in your relationship?
- Are you afraid to say No to sex?
- Are you criticized or humiliated in front of other people?
- Does your partner check up on you or question you about what you do when not with him/her?

- Are you made to feel like you are wrong, stupid, crazy, or inadequate?
- Are you told what to wear, or how to do your hair?
- Has your partner taken your car keys or controlled your money?
- Have you been subjected to reckless driving?

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, you could be with an abusive partner, or with a partner who may become abusive. Remember, you don't deserve to be abused, no matter what. For confidential support, assistance and information call the statewide domestic violence hotline 1-800-228-7395, or in Addison County and Rochester, call 388-4205/1-800-388-4205. Anonymous calls accepted. Remember, the first call may be the hardest, but everyone deserves to live life free of fear and control.

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## New Hope For Survivors of Violence Seeking Asylum

By Foresta Castañeda, Outreach Advocate

In a recent victory for battered women immigrants and anti-violence advocates, the Obama administration has recently reversed an earlier decision by the Bush administration to allow women who have experienced severe domestic and sexual violence to be eligible to seek asylum in the United States.

A person may petition for political asylum in the United States if they have already fled from their home country and are unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. It is a lengthy legal process that if granted allows the petitioner to live and work in the United States. Once a person has been granted political asylum they are then eligible to apply

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## New Hope For Survivors of Violence Seeking Asylum *(continued)*

for permanent resident status one year after asylum is granted. While similar, refugee status is distinct from asylum status because a person is granted permission to enter the U.S. as a refugee before leaving their home countries. Typically, the United States will authorize large groups of people as refugees based on human rights violations findings by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. While Asylum seekers must meet the definition of a refugee, it is their responsibility to petition individually and to provide specific proof to substantiate their claim of persecution.

Under the new policy, in addition to the above criteria, women experiencing violence must show that they are treated as subordinates or property by their abuser; show evidence that domestic violence is widely tolerated in their country; and show that they could not find protection from local agencies or elsewhere in their home country.

Whether or not immigrant victims of violence should be eligible for asylum has been a widely debated issue that began in 1996 when a Guatemalan woman was granted asylum based on her account of repeated physical violence perpetrated by her husband. Three years later an immigration court overturned the decision saying that she did not meet the criteria of belonging to a particular social group facing persecution. Since then a legal debate has emerged as to whether abused women could be a part of any social group that would be eligible under the terms of asylum law in the United States. Opponents of the movement have voiced concern that claiming that battered women belong to a bigger social group classified as victims of domestic and



sexual violence is a circular argument. One could argue that battered women, as women belong to that larger social group, however asylum law currently does not specifically address gender as a category protected from persecution.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, last year 22,930 people fleeing all types of persecution were granted asylum in 2008, but this number has decreased over the years. Since asylum claims are confidential, it is impossible to know how many more cases are denied each year. Each case is highly individualized and hinges on facts relating to the specific circumstances of the situation. While the new ruling does not guarantee that women violence victims will be granted asylum, proponents are hopeful that the new decision will allow for more cases of women seeking asylum based on domestic and sexual violence claims to come forward and have their cases heard.

For more information on this and other topics relating to women seeking asylum please visit:

United States High Commissioner of Refugees:

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services:

[www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)

Department of Homeland Security:

[www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)

Human Rights First:

[www.humanrightsfirst.org](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org)

United States Committee on Refugees and Immigrants:

[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

Asylum Law:

[www.asylumlaw.org](http://www.asylumlaw.org)

Vermont Immigrant and Asylum Advocates (formerly known as Vermont Refugee Assistance):

[www.vtimmigrationandasylum.org](http://www.vtimmigrationandasylum.org)

# Teen Dating Violence

By Abigail Leathe, Advocate

The reaction was enormous when photos of Rihanna, the hugely popular 20-year-old singer, with her face bruised and swollen were leaked onto the internet. The injuries were the result of an attack from her then boyfriend, singer Chris Brown. For the entertainment industry, this was a juicy scandal to plaster the newsstands, and tabloids followed their relationship closely, desperate to see whether what People magazine called “the fairy-tale romance gone awry” would be rekindled or if it was really the end.

For the countless teen fans of Rihanna and Brown; however, this story was much more important than any another

Hollywood breakup. This was a wake-up call to domestic abuse, and put a famous face on the reality of dating violence. Although the Rihanna and Brown story made headlines for months, dating violence among teens and young adults is nothing new. In fact, one in five high school girls experience some form of dating violence (Journal of the American Medical Association, 2001). Dating violence can be physical, such as pushing or hitting; emotional, such as verbal insults and controlling behavior; or sexual, forcing a partner to participate in sexual acts with which they are uncomfortable.

For teenagers entering their first relationships, recognizing dating abuse can sometimes be difficult. The idea of domestic abuse and an abusive relationship may seem far off and unrelated

to their experience. However, abuse in a teenage relationship, in the form of extreme jealousy and possessive, controlling behavior, insults, threats, sexual pressure and manipulation, physical violence, or holding all of the power in the relationship, is a serious matter.

Chris Brown recently pled guilty in exchange for a plea bargain that includes six months of community service, five years of probation, and completion of a domestic violence counseling program - sending the message that dating violence is a crime that holds up in a court of law. Hopefully this message hits home for teens that are experiencing dating violence. If you or someone you know is experiencing dating violence, consider talking to someone you trust or contacting WomenSafe. There is support available.

Article Review:

## “High Conflict Divorce, Violence, and Abuse: Implications for Custody and Visitation Decisions”

By Christina Grier, The SVP Coordinator

What does it mean when a family is described as “high conflict?” Does that mean couples cannot get along and disagree about everything or are they referring to domestic violence? It is an important distinction to make because using the term “high conflict” when domestic violence is involved minimizes the violence and abuse inflicted upon one parent by the other. It is also ambivalent about the root of the problem – power and control achieved by one parent over the other through emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse.

In the following article, “High Conflict Divorce, Violence, and Abuse: Implications for Custody and Visitation Decisions,” in the Fall 2003 issue of the *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, the authors clearly define these terms and introduce the reader to some new ideas about how to identify, work with and make decisions about keeping families safe while creating court orders. The authors challenge courts to ask the hard questions and discern the needs of the families while

considering the safety needs of children and parent victims of domestic abuse.

The authors give the readers a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and typical characteristics of abusers. Then they introduce us to the new terms they use to differentiate between conflict violence and a pattern of violence used to control a partner. The authors suggest using “conflict-initiated” violence and “control-initiated” violence. Initially, I was uncomfortable with the simplicity of the terms and concerned that they minimize violence. However, as I continued to read the article I came to appreciate the clarity that allows readers to differentiate between the two types of violence, as well as addressing batterers’ behaviors and the importance of victim safety.

The article includes a useful tool that helps courts determine whether the relationship is conflictual or abusive (p.24). The authors also make helpful recommendations for courts to maximize safety and limit abuse during proceedings. These include the inappropriateness of using mediation for families experiencing violence, offering separate parent education programs for each parent and adopting a practice of using the same judge, whenever possible (p.27).

There are so many good things to say about the last section of the article titled, “Crafting Effective Orders: Maximizing Long-Term Safety and Limiting Ongoing Abuse.” There are pages of recommendations for giving priority to safety and

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Book Review:

## Is the *Twilight* Series Good for Young Readers?

By Christina Grier,  
The SVP Coordinator

I recently completed the *Twilight* series (books that include *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*) by Stephenie Meyer. This is the uber-popular series that has matching blockbuster movies starring Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart (the second installment of the movies will be released on November 20, 2009). I have to admit that I went into this reading adventure knowing that it was a set of tomes intended for a younger generation, but, as a huge fan of the Harry Potter books, I dug in with juvenile delight.

I actually enjoyed *Twilight*, because it was entertaining, intriguing and romantic and provided me with a bit of escapism. It also introduced me to a world of unknown beings – werewolves and



I have to admit that as a woman, mother and feminist, there are several aspects of the books that concern me. The main character, Bella Swan, starts off as an independent, strong, and stubborn young woman, who quickly turns weak and dependent once she falls in love with Edward – a handsome, mysterious vampire. As Kellen Rice explains in a review available online, "...the books present a female heroine who can hardly take a step without needing some boy to rescue her. In fact, the books represent sexist views in almost every way—from the fact that Bella gives up her ambitions and plans for college to get married to Edward... their relationship is dangerously unhealthy..."<sup>1</sup>

It actually gets worse in *New Moon*.

loved ones by getting into their heads). The most disturbing aspect of this is the message that it sends to young female readers. Again, as Rice describes, "... [it says] That they should fall apart at the seams for months if their boyfriend leaves them... That reckless self-endangerment is okay, so long as it's to be close to your lover?..."<sup>2</sup>

The saving grace throughout the first two novels is one of the male characters - Jacob Black. He is a Swan family friend and lives on a nearby reservation. He becomes Bella's best friend and helps her deal with her broken heart after Edward leaves her. Jacob encourages Bella to be independent, strong and to love herself as she is. It is clear though that as he falls in love

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vampires. However, it wasn't until I was finished with the entire series that I could really see it for what it was. I think I was caught up in the romantic drama of the book and the excitement for the recently released movie. Eventually, as I got further along in the books, I found myself feeling frustrated with the characters and confused about the author's choices and intentions. My opinion has drastically changed since I first picked up *Twilight* several months ago.

**Spoiler alert:** I have to warn you that if you continue reading I will probably give details that will spoil the ending.

Soon after the story begins, Edward ends their seemingly perfect relationship and cuts off all contact with Bella. She quickly becomes extremely depressed as she spends several long months in a comatose-like state. She barely communicates with others, starts engaging in risky behavior and actually loses time to being so depressed. Bella eventually becomes almost-suicidal and learns that when she engages in unsafe behavior, it is the only time that she hears Edward's voice in her head. I didn't know if this was auditory hallucinations because of her depressed mental state or some unknown talent of vampires (to mentally torture your

with Bella, she doesn't reciprocate his romantic feelings. Jacob supports Bella as Edward comes back into her life. Soon after their reunion, new disturbing character traits in all the characters start to emerge.

In *Eclipse*, there are a few examples of Edward's abusive and controlling behavior. At one point, he disables her car to keep her from seeing Jacob and actually has his vampire sister "kidnap" her for the weekend, so she can't get in trouble or hurt herself. Unfortunately, Bella describes his behavior as "over-protective" and "...because he loves me." It is disturbing because the

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## Would you like to help WomenSafe? Here are a few ways.....

### Donate a cell phone

- Broken or no longer used
- Call 388-9180 and we will set up a convenient place for you to drop off the cell phone(s)

### Sign up for Shaw's Community

**Rewards** (Replaced Receipt Rewards Program as of 2/28/09)

- Go to [www.albertsons.com/cp/shaws/](http://www.albertsons.com/cp/shaws/)
- WomenSafe ID# is 49001018323
- Any problems or questions, please call Carol at 388-9180

### Volunteer

- Call 388-9180 for a list of the various volunteer opportunities



## OTHER NEWS

### Neat Repeats Donations

If you are not in the mood for a tag sale and are wondering what to do with your gently used clothes and household items, you can donate them to Neat Repeats and designate WomenSafe as the recipient of the proceeds. For more information, call Carol at WomenSafe at 388-9180 or Neat Repeats at 388-4488.

### Help Us By Going Paperless!

WomenSafe works hard to conserve our environment. Please help us by signing up to receive *The Advocate* via email. Your participation means that not only would we save more trees and use less petroleum products in the production and distribution of this newsletter, but you would also be helping us to continue to raise awareness and consciousness of the issues faced by our family, friends and neighbors who are being victimized by their partners or other people in their lives - but in a cost-effective manner.

If you would like to "Go Paperless," let us know at [info@womensafe.net](mailto:info@womensafe.net) Thank you to the over 30 people who have already signed up. Your support is appreciated!

### RSVP

Thank you to Faith, Sylvia, Gertrude, Joyce, Alice, Agnes, Phyllis, Helen and Lucille - the RSVP volunteers who spend many hours preparing over 2,000 newsletters for our mailing. We couldn't get this information out to our readers without their help. We appreciate all their hard work and dedication! A special thank you to Helen Ryan who coordinates the biannual mailing for WomenSafe.

### WomenSafe Mission Statement

WomenSafe works toward the elimination of physical, sexual and emotional violence against women and their children through direct service, education and social change.

## The Advocate

WomenSafe does not necessarily share the opinions expressed by the writers and reserves the right to edit and determine the content of *The Advocate*.

### The Advocate

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## WomenSafe

Committed to ending domestic and sexual violence

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[www.womensafe.net](http://www.womensafe.net)  
office: 388-9180 fax: 388-3438

**The Supervised Visitation Program at WomenSafe**  
(The SVP): 388-6783



## Is *Twilight* Good for Young Readers? (continued)

author is not only making her main male character a controlling boyfriend, but through Bella, Meyer tells us that his behavior is okay as long as it's for love. I wish that Meyer had Bella stay true to her character (as in *Twilight*) and used this as an opportunity to recognize and denounce abusive behavior. I understand that Bella's reaction is common and understandable, but I wish the author could've sent a different message to young men and women – either by not having Edward behave this way in the first place or by having Bella recognize this behavior for what it is and call him on it (which is what I think Bella would've done in the first book).

For many people who have had an abusive partner (as a teen or otherwise), they know how damaging these beliefs can be. It is never okay to restrain or kidnap your partner. It's never okay to disable your partner's car or phone, limiting her/his access to assistance. These are red flags that your partner is controlling and abusive and may eventually become physically abusive.

I was also outraged when Meyer decided to have Jacob behave in a way in *Eclipse* that was completely uncharacteristic. For example, I remember thinking that even though Edward was

becoming abusive, at least Bella had Jacob to turn to for comfort and support. Unfortunately, out of almost nowhere, Jacob forces himself on Bella on at least two occasions - kissing her when she's made it clear that she doesn't want his advances. Jacob also threatens to kill himself if Bella doesn't comply with his desires. The weirdest thing is that after the second time that Jacob kissed her, all the sudden she decided that she was in love with Jacob, too.

My problem with this (besides the fact that it isn't very realistic) is that it perpetuates two myths about sexual assault - that women enjoy being sexually assaulted and that it isn't considered sexual assault if it's someone you love (for example, the myth that you can't be raped by your spouse). I don't think I could say it any better than Rice describes, "...not once does the thought of abuse, sexism, or inequality even occur to her main character! In fact, half-way through Jacob's forced kiss (sexual assault, mind you) Bella actually decides that she's in love with him. What is this??"<sup>3</sup>

At this point, I really didn't want to keep reading the books. I work to end domestic and sexual violence and I certainly didn't want to support something that perpetuated myths and excused abusive behavior. However, I decided to keep reading to see how things would end and if Meyer would take the

opportunity to redeem herself.

Unfortunately, the disappointment continued. The ending isn't even worth discussing, because of its unrealistic happily-ever-after finale where Bella, Edward and their half-human-half-vampire child walk into the sunset (or woods, in this case). Overall, I can see how people could get caught up in the adventure and romance, but as the books progressed, they became more idealistic and improbable. In addition, as a woman, mother and feminist, I am most worried about the images and gender role stereotypes it portrays to young people about healthy relationships. I hope they understand that healthy love is respectful, fun, exciting and sometimes overwhelming. I hope they know that healthy love is NOT forced, threatening, restrictive or controlling. If you know a young person who has read these books or seen the movies, please use this as an opportunity to discuss these issues with them. Please share with them that these behaviors are not okay and that it may be a sign of further, more dangerous abuse. Hopefully having good discussions with our youth will be the best thing that comes from Meyer's books.

<sup>1</sup> <http://psa.blastmagazine.com/2008/08/16/twilight-sucks-and-not-in-a-good-way/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## We Are Here...

We are here to listen...  
not to work miracles.

We are here to **help you discover**  
what you are feeling...  
not to make feelings go away.

We are here to **help you identify your options...**  
not to decide for you  
what you should do.

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not take steps for you.

We are here to **help you discover** your own strength...  
not to rescue you and leave you  
still vulnerable.

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not to take responsibility  
for you.

We are here to **help you learn to choose...**  
not to make it unnecessary for  
you to make difficult choices.

**We are here to provide support for change.**

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# Women in Prisons: The Link to Domestic Violence

By Claire Opel, 2009 Bachelor's in Social Work Intern at Women-Safe

It is an unfortunate fact that over the last few decades the number of women who are incarcerated has gone up dramatically. The rate of increase in numbers of women in prison has actually exceeded the rate of increase in the numbers of incarcerated men (Zust, 2008). These growing numbers have mostly been attributed to the "War on Drugs" initiated by ex-President Nixon.

Though some women do voluntarily become involved in drug possession and dealing, many others come to prisons as a result of histories of victimization. Partners who are controlling or violent sometimes use illegal activities as a form of abuse. Women involved with these partners are threatened with violence if they do not participate in the illegal act (Zust, 2008).

Even if women do not become incarcerated as a direct result of domestic violence, there is still evidence of a strong link between incarceration and abuse. Studies that have been conducted on young offenders reveal that most of the women were first arrested after running away as an attempt to escape abusive partners at home (DeHart, 2008). Further, a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice "found that 50%

of the women in prison had experienced domestic violence or rape prior to their incarceration" (Zust, 2008, p. 70). Nobody would claim that domestic or sexual violence inevitably leads to incarceration as there are numerous women who are assaulted or controlled without being arrested. However, neither should anybody bat an eye at the rate of women in prison who have a history of domestic or sexual abuse.

Finally, women who are incarcerated, even if they have not experienced violence outside of prison, are at a higher risk of being sexually assaulted within the prison walls. In the United States of America's federal prisons, up to 70% of the guards in women's prisons are male while most other countries only employ female guards to oversee female prisoners (Zust, 2008). The unique needs of these incarcerated women, including pregnancy while incarcerated, motherhood from inside the walls, and fear of returning to violent partners upon release, are often not taken into consideration. Our nation needs to take a closer look at these needs as well as the link between domestic and sexual violence and the rates of incarcerated women.

DeHart, D. (2008). Pathways to prison: Impact of victimization in the lives of incarcerated women. *Violence Against Women*, 14(12), 1362-1381.

Zust, B.L. (2008). Assessing and addressing domestic violence experienced by incarcerated women. *Creative Nursing*, 14(2), 70-72.

## "High Conflict Divorce, Violence, and Abuse . . ." (continued)

the best interests of the children. Most poignant is the following statement:

"Any arrangement that gives the abusive parent shared physical custody will create unacceptable risks for both the children and the abused parent, and provide the abusive parent with too many opportunities to continue a pattern of intimidation and control" (p. 27).

For anyone who's experienced abuse or worked with victims of abuse, it is refreshing to hear other professionals acknowledge the risk that shared physical custody poses to victims. Mothers who are abused have often said to me that they want the abuse to end and for the abuser to leave her alone, but they do not want to limit his access to the children. The abuser makes it impossible for them to keep the children and themselves safe during exchanges and/or visitations after the relationship is over. A few years ago, I was listening to a presentation by the author of *The Batterer as Parent*, Lundy Bancroft, and he pointed out the constant conundrum that so-

ciety creates for mothers. He said that we as a society judge and blame mothers who are battered for exposing their children to the abuse and blame them for not protecting their children when they do not leave the abuser. On the other hand, he said, we also judge and blame them for taking children away from their fathers when they do leave. Women who are abused simply cannot win.

The authors wrap up their discussion of safety and best interests of the children by recommending a combination of supervised visitation and supervised exchanges that gradually increase the abuser's access to the children based on a constant assessment of the danger the abuser poses to the child and the abused parent (p. 28).

In conclusion, the courts have tremendous power and impact on the lives of families who are experiencing violence. This article gives the court and other professionals tools for determining which families are experiencing conflict-initiated violence and which families are experiencing control-initiated violence. Hopefully, this information will lead to the creation of safe orders that consider the best interests of children and the safety needs of parent and children victims of domestic violence.

# WomenSafe

Committed to ending  
domestic and sexual violence

# The Advocate

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24-hour Hotline

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Legal & Hospital Advocacy

Support Group

### ▪ Community Outreach & Education

### ▪ Supervised Visitation & Monitored Exchange

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