



Riverbend Resources If You Experience Domestic Violence

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RIVERBEND - If you've experienced domestic violence or other forms of intimate partner violence, keep reading. There are resources in the area that might be able to offer you some help.

There are two local organizations that specialize in domestic violence. These organizations offer a variety of resources and can also connect you with other groups or support services as needed.

The [Oasis Women's Center](#) explains that despite the title, they also work with men and boys; about 25% of their client base is male. They offer a 24-hour hotline, emergency housing, assistance looking for work and housing, counseling, and other resources and supportive services such as food, clothing and school supplies. The shelter is located in Alton, but they have [outreach offices](#) in Edwardsville, Carlinville and Jerseyville. Visit their [official website](#) to learn more about their work.

The [Violence Prevention Center of Southwestern Illinois \(VPC\)](#) is located in Belleville and primarily serves Monroe, Randolph and St. Clair counties. They offer the same services as Oasis, including a 24-hour hotline that averages 22 calls a day. In the last

five years, VPC has expanded to better serve the Hispanic community with Spanish-speaking advocates. You can learn more about their services at [their website](#).

“Everything we do is voluntary and survivor-led. So when a survivor asks for help or reaches out for help, we kind of meet them where they’re at,” Melissa Tutterow, the Director of Development at VPC, said. Oasis’s Coordinator of Client Services, Marcy Jacobs, echoed this, adding that Oasis is “never directive” and always honors the survivor’s choices.

Oasis and VPC also provide legal advocacy services, meaning they work with survivors to figure out what legal courses of action are available to them. This often includes an order of protection, which is similar to a restraining order but generally catered to serve survivors of domestic violence.

The terms of an order of protection can vary, but they are designed to restrict someone’s access to you and your children. The terms can also suspend an abuser’s gun license and might require them to stay a certain distance away from your child’s school, your workplace or other specified locations.

Jacobs explained that these orders can be extremely helpful when a survivor is in the process of leaving an abuser.

“The most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence is in the act of leaving or after they’ve gone,” Jacobs said. “That is one of the biggest opportunities and triggers for a controlling person...Up to 75% of us who are seriously injured by our partners, that happens in the act of leaving or afterwards. So orders of protection are a key tool for some victims to establish more safety during that most dangerous time.”

But Jacobs and Tutterow remind people that they don’t have to do it alone. Legal advocacy services make this process easier, and most courts will quickly grant an order of protection as soon as it’s filed. An order of protection is one common legal method, but Oasis and VPC can assist with other legal advice and help survivors determine what is best for them.

“We can help somebody file for an order of protection or kind of walk them through the legal process and help them find the right legal tools for safety,” Tutterow explained. “We can also be an emotional support through the whole process...This kind of thing can be really taxing, especially if you’re not used to working in the legal system. We’re there to help you through that.”

But let’s be clear: You don’t have to take legal action or talk to the police if you don’t want to. Oasis and VPC can help you through either process, but they understand that

different survivors need different things. Ultimately, their goal is to make sure you're safe and provided for while you assess what you need to move forward.

Jacobs explained one of the first things they do with each person at Oasis is “safety planning,” meaning they sit down and talk through a survivor’s situation, concerns and ways to reduce risks. This also helps them understand what services would be most helpful to each person. She reiterated that their only goal is to keep a survivor safe and support whatever decisions they make.

“In order to survive, victims often say, ‘This isn’t very bad,’ or, ‘This isn’t as bad as it could be.’ That’s the way we hide it from ourselves in order to survive,” Jacobs explained. “And so if you do a really good safety plan and then at some point he or she is saying, ‘I have decided to go back,’ we just say, ‘You know, we’re concerned for you. How can you be more safe than when you left?’”

She added that they usually receive more people as soon as the school year ends, and there’s often a lull in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Both instances indicate that survivors have been trying to hold the household together for their kids.

With that in mind, Tutterow recognizes that asking for help can be a complicated decision. To people who aren’t sure if they’re experiencing domestic violence or don’t know if they would benefit from services, she reminds them of two things.

“One is that you can always call out to our hotline and ask questions, and you can do that with a stranger who doesn’t necessarily know you and isn’t involved,” she said. “There are no repercussions. You can just start asking questions and then decide from there where you’re headed. And the other thing is that violence always escalates. You might think it’s not bad right now. But the amount of time that passes — just, violence always escalates.”

HOW TO HELP

Every minute — every 60 seconds — 20 people are physically hurt by an intimate partner in the U.S. That’s according to the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#). The number is only an average, and only based on what is reported.

It can be terrifying to know or suspect that someone you love is experiencing domestic violence. If you’re concerned about a friend or family member, what can you do to help?

Tutterow and Jacobs both pointed out that it's easy for someone on the outside to encourage a survivor to simply leave the relationship, but it's rarely that simple. This is why Oasis and VPC work with survivors to ensure they're safe and supported through every decision they make.

“the most dangerous thing they do,” Jacobs said. “So it takes some planning and it takes some support services. The victim of domestic violence knows that they're in danger. They're not mistaken about that. And so somebody saying, ‘Why don't you just leave?’ is really not all that helpful.”

Instead, show support by listening to what your loved one tells you they need. Jacobs said that society tends to “blame the victim,” so she encourages people to educate themselves about domestic violence and avoid falling into that pattern of thinking.

“Everybody knows a battered woman or battered man,” Jacobs said. “They may not know it. But one in three women is hit sometime during their lifetime by a family member or partner, and all of us know and love more than three women. So be aware and be supportive, because you often don't know who you know that's being battered.”

Oasis and VPC offer resources for people who care about a domestic violence survivor, and they both rely on donations to operate. You can visit their websites or reach out to them for more advice or information on donating and volunteering.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE AND GET HELP

Visit the [Oasis Women's Center official website](#) or call their hotline at 1-800-244-1978. Visit the [Violence Prevention Center of Southwestern Illinois official website](#) or call their hotline at 618-235-0892. You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.