Domestic violence work, at its core, is about empowering people who are victimized by their intimate partners and assisting them to access the resources that will help to connect them to safety and justice.

**Oppression and Injustice Make Domestic Violence Possible**

Systems of oppression keep injustices like domestic violence in place. Dismantling or taking apart such systems is an important part of our work as advocates. To create a just society for victims of domestic violence, advocates and allies must seek to create a just society for everyone. This creative work allows all of us to address problems that result from violence and change community norms that allow violence to happen. Unequal treatment may be based on or referred to as "isms:"

- **Age/Ageism/Adultism**
- **Disability/Ableism**
- **Gender/Sexism**
- **Lookism**
- **Nationality/Nationalism**
- **Race/Racism**
- **Religion/Christianism (Anti-Semitism)**
- **Sexual orientation/Heterosexism**
- **Socio-economic class/Classism**

Unequal treatment may be based on other identities, too.

**Intersectionality of Oppression**

People may fit into more than one group, and be subject to more than one type of oppression. This is referred to as the "intersectionality of oppression." One group may have power and advantages over another, leaving some people with access to fewer resources and at higher risk for abuse, including domestic violence.

Communities can organize to address violence. People can learn to address the “isms” and inequalities within their community.

The following resources provide more information on what dismantling oppression means within our collective work to prevent violence.
DEFINITIONS

Ableism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of people living with a disability.

Adultism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of young people by adults.

Anti-Semitism – prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed against people who are Jewish.

Christianism - the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of faith groups who do not hold the beliefs and practices of Christians.

Classism - the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of people based on their economic background. The Poor/Front-line workers/Unemployed/Welfare/Homeless are powerless. The Middle/Professional/Managerial have both power and are powerless. Rich/Owners are raised to be in (wealth is often passed from generation to generation) or rise to positions of power; consequently they are the ones with power.

Heterosexism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender people. Homophobia is the fear of homosexuals and the fear of being gay or thought to be gay.

Lookism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of people based on their physical appearance. This relates to preconceived societal notions of beauty.

Muse - Someone who inspires girls, who recognizes and draws out their strengths and potential (Amy Sullivan, From Mentor to Muse, p. 243.)

Nationalism – the policy or doctrine of insisting the interests of one's own nation should be viewed as separate and superior to the interests of other nations or the common interests of all nations.

Oppression - working definition of oppression for the purpose of advocacy is keeping someone down by the cruel or unjust use of authority. Oppression is an action against a person or a group of people. It can occur interpersonally (between people) or through systems (institutionalized).

Racism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse by one group of people by another based upon race. In the United States, this usually refers to exploitation of people of color by white people.

Sexism – the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of women by men.
Resources

The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond is a national and international collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers and educators dedicated to building an effective movement for social transformation. The People’s Institute, through training, technical assistance and consultations helps individuals, communities, organizations and institutions move beyond addressing the symptoms of racism to undoing the causes of racism so as to create a more just and equitable society.

Paul Kivel’s website has a variety of social justice, community organizing and anti-oppression resources, particularly for working with youth. This social justice educator, activist and writer has been an innovative leader in violence prevention for more than 35 years.

Faith-Trust Institute: Faith-Trust Institute is an international, multifaith organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. The institute provides communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse. FaithTrust Institute works with many communities, including Asian and Pacific Islander, Buddhist, Jewish, Latino/a, Muslim, Black, Anglo, Indigenous, Protestant and Roman Catholic.

Recommended Readings


"In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning," by Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer. Published in Phi Delta Kappan, pages 593-599, May 1996.