

INFO CURRENT AS OF OCTOBER 2005

WHO IS COVERED BY THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW IN NEW HAMPSHIRE?

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QUESTION: Who is covered by the domestic violence law in New Hampshire?

ANSWER: October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. While you may be unaware of it, you likely know someone who is a victim of domestic violence. An estimated 24.8% of women and 7.6% of men have been raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Domestic violence cuts across all cultures, ages, and economic levels. Forty-five percent of females and 43% of males have reported that they have experienced some sort of physical aggression from dating partners at least once in the course of dating. Approximately one in five female students (9-12 grades) have reported being physically or sexually assaulted by a dating partner. Despite these statistics, very few report these incidents to law enforcement or seek legal protection.

When most people think of domestic violence, the stereotypical response is that of a husband beating his wife. While the result of domestic violence can be physical pain, pain is usually not the ultimate goal of the abuser. An abuser typically uses this behavior to gain psychological power or control of his/her victim. This behavior is not limited to hitting or beating; it also includes pushing, confinement, mental cruelty, emotional abuse, threatening, destruction of property, unauthorized entry, harassment, reckless conduct, and sexual assault. Domestic violence is not limited to married couples or persons of the opposite sex. Domestic violence can be committed by husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, family members, and household members.

A victim's best measure of defense and safety is to report the violence. The New Hampshire domestic violence law provides several avenues of protection for victims of domestic violence, including domestic violence restraining orders. A restraining order makes any contact by the abuser illegal, subjecting the abuser to arrest and other penalties under the law.

The New Hampshire statute is far-reaching in who it protects. It protects you from your spouse, ex-spouse, dating partners, step-parents, parents and other people related to you, except minor children. The statute protects both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and in romantic relationships, it is inconsequential whether the relationship has been consummated by sexual activity.

If you are the victim of domestic violence, or fear your safety is in danger, contact an attorney or police officer about obtaining a restraining order. If you have questions about domestic violence or wish to seek safety, contact your local domestic violence crisis center or the New Hampshire Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence at 1-866-644-3574 or at www.nhcadv.org.

There is no shame in admitting that you need help, this law is in place to keep victims alive and safe. No person has the right to hurt another, mentally or physically.

*Answered by **Attorney Connie Boyles Lane** of Orr & Reno, P.A. in Concord*