

6. DEAF WOMEN

As a Deaf woman you are probably used to doing things differently from hearing people. The way abuse is carried out will be different too. If you are Deaf, or Deaf-blind, you have developed visual or tactile ways to communicate. They include how you get information about what is happening around you. An abuser will try to control you by isolating you. If you are Deaf, he will try to interfere with your communication. Another tactic is to cut you off from emergency services or from support systems that help abused women. The tactics he chooses may depend on whether he is hearing or Deaf. (Those differences are described in *You Can Be Free*. (www.Powell's.com))

Know Your Rights

Below is a partial list of your rights. If the abuser is not abiding by them, that can signal that his behavior is abusive. You have a right to:

1. Choose the kind of sign language or communication method you want;
2. Use your preferred method in public or in private places;
3. Ask for help from advocates, police, and others in hearing communities;
4. Ask for a change of caseworker or therapist;
5. Have an interpreter who is qualified and neutral;
6. Control your use of your TTY, telebraille, or other devices;
7. Decide when to see friends in the Deaf and hearing communities;
8. Obtain public and private services. Ask your advocate about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.

Carol, a Deaf Woman, was in serious danger from a violent husband. She had good support from the Deaf community in her hometown. But, to isolate her, her husband moved her to another town. When her husband kept her from using sign language with her baby, Carol walked out. She went to a hospital and was taken to a shelter, where a Deaf advocate helped her find ways to be safer and to get back to her hometown support system.

It is not easy to make a decision to stay or leave a relationship. Maybe your biggest worry is losing contact with your Deaf community. That is an important consideration. Deaf women face some challenges that are different from those of other women. Accurate information about your choices will enable you to confront them. Talking to the right advocate can help you do that.

Many Deaf women find advocates who understand domestic violence and deafness and Deaf culture. You can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (<http://www.ndvh.org/>) at 800/787-3224. This TTY is answered nine-to-five by Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services' (www.ADWAS.org) advocates. They know where to find Deaf advocates and what services are available near you. They can tell you whether a shelter has a TTY or if the advocates understand ASL, or use qualified interpreters. No matter where you live, they can find the closest advocate to fit your

needs. After you make any phone calls the abuser might track, be sure to clear the text from your TTY, pager, or computer. If you keep the printouts of risky TTY tapes, make sure they are in a safe place. See the Technology Tips below.

You may be afraid that an advocate will tell you to leave your partner. But she will know that you need to decide that for yourself. She can help you make a safety plan in case at some time you have to or want to get away. She has a lot of general information gained from talking to other women. But you are the one who has specific information about your personal situation. The safety plan can be made as a partnership between you and the advocate. Advocates for Deaf women and advocates for abused women keep strict confidentiality.

Technology Tips for Deaf Women

Technology gives us new and better ways of communicating. Things are changing all the time. Computers, pagers, TTYs and other adaptive aids have changed how Deaf people get things done. Deaf people now connect around the world in a way that is visible and clear to everyone. Videophones make it possible to use ASL for phone calls and to see someone sign back to you from across the country. There are many other wonderful and accessible ways for Deaf and Deaf-Blind people to connect.

- Make sure you know how the devices work. Find out the safest way to use them. Abusers also can use the new technology to learn about your conversations with your friends or other support people. An abuser is likely to try to control whatever method you use to communicate with others. He may try to watch what you talk about or try to cut off your communications with others.

- Set up a code word or a signal with your friends or support people who call you on the TTY. Or get a Caller ID to help you make sure of the identity of the caller. But remember that when using the TTY relay system (dial 711) your phone number will be seen on the Caller ID machine, even if you have blocked your Caller ID from sending.

- When you call 911, make sure you use a TTY, telebraille or telephone. For now, 911 cannot answer calls from the DSL types of programs. Keep a phone line or make other safe arrangements to call 911 in an emergency.

- Many TTYs have a memory. Learn how to clear the memory of your TTY or telebraille. This way, your call will not be seen by the abuser.

- Think about where you keep printed tapes of TTY calls. Recent court decisions allow these tapes as evidence. Make sure that any risky TTY tapes are kept in a safe place.

When you know your rights and are careful about the safety measures you take, you will feel more confident. That will help you take the next steps that enable you to gain more control over your life.

Adapted from *You Can Be Free* www.Powell's.com)