

Domestic Violence Timeline

1500's-1800's:

- Early settlers in America based their laws on an Old-English common-law that explicitly permits wife-beating for correctional purposes. The states tried to break away from that law by saying that the husband is only allowed to whip his wife with a switch no bigger than his thumb. (Early 1500s)
- Mississippi's Supreme Court allows a husband to administer "moderate chastisement in case of emergencies". (1824)
- The American Society for the Prevention and Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) is founded. The SPCA predates both the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and preventing any cruelty to women. (1866)
- Alabama is the first state to rescind the legal right of men to beat their wives. (1871)
- Maryland actually was the first state to pass a law that makes wife-beating a crime, which is punishable by 40 lashes or a year in jail. (1882)
- North Carolina courts declared that a criminal indictment cannot be brought against a husband unless the battery is so great as to result in permanent injury, endanger their life or is malicious beyond all reasonable bounds. (1886)
- With Queen Elizabeth's rise to the English throne lawmakers began enacting reforms for women. Wives can no longer be kept under lock and key, life threatening beatings are considered grounds for divorce and wives and daughters can no longer be sold into prostitution. (Late 1800s)

1900's-1960's:

- The first Family Court is created in Buffalo, NY; the decision was that it is better to solve family problems in a setting of discussion and reconciliation with social service intervention. (1911)
- Women are allowed to vote for the first time with the passing of the 19th amendment. (1919)
- Civil rights, anti-war and black liberation movements challenge the country, this lays a foundation for the feminist movement. (1950s and 1960s)
- New York domestic violence cases are transferred from criminal court to civil court, where only civil procedures apply. The husband never faces as harsh penalties as he would suffer if he was found guilty in criminal court for assaulting a stranger. (1962)
- Congress began passing laws that prohibited discrimination against women in employment and requiring equal pay for equal work. (1965)
- Beating as cruel and inhumane treatment, becomes grounds for divorce in New York, but the plaintiff must establish that a sufficient number of beatings have taken place. (1966)
- The state of Maine opens one of the first shelters in the United States. (1967)
- The women's libertarian movement started. It claimed that what goes on in the privacy of people's homes is deeply political. (1960s and 1970s)

Domestic Violence Timeline (continued)

1970's:

- Women were coming together with African Americans seeking their equal rights. As a result, women started talking about violence against women in the forms of spouse abuse and sexual assault. Women recognized three major contributors to the violence against them: economic disparity, traditional gender role expectations, and a criminal justice system that did not hold men accountable for violence against women. From this, the battered women's movement was born. (1970s)
- In Chicago married women who leave their husbands due to battering are denied welfare because of their husband's salaries. (1970s)
- Grassroots organizing efforts begin transforming public consciousness and women's lives. "We will not be beaten" becomes the mantra of women across the country organizing to end domestic violence. This theme stems from the notion that women face brutality from their husbands and indifference from social institutions. (1970s)
- In Philadelphia, Women in Transition forms. Their mission is to provide services to divorced or separated women, battered wives and single mothers. (1971)
- Informal networks between women begin sharing information, strategies and support. In Pittsburgh, this influences the founding of the Pittsburgh Women's Center South which began in the home of Ellen Berliner. (1974)
- Al-Anon, Drug and Alcohol support group members, that are battered, organize a shelter in Harrisburg. (1974)
- Most US states allow wives to bring criminal action against a husband who inflicts injury upon her. (1975)
- In Scotland, a Magistrate fines a husband \$11.50 for hitting his wife in the face. He states, you may strike your wife's bottom if you wish, but you must not strike her in the face. (1975)
- Brazil passes a penal code that prohibits husbands from selling, renting, or gambling away their wives. (1975)
- The Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence is formed through grassroots impact on state legislation. (1976)
- In Pennsylvania, an old town ordinance is still on the books that no husband shall beat his wife after ten at night or on Sundays. (1976)
- Women around the country march annually to "Take Back the Night". With the walk, women begin to gain confidence because of the collective presence of their collective presence; they begin to feel strength and temporary psychological liberation through turning individual fear into mass anger. (1977)
- Still only 14 states have provided funds for shelters. (1979)

1980's:

- The Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence begins holding regional retreats and statewide meetings in order to build support, involve more women and strengthen support of coalition activities. (1981)

Domestic Violence Timeline (continued)

- The Victims of Crimes Act is amended to make awards available for the first time to victims of domestic violence. (1988)
- The United States has 1200 battered women programs which shelter 300,000 women and children per year. (1989)

1990's:

- Stalking is first identified as a crime. (1990)
- For the first time judges are required to consider any history of spousal abuse before determining child custody or visitation rights. (1990)
- The Surgeon General ranks abuse by husbands to be the leading cause of injuries to women ages 15-44. (1992)
- The American Medical Association releases guidelines that doctors screen women for signs of domestic violence. (1992)
- In California, a bill was passed protecting children from the effects of domestic violence. This bill gives the court the authority to remove the battering parent or guardian from the household and prohibiting visitation if it would jeopardize the safety of the child. It also allowed the non-offending parent to create a safety plan to protect the child from the offending parent before the child can be removed from the non-offending parent's home. (1996)

