

# Domestic Abuse Danger Assessment

Studies consistently report that 75% of serious domestic violence related injuries and deaths occur after the victim has decided to end the relationship and the batterer believes he no longer has the power to get the victim back into the relationship and under his control. The vast majority of all homicides committed in Macomb County each year are domestic violence related and most of these murders are committed after the victim has attempted to end the relationship.

Although no one can accurately predict when or if a batterer will kill or escalate violence to a life threatening level, the following indicators can serve as warning signs that a batterer may be reaching that level. It is important to note that while these indicators are a valuable assessment tool, the presence or absence of one or more indicators cannot definitively predict the behavior of a batterer.

The most important indication of life-threatening violence is the victim's perception of her danger. If the woman is very afraid and says she will be killed or may be killed, then the possibility of life-threatening violence is present. National experts on domestic violence note, "Battered women are usually the best evaluators of the potential for lethal violence because they generally have more information about the batterer than anyone other than the batterer himself" (Hart, 1988). At the present time it appears that the best approach to screening for life-threatening violence is a combination of the women's perspective and the advocate's assessment (Davies, 1998).

## Lethality Indicators

- Perceived loss of control over the victim through separation, divorce, victim fleeing
- Extreme jealousy
- Escalation of abuse
- Acts of abuse in public
- Suicide / homicide threats
- Plan to carry out either of above
- Use of, or threat to use weapon (especially a gun)
- Stalking
- History of mental health problems
- Substance abuse
- History of sexual abuse of victim or children
- Violation of protective orders