

FAMILY VIOLENCE

**Family and Consumer Studies 5370.01 – 3 credit hours
Earns Upper-division Communication/Writing Credit**

Don Herrin, Ph.D. – 801-581-3497 – don.herrin@fcs.utah.edu

“Violence, like charity, begins at home. The use of violence as a means of resolving conflict between persons, groups, and nations is a strategy we learn first at home. All of our basic problem-solving, problem-exacerbating, problem-creating strategies, for living and dying, are learned first at home.” (James Gilligan, author of *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1997, p. 5)

Our class is designed to study and understand this violence that “begins at home.” Violence, abuse, and neglect that occurs within family relationships has become one of the most damaging problems prevalent in our society today. To prevent, reduce, and eliminate this violence we must first understand it from a couple of different points of view. When you hear about cases involving violence between family members, we often hear people say that the perpetrators are evil or bad. Unfortunately, such statements are only value judgments. They are not statements or explanations that help us understand the violence or the perpetrators. Listening to victims helps us see the violence from their perspective but this doesn’t help us understand perpetrators and why they became violent in the first place. We will study how violence is explained by both victims and perpetrators and discover that there is often a very wide gap between these perspectives. We also study how family studies, psychology, sociology, feminism, and related disciplines generally view family violence and how it could be prevented, reduced, or eliminated. We consider how different professionals — such as researchers, therapists, educators, policy makers, law enforcers, medical doctors, nurses — contribute different perspectives and considerations to our understanding of family violence and what can be done about it. The following are some of the important questions we will endeavor to understand and answer:

- How should family violence be defined so we can differentiate it (if and when possible) from legally acceptable forms of violence in our society? If we can’t define and differentiate it, how can we prevent, reduce, and eliminate it?
- Why is it so hard for us to agree on what it is and what should be done to prevent, reduce, and eliminate it? Who should do what and how should it be done?
- If so much violence is learned “first at home,” what are folks doing in their homes and families that contribute to learning these strategies of violence? What kinds of parenting contribute to learning violence?
- What can we do to establish, build, and maintain the necessary positive family environments and communication patterns between family members?
- What can we do to eliminate the roots of the problem of violence and abuse in our own thinking and in our lives, families, communities, and society?
- What can we do to help ourselves and others heal from the effects of violence, abuse, and neglect?

Grades are based on a combination of small-group and class discussions, in-class writing activities, reading insights, and two in-depth written analyses of your learning. Come and check us out, become a contributing member of our class, and learn some useful stuff. When learning matters a lot to you, you will learn a lot that matters! Thanks for your interest. Hope to see you in class sometime soon.