

STOPPING THE CYCLE

WHEN ABUSE RUNS RAMPANT

by Katherine DeYoung LCPC, LMHC

As October is Domestic Violence Awareness month, I want to shed light on such a prevalent and impactful issue. For those who may be unfamiliar with the term *Domestic Violence*, let's start off by learning some definitions. Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse or threats of abuse given from one family member to another. Within this family dynamic, an abuser uses certain coercive tactics to gain a more dominant position of power and control (typically over a spouse or intimate partner). The following are common tactics used by abusers: intimidation, manipulation, humiliation, isolation, and injury. With this in mind, let's identify different kinds of abuse, learning how to recognize warning signs, and knowing how to respond to abuse when it's happening.

Types of Abuse

There are many different ways in which abuse occurs. The main types of abuse fall into one of the following categories: physical, emotional, financial/economical, sexual, spiritual, psychological, or technological. Let's look at some examples.

1. Physical - A husband slaps his wife on the cheek for messing up dinner.
2. Emotional - A wife calls her husband names to demean him and put him down.
3. Financial - A husband holds the family's finances on a tight leash, refusing to give the wife access to any of the accounts.
4. Sexual - A wife demands intimacy, even though the husband isn't interested.
5. Spiritual - A husband tells his wife that God will punish her if she doesn't obey him.
6. Psychological - A wife cuts her husband off from seeing friends and family, forcing him into isolation.
7. Technological - A husband tracks his wife using GPS without her consent.

Warning Signs

There can be a lot of confusion when it comes to recognizing abuse, as victims often downplay, rationalize, or normalize their abuser's actions. Victims may feel that the abuse "isn't that bad" or that the abuser is "really a good person". They may express that other people have it worse than they do. They excuse the abuser's bad behavior by claiming that this individual has been "stressed" or "irritable" lately. These statements may be true; however, they don't make an abuser's violent outbursts acceptable. Anger is an emotion we all experience and (generally speaking) learn how to express in healthy ways. Abuse, on the other hand, is manipulative and involves an inner motive of gaining power and control over someone else.

For those who are dating, let's address some common warning signs to be on the lookout for. A partner who does any of the following is exhibiting a "red flag" that should be taken seriously.

- Calling you names and putting you down.
- Acting jealous or possessive.
- Tracking your whereabouts and controlling who you talk to on the phone.
- Threatening or physically hurting you in any way.
- Controlling your spending and access to money.
- Isolating you from seeing family and friends.
- Not taking responsibility for his/her actions, rather blaming you for the violent behavior.



- Continue to Page 2 -



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- Continued from Page 1 -

Domestic Violence often occurs within a cycle. The first part of the cycle is “tension building”. The abuser creates tension in the home, and the survivor feels stressed. Then the “incident” of abuse occurs in whatever form. After this act of violence, the abuser makes amends and apologizes during a “reconciliation” phase (appearing genuinely remorseful). This phase is followed by a time of “calm” and peace, where things feel normal. This peace only lasts for a time though, as the cycle starts back over again when tensions start to build.

Response to Abuse

For anyone experiencing domestic violence, *realize that you are not alone*. One of the main ways that abusers can continue with their violent behavior is because they isolate their loved ones. So, if you are being abused, finding the courage to reach out and tell a trusted individual is a big first step (whether that’s a friend, family member, counselor or hotline). Also, abusers will not take full credit for their violence, oftentimes blaming their spouse for triggering the event. If you are in a domestic violence situation, *know that it is not your fault*. Do not take the blame for the abuser’s behavior. You have done nothing wrong and you don’t deserve to be hurt in this way.

In doing these things, our mindset shifts. Rather than seeing oneself as a victim, abused individuals can work towards seeing themselves as a survivor. This new mindset can *empower survivors to make changes* and to do hard things...things that once seemed impossible. Depending on the situation, survivors may be encouraged to leave the abusive environment and prioritize safety. If that’s the case, it’s important to make an exit plan. An exit plan involves identifying steps to take if an abusive situation is anticipated (finding safe exits out of the house, keeping a purse/key readily available, teaching children how to call 911, telling a neighbor, etc.).

Biblical Thoughts

The Bible is very clear that any form of abuse is sinful and doesn’t line up with godly living (Psalm 11:5). God created intimate relationships to have a foundation based on love and I would suggest that abuse is the exact opposite of this (Colossians 3:19, Romans 13:10). Along with love, another theme throughout Scripture is that of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a necessary component for any relationship. However, in light of abuse, let’s be careful not to confuse forgiveness with acceptance. I can forgive someone for hurting me, which is different than giving that person an invitation for the hurt to continue without consequence. God doesn’t enjoy seeing His children hurt (Lamentations 3:33). Remember that you are not alone, and the abuse you may be experiencing is not your fault. In embracing these truths, you will become empowered to do amazing things.

Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline- 1-800-799-7233

List of Local Emergency Shelters in Illinois

cookcountysheriffil.gov/evictions/social-services/emergency-shelter-domestic-violence/

List of Local Emergency Shelters Indiana

St. Jude House (Crown Point) and The Caring Place (Valparaiso)

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