

Domestic violence awareness: Expert advice on signs to look for, what to do

by Annita West Special to the Progress-Index | Posted: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 3:13 pm

“‘You are worthless; you are nothing; no one will love you as much as I do.’ These are the things she would say as she beat me,” said a victim of intimate partner violence. “These are the reasons I stayed.”

This individual eventually was able break out of the cycle of abuse.

Linda MacIsaac, a local counselor, said there are four parts of the cycle of domestic abuse and manipulation that occurs.

When the abuse starts, she explained, it might be name-calling. The victim usually justifies it, thinking he or she had a long day or was not feeling well. The tolerance for this verbal abuse increases.

Next, MacIsaac said, comes the isolation when the abuser might say, “I don’t want you hanging out with those friends anymore.” The victim could think it will benefit the relationship to spend more time together as a couple, so again the tolerance to control increases.

Other factors like children and an established home could mean the victim is more invested in the unhealthy relationship, making it harder to leave.

“Little by little, the abuse and tolerance escalates and the longer that goes on, the victim’s ability to determine reality from the reality the abuser creates is very difficult,” MacIsaac said.

“The self esteem drops down. They are told, ‘You are crazy. Your family is crazy. I can’t believe how you are. No one else is ever going to love you.’”

MacIsaac pointed out that if an individual hears those words enough, they might start to believe them.

“They just get so isolated,” she said. “To stand up and say, ‘I have to do what’s best for me’ – they don’t know how to do that anymore.”

After a violent assault, the abuser usually apologizes and promises things will be different. This is followed by a “honeymoon” period in which the abuser appears to have changed.



Domestic Violence Awareness

October is domestic violence awareness month. Know the signs and what to do when encountered with an abusive relationship.

Then the cycle begins again, starting with verbal abuse.

The National Crime Victimization Survey reports that non-fatal domestic violence accounts for one-fifth of all violent victimizations, with 64 percent being simple assaults. The rates were highest in young adults ages 18 to 24.

According to a statement from Ingleside Police Department, there have been eight assaults between Sept. 21 and Oct. 19 this year.

According to Police Chief Stan Bynum, a high percentage of the assaults are domestic violence that are related to alcohol or drug abuse. Most calls occur on the weekend and half of them are repeated calls from the same residents.

Chief Bynum also shared the frustration the officers experience when an abuser is put in jail and the victim quickly goes and posts bail.

All officers are trained to handle family violence and how to make referrals. However, “it’s easy to recognize,” said Bynum.

“Where it falls down is when the victim is unable to take advantage of the services.”

The Aransas Pass Police Blotter for the same period of time shows 11 assaults and two harassment incidents, which might be related to domestic violence.

Capt. Lynn Pearce, patrol commander, made an unscientific estimate that 99 percent of the assault calls are related to domestic violence and about 55 percent are repeat calls from the same persons.

“I just put together a lesson plan for my supervisors to administer at any shift change for the next few days on the proper way to assist a victim in requesting and filling out the application for an emergency protective order in these situations,” Pearce said.

Although this is not new training, Pearce said he feels a refresher would be beneficial.

The emotionally charged environment when officers answer these types of calls provides a challenge to the department, according to officials.

“It is also a challenge to the officers in determining who the aggressor is and who is the victim,” Bynum said.

He also mentioned that at times there are mutual combatants, so officers separate them for the night.

“All domestic violence is about using power to control another person,” MacIsaac said.

Besides physical violence, there is use of harmful language, social standing, intimidation and threats. Abusers often blame the abuse on the victim or on drugs and alcohol.

Sexual coercion, harassment or assaults as well as controlling what someone does or where they go

are part of this power and control.

The newest controlling behavior is the use of technology. Aside from sending unwanted texts or pressuring someone into taking, sending or looking at sexual photos, abusers are breaking into victims' email accounts or cell phone. Tracking apps have been found on victims' phones.

Teen dating violence is a growing concern, according to MacIsaac. A parent may now initiate a restraining order on behalf of a minor.

The Women's Shelter of South Texas has developed "Moving Up-Stream," an eight-week curriculum for use in the local schools as an effort to reach teen victims.

MacIsaac added that both heterosexual and same sex couples experience domestic violence. The children in these homes also are victims with a result of often becoming abusers themselves.

Services are available to victims and abusers through the Women's Shelter of South Texas and some local churches.

"Domestic violence really reaches across all walks of life," Pearce said.

"We've dealt with it in the poorest neighborhoods and we've dealt with it in some of the best neighborhoods."

Chief Bynum said it exists in every town, every city and every county.