

Abuse is difficult to walk away from

By Liliana E. Sanchez

Yesterday's article discussed some of the reasons why people abuse their partners. Today we are going to look at why victims of domestic violence stay in an abusive relationship.



If you ask a person who has lived or is living in an abusive relationship, "why do you stay?" you will hear many reasons such as love, fear, children, money, security, hope, and religious and cultural reasons. It is difficult for someone who has never been in an abusive relationship to understand why someone would stay, but we hope that when you read this piece you will gain a little more understanding.

Relationships start out with courtship, romance and kindness that may lead to a loving, respectful and healthy relationship full of hope and dreams for the future. But for some, this loving, respectful and healthy relationship takes a turn that no one saw coming. The relationship gets violent, the respect disappears and it is no longer what it was in the beginning. The victim in this type of relationship hopes their partner changes their ways, trusting that someday it will happen. The victim is then confused because what was once perfect is suddenly chaos, so they wait for the situation to get better and easily slip into the cycle of violence as they hold on to the promises and the illusion of being loved and cared for by someone they love.

Honeymoon, tension and explosion are the phases victims go through cyclically, and fear is a main driving force for victims to stay put. Fear the abuser will hurt the children,

hurt family members, and/or destroy their belongings. They fear they will not be able to provide for their children without the other person's support and they fear retaliation if they report the abuse and eventually, they convince themselves that they will be safer if they stay.

Slowly, victims become isolated. Their abusive partner gradually controls whom they can or cannot talk to – slowly removing them from their support system until they no longer have one. They learn to be passive because they live under the control of someone who has kept them dependent, consequently they feel like they are unable to survive on their own. They have been emotionally, psychologically and physically trampled into conformity that they no longer have the ability or confidence to survive independently, which lowers their self-esteem. Their self-esteem becomes so minute that they believe that they will never be able to get a job on their own, get a bank account, live independently or even go out in public. They begin to believe they don't deserve to be loved, that everything is their fault so they deserve to be beaten and mistreated and that their spouse or partner is the best they can do.

Sometimes, cultural beliefs can keep a victim in an abusive relationship. Some cultures still operate as a patriarchy, where men are regarded as the authority within the family and society thus women and girls are expected to comply, cultures where defiance is punished with abuse. Although this country has come a long way in gender equality, the belief that women are second class citizens is still out there which also causes domestic violence.

As you can see, the reasons why victims of violence don't leave are very complex and sometimes dangerous. Perpetrators have complete power and control over their victims, not only psychological but emotionally and physically and according to studies victims who leave an abusive relationship are at a higher risk for stalking and physical retaliation once he/she

leaves the abusive relationship. Victims know better than anyone when is the right time to leave and as a friend, a family member, a co-worker or an acquaintance we need to be supportive and try to understand that this is one of the most difficult decisions they will ever make and be there to help them when they are ready to leave. Know that there are agencies whose mission is to help victims of domestic violence and have expert staff that are dedicated to the cause and understand the dynamics of abusive relationships. Know that there is hope.

If you know someone involved in an abusive relationship the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is that agency dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence, call us at (530) 544.2118. The Women's Center Business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

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