

Taking action to help the abused

By Liliana E. Sanchez

As we wrap up the series Breaking the Cycle, we recap the previous three articles and we end with what we hope will inspire you to take action if you witness domestic violence or if you know someone in an abusive relationship.



In the first article we discussed the cycle of violence, how each phase affects victims and the different tactics used by abusive partners to manipulate and coerce their victims. The second article looked at the abusive partner by explaining some of the characteristics and tactics of those who batter, followed by the third article that answered the most common question asked by anyone who has not experienced domestic violence, “why do they stay?”

Today we are going to address how the damage of domestic violence propagates through every aspect of a victim’s life and how it affects everyone and everything around her. But more important, we will discuss what we can do to help victims of domestic violence and their families whether you are a bystander, a coworker, a friend or a family member.

You may be wondering if domestic violence extends beyond the confines of four walls or if it affects any other part of a victim’s life or other people around them? Domestic violence does not stop when victims walk out and close their door. Domestic violence follows the victim and affects every part of their lives as well as those around them. Let’s first look at someone in a domestic violence situation who is employed. Absenteeism and/or tardiness are reoccurring issues at work

for a victim of domestic violence for various reasons. These can be severe arguments at home, physical altercations or evidence of it especially on the face and neck areas, emergency visits to the hospital, jealousy, physical injuries which are not addressed or the abusive partner won't allow the victim to go to work that day or ever. Productivity and job performance are other aspects that are affected by domestic violence; the victim may have trouble focusing on the task at hand resulting in the decline of productivity and/or job performance. This makes a negative impact on a business which can result in loss of revenue, clientele or both which is how domestic violence affects the workplace.

Another part of life that is affected by domestic violence is academic performance for both the victims and their children. The victim may fall behind in school work, miss assignments, fail or drop out of school. The children may lose interest in school, arrive to school late, miss breakfast, lose concentration, withdraw from their peers, act violently towards others, fall behind academically or fall asleep in class because they were up all night listening to violence at home.

Family members are also affected. They may often be pushed away by the victim because the abusive partner does not want them around due to power and control and fear that the victim might leave. Often, friends and family members turn their back on the victim judging and criticizing their choice to stay in the abusive relationship, not realizing or understanding that they are being coerced into isolation. This judgment, criticism and lack of understanding from family and friends can put the victim in deeper isolation because he/she will feel like they don't have anyone but their abuser. Family and friends may spend time and money trying to help a victim leave the abusive situation and may even become involved in conflicts and confrontations with the abusive partner to protect the victim.

As you can see, domestic violence indirectly affects the workplace, employers, coworkers, school, academic performance, children, and family. The problem does extend beyond the four walls and it touches everyone directly and indirectly, so what can we do? As family members, friends, coworkers, employers, neighbors or even bystanders we need to take action to help victims of domestic violence. To begin, you can let victims know that there is a way out.

As an employer, ask how you can help or if they would like to talk about what's going on, refer them to law enforcement or the Women's Center, be supportive and never threaten their job security – work may be the only safe place they have. As a neighbor or a bystander, every time you hear or see yelling, shoving, objects hitting the wall, screaming or children crying hysterically call 911 or call the police and ask them to do a welfare check at the address where the commotion is coming from – this can save someone's life. As a friend or family member it is extremely important to remain supportive so that the victim feels that he/she has support and help when they are ready to leave the relationship, help them come up with a safety plan if time allows. Don't turn your back on them by judging or criticizing their choice to stay because leaving the relationship can put them at greater risk for physical retaliation which may cause injuries and sometimes death.

Finally, listen to them and be there for when they are ready to leave because it takes a lot of courage to do so and if you have any questions on how to help someone who is in an abusive relationship call the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center to discuss more ways in which you can help.

During Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, South Lake Tahoe Women's Center took our Silent Witness Exhibit to different locations in the community each week. This exhibit is composed of silhouettes of men, women, children and pets. Each silhouette honors a person from Reno/Tahoe and the

surrounding area whose life was cut short because of domestic violence. The exhibit is meant to bring awareness to the public and to evoke others to take action against domestic violence.

Joins us in our efforts to stop domestic violence. To find out what you can do call the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center, Monday-Friday 8am-4pm at (530) 544.2118 or call our 24 hour crisis line at (530) 544.4444. The Women's Center Business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

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