

NOVEMBER IS FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION MONTH

By Marina Phillips

Every November, I begin my research for Family Violence Prevention Month by looking for changes in statistics from last year. Usually, they say that the problem continues to be a serious one all across the country. The numbers just don't seem to get better. This year, I didn't go to the stats. Instead, I decided to pass on some knowledge I've gained about abuse, so that perhaps others might recognize their situation and make some important decisions for change.

It can be really difficult to see things clearly when a person is in the middle of an unhealthy situation. An abusive relationship can be like that. Many people have a hard time wrapping their brain around the fact that they are being treated badly. This can be largely because abuse takes so many different forms. It isn't just about hitting anymore. There are a lot of ways in which to hurt someone besides striking a physical blow.

Basically, abuse is a pattern of controlling behaviour. It happens when one partner develops a pattern of trying to control the other. The abusive partner uses a lot of different tactics to get their way, to show they have more power than the other, or to stop the other partner from leaving the relationship. The abused partner tries to change their behaviour to meet the demands, hoping the abuse will stop. The many forms of abuse can include, but are not limited to:

PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE tactics cause great emotional pain and injury. It is often difficult to describe this because emotional 'weapons' don't leave a physical mark, and they can be very subtle. This kind of abuse includes treating you with disrespect; name-calling; insulting; blaming; humiliating; ridiculing your spiritual beliefs and practices; having wild mood swings that keep you off balance; isolating you from friends and family; being possessive or not wanting you to be with other people; and manipulating you emotionally, such as, "If you love me, you will do as I want."

PHYSICAL ABUSE tactics openly cause pain and physical injury. It can include a wide range of assaults such as pushing; shoving; slapping; biting; punching; pinching; hitting; hair-pulling or threatening to harm you using a weapon. Physical abuse can also include locking or tying you up; refusing to allow you to leave the room or the house, and preventing you from getting medical help.

SEXUAL ABUSE tactics include anything you feel is unsafe, unwanted, humiliating or painful. It can include pressure to have sex when you don't want to; unwanted or unsafe sexual practices; making fun of you or calling you frigid if you refuse; or forcing you into degrading, humiliating or painful acts. This kind of abuse is extremely nasty, and can have long-term, lasting, often permanent effects on the abused person.

INTIMIDATION tactics are any words or actions an abusive person uses to scare you. This can mean threats of harm to you, people or pets you care about; stalking; harassing; throwing things; breaking things; threatening to spread rumors or get you in trouble; threatening to commit suicide if you do not do a certain thing, and making threatening gestures or facial expressions.

It is important for an abused person to realize that there is no excuse for how their partner is treating them. Abusive behaviours are always a choice. It does not matter what the abuser's background or experience is - they must take responsibility for their actions.

Being subjected to abuse lowers a person's sense of personal strength and value, and can create a life of ongoing fear. Abuse and violence in intimate relationships does not happen 'just once'. If it has happened once, it will continue to happen, and over months and years it will become more frequent and severe. However, abuse is not reserved only for long-term relationships. It can begin in the dating stages as well, causing a person to feel that it is 'just normal' - but it is not normal.

The best way to tell if you are being abused is to think about how you feel when you are with that person. Quite simply, a healthy relationship feels good. You enjoy spending time with that person; they respect your opinion; it's okay to disagree; you feel comfortable doing things apart, and you do not try to restrict or control each other. Each partner takes responsibility for themselves - you are not expected to solve the other's problems or make them happy. In short, there is no fear in a healthy relationship. It is easy to be true to yourself, and you are encouraged to grow, change and progress as you wish, unhindered.

If any of this information has made you stop and say, "Hey! That's me!", perhaps you need to call our local women's shelter, Phoenix Safe House, to speak to someone there about what you are experiencing. They can be reached any time at 529-1091. If you feel you need more information, you can also call the Family Violence Information Line at 310-1818 - they are available 24/7 as well. If you are an abused person, (or if you know someone who is being abused), I greatly encourage you to make that phone call, and begin to talk about it out loud. It will be a small first step towards getting your life back.

Have a terrific week, all!