

Interpreting the Signs of Domestic Violence

As a community, we often fail to acknowledge the presence and extent of domestic violence. It is important to understand that abuse is often hidden from public awareness. Learning what to look for and what questions to ask will heighten this awareness and open avenues for dealing effectively with the violence.

Domestic Violence Indicators

Evidence of Physical Injuries

If someone has an obvious physical injury, ask about it as sensitively as possible. Don't ignore it. The victim may not have had the confidence to talk to anyone before who has believed them, and it may be a relief just to verbalize it. However, be sensitive to the person feeling shame and embarrassment and don't push too hard. If the person insists that the injuries were caused by an accident but you have reason to believe otherwise, express your concern and offer your availability to talk another time. Mention that there is help available.

Feelings of Depression, Anger, Low Self-Esteem, Suicidal Thoughts

Be alert for signs of depression and anxiety, which may indicate long-term emotional or psychological abuse. Non-physical abuse can have equally devastating effects as physical assault. Severe agitation, anxiety, confused thinking, lack of eye contact or an inability to make decisions may be associated with abuse.

Violence in Family of Origin

When talking to a woman, you may obtain information that she grew up in a family where her mother was a victim of spousal abuse. This may indicate that she is in an abusive relationship and believes the way her parents related is the norm. If the partner grew up in an abusive family, there is higher probability of this pattern of abuse being learned than if the family of origin was violence free.

Requests for Financial Assistance

If someone talks to you about little or no control over finances, they may be experiencing economic or financial abuse. This can look like being prohibited from getting a job, a partner controlling access to all family resources, having to get "permission" to spend money on basic family needs, etc.

Isolation

Being isolated from friends and family is often a sign of domestic violence. The abuser exercises power and control by keeping the victim from having contact with other people. This can often take place gradually, over a period of time until the person being abused has lost contact with friends and family.

Fear

If a person exhibits fear around a partner or extreme concern about displeasing them, this should alert you to the possibility of abuse. Constantly making excuses and covering for their behavior is also a red flag.

24-Hour Toll Free Crisis Line
1-888-215-5555

STAND!
Against Domestic Violence

Formerly Battered Women's Alternatives