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University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension EC04-465

There's No Excuse For Abuse: Men Can Help Stop Domestic Violence (Part 2 of a four part series)

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One of the hardest things to do is to confront a family member, friend, co-worker, or neighbor who abuses his wife or girlfriend about his inexcusable and wrongful behavior. You may feel that you don't know what to say, are fearful of becoming involved, or that his behavior towards his significant other is none of your business.

Your friend may want to talk about the problem but has not had the opportunity because no one has had the courage to address the issue with him. Your friend may hesitate to talk about his behavior but at least you can let him know that you've noticed. By asking him about his behavior you may open the door to future communication. If you have an acquaintance or friend who you suspect is hurting his partner, now is the time to say something before things get worse. When abuse and violence are present in a relationship things rarely get better; in fact, the abuse usually escalates. Some tend to think that men who abuse must have something wrong with them or have a mental illness that can be diagnosed. Being abusive is not caused by a mental illness; it is a learned behavioral choice. Abuse toward an intimate partner is an issue of dominance and control.

Note: It is of utmost importance that your friend's partner and children are safe. This is a priority and their safety cannot be assumed. Make sure your friend's partner knows how to contact shelter services or emergency help and encourage her to seek assistance. Let her know that you care about her safety and well-being. If you feel as though your safety is in jeopardy, do NOT confront the abuser.

The following are signs to look for to help you determine if your friend, family member, or acquaintance may be an abuser. Your awareness of partner abuse and your active involvement may help prevent domestic violence.

- Does he feel he is entitled to dominate and control his partner?
- Does he think his partner is obligated to obey him?
- Does he frequently get angry at his wife or girlfriend?
- Does he call her names, yell and scream at her?
- Does he throw things in front of her or at her?
- Does he put her down or make fun of her?
- Does he get jealous when she's around other men, or spends time with friends and family?
- Does he try to make all the decisions?

- Does he tell her what to do?
- Does he complain about the things she does?

When a perpetrator is confronted, he may become threatened and seek more control over his partner. There is great potential that the abuse will escalate, especially if the abuser thinks his partner is leaving him. However, abusers must be held accountable for their abusive behaviors. You can ask him some questions if you suspect that your friend may be abusive, such as how the relationship is going and if he and his partner are having problems. You may ask who keeps the finances or if he's ever kept his partner from going somewhere. Ask whether he has ever hit his partner. If he says no, ask if he's ever pushed, shoved, grabbed, kicked or slapped her. If he admits to any of these controlling or abusive actions, express concern. Even if he denies the abuse, continue to voice your concern. Abusive men often have genius ways to hide the truth. Too often, friends and professionals ask about the abuse but then when denied, back off. Be persistent in learning about the abusive behaviors.

Let the abuser know that what he's doing is wrong, is offensive to you, is not excusable, and that you won't stand by in silence. Point out the consequences of abuse and inappropriate behavior. Tell him that physical and sexual abuse, such as hitting or raping his partner, is a crime and that he could land in jail. Remind him that the local police follow the law that may require an arrest and that judges are getting tougher on perpetrators. Although the road to changing abusive behaviors is a long difficult struggle for many, let him know that he can get professional help if he wishes to stop the abuse. Give him phone numbers for professional assistance and help him make the telephone calls for an appointment.

In the event of an attack or immediate threat, call 911 or your local police.

Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition (NDVSAC)
Toll free crisis line 1-800-876-6238.
Web site: http://www.ndvsac.org

Kansas Crisis Hotline: 1-888-END-ABUSE
Outside Nebraska or Kansas, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) (voice) or 1-800-787-3224 (TDD).

If he continues to deny the abuse, call him every few days or talk to him at work to see how things are going; share your concern for both him and his partner. Continue to hold him accountable for his abusive behaviors. If you have an opportunity, talk with his partner and give her information on how to get help. Let your friend's partner know you care about her and her children's safety and well-being.

Who are the Abusers?

Most abusers appear normal to outsiders. But immediate family members see them differently. Men who abuse their wife or girlfriend may have certain characteristics, but not all of these characteristics will be obvious, and there are always exceptions. Abusers tend to have low self-esteem which means that they feel bad about themselves and who they are, feel inadequate, feel incapable of certain tasks, or may feel like a failure. They may be jealous of others (especially their partner) for succeeding or being happy. They feel as though they're entitled to dominate, control and to hurt others. Abusers perceive themselves to be moral even when using abuse or violence. They tend to believe myths about battering relationships such as "women must be kept in their place," or that "she deserves to be punished."

The man tends to be a traditionalist in his home, believing in male supremacy and stereotypical sex roles. He tends to blame others for his actions and definitely when things go wrong. He is usually pathologically jealous, controlling and intrusive into the woman's life. For example, he may control her

coming and going and even prevent her from speaking on the telephone. The abuser often displays a dual personality of being a sweet, adorable and lovable "teddy bear" to being a blaming, controlling, mean and violent monster. Abusers tend to be the sweet adorable teddy bears in public so that others question the abused woman's complaints and concerns when she finally speaks up. He has a public and a private face. Typically abusers do not know how to cope with stress and life in general without hurting someone else and exerting control through force.

He tends to use sex as an act of aggression to enhance self-esteem. He may force his partner to do unpleasant things which cause physical pain or withhold sex to be punitive. In many cases, an abuser suffered from abuse or neglect as a child, including witnessing his father being abusive. He usually feels that his behavior is not wrong nor should he have to face negative consequences.

Abusers are found in all ages, races, socioeconomic groups, occupations, religions, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Things will not change for the better until each individual activates change, public policies are enacted to support women and children in abusive relationships, and society, including law enforcement and the judicial system, holds abusers accountable. What can you and I do to end abuse towards women or domestic violence? Abusers must be held accountable for their behavior and asked the question "why do you abuse?"

Policies and laws must be enacted and enforced that penalize perpetrators for abusive behaviors. Society must rise to the level of zero tolerance for abuse towards any person.

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