

Shedding Light on Domestic Abuse

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. According to studies, domestic abuse affects an estimated 10 million people every year in the U.S. and as many as 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men are victims of domestic violence. A recent report by The Network indicates that calls to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline received from individuals in Illinois increased by 16% from 2019 to 2020. Many people think of physical harm when thinking of domestic abuse. However, domestic violence is not “one size fits all.”

Ashley Lisek, an OSF HealthCare family medicine APRN who has specialized training in domestic violence and survivor treatment, discusses warning signs, getting help, and supporting a loved one.

“It’s not always that he or she has to hit you or you have to be physically abused. It’s that emotional, verbal, repetitive abuse as well where you don’t feel comfortable. That is still a form of domestic violence and I think that is important to know,” explains Lisek.

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, domestic abuse includes behaviors that physically harm, intimidate, manipulate or control a partner, or otherwise force them to behave in ways they don’t want to, including through physical violence, threats, emotional abuse, or financial control.

Lisek, who also has a background in emergency care and, explains that sometimes victims of domestic violence may not even know that it’s happening until it escalates.

“It happens a lot of times where the partner, irrelevant of who they may be, start to distance you from your friends, from your phone, or they start to have more of a controlling side and want to be monitoring you 24/7 – those types of things where they are trying to isolate you or control more would be a concern for family members to kind of take notice of,” Lisek says.

Forms of domestic abuse that are not physical can quickly turn physical. However, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), only 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries. If you or a loved one needs medical attention from injuries sustained by a partner, Lisek offers advice for getting help safely.

“If you go to the ER and have hurt, for example, your leg or your arm and you go somewhere like to X-ray – or are taken away from that person for any time where someone cannot go with you – that is an opportunity to say you want to be talked to privately because there is something else going on,” advises Lisek.

If you have a friend or family member who is in an abusive relationship that you are aware of, you most likely want to help them leave. It is important to remember that the safety of the person you are trying to help is most important.

“I think sometimes people find out something is going on and want to react, but you have to remember that they may have kids with this significant other or a household with them or they live with them. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes things that people sometimes don’t think about. So be receptive and willing to understand that it is a slow process and I think once somebody knows they are ready to leave, they will and try to make those steps. But until then, the people around them kind of need to have that extra support for them.” Lisek explains.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline recommends the following ways to support a loved one who is in an abusive relationship:

- Acknowledge that their situation is difficult, scary, and that he/she is brave
- Refrain from judging their decisions and refusing to criticize them or guilt them over a choice they make
- Remember that you cannot “rescue them,” and that decisions about their lives are up to them to make
- Don’t speak poorly of the abusive partner
- Helping them create a safety plan
- Continue being supportive of them if they do end the relationship and are understandably lonely, upset, or return to their abusive partner
- Offer to go with them to any service provider or legal setting for moral support.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, contact the 24 hour National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) for anonymous, confidential help. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

Additional Resources:

- [A New Direction, Beverly/Morgan Park](#)
- [Crisis Center for South Suburbia](#)
- [Illinois Department of Human Services](#)