



Domestic Abuse

The not so uncommon secret that no one wants to talk about

[T]here are few feelings more exhilarating than being in love: the butterflies residing in your stomach; the inside jokes only you and your beloved share; the undulations of praise and affection you shower upon one another. But what happens when the person you love and trust – perhaps the man or woman you’ve pledged to spend the rest of your life with – hits you? Pushes you? Throws something at you?

Many people believe that the issues of domestic violence are, while disturbing, fairly straight forward. It is never acceptable to abuse a spouse or partner, and the target of the abuse should take immediate action

following such an incident. However, for those immersed in the cyclical and secretive world of violence and abuse, resolution of the problem is almost never that simple.

According to Family Shelter Service, a Wheaton social service agency that assists victims of domestic abuse, there were 6,452 police reported incidents of domestic violence in DuPage County in 2010. Issues of domestic abuse also annually generate the second most calls for response at many area police departments. And for every incident that is reported, many more are not.

“Abuse has one goal: power and control over the victim,” says Christine Hibbard, a psychotherapist with a private practice in

St. Charles. “It’s not about how the abuser feels, it’s about how he thinks – this need for power and control.” Though intimate partner violence – violence between two people who are currently or who have been engaged in a relationship such as dating or marriage – extends to people of all genders and sexual preferences, men are more likely to abuse women, especially physically.

Hibbard says there are a plethora of myths surrounding intimate partner violence, which often lead victims to deny the reality of their situation and stay in unhealthy relationships longer. Such myths include: my partner was abused as a child; my partner was hurt or used in the past; he only abuses

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those he really loves; the abuse is the result of substance or alcohol problems; he has anger issues; and, I can change him. Perhaps the most common and potentially damaging myth of all is that abuse only happens to a “certain kind of woman.”

This was one of the hardest concepts for journalist and assistant professor Michele Weldon, of River Forest, to grasp. Though her former husband physically and emotionally abused her through nine years of marriage, for years Weldon refused to acknowledge that she was an abused woman. Educated, independent and accomplished, Weldon always found a way to excuse her equally intelligent and educated husband’s abuse and was convinced she could change him for the better.

When she finally realized that was not going to be the case, she sought help at Sarah’s Inn, an organization that assists victims of abuse and their families. In her memoir, *I Closed My Eyes: Revelations of a Battered Woman*, Weldon writes, “Then I felt depressed that I was labeled a type, a photograph in a psychology book with the caption, ‘Battered Wife.’ But when I started to learn about the other women there . . . I learned we could not all be a type, we could not all fit in a chapter. There is no one type.”

Anne (pseudonym), a St. Charles resident who was physically and emotionally abused, was first shoved by her soon-to-be husband about a month before their wedding. She shrugged it off, even after it happened again. And again. And even when the abuse began to escalate. “You see so many other good sides to the person,” she says of her now soon-to-be ex-husband. “You know a side of the person that is good, and it keeps you around.”

Hibbard explains that abusive people, those whose debasement is calculated and planned and who maintain a repetitive pattern of abusive actions, behave this way not because of anger management problems or stress, but because this mindset has become an ingrained part of his or her psyche. “Abusers have attitudes and beliefs they learned as children that carry into adulthood,” she says. “Because abusers have to change



Domestic Violence Resources

• **SARAH’S INN**

311 Harrison St., Oak Park. 24-hour hotline: 708 386-4225. For general information, call 708 386-3305.

• **MUTUAL GROUND**

418 Oak Ave., Aurora. 24-hour hotline: 630 897-0080. For general information, call 630 897-0084.

• **FAMILY SHELTER SERVICE**

605 E Roosevelt Rd., Wheaton. 24-hour hotline: 630 469-5650. For general information, call 630 221-8290.

embedded beliefs and behaviors from childhood, the cure rate is low.”

Many women are reluctant to leave abusive relationships – even when in physical danger – for fear of shame, beginning anew with next to nothing, or uprooting children. However, as Hibbard notes, abusers rarely mend their ways, though they are often contrite immediately following a flare-up of abuse.

It’s important for women to know that there is help available. As Weldon says, “A woman may have to walk out of the house with nothing but what’s on her back, but there is a way out.”

Until 1982, there was no formal domestic violence law in the state of Illinois, explains David Hopkins, partner at the law firm Schiller DuCanto & Fleck in Wheaton. For seven years, Hopkins served as the chair of a task force consisting of judges, public defenders, prosecutors, attorneys representing domestic violence support organizations, and private practitioners that helped to write and re-write a Domestic Violence Act that was eventually passed in the Illinois Legislature. This act, among its other invaluable contributions, expanded the

scope of protected groups to include people in a dating relationship.

Victims of abuse now have various forms of legal recourse they employ to help remove themselves from their situations. “Going the route of calling the police and having the person arrested – people are reluctant to do that for fear of income interruption, embarrassment, etcetera,” says Jason Adess, partner at the Chicago-based law firm Berger Schatz, adding that “There’s a lot of flexibility in the law in Illinois to protect spouses from their abusers.”

Restraining orders and orders of protection are two avenues by which people can seek refuge from abusive situations. Restraining orders are, however, civil remedies and cannot be enforced by police.

Orders of protection are more commonly used in cases of abuse. Women can seek orders of protection through attorneys or on their own. In many courthouses, advocates are available to help women fill out the necessary order of protection forms. “Orders of protection are not just for physical abuse,” says Deborah Carder, a partner at Schiller DuCanto and Fleck. “They can also be used for harassment, stalking and following.”

Adess notes that when an order of protection is filed, a record of it goes into the state police system, so the police can be called if the order is violated. Violations of these orders can come with severe consequences for the perpetrator. A violation of an order of protection is a Class A misdemeanor, but it may be elevated to a Class 4 felony under certain circumstances, such as if the accused was convicted of a previous violation of an order of protection or domestic battery.

Legal recourse is not the only option available to victims of abuse. Shelters offer women and children not only safe havens, but also services that help them cope with and overcome abuse. Sarah’s Inn of Oak Park offers a wide range of services and programs, including support and education groups, shelter placement and relocation services, art therapy for children, and

emergency financial assistance.

Colleen Sutkus, associate program director at Sarah’s Inn, says, “We work on a lot of life skills and picking up and moving on. We do therapy with children. It’s OK to still love Dad, but it’s OK to be mad at him.”

Mutual Ground of Aurora is a 28-bed shelter that also offers educational and therapeutic programs for victims of abuse. For women wanting to leave and start a new life, they can work on goals such as how to get a job and a house. If a woman is planning on returning to her husband, she works out a safety plan and is educated about the cycle of violence. “We don’t judge,” says Executive Director Michelle Meyer. “Anything she wants, we’ll help her with, but we won’t push her in one direction or another.”

People in the local communities are stepping up to help, as well. In October, Mutual Ground will host its “Walk for Hope” fundraiser, for which people raise money to walk against domestic violence. Both Mutual Ground and Sarah’s Inn have various volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, Naperville’s Ribfest, one of the largest and most popular summer festivals in the western suburbs, serves as the primary fundraiser for the Exchange Club. Through the fest, the service club has raised more than \$12 million in the last 25 years, most of which has been donated to various domestic violence organizations. “We just really want to stop this cycle and protect everyone,” says Julie Lichter, public relations and marketing chair for Ribfest. “That is the goal of the Exchange Club.”

For those who suspect someone close to them is struggling with abuse, “Never ask, ‘Why don’t you just leave?’” cautions Weldon. “You absolutely can help somebody by not being judgmental.” For those who are in an abusive relationship – whether physical, sexual, emotional or verbal – there are several 24-hour hotlines (see Domestic Violence Resources on opposite page) available for counseling and support.

“You don’t have to be ashamed,” says Meyer. “It’s not your fault. You deserve to live a happy, safe life.” — *Brittany Clingen*

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LEGAL RESOURCES FOR LEAVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP



David Hopkins

Last year over 7,000 cases of domestic violence were reported to law enforcement officials in DuPage County. Unfortunately even more cases are not reported, for a variety of reasons. Domestic violence is a real problem, especially in upscale communities such as ours. It is critical to know that there are options to end an abusive relationship, receive the protection you need and not live in fear for what tomorrow may bring.

Know Your Options

As difficult as it may be to leave, no one needs to tolerate abuse, physical or mental. If you are a victim of domestic violence, Illinois law is on your side. Whether you may be a victim or know someone who is, it’s important to know that the following resources are available.

- Illinois has a Domestic Violence Act that seeks to prevent physical abuse and harassment among family and household members. The attorneys at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck, LLP (630) 665-5800 have a good understanding of the system and what is needed to achieve protection.
- Family Shelter Service offers a 24-hour hotline at (630) 221-8290.
- Illinois Domestic Violence Help Line at (877) 863-6338.

Receive the Protection You Need

The first step to take action will be the most difficult. The number one priority is your safety, and that of your children. Domestic violence is a real problem in our communities and communities across the country. By breaking the silence, increasing understanding of the issue, we seek to find ways to support victims and their children.

David Hopkins was Chair of the Illinois Bar Association Task Force that wrote the 1992 revampment of the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. A partner in the nation’s largest matrimonial law firm of Schiller DuCanto & Fleck, he has been a fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers since 1981 and has been selected by peers for inclusion in the 2003-2012 Illinois Leading Lawyers and in the 2005-12 Illinois Super Lawyers. He has also been selected for inclusion in “Best Lawyers in America,” Naifeth and Smith (2010-2012).

For more information, contact Schiller DuCanto & Fleck at 630-665-5800.

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