

What Kind of a Community Do You Envision?!

Domestic violence. When you hear the words, what do you see? A middle-age woman with a black eye? A child cowering in the corner holding a teddy bear? A drunken man yelling at his wife while their teenage son listens from his bedroom?

Do you see that same teenager later grabbing his girlfriend's arm? Or do you see a man pointing his finger and threatening to deport his wife? Or a caregiver leaving an elderly man all day in his wheelchair to look out the window? Or a woman calling her female intimate partner names?

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors perpetrated by one person in an intimate relationship against another with the goal of exerting power and control. U.S. Bureau of Statistics reports show that of all domestic violence incidents, the majority of crimes are committed by a man against a woman, and women are 5 to 8 times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner. These statistics, however, do not examine the larger context of why this gender inequality exists nor do they address the reality that when violence happens in the home, as a community, we all suffer. If we truly believe that people are equal, then we will encourage all people to act in ways that are loving and equal, rather than in ways that are hurtful and unequal.

Are we part of the **PROBLEM!**

-modified from A. Cosgrove
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One of...

EQUALITY

1. the state of being equal; likeness in magnitude or dimension, value, qualities, degree, and the like; the state of being neither superior nor inferior; as the equality of men: an equality of rights.

Or one of...

OPPRESSION

1. to weigh heavily on the mind, spirits, or senses of; to lie heavily on; to burden.
2. to keep down by the cruel or unjust use of power or authority; to burden with harsh, rigorous impositions; to tyrannize over.
3. (a) to crush; to trample down; (b) to overpower.

Recognizing that domestic violence is a form of oppression and the function of oppression is to keep certain groups of people down is the beginning to stopping violence in our community.

It's a hard reality to face, but at times, for some of us, the only way we feel good about ourselves is if we can act more powerful, superior to, or in control of another who we perceive as less than. Or, perhaps some of us have simply come to believe that we are inherently less than, that violence is normal, or somehow we've done something to cause another person's abusive behavior and, so, we just quietly endure ongoing abuse.

Domestic violence occurs in all socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. For many people, there are barriers to receiving services to end abuse. All of us who live in Jefferson County already face the rural challenges of a below-standard economy, long distance commutes, and geographic isolation from basic resources. But people in our community who encounter other forms of oppression based on their age, race, background physical or mental ability, and/or sexual orientation, can be even more vulnerable to intimate partner violence because pre-existing stereotypes and judgements about their particular group often hinder us from offering appropriate services and hinder those groups from reaching out to us. We can help by raising our awareness about how we end up contributing to oppression and by committing even more to creating equality.

The answer to ending domestic violence is a coordinated community response; there is no single organization or family or church that can create solutions for such a wide-spread social issue. Through intervention and professional help, the community can hold the offender accountable for criminal behavior and ensure safety and accessible services for victims.

We have the choice to end violence, but it takes a lot of hard work: thorough self-examination and honesty are essential to our efforts. So, the next time you hear the words "domestic violence," will you see yourself as part of our community and remember you are as responsible as the next person for stopping domestic violence?

