

take a
STAND

*Help a victim, or help yourself, but most important —
 take a stand against family violence*

BY LORI B. MURRAY

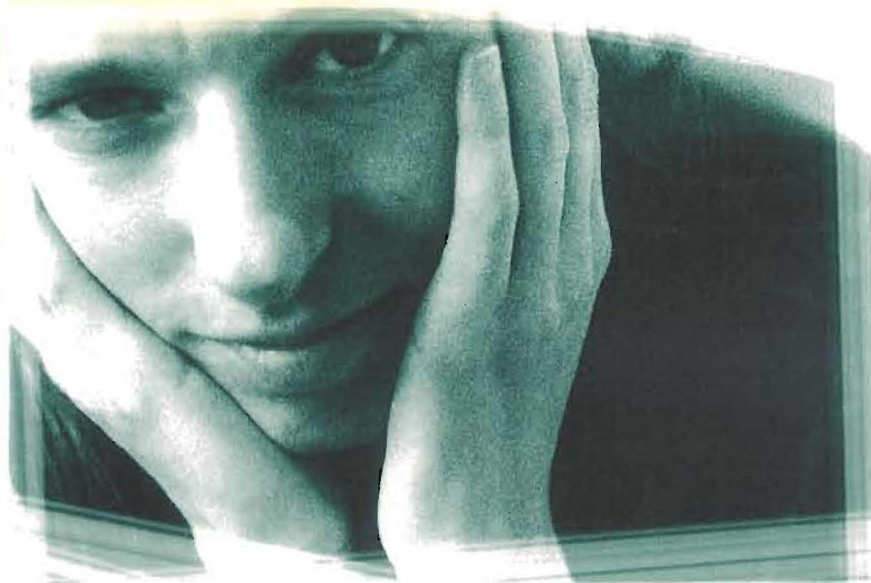
DON'T THINK family violence is in your neighborhood? Think again. The truth is, nearly one-third of the Franklin County Municipal Court arraignment docket is spent on crimes of domestic violence. In 2006, over 20,600 domestic violence civil protection orders were issued, and over 37,500 domestic violence arrests were made in the state of Ohio alone, according to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. With statistics like these, it's pretty clear that family violence exists among us — transcending race and economic levels. Knowing that, it's fairly certain that at some point in time you will be faced with the opportunity to help a victim. When that happens, whether it's in a restaurant, talking with a friend or providing information to a co-worker, the question is: Will you be prepared?

Before you respond, remember, being prepared goes way beyond just knowing what to say. Through years of research and experience, experts know that perpetrators typically become more abusive when they discover that the victim is seeking help. That's why it's critical to approach the situation delicately. At the same time, we also know that the average victim will leave an abusive relationship up to seven times before leaving the situation permanently. This can be frustrating for the person who is trying to help. But because this is so important — and because you may someday find yourself face-to-face with a victim and/or a perpetrator — here are some things you should know.

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WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Family violence is categorized in three different forms: child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse. As the names imply, child abuse occurs when a child is involved in the abuse, and elder abuse occurs when an elderly person is a victim of abuse. Typically, domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual and psychological attacks that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. The perpetrator views this as a way to achieve power and control over the victim. The problem often begins with the perpetrator using isolation, threats and name-calling against the victim, and it may also include emotional, sexual or verbal abuse. Unfortunately, it can progress to physical violence, which may escalate and result in serious injuries, hospitalization and even death.

Domestic violence does not discriminate. In fact, all races are about equally vulnerable. It occurs regardless of age, income, culture, religion, education and race. And it happens in various types of relationships, from husbands and wives to dating couples, live-in partners and same-sex couples. There simply are no boundaries.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE

Chances are good that if and when you're faced with a situation in which someone needs assistance, you probably won't be expecting it. For instance, it might take place in a public place, like a restaurant. If you witness a perpetrator

hitting a victim, for instance, you may feel compelled to do something. But before you attempt to intervene, stop for a moment and assess the situation. "In a restaurant or something similar, think about safety first — not only for you, but also for the victim," says Karen S. Days, president of the Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence. "When the perpetrator realizes the victim is trying to get help, it will get worse. That's why a victim may act like she doesn't want help." In a situation like this, the best course of action is to seek professional assistance by calling 9-1-1.

Although some violence occurs in public, generally speaking, the majority of family violence takes place behind closed doors. If you don't actually witness

the abuse, but you feel fairly certain that it is taking place and you want to help the victim, consider the following:

- Plan what you want to say to the victim and determine a good time and place to talk.
- Ask questions like: "How can I help you? What do you want to do about the situation?" and then listen without judgment.
- Don't moralize or criticize the person; give them plenty of time and space to consider your questions and to answer them.
- Don't say "Just get out." It's not safe advice and it may not be practical for the victim.
- Let the victim know that you believe that verbal, emotional or physical abuse in a relationship is never acceptable.
- Provide the victim with information about local resources that can help. (See the Columbus Coalition's Web site: www.ccaf.v.org or call the Coalition at 614.722.5985 for more information and assistance.)

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

What if the person who needs the help is you? Remember, no one deserves to be abused — not you, not your friend, not your neighbor, not your relative. If you are in a threatening situation, call 9-1-1. This is the best way to immediately avoid being harmed. If calling 9-1-1 does not feel like a viable option for you, talk to a friend, a neighbor, a faith

leader, a physician or any other person who can be a source of support for you.

If you are trying to leave, plan ahead by setting aside some cash, important documents, an extra set of keys and a change of clothes that you can grab in a hurry. Then, contact community resources that can help you find a place to stay and provide you with legal resources should you decide to take action against your abuser (visit www.ccafv.org or call the Coalition at 614.722.5985 for a list of resources).

TAKING A STAND

Whether you are being abused yourself or you are in a position to help another person, someone needs to take a stand against the wrongdoing. Women have been speaking out against domestic violence for a long time. Still, many experts believe that the problem won't diminish until non-offending men take a stand and commit to eliminating the problem from society. "The majority of the perpetrators are male, and therefore, it's going to take non-offending men to hold their brothers accountable," says Days.

Instead, many men ignore the issue because it's not personal for them. But suppose you're on the basketball court and one of your teammates admits to slapping his wife or girlfriend. That's the time to let him know how that makes you feel. What if he was dating your sister or your daughter? "Men have a powerful opportunity to make an impact by stating that it is not acceptable behavior," says Days. "We want to get men who are in healthy relationships to take a stand."

Perhaps no one understands this better than Los Angeles Dodgers Manager Joe Torre. He grew up in a Brooklyn, N.Y., household where he and his siblings watched their father abuse their mother. After Torre went public with the story in 1995, he started the Joe Torre Safe At Home Foundation to educate children and adults about family violence. One of the organization's initiatives is a comprehensive school-based program known as Margaret's Place, in tribute to his mother, that provides students with a safe room in

school where they can meet with a professional counselor trained in domestic-violence intervention and prevention. There are now 10 Margaret's Place locations throughout New York City and Westchester County, N.Y.

Torre is one individual who is taking a stand, and the Safe At Home Foundation is one of many organizations committed to domestic violence prevention and intervention. There are numerous ways to help victims, and your help can make a difference. If you would like to volunteer your time to a local organization that takes a stand against family violence, contact the following:

FIRST LINK

614.221.6766 • www.firstlink.org

CENTER FOR CHILD & FAMILY ADVOCACY

614.722.8200 • www.nationwidechildrens.org

COLUMBUS COALITION AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE

614.722.5985 • www.ccafv.org



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