

Detecting the warning signs and red flags of domestic violence

BY TAHIRAH OGLETREE
GUEST WRITER

As I wrote in my book, "Survivors Celebrating Life Beyond Domestic Violence," abuse doesn't always scream. Sometimes it whispers. It's critical that a person remains vigilant in recognizing non-physical, as well as physical, abuse in domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a topic commonly ignored because of the vicious attacks, humiliating anguish, suffering and shame a victim faces. The brutal physical scars it leaves behind both physical and psychological speaks blaring volumes through a victim's silence.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of domestic violence starts with observing the behaviors, gestures and patterns of both victims and the abuser.

The abuser may show signs of abuse by controlling the victim's conversation, or making the victim feel uncomfortable by certain intimidating gestures. Condescending remarks to the victim also indicate emotional abuse. This behavior may happen in any setting where the abuser feels a need to exert power by belittling a partner.

The unsettling signs of a victim can be seen in many different ways in how she or he responds to their abuser. Crying, avoiding eye contact, doubtfulness, timidity and being afraid of speaking are all potential signs of domestic violence. Victims go out of their way to ensure they are not offending the abuser.

Other outward signs of fear can also be seen by the way the victim seeks permission, apologizes for everything she or he does, including making excuses for the abuser's actions.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, including flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, battered women syndrome, uncontrollable thoughts,



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low self-esteem, thoughts of suicide are all signs of what a victim faces dealing with domestic violence. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 1-800-273-8255

The physical signs of domestic violence may lead to specific injuries that can be vividly seen by physicians, family members, neighbors, friends and co-workers.

Here are several examples of visible physical abuse: severe bruises on or around the eyes, purple or red discoloration marks on the face or neck, involuntary shaking, bruises on the arms, back, and legs changes in eating patterns chronic fatigue, sprained or broken wrist, abdominal cuts, broken or missing teeth, eardrum rupture, rectal or genital injury, cigarette burns, rope bruises and welts from belt buckles. The National Domestic Violence Hotline number is 1-800-799-7233

Some signs of physical trauma can be immediately recognized by a survivor of domestic violence. Others can be camouflaged behind the victim's hidden shame. This psychological disturbance can prevent the victim to be forthcoming with what is happening to them. They might make excuses or deny how they were injured.

Helping a victim reach the point of opening up about their abuse will take time. It's important to be patient, and understand that the victim is living in mind-shattering fear and entangled in deep-rooted emotions. Using forceful tactics or language to get the victim to act or leave their abuser is not recommended.

Here are some effective ways to help a person dealing with domestic violence: Ensure the victim is safe, provide resources that will get them immediate help and keep them safe. Contact a local organization such as Turn A New Leaf (TurnaNewLeaf.org, 480-733-3019).

Showing support by listening and being there for a victim is important. Encouraging the victim to know the importance of breaking their silence is key. Advising that will help end the perpetual abuse.

Remember: A victim must want to leave an abusive relationship on their own. Using forceful language or trying to force them to leave is similar to what their abuser has been doing. ■

Tahirah Ogletree, a domestic violence survivor in Chandler, is an author and founder of the O'Tahirah Foundation. Information: otahirah.org. Her book on domestic violence is available on her website and amazon.com