

Family violence

Indications of possible abuse must be heeded

By JACIE B. PALMER  
Herald Special

A few days ago I learned that a friend of mine is becoming more than just friendly with a man who has repeatedly been convicted of assaulting another woman.

I was in a state of shock because I'd always respected this woman for her intelligence and her awareness of the world around her. Certainly she is familiar with abuse because she has been involved with women's activist groups and has even shared with others her concern for abusive male partners and the lack of treatment available for them.

If a woman is presently with a partner she knows has abused other women, she is walking a dangerous path. There is no acceptable excuse or valid reason for a man to physically or sexually assault a woman. It is a criminal offence.

If the abuser has not sought help for his problem, and it is his problem, he will eventually assault another woman. It may not happen today or tomorrow or even next year but eventually it will happen again. He will lose control and batter his female partner. Any woman knowing the violent background of her partner should rethink her relationship with him and walk away before she too becomes a victim.

The very fact that a woman is aware she is with a formerly abusive male means he will try hard to hide or excuse his problem. This woman owes it to herself to take any indication of abuse very seriously. Don't let any minor act of abuse pass without showing concern.

Attempts to control, picking fights, put downs, negative remarks, hostile reactions to minor incidents, acts of violence directed at objects and placing blame on others are all indications of abusive behavior. An abuser will intensify the abuse and abuse more frequently if left unchecked.

For her own protection a woman with a male she knows to be an abuser should try to find out how many other women he has abused. Delve into his past. How many successful long-term relationships has this man had? If he's had none, she should recognize that this man suffers from a variety of problems.

Does he blame his former girlfriends for dissolution of the relationships? If he does this consistently, she should be aware that the problems and difficulties are likely to be his. Mature adults accept responsibility. They recognize the part they play in a failed relationship. An abuser does not.

Is he still friendly with former girlfriends? Maintaining good friendships is indicative of a healthy mind and an emotionally-well person. Does he have female friends as well as male friends who share some of his time? If he does, it indicates he values time with both sexes. Does he have a good support system? If his friends are few and not close, she should stand back and ask herself why? Lack of friends may indicate her partner has a side to him she has not seen. Lack of

friends indicates a lack of depth in the person himself.

It is likely any abuser will be somewhat secretive about his life, his family and his friends. Often an abuser appears to be aloof and a loner. He may denigrate relationships. He may be an isolationist. This is often the case since an abuser doesn't want to be found out. If he suffers from very low self-esteem he may be insecure in social settings with unfamiliar faces or conversations in which he is uncomfortable to participate. He will stay away from anyone he believes may discover his secret.

Catching an abuser in a small lie may be of much greater significance than his potential victim realizes. If a woman is with a man who has abused other women and she is aware of it she must be very cautious in trusting this person with her life and the lives of her children. Over a period of time she may find she still has scanty details about his personal and professional life. The caution light must remain on!

Probably she will find this man



is capable of dealing with most issues on only a superficial basis. His adherence to making and keeping commitments may be sporadic. He will always have seemingly valid reasons for his absences or broken promises but over a period of time she will

notice more and more that he is secretive. She will likely begin to recognize that he is probably lying to her over small things such as appointment times and work hours. Relatively minor? Yes, but indicative of unacceptable long term behavior patterns.

Yet here is my friend - over her head - into a relationship which will certainly develop into an abusive one. You see, this man is convinced he has no responsibility for the vicious attacks on his victim. He continues to blame his victim for his violence. This man needs counselling.

Any woman involving herself and her family in a potentially life threatening relationship should contact Halton Women's Place, the Distress Centre, her physician, her minister or avail herself of other counselling services in the community to ensure her decision-making is appropriate given the circumstances.

Watch for upcoming articles on co-dependent relationships and the plight of the rescuer. These articles will offer some reasons why women involve themselves

in and remain in abusive relationships.

Feel free to contact Jacie by directing letters to her attention at The Herald. All correspondence will remain confidential. Should you wish to speak to Jacie, call the Distress Centre at 877-1211 and your call will be returned. If you are a woman or child in crisis or an abusive male wanting help, call the Distress Centre or dial 911.



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