

Family violence

Community must be aware of warning signals

By JACIE B. PALMER
Herald Special

I read with interest a letter to the editor regarding The Herald's coverage of family violence cases and, in part, this reader states: "I really do not think it is fair to print the names of persons accused or convicted of sexual assaults...what about the victims and their families." This view is totally untenable in today's society!

As a resident of this community I want to know who the perpetrators of assaults are. I don't care whether it is domestic violence or sexual assault. I want to ensure that my family and myself are not negatively impacted by these abusers. The fact that members of the public are aware of an abusers' deviant behavior will help to ensure this person does not repeat his acts of violence. Members of our community have a right to know if they live next door to a man or woman convicted of sexual assault. They have a right to protect their own family and an obligation as neighbors to help protect the victims of violence.

A long-held belief that violence should be kept within the family is outdated today. In fact, suppression and sublimation of acts of violence has long-lasting effects on victims. There are documented cases of childhood victims of incest who in their senior years, through therapy, have come to realize they were sexually abused as children.

Certainly people don't like the general public to become aware of their family life and related problems but this secrecy further compounds the psychological and emotional stress placed on victims.

In looking at child victims of abuse we only need to look to our school systems which have documented increasing violence directed against teachers in the

form of unprovoked attacks resulting in broken and damaged furniture and teachers being bruised, kicked and bitten.

Even at the Junior Kindergarten level there is an increase in abusive and destructive tantrums. This violence is brought to school from poor role models with few parenting skills and continues to affect our children throughout their school life. Parents themselves are often victims of family violence.

While disclosure of childhood sexual abuse is traumatic for the victim, is it any better that the child develop multiple personalities to overcome this atrocity? Split personalities are a defense mechanism children may develop to deal with the issue of incest and reduce the stress caused them.

By developing a stronger self they can handle the situation



easier. Often victims of assault feel they are re-victimized by the

investigation itself. They need to find support and are unable to obtain the support they need by hiding the secret within the family. In short, they should talk to peers who can be supportive to their needs. Long term counselling is also necessary to ensure complete recovery.

We, as adults, do well in informing children about sexual abuse. They know the signs, but when confronted with the act occurring within our family or to a friend we cannot deal effectively with victims' feelings. Often we ignore their need to talk or we tell the victim not to think about the violence rather than having the issue confronted openly and honestly. Parents may ignore the situation because they are uncomfortable or because they are economically dependent upon the abuser. In cases like this the deviant behavior may continue

unabated for years.

Symptoms of childhood sexual abuse include: aggressive behavior, escape into fantasy worlds, massive weight change, poor peer relationships, fear of males, talk of running away, displaying sexual knowledge inappropriate for their age and discussion of suicide. Overt signals include: torn, stained or bloody clothing, difficulty in walking or sitting and experiencing abdominal pain.

The community must accept the fact this violence occurs and maintain a vigilant watch to ensure victims are protected. This can only happen through knowledge and increased levels of awareness of the levels of violence in our own community.

Endnote: Information provided from Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario Newsletter Jan/91.

Graduate

Clifford Britton, son of Ross and Marjorie graduated in May from Lakehead University receiving his Honors Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation and Bachelor of Science (majoring in Natural Science) Degrees.

He was also awarded the Dean Braun's Medal for the highest standing in the Outdoor Recreation graduating class.

He will be attending Queen's University this fall for one year to obtain his Bachelor of Education Certificate.

Congratulations Cliff from Dad, Mom, Jim and Rosa, Jan and Mike and Cathy



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