

Family Violence

Alcohol is just an excuse for abusive male

By JACIE B. PALMER
Herald Special
The man describes himself with these words: "When I'm drunk I am more interesting. I can be around people more. The alcohol makes me feel more important and what I have to say is important to those around me."

These words are typical of a man with low self-esteem. This man drinks because he can't deal with his problems. He drinks to build his self-confidence because as a sober individual he is too insecure to socialize. He may believe himself to be boring unless he's had a few drinks.

Even when under the influence of alcohol he may appear restless and abruptly leave a social gathering when the conversation is not one in which he's comfortable. This man may appear to be aloof, sometimes unapproachable, or even a little arrogant to those around him. He is considered to be superficial by acquaintances. Since they have few in-depth conversations with the abuser they cannot recognize the characteristics he demonstrates to be symptoms of a much deeper problem.

In the life of him and his family there is a secret. The family tries hard to deny it but it is there. This man is a batterer.

Abused as a child, he has learned his stock and trade well. He is an artist at psychological mind games and when they don't work

he controls those around him by grabbing them and physically abusing them.

After each physically violent encounter he is remorseful. To justify the abuse he recounts tales of abuse which date back to his childhood. His family listens to all the disappointments of his life over and over again.

His wife knows what's happening is not right but she cares very deeply and at the same time feels much pity for him. After each incident he apologizes and makes promises and she remains hopeful her life will change for the better. He promises her the world and it looks very inviting.

This is stereotypical of an abusive relationship and an abusive male. Here we have a man who has low self-esteem. Perhaps this man has been unable to hold together positive relationships, has few friends or is in a dead-end job. He may have many dreams which he now knows will never be realized. He is a failure in his own eyes.

In any case, his parents, in abusing him eroded his self-confidence to the point where he no longer believes in himself and his ability to make something of his life - to succeed. He shies away from any challenges, rarely makes or keeps commitments and will often avoid contact with coworkers. He is afraid his secret will be found out.

To mask his insecurities he



becomes a tyrant in his own home. He belittles his wife by telling her she is "no good." According to him, she doesn't keep house properly, doesn't cook well, doesn't know how to shop or dress. Nothing she can do will please him. He discourages every initiative she takes to improve their life together. Over a period of time her confidence has become eroded and she starts to believe his belittling statements. Rather than admit he needs help, he drinks. That masks his fears, lack of self-confidence and his insecurities.

This man needs help. The problem is: most male abusers see others as the problem. Just as this man passes the blame to his wife, he blames coworkers for undermining him with supervisors. He blames friends for not being "true" friends when they disappoint him. He blames his wife for difficulties leading to the dissolution of their relationship. He blames his children for creating problems. Those that don't remain "faithful" in their friendship are put down repeatedly during conversations and contact is shunned.

He denies all responsibility for his actions.

Will this man ever change? That's difficult to say. Years of drinking make that habit a hard one to lick. Drinking often increases the intensity and frequency of the abuse. Years of abuse as a child and years of being an abusive adult are not easily washed away.

This man needs to be found out. He needs to be held accountable for his actions. Only then will he be forced to recognize his problem and responsibility for it. Counselling can, over the long term, stop his learned abusive behavior.

Confidence building courses, skills upgrading, or job refraining may help. Family counselling with his partner may help to ensure this relationship survives.

But it will take long term counselling with committed partners to ensure success. They can succeed!

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.

Child abuse still a national problem

By TERESA PITMAN
Halton CAS

Child abuse has received considerable attention over the past few years, and yet it continues to be a serious national problem. It is important that children know they have the right not to be abused, and that we report abuse when we are aware of it. But preventing abuse before it happens is even more important.

How can you prevent child abuse?

If you are a parent:

- Learn as much as you can about normal child development and how to deal with different behaviours, through reading or joining a parents' group or parenting class.

- Being a parent is a tough job. Look for support - from family, other parents, professionals in your community. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

- When you feel yourself "losing it" (and we all do sometimes), take a deep breath,

count to ten, and walk away from the situation if you can. This may be a good time to call a friend or supportive family member. Or call Parental Stress at 844-7234.

- Be cautious when choosing babysitters for your child. Ask for references, and be sure to check them out. Listen to what your child tells you after spending time with the babysitter.

- Help your child to develop self-confidence by treating him with respect and consideration. Let him know you are willing to listen to what he has to say, without criticizing or judging him. Then if he does experience abuse, he will be more likely to tell you.

If you are concerned about the children in our community:

- Look for ways to support the parents around you. Even a positive comment made in passing can help a mother who is having a rough day. If you can be available to talk or to help out in

practical ways, that can make a big difference to parents under stress.

- Consider volunteering with the Halton Children's Aid Society. They have a variety of programs run by volunteers that work to reduce child abuse. Call Corrie Galloway at 844-8211 or 878-2375 for information about how you can help.

- Give financial support to organizations which help children and families, such as The Children's and Youth Foundation of Halton, your local Parent-Child Centre, Parental Stress Services, United Way, and other programs.

Be aware that our children are our future. When a child is abused, the effects can be far-reaching. The steps we take to prevent child abuse today will mean a brighter future not just for the child we protect, but for all of us.

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