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The Canadian Champion

Rape crisis centre's Thought Check List aims to dispel myths about sexual assault

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Thoughts can hurt. And that's why the Halton Rape Crisis Centre (HRCC) is releasing the 12-point Thought Check List aimed at dispelling the myths that still swirl around sexual assault.

“We get so many messages from so many places,” said Jacquelyn Schlatman, co-executive director of the HRCC. “It's pretty powerful. We really need to combat them.”

The list, which was drawn up with the support of the Halton Violence Prevention Council, will be distributed through schools, social agencies and police and victim services next month.

At their worst, unchecked ideas contribute to a continuum which can result in domestic and sexual violence.

And they can leave victims feeling isolated and guilty, said Ms Schlatman.

“That's present in any sexual assault I've been privy to,” she said. “The victims do blame themselves. They think they must have done something.”

Unconscious beliefs are revealed when questions like ‘why does she stay’ are heard more often than ‘why doesn't he stop,’ said Ms Schlatman.

And they're most dangerous in people such as judges, police officers, lawyers and the clergy.

Prevalent misconceptions that the Thought Check List aims to debunk include the notion that

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sexual assault can be provoked by a certain manner of dress, that many if not most women lie about sexual assault, that women say no to sex in order to be forced or teased into it, and that being bought dinner or drinks obligates a woman to have sex.

The beliefs that a sexual assault can't occur unless an actual struggle takes place, that males can't be victims and that most assaults are reported to the police are also tackled.

Also busted is the idea that women can't be sexually assaulted by a person they've had intimate relations with in the past, and that memory is always accurate after an assault. Finally, the Thought Check List aims to increase the awareness that women of all ethnic and racial types, as well as disabled and lesbian women, can suffer an assault.

By addressing popular misconceptions, the Thought Check List aims to show that the offender

is solely responsible for their actions, that being bought dinner and drinks is just that, that many women are too frightened or shocked to struggle during an assault and that the very same fear and shock can affect both long and short-term memory. It also attempts to show that women say no in a variety of ways, that men can be victims too and sexual assault is wildly under-reported.

For many, it may seem astounding that people believe what's on the list.

But they do, said Ms Schlatman.

“You start thinking you've gotten past it but it's surprising how many times it still comes up,” she said. “We've heard it even from young women. They've absorbed that from somewhere.”

To fight back, the HRCC plans to bring the list to area schools, along with the message of equal respect for everyone.

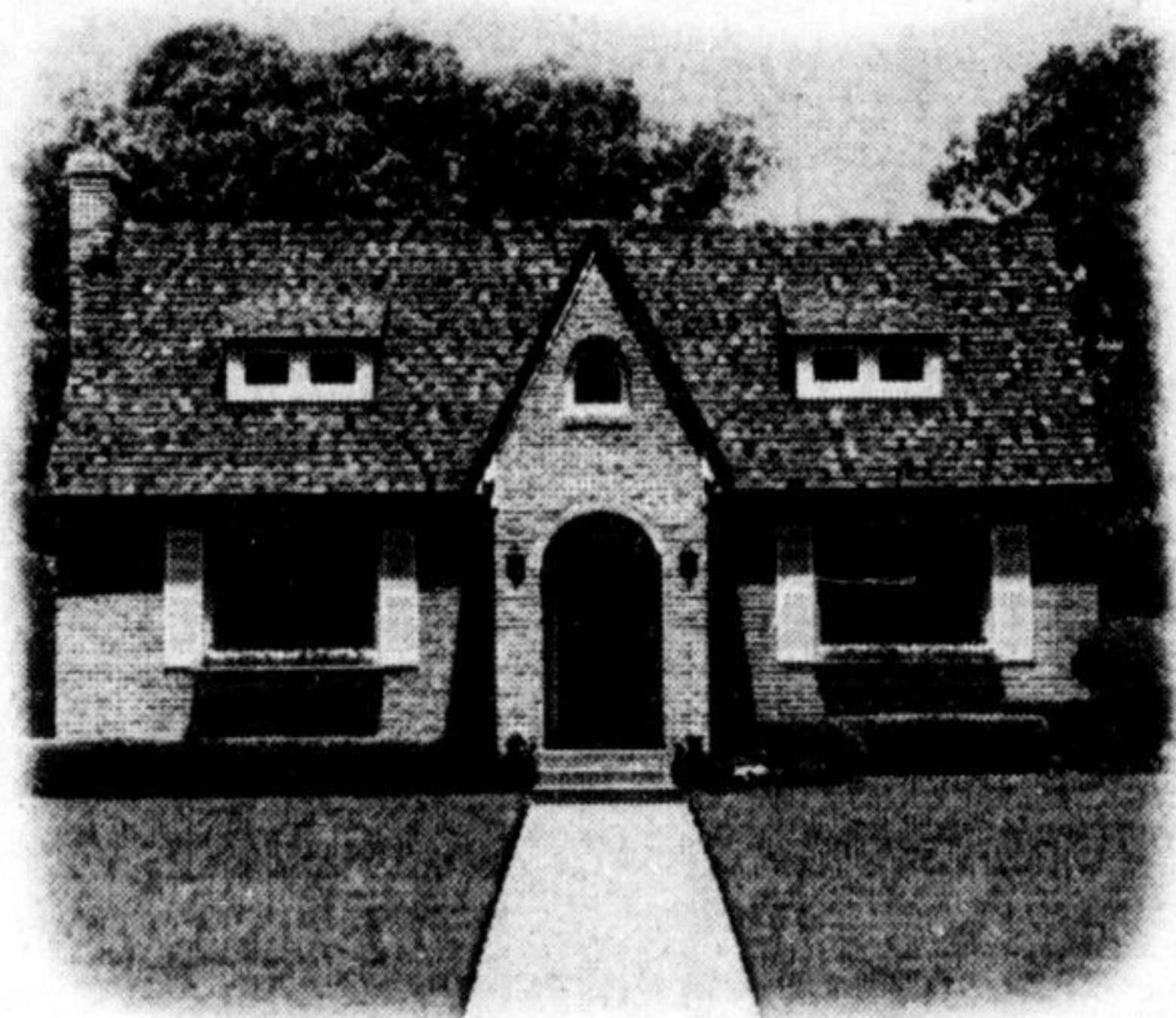
But the bulk of teaching still has to take place in the home. That means parents should examine their ideas about gender roles and sexual and domestic assault. Even child-rearing has to come under scrutiny, said Ms Schlatman.

“It's just teaching respect for everyone, and nurturing our boys, not going so much by the stereotype that big boys don't cry,” said Ms Schlatman. “Allowing them to have feelings, show feelings and express feelings. Anyone can hurt.”

Encouraging boys to share a care-taking role with women could also help, she added.

For more information, contact the HRCC at 825-3622.

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It's not too late to get involved in Arthritis Month in September.

The Arthritis Society is seeking phone volunteers, leaders and canvassers for its September residential fundraising campaign.

And members of the community are asked to give generously to canvassers to help find a cure.

Arthritis is Canada's number one chronic disease of which four million people of all ages suffer.

For more information call (905) 712-2281.



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Sunday, Sept. 3 11 am - 11 pm
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