

A friend in Meade

Dr. Ed Meade



Abused wife needs support of friends

Dr. Ed Meade is a registered psychologist and director of the Markham Stouffville Family Life Centre. In this column, he answers questions from readers covering a wide variety of topics.

Q: I have an acquaintance who is frequently abused both mentally and physically by her husband. They have a child and are expecting another any day now. It upsets me to see the situation she is in and I feel like shaking her and telling her she doesn't have to put up with it. I know it is her problem, but my knowing about it seems to have made it my problem too. Do I have any legal obligation to report what is going on? What, if anything, should I say to her?

A: I believe you have no legal obligation to report your acquaintance's situation. It can be frustrating to be close to a person who is involved in a physically abusive relationship and is not choosing an exit.

My experience with these situations is that women can fear the independence and being on their own more than they fear the beatings which occur in the relationship.

Physical violence has no part in a relationship. Perhaps you could alert other women to reach out and help your friend get out of her situation. There are groups being run in York Region designed for women experiencing psychological and physical abuse. (Call the Markham Stouffville Family Life Centre at 294-2371 for information). Perhaps you could accompany her to one of these group meetings. Often it is the support of other women which enables a woman to leave a violent relationship.

If you can give guidance to the abusive husband, there are also groups for men who abuse women.

Perhaps this couple would be willing to talk with a counsellor at the M-S Family Life Centre.

There is no legal obligation, but perhaps there is a moral obligation to help your friend.

Q: I am frustrated with one of my personality traits. I am afraid of confrontations of any kind. I get taken advantage of frequently because I won't speak my mind for fear of an argument. When my wife and I disagree, she yells and screams. I clam up and won't give my side of the argument. Or else I avoid the yelling completely by giving in against my better judgment before the fight begins. Do you think I could be this way because my parents fought a great deal when I was growing up? What can I do to remedy the situation? I resent myself for not speaking my own mind, yet the thought of doing it terrifies me.

A: You appear to be frustrated with your lack of assertiveness in life. It seems to be interfering with your life in general, but more particularly with your marriage.

You ask if I think you're doing this because your parents fought a great deal. My answer is no. This could well be a factor which influences your life, but there is no cause-and-effect relationship between your parents fighting and your lack of assertiveness. It could well be that you are connecting the two in your mind and deciding to be quiet rather than argue.

You may have learned as a child that to be quiet is less dangerous than to argue. This is a learned social skill, and new learning can overcome the social deficit you are experiencing.

May I suggest that you first give up the self-resentment? Give yourself a break. Your quietness has value and probably contributes a certain balance to your marital relationship.

The new learning could well be gained in a group counselling situation. Perhaps you and your wife, if she will participate, would grow through a group experience. Groups can be found through the Markham Stouffville Family Life Centre, or there are many other group programs in North York and Toronto. You could also read books on assertiveness, or seek individual counsel, to increase both your awareness and your assertiveness.

May I say lastly that by recognizing your frustration you are on the way to developing assertiveness. When we are not aware of our frustration is, when we are truly stuck.

Q: My marriage is over. My husband and I haven't communicated in years. He is very involved in work, friends and sports and spends very little time at home. When he is home, he complains and becomes angry at the smallest things.

A: My problem is that I can't leave him because we have three children, and financially I cannot afford to support them on my own. I haven't worked for years, and an office job that I would be qualified for, wouldn't pay well enough. Am I stuck in a relationship that is hurting everyone involved, including the children, because of money? Do I have an option? I want out.

A: When you say your marriage is over, you may mean that a phase of your marital relationship is over. You paint a helpless scenario, one which many women who have children experience.

There are many details not supplied that might make a difference. Have you sought professional help concerning your situation? Having a competent, trained person to be a fair witness to your marriage and family difficulties often makes a tremendous difference.

If your husband will not co-operate in resolving the difficulties, you might look to increasing your assertiveness. Take an assertiveness training course and learn to fulfill your own needs. Your husband might benefit from your leadership and from a strong assertive stand on your part.

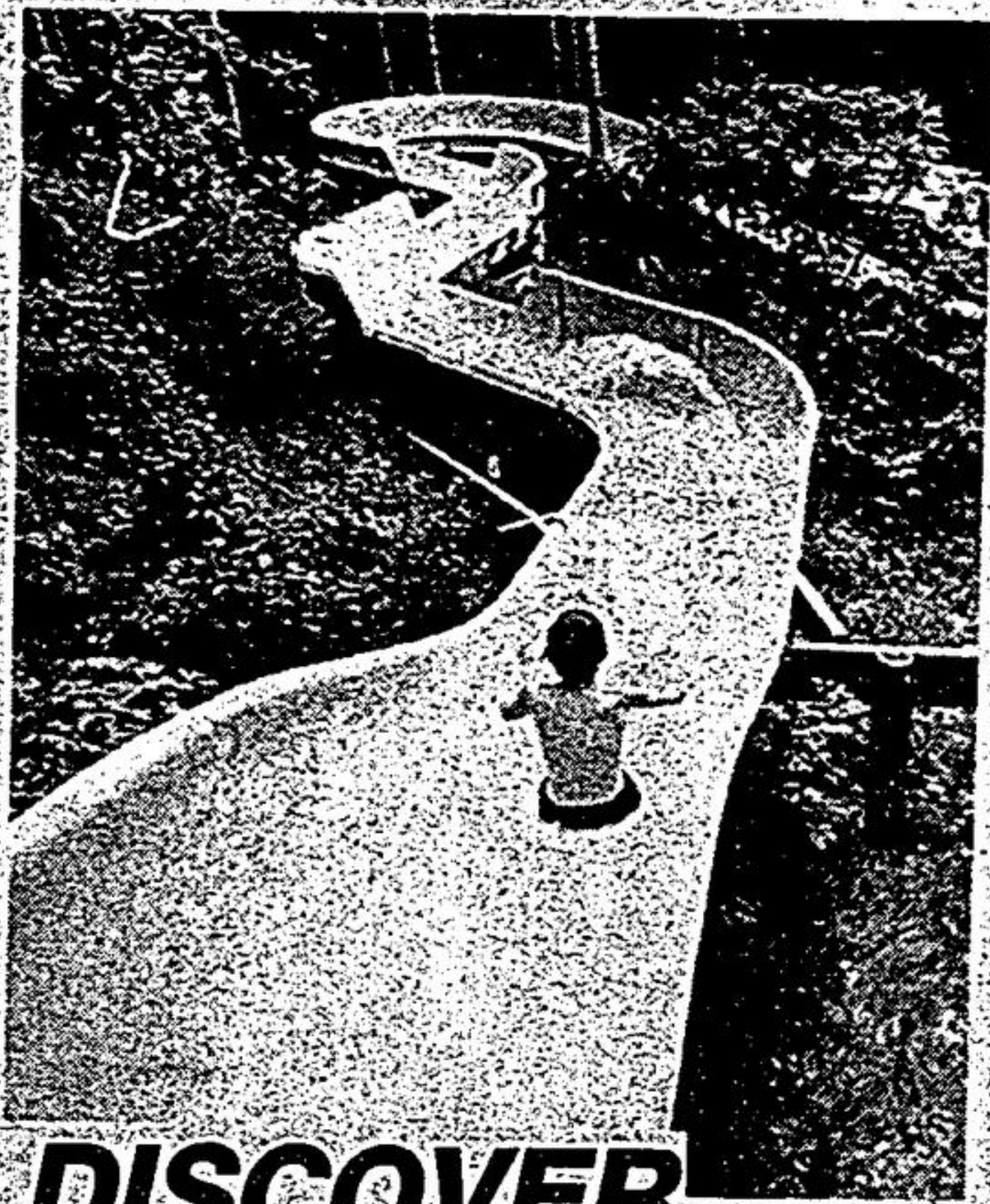
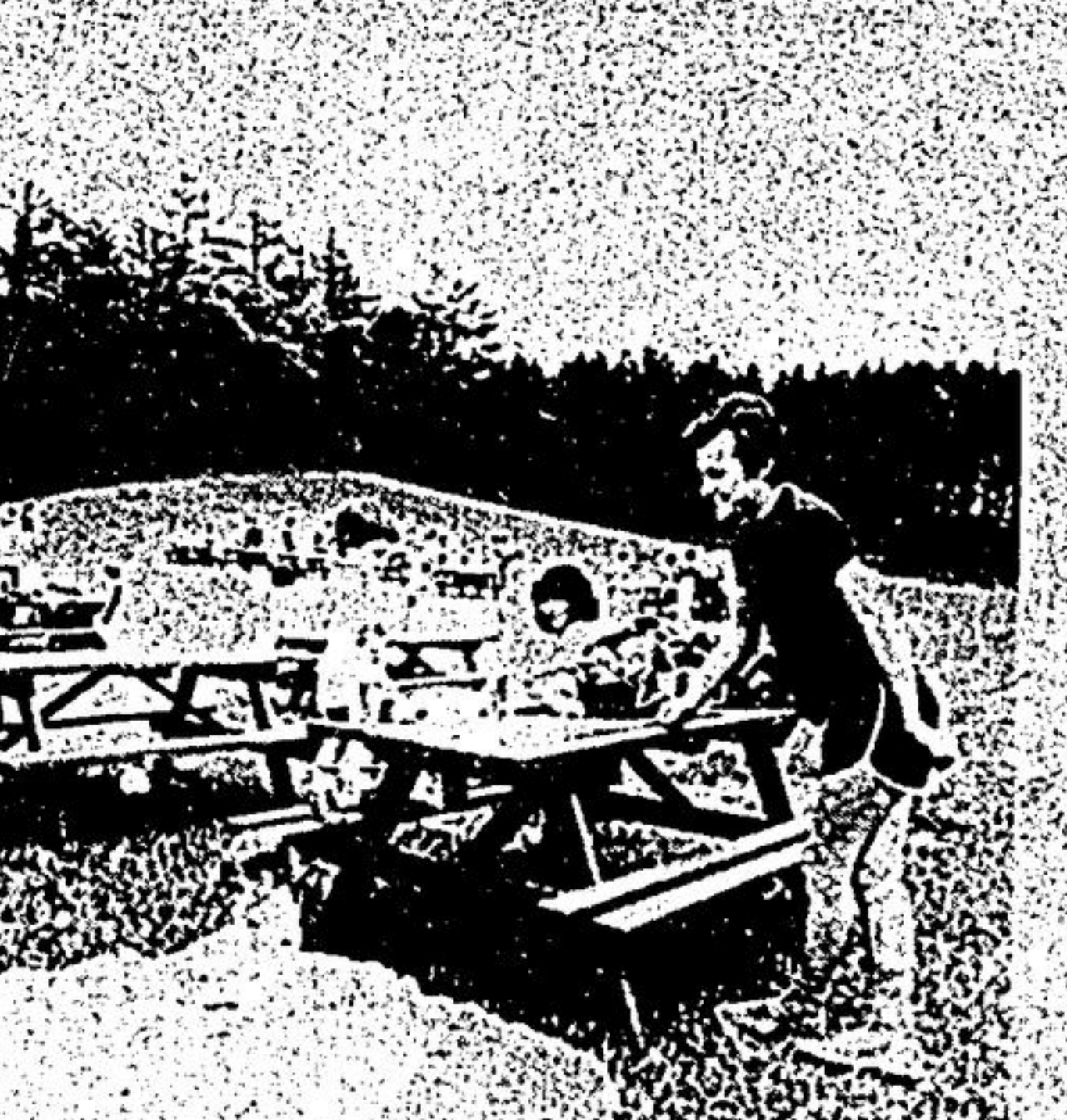
You might look at your relationship as a union management situation. If you are a union, you need the strength of a strike. Let management know you won't be pushed around, without laying blame.

You need solid current legal information. Family laws have changed in Canada, providing a greater possibility of justice for women. For instance, if you have custody of the children, your husband would be required to provide adequate support for them.

Finally, could you begin to develop an alternate career now? Talk to a career counsellor at Seneca College. Most people look for a job while they are still in the present one.

Dr. Meade welcomes your questions. If your response is published, name and identity, if included, will be withheld. Please direct questions to the Markham Stouffville Family Life Centre at 113 Main St., Markham, L3P 1X9.

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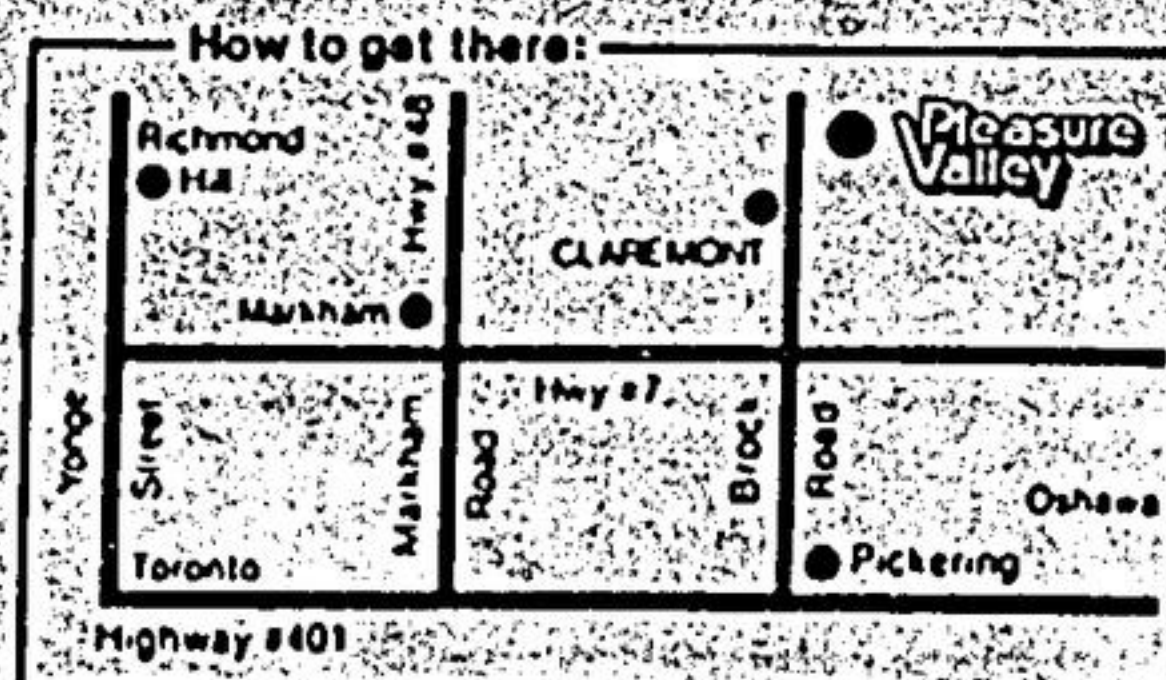


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