Early Warning Signs of Relationship Violence

Relationship violence, also known as domestic violence or partner abuse, is where one person is controlling and abusive towards their partner. There are often early warning signs of controlling or overly loving behaviors that can predict when someone is likely to be abusive. The coercive controlling behavior is usually combined with abuse and charm. Coercive control and rule setting by the batterer may start out slowly and be very subtle. No batterer is the same, but most abusive relationships contain elements of the warning signs listed below. For some relationships all signs are present. In other cases there may be only one, such as extreme jealousy. Violence and abuse may not occur frequently, but the behaviors listed below occur often. People who are abusive may:

- **Be Overly Charming:** This may include acting “too good to be true” and charming. This person may be very helpful and attentive to your needs, helping drive you around, watch your children or whatever you need. You may feel this person is perfect and understands you more than anyone else. Often the charm, or good times, makes it difficult to end the relationship and results in others not believing that this person can be hurtful or abusive because they are so nice. This can be part of the manipulation used by many abusers.

- **Move very quickly:** Within months of dating this person may talk you into moving in together, combining bills or cars, moving to a different community, having children together or marrying.

- **Be insistent on sexual contact:** This person may start out initiating sex in a loving and respectful manner, but over time there is often pressure and coercion to be intimate when you do not want to be.

- **Be very jealous:** Expressions of jealousy may be flattering at first, but in time can feel smothering and be used to control, punish or isolate you. This often leads to false accusations of you being interested in others which can result in your being cut off from family, friends, or pursuing professional or personal goals.

- **Call you names:** This often includes using insulting or derogatory names that are very hurtful and can be degrading. This same person might compliment you at other times, which creates confusion and doubt.

- **Blame behavior on external factors:** This can include this person blaming their abusive behavior towards you on factors that do not cause one to be violent: drinking too much, stress, growing up with abuse, problems at work, being unemployed, things you have said or done, or because of an ex partner.

- **Use finances:** Economic abuse can include this person relying on your income, expecting you to quit your job, keeping financial records hidden from you, or making decisions that result in your being economically tied to this person so that it makes leaving the relationships more difficult.

- **Use values to control you:** This can include convincing you that their behavior is acceptable; your behavior is wrong; or your culture, family or religious values are problematic. These values may force you to do or say things you do not want to, or keep you trapped in the relationship even if it is abusive.

- **Make threats to you or others.** These threats may be related to your leaving the relationship, disagreeing with this person, telling someone about the abuse, or other reasons. Fear due to this person’s threats may prevent you from leaving the relationship or doing something you want in order to protect the safety of a pet, child, your family or yourself.

- **Be critical.** This can result in you thinking less of yourself, and can affect your thoughts, interests, how you dress, life choices, and who you spend time with.

If someone you know is treating you with any of the behaviors listed above, take these warning signs seriously and reach out for support. Contact MSU Safe Place, the campus relationship violence program at Michigan State University at (517) 355-1100, noabuse@msu.edu or find us on Facebook and Twitter!