

Family Violence Prevention Week February 11-18

By Stephannie Douglas

Family violence is often associated with spousal, child and elder abuse. In reality, family violence is as many sided as there are relationships in a person's life. Even when an individual is not the target of the violence, if it is taking place within their environment, it can be painful and provoke many feelings of isolation, anxiety, anger and depression. Not all family violence has to do with physical or sexual abuse. If a parent is dealing with a teenager or young adult who is having a problem with substance abuse, often they are also dealing with anger, personal theft, verbal abuse, pushing, shoving, spiting and slamming doors. For other family members, especially for other siblings in the home, this can be particularly distressing because their experience of the situation is often overlooked and overshadowed by the events taking place.

Marion Morrison, one of the two counselors available through UPEI's Student Services counselling department, said people who might be experiencing difficult family situations can come to the centre for one-on-one support as well as referrals to other community services.

"A student can come here and we will work with them to try and help them develop communication skills that might help them deal with or even interrupt the volatile situation they are in at home," said Morrison. Any type of family violence or volatile family relationships can play havoc with in an individual's life and Morrison said the pain, hurt and experience can be an assault on a person's own values. In addition, she said, "through counselling, we can help them build up that self-esteem and help them learn ways to disengage themselves from the person or the situation."

Whether a student is living in residence and dreads the idea of going home for the holidays or on weekends, or if a student just can't wait to leave their home in the morning to get away, and delays going home at night, the situation can make student life and learning difficult.

Morrison believes that "home is a place where you are supposed to feel safe and nourished." When a person doesn't have that safe environment to go to, it can leave a student unable to focus



on learning which produces a whole other set of difficulties in the person's life. Above all, Morrison said people shouldn't let fear stop them from reaching out for help and support. Reaching out for help and realising that there is no shame or stigma attached to people living in difficult family situations, is an important message that Rona Brown also wants people to hear. Brown, who is the Provincial Consultant on Family Violence, said that the community services that do exist for people are there to help "they are not about judging or placing blame." Brown echoes Morrison in saying that family violence covers a broad spectrum that isn't confined to spousal relationships or to children. "It has to deal with any intimate relationship where there is trust and dependence and where these are affected through violence or abuse. And it impacts on everyone who is closely involved."

Brown said she looks at the issues linked to family violence, "through the lens of more than 20 years of experience." Within that time, she said there have been and continue to be,

many encouraging changes. In fact, Brown says that even during the past five years, she has seen a significant change in how the community in general approaches issues of family violence. "The main difference, is that people are not as afraid to talk and discuss family violence," Brown said.

She is further encouraged with this change because it means she is increasingly being approached by both the private and public sector requesting information or inviting her to speak to their staff or membership.

The most important thing for people to remember when dealing with difficult, angry or violent relationships said Brown is that they are not alone, there are supports and services available to them in the community.

For students at UPEI wanting to access counselling services they can contact either Marion Morrison or Ray Malone through student services at: 566-0488. All information is strictly confidential. Another good contact for information about organisations or services in your community is the Health Information Resource Centre. They can be reached at 368-6526 or toll free at 1800-241-6970. There is also the Island Help-line at 1800-218-2885.

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