

## DOMESTIC ABUSE



I'm Sergeant Lowell Spee with the Fairmont Police Department reporting to you on an important subject in law enforcement, **Domestic Assault** and **Domestic Abuse**.

Usually, people only think of domestic assault as a physical confrontation between one spouse and another. However, domestic assault can also involve an ex-spouse, girlfriend/boyfriend, family member (brother, sister) or someone you have lived with in the past. Domestic abuse is not as clearly identified. It includes such things as intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, name calling, threats of physical harm, threats to take children, forced sexual relations, destruction of personal property, among many others. Usually, a number of these behaviors are used to control another person in a relationship. These types of behaviors can erupt into violent outbreaks. They often result in a call to police for help. Fairmont Police typically respond to about 130-160 such calls per year. These types of calls are regarded as one of the most dangerous incidents we get called to.

Some alarming facts to think about are:

- In the United States a woman is battered every 9 seconds.
- 1 out of 4 women in the U.S. have been assaulted by an intimate partner.
- 78% of rapes in the U.S. involve a person the victim knows, including husbands, ex-husbands, boyfriends and former partners
- In Minnesota 24% of homeless women with children were fleeing abuses
- In homes where domestic violence occurs, children are abused at a rate 1500% higher than the national average.
- Children growing up in abusive homes are at a greater risk to be abusive themselves or end up in an abusive relationship as an adult.

In 1993 Minnesota passed a law requiring every law enforcement agency to create a written policy governing domestic abuse calls. As a result, a task force of local citizens and criminal justice professionals led us to a "Zero Tolerance" viewpoint on domestic assault. So, what does this mean? First of all, Minnesota state law defines domestic assault as "an act done with intent to cause fear in another of immediate bodily harm or death, or intentionally inflicting or attempting to inflict bodily harm upon another." If a domestic assault occurs and police find enough evidence to establish probable cause, the offender is likely to be

arrested. Once the suspect is arrested, they are placed in jail and must see a Judge before they can be released. That can often take a couple of days. Upon conviction, the defendant is likely to face further time in jail, fines, probation, loss of right to possess firearms and other conditions. Fairmont Police want citizens to know these facts. We urge family members to think about the consequences of family violence before it occurs.

Fairmont Police also urge victims of Domestic Abuse to take action or seek help before it erupts into violence. Some cues that indicate you may need assistance are:

- You feel afraid to break up with your partner.
- You are afraid to make decisions on certain topics or bring up concerns fearing your partner will be mad.
- You find yourself obsessed with keeping your partner happy to avoid conflict.
- You find that the physical or emotional abuse is getting worse over time.
- You and/ or your children are afraid of your partner.
- You sometimes lie to family and friends to cover up your partner's abusiveness.
- Your partner has threatened you, grabbed you, shoved you or hit you.
- Your partner checks up on you, has to know where you are at all times and sets time limits for how long you are away.

Martin County Victim Services Coordinator, Rebecca Bentele, can be of great help to a victim before or after an assault. To reach her call 507-238-3209 or the 24 hour crisis lines 507-238-3228 for local calls or 1-800-333-3983 for out-state calls. She can help the victim in many ways, such as:

- Providing information and support to victims of a charged crime. Serves as a link between prosecutor and victim in criminal cases.
- Assisting in Orders for Protection and Harassment Restraining Orders
- Assisting in developing a safety plan for the victim
- Providing information on attending the S.H.A.R.E. (Support, Healing, Awareness, Resources, Education) Support group.
- Providing transportation to a domestic assault crisis shelter
- Assisting the victim in recognizing several types of abuse (physical, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, blaming, etc).
- Providing cell phones for those in a crisis
- Assisting in securing financial help through the Minnesota Crime Victims Reparations Board for medical bills, psychological services, etc., through the Emergency Fund for those needing assistance in leaving their abuser and other related needs, assisting in seeking financial help through other community agencies like the Salvation Army, Minnesota Valley Action Council, churches, etc.

Indeed, Domestic Violence is both a community and national issue. Household members are reminded to think of consequences ahead of time and take action before problems turn into violent outbreaks. Our families will be safer and domestic violence crime cycles will be reduced.