

Hanshaw: Working together to stop domestic violence

By Tom Hanshaw/Watchwords

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AMESBURY - Domestic violence continues to be one of the worst problems of today's society in any community. The tragic stories often headline newscasts and involve victims from every background and age group. All too often, the end result of an abusive relationship is a serious injury or death.

Although great progress has been made in identifying cases and providing assistance, there's still much work to be done. Our community has witnessed far too many of these tragedies but fortunately there are people working together to stop domestic violence.

Domestic violence involves threats, intimidation, battery and control. In most cases, the perpetrator is a man who victimizes his girlfriend or spouse. The abuse may involve limiting her freedom, controlling her decisions, making threats or causing physical or mental injury. The pattern can escalate over a long period or suddenly with injuries more severe. If left undetected, the pattern can eventually lead to a homicide. In many cases, children witness the actions and abuse.

Since 1982, the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center has provided services to battered women in our area. The agency provides counseling, legal services, referrals, community education, prevention classes and much more. The staff also works closely with local police departments and the District Court to bring batterers to justice. Recently, local police departments and the Center expanded their partnership to create a regional team to address domestic violence and let victims know that they are not alone. Today 24-hour emergency service is available for anyone in need of help.

Detective Bob Wile is the domestic investigator with the Amesbury Police Department and works closely with the Crisis Center and victims. A victim of domestic violence may feel alone, fearful, trapped or too intimidated to ask for help. Sometimes the signs of domestic abuse aren't visible or obvious, which can make someone less likely to ask for help. In many cases, the victim may fear retaliation by the batterer, financial distress or the thought of being alone and less likely to seek help but no victim should be afraid to seek help.

Protective services and assistance are available by contacting the police department or Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center. You may reach Detective Wile for questions or guidance by calling the police department at 978-388-1217. The Crisis Center daytime business number is 978-834-9710 and the 24-hour hotline is 978-388-1888. They also staff an office downtown at 5 Market Square, Suite 109. In any type of emergency, for yourself or someone who is being abused, please use 911 to get immediate help.

Thursday, Feb.14 is the first "White Ribbon Day" in Massachusetts. The Jane Doe Inc., crisis centers and police agencies are asking men to wear a white ribbon that day to stand against domestic violence and say that domestic violence is never acceptable. The statewide effort is part of an international initiative to end violence against women and raise support for domestic violence organizations.

White ribbons will be available for the public at the police station. TV personality Rachel Ray is scheduled to wear a white ribbon that day on her nationally televised show for support. Police officers throughout the region will also wear white ribbons that day to demonstrate the department's commitment to stopping this terrible crime.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or know someone who is, seek help. Lives can be shattered by this senseless crime, which has no place in today's society. The police department and Crisis Center are community resources and help is always available. Don't let a domestic violence incident escalate into a senseless tragedy, we've seen far too many already.