

On the MOW

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The many symptoms of Abuse



Have you ever shoved, grabbed or struck your partner?

During conflict do you often threaten, ignore or leave your partner?

If so, you may have a problem with abuse in your relationship.

These are among a set of 19 questions, listed on the right side of this page, issued by the Nonviolent Alternatives Counseling Service (www.nonviolentalternatives.com), a program of Alcohol Drug Abuse Prevention Training Inc. (ADAPT) in Indiana. Sue Versluys, diocesan program specialist for youth ministry, has incorporated these questions into recent presentations on nonviolence. The workshops have been held at gatherings of youth ministers throughout the diocese.

Versluys said the meetings have also dealt with how to get out of an abusive relationship. She begins the discussion by telling about a fictional teenage couple in which the male, although he doesn't strike the girl or force her to have sex, begins swearing at her and insulting her. She tolerates the abuse because she's afraid of losing him, even though her parents and friends tell her to get out of the relationship. Finally, after her parents have a restraining order placed against the boyfriend, she decides to take steps to leave him. What should she do?

Versluys said the story of these two teens has evoked real-life examples involving teens. "What's been happening is that this rings a bell with youth ministers," Versluys said.

The youth ministers offer the following

tips:

☞ Talk to your parent, youth minister or another trusted adult.

☞ Be in a safe place where the abuser can't find you alone.

☞ Always go somewhere with a friend or adult.

☞ Hang out with friends who support your decision.

☞ If the abuser becomes violent, let the police know.

☞ Stay busy so you do not dwell excessively on the situation.

Although Versluys' workshops have focused mainly on abuse in relationships, she said many parallels can be drawn to other instances involving abuse and violence by teens. For instance, she said that abuse was the driving force behind the shootings at Columbine High School three years ago. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 12 students and one teacher at the Colorado school, as well as themselves, reportedly in response to a long-standing history of being bullied.

Even on a much more subtle level, Versluys said, abusive and violent behavior can surface in such a seemingly innocent act as tickling.

"Tickling can be violent if it goes beyond the person saying no. 'No, stop it, cut it out' — when that's said, it needs to stop," Versluys said.

A common trait among abusers, she added, "is not understanding that other people have feelings. Those feelings don't really matter to them."

But there is hope for people who may be prone to such tendencies. Versluys of-

Signs you may be an abuser:

Do you feel that sometimes you just snap and lose it?

Do you say or do things you later regret?

Was there violence in your family?

During conflict do you often threaten someone, break things, punch walls, slam doors, ignore your partner or leave?

Do you have mood swings, where one moment you feel loving and affectionate, and the next moment angry and threatening?

Have you ever used physical violence (shoved, grabbed, hit, slapped, choked, etc.) with your partner, or any past partners?

Do you tend to blame others for your behavior, especially your partner?

Are you a very jealous person?

Do you try to control how your partner thinks and dresses, who your partner sees, how your partner spends his/her leisure money?

Do you try to discourage your partner from seeing friends or family?

Do you get angry or resentful when your partner is successful in a job or hobby?

Do your conversations frequently contain innuendos or threats of retribution or divorce?

Do you seem to make it hard for your partner to leave, or do you seem to have a "no" button on you?

Do you do things that are not necessary to make your partner feel happy or loved?

Do you think about doing things or other life events for your behavior?

Do you feel guilty when you have abusive behavior and expect for your partner's forgiveness?

Do you think you could never live without your partner, yet at other times want him/her out of your life?

Do you use sex, money or other favors as a way to make up after conflict?

Is your partner afraid of you sometimes?

fers some thinking tips for potential abusers from Nonviolent Alternatives, such as:

☞ Everybody doesn't have to love me.

☞ I don't have to control things.

☞ I can handle it when things go wrong.

☞ I am accountable for my own actions.

☞ Two wrongs don't equal one right.

Versluys said anger is a natural feeling, noting that Jesus got angry as well. Yet she also stated, "I think it's really, really important for kids to understand you can have feelings — but you've got to know what to do with these feelings."