



Kids These Days: Family Violence is Everyone's Business

By Dr. David Rideout

Two words that should not belong together are “family” and “violence.” Like “child” and “abuse,” it’s a kind of an oxymoron describing a terrible reality that leaves lifetime scars on people and communities.

Every hour of every day someone is a victim of violence at the hands of a partner or significant other. And it’s not just women who are assaulted by an intimate partner; men are victimized as well. So are children when they either experience or witness the violence.

It happens in all kinds of homes, to people from all walks of life, when power is misused to endanger the survival, security or well-being of another person. That may include physical or psychological abuse; criminal abuse; stalking; verbal and emotional abuse; sexual assault; financial exploitation; or even spiritual abuse. It can, and does, result in the death of a victim at the hands of an intimate partner.

Unfortunately, Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada. It is estimated that in any classroom, there are 3-5 children who have directly witnessed violence in their home. Sadly, parents are responsible for more than half of all family-related sexual offences and physical assaults against children and youth.

This is a problem that affects everyone, not just the victims. That is why November is designated as Family Violence Prevention Month. It’s important to raise awareness of this societal problem, which reaches far beyond a person’s home.

The human costs of family violence are immeasurable and the impacts can last a lifetime. It’s a problem that affects victims, witnesses, bystanders, workplaces, communities, and particularly, children. Children who experience family violence are more likely to become depressed, anxious, or exhibit violent behaviour themselves. They may also experience cognitive delays and have difficulty learning or solving problems. Often, children who are exposed to family violence grow up to become offenders themselves, perpetuating a destructive cycle.

The financial implication of family violence is estimated to be well in excess of \$100 million a year on the health care system of this province. That is money which could be much better spent in other ways to support families and communities.

Family violence is not a private matter. If you or someone you know is a victim of family violence, call the Family Violence Information Line at 310-1818 or the Bullying Helpline at 1-888-456-2323. If the victim is a child, call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911. If you are aware that your neighbour, colleague, or acquaintance is a victim, reach out. Encourage them to seek help through community networks that can provide a safe place to escape—crisis centres, women’s shelters, sexual assault services, counseling services and community response programs.

Prevention is the key – we need to stop the violence before it starts. We can do this by helping young people understand the importance of healthy and respectful relationships. For more information, visit familyviolence.alberta.ca.

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