**October is Domestic Violence Month**

What exactly is domestic violence? Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. The term domestic violence is often used as a synonym for intimate partner violence and can take place in a heterosexual or same sex relationship. In its broader sense it also involves violence against children, parents and the elderly. The one constant component of domestic violence is one partner’s consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other. It is a major public health problem affecting more than 2 million women and 800,000 men, resulting in homelessness, injury or death, billions of dollars in health costs and loss of work productivity. Domestic violence is not always physical as emotional and psychological abuse can often be as harmful as physical violence.

 Domestic abuse crosses racial, religious and socio- economic status, and sexual orientation. Risk factors for those becoming victims or abusers include poverty, lack of high school education, witnessing family violence as a child (an estimated 3.3 million children in the U.S. witness violence against their mother or female caretaker by a family member), having low self-esteem, attitudes of male dominance and substance abuse, especially alcohol abuse. In addition, the presence of a gun in domestic violence situations increases the risk of homicide for women by 500%. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, men who carry out mass shootings have a history of violence toward their intimate partners.

In the early stages of the relationship, the abuser may seem friendly and attentive but becomes more aggressive and controlling over time. Abusers may apologize profusely for their actions or try to convince the victim they do these things out of love or care. However, violence and control always escalates, over time despite the apologies. Some examples of abusive tendencies include:

* Telling the victim, they can never do anything right
* Showing jealousy of the victim’s family and friends
* Accusing the victim of cheating
* Embarrassing or shaming the victim with put-downs
* Dictating how the victim dresses, wears their hair, etc.
* Controlling all spending in the household
* Intimidating the victim with guns, knives or other weapons
* Stalking the victim or monitoring their every move (in person or also via the Internet or tracking devices)
* Destroying the victim’s property
* Preventing the victim from making their own decisions
* Pressuring the victim to have sex against their will or perform sexual acts they are not comfortable with

The safety of the victim is the first step in addressing domestic violence since if left untreated the emotional and physical consequences can be severe and could even end in homicide. Domestic violence does not always end when the victim escapes the abuser, attempts to terminate the relationship and/or seeks help. Often it intensifies because the abuser sees his control dissipating and will frequently continue to stalk, threaten or harass the victim. Statistics show that one in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. More than three women and one man are murdered by their intimate partners in the U.S. every day. More than two-thirds of restraining orders against intimate partners who raped or stalked the victim were violated. Research shows that the victim is often in the most danger directly following the escape from the relationship.

So how do we stop domestic violence before it starts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has outlined several approaches on their website: [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention).