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The phone rings. I look at the clock next to the bed and it's almost midnight. I pick up the receiver and hear sobbing and muffled words. "Lizzy, is that you? What's wrong?" More jumbled words spewed out in a desperate tone. "Slow down... I can't understand what you're saying." Then the words are clearer and I understand – more than I wish I did. Five minutes later, I'm in my car heading north on the highway to Lizzy's house.

Alarmed, afraid, and angry, I find myself making this trek for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in as many months. Hoping that this will be the last time, I wonder why she just doesn't pack her belongings and get both she and her son out of this cold and calloused building she calls home. I pray that I can get there soon enough. Her husband will be home soon and I don't want to be there when he arrives. I don't want Lizzie and her son, Donovan, to be there either. I keep thinking "Why does she keep living like this?"

Although names are changed, this scenario is based on a true story from my own personal experience as I tried to help someone who was living the cycle of abuse that is associated with domestic violence. It is a troubling and confusing role – being a support person for someone who lives with this bondage in their life. Unfortunately, I know too many people who have been victims of intimate partner violence.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. For both personal and professional reasons, it is important for me to help others understand the warning signs, impact, and reach of domestic violence in the U.S. More importantly, though, we also need to know how to help those who are in a relationship where violence occurs.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that approximately, 29% of women and 10% of men in the U.S. have experienced some form of physical violence, rape, and/or stalking by an intimate partner. The agency goes on to report that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men aged 18 and older in the United States have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their life time. Of those victims, 15% of women and 4% of men have been injured from this violence including rape, physical violence, and or stalking. In 2010, 1095 females were murdered by an intimate partner (U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, 2011.)

How can we identify if we or someone we know is living with a violent partner?

A list of warning signs is provided on the Kansas Attorney General's website at <http://ag.ks.gov/public-safety/domestic-violence/warning-signs> to help victims and victim advocates, alike:

## Warning Signs

1. Does your partner try to control your behavior? Monitor where you go or what you do? Does your partner check your cell-phone or call you incessantly to check up on you?
2. Do you need permission before doing anything? Buying food? Writing a check? Choosing what you should wear? What to say?
3. Is your partner overly critical of you? Does your partner say you are stupid, incompetent, or criticize your clothes or appearance? Do you feel you can't do anything right?
4. Does your partner punish and even beat you, telling you it is for your own good?
5. Is your partner extremely jealous? Accusing you of things you did not do?
6. Are you afraid, unsure of what will happen when you spend time with your partner? Are you walking on eggshells and filled with anxiety because you don't know what to expect?
7. Does your partner pressure you into having sex against your wishes?
8. Do you feel you have to protect your children from your partner?
9. Are you trying to be perfect to avoid a verbal/physical attack? Do you avoid seeing people or going to work because you don't want anyone to know about your injuries?
10. Are you trying to save a relationship/family but losing yourself in the process?

If you answered "Yes" to ANY of these questions, think seriously about your relationship. It is possible that you are in an abusive situation and help is available.

Help is available to Kansas residents from a variety of agencies. The Kansas Attorney General's office has a designated division for assisting victims. They can be contacted by calling Victim Services toll free number at 1-800-828-9745. They have a resource for developing a safety plan for the victim. Regardless of whether you are the victim or victim advocate, knowing the steps you can take to insure the highest level of safety is critical – perhaps even life-saving. The link to a recommended safety plan is:

<http://www.kcsdv.org/resources/brochures/general-info/safetyplan.html>

Another organization that is dedicated to the awareness and prevention of domestic violence is the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. In addition to supporting the 24-hour Kansas Crisis Hotline (1-888-363-2287), they provide a wealth

of resources on their website including contact information on Sexual and Domestic Violence programs across the state of Kansas. The program that supports Geary County residents is in Manhattan at The Crisis Center, Inc. It also provides services to Marshall, Pottawatomie, and Clay county residents. The contact information for the Crisis Center is 1-800-727-2785 or 785-539-2785. The Crisis Center also has a local Junction City phone number, as well: 762-8835.

It took Lizzy eight years to break the cycle of domestic violence for her and Donovan. With a lot of courage and a strong support system, she is living a violence-free life, and we remain close friends.

For more information about family relations, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension at 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!