

domestic and sexual violence

If you see something, say something.

The transition of seasons brings about obvious trends throughout the year. Increases in sunscreen sales, theme park attendance, and tourism are all positive trends influenced by the onset of summer. Unfortunately, not all trends are positive or beneficial to our community. Recent data has demonstrated annual spikes in both domestic violence (DV) and sexual violence (SV) during the summer months.

So what is causing this? There are a number of contributing factors including, high temperatures, increases in alcohol consumption, and intensified stress with children not being in school. In understanding the stressors that contribute to Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, we might more easily recognize the signs and provide support and services to the members of our community before it escalates.



WHAT DOES A DV OR SV RELATIONSHIP LOOK LIKE? No two situations look the same, but many have similar characteristics. Individuals who are abused—as well as individuals who are abusers—are represented by all races, ages, genders, economic classes, and sexual orientations. There are some warning signs to look out for that may indicate something is wrong.

Individuals involved in an unhealthy relationship may exhibit a withdrawal from daily activities, in conjunction with unexplained injuries. They may make excuses for not participating in family events, and most of all you may notice extreme personality changes (such as a sudden need to always take the blame or frequent apologies).

The signs for sexual violence are much the same, but sexual violence survivors may also have changes in dress, such as wearing baggie clothes, or sudden changes in hygiene practices (not showering as often).

WHEN SHOULD YOU SAY SOMETHING? Be sure to approach the subject when you and the suspected victim are alone. Do not, under any circumstances, bring it up in the presence of the suspected abuser. This could be dangerous because the abuser could lash out at you or the victim. Be discrete when you speak to someone you suspect is a victim.



WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE YOU SUSPECT IS IN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIP OR A VICTIM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

This can be a difficult conversation to broach, so it must come from a place of compassion. First, ask this individual about it. Let her/him know you have noticed some signs and you are concerned. Offer support and encourage her/him to talk about it if they are comfortable. But do not force the conversation. The individual needs to know they can trust you and you are there for support. Ask if you can help and if they accept, be ready to offer any assistance you can safely.

HOW CAN YOU SAFELY SUPPORT A SURVIVOR? An important thing you can do is to keep an open line of communication. She/he needs to know you are there and are available to talk. The isolation most survivors experience is part of the control from abusers. By keeping communication open, you are helping the individual resist that control. Reassure her/him it is not her/his fault. Abusers often control their victims by blaming them for the violence against them. Also, it is important to note on average, it takes a survivor nine times of leaving and returning to finally break the cycle with an abuser, so be patient as this is a process.

WHERE CAN YOU DIRECT A SURVIVOR IF THEY ASK YOU FOR HELP? Peace River Center has free hotlines available 24/7/365 for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. The Domestic Violence Hotline for Polk County is 863.413.2700, Hardee and Highlands Counties is 863.386.1167. Peace River Center also has two domestic violence shelters in Polk County and Highlands County.

Our Domestic Violence and Rape Recovery Programs provide survivors of DV and SV with legal services, advocacy, safety planning, group support, assistance with victim's claims, and mental health resources they need to heal and recover.



24-Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Lines:
863.413.2707 or toll-free 877.688.5077

24-Hour Domestic Violence Crisis Lines:
863.386.1167 (Hardee/Highlands) or 863.413.2700 (Polk)