

Domestic Violence Rises as Partners Spend More Time Together

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October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the COVID-19 crisis has led to an increase in domestic abuse, according to Melville-based divorce and family law attorney Russell Marnell.

“People are spending a lot more time in close proximity to their spouse,” Marnell said. “Even if both parties are still gainfully employed, many are working remotely and there are far fewer things to do with your free time other than stay in the house. There’s also a lot more financial stress for many couples” because of the epidemic and the related economic slowdown.

Abuse is about power and control, and when survivors are forced to spend more time in close proximity to their abuser, the abuser has more opportunity to exert control over the survivor, according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which recorded a 9 percent uptick in contacts during the first two months of the pandemic versus the same time period the previous year.

[Family Service League](#), a Huntington-based multi-service nonprofit organization with more than 60 programs across Suffolk County, has not seen an increase in calls about domestic violence, but that doesn’t mean it’s not occurring, said President and CEO Karen Boorshtein.

“Clinical staff believe the reason we may not be hearing about it has to do with the offender still living at home and out of work,” Boorshtein said. “If the victim would call while the offender is home, this could cause the abuse to increase. So there is a fear there. We think we may begin to see the increase once the offender is able to get out of the house more.”

Domestic violence is not restricted to physical violence; it also includes stalking, menacing, harassment, disorderly conduct and grand larceny, as well as unlawful dissemination or publication of intimate images, said Marnell, who encourages victims to obtain help from both the police and legal counsel to secure their safety. “For people with limited finances, local bar associations can provide referrals to attorneys who can provide services for a reduced fee,” Marnell said. Local nonprofit

organization L.I. Against Domestic Violence provides a free, confidential 24-hour hotline at (631) 666-8833.

When domestic violence survivors are at home and at risk of having an argument with their abuser, “they should get the children to a room where the door locks, and there should be a code word the children are aware of,” Boorshtein said. “They should have already set up a system in which there is someone they trust (who also knows the code word), who the children can call and who will then call the police. The victim should stay in a room with several exits (including windows and doors) and keep their phone on their person but out of sight of their offender. They can have the police on speed dial, or their trusted friend who would call the police.”

Besides physical bruising, signs and symptoms that someone is being abused include anxiety, depression, hopelessness, fear and despair, Boorshtein added.

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