

Intervene to protect children from abuse

COMPASS: *Other points of view*

By GOV. SEAN PARNELL

(10/08/11 20:52:31)

The experiences domestic violence survivors have shared with me have never left my memory: women battered, stabbed, shot, burned, and tortured -- and far too many children witnessing these nightmarish scenes.

I often wonder how humans can be so cruel to the persons they are supposed to love and protect. I have learned a great deal about domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska, and as governor I've made ending this epidemic one of my highest priorities.

My administration launched the Choose Respect Initiative in 2009. We have held marches, met with survivors and victims' advocates and leaders in the field. We have spoken to groups across the state about Alaska's domestic violence epidemic.

Throughout these conversations, a very significant consequence of domestic violence has gotten our attention: Children exposed to domestic violence often endure lasting physical, mental and emotional scars.

They often suffer from depression, anxiety, aggression, and "acting out." They may be more susceptible to dating violence, or become abusers in their own adult relationships, perpetuating this epidemic.

To keep more children from being harmed, communities and citizens need to intervene before these crimes infect the home.

But how to intervene? Alaskans may not feel they have the skills needed to intervene on behalf of a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker or child. Every situation is different, and keeping yourself safe is important. Yet passivity need not drive us.

One way to intervene on behalf of a child is to report child abuse to the Office of Children Services (OCS) or your local police department. Child abuse includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and children who are exposed to domestic violence.

Many national organizations publish "playbooks" to help community members think through their roles as witnesses to violence or behaviors that condone violence. Here are some key points for your consideration:

- Be a positive role model, showing respect.
- Educate yourself about services in your community.
- Courageously speak up when you hear threatening language or behavior.

- Avoid antagonism.
- Be honest and direct whenever possible.
- Recruit help if necessary.
- If things get out of hand or become too serious, contact the police.

Most important, take the time to go out on a limb for a friend who may be in need of help. You can start a conversation by asking, "We're friends, aren't we? So can I ask you how you are doing?"

Reaching out to a friend or colleague who may be in a violent relationship can be uncomfortable, but your actions could save a life and help someone to a path of safety and healing.

Children listen. Children learn. We can make sure they know that domestic violence is not the norm.

With a single choice in one moment in time, you can make Alaska safer and positively alter the course of a child's life.

Learn more at our website, www.gov.alaska.gov, by clicking on Choose Respect.

Sean Parnell is governor of Alaska.

Copyright © Thu Mar 29 08:17:59 UTC-0800 20121900 The Anchorage Daily News (www.adn.com)