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Are you celebrating a healthy relationship on Valentine's Day?

By Cheryl Swanson
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Today is Valentine's Day — the traditional day when sweethearts express their love for each other.

However, Valentine's Day isn't candy, roses and romance for everyone.

Do you find yourself remembering a time when your partner was attentive and caring, but now that person has become jealous, controlling and perhaps even violent? If this describes you or someone you know in a relationship, help is available.

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by one person to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence a current or former partner. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, coerce, manipulate, threaten, humiliate, frighten, isolate, blame or hurt someone. Domestic violence occurs to people who are married, divorced, separated, dating or formerly dating, and applies both to heterosexual couples and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples.

A romantic relationship has the potential to enrich you, adding to feel-

ings of self-worth, growth and enjoyment. On the other hand, you could end up feeling uncomfortable in the relationship. It can be difficult to realize a partner is not treating you with the respect you deserve.

Keep in mind that even in healthy relationships, there is likely to be some disagreement, need for compromise and times of frustration. These alone do not necessarily indicate that a relationship is unhealthy. Here are some things to think about when considering whether your relationship is a healthy one or not.

Signs of a healthy relationship:

- freely voicing thoughts, feelings and opinions;
- respecting individuality, embracing differences, and allowing each person to be themselves;
- trusting and being honest with yourself and each other;
- respecting each other's need for privacy;
- making mutual decisions;
- loving and taking care of yourself before and while in a relationship;
- being comfortable with spending time away from each other;
- respecting sexual boundaries;
- maintaining and establishing relationships outside the partnership;
- listening to each other's feelings,

needs and desires;

- allowing for differences of opinion;
- compromising equally;
- feeling like an individuals, each responsible for your own happiness and self-esteem.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship:

- exhibiting extreme jealousy;
- having an explosive temper;
- constant criticizing;
- giving orders;
- blaming others or not taking responsibility for actions;
- using force or violence to solve problems;
- caring for and focusing on your partner only and neglecting yourself, or focusing only on yourself and neglecting your partner;
- feeling pressure to change to meet your partner's standards;
- being afraid to disagree or having your ideas criticized;
- pressuring your partner to meet your standards and criticizing his/her ideas;
- justifying what you do, where you go and who you see.

Other signs include one partner making all the decisions and controlling everything without listening to the other's input; one person feels unheard and is unable to communicate what he or she wants or needs; or one

person makes excuses for the other's abusive behavior (e.g., "it's not like he hits me," "she calls a lot; she likes to know where I am" or "he gets so jealous only because he loves me").

If you or somebody you know is in an unhealthy relationship, help is available. Nobody deserves to be abused.

Services for victims include safe shelter, counseling, social services, legal advocacy, legal aid, low-income health care and child care, protection (restraining) orders, temporary safe pet housing, sexual assault resources, employment, self-sufficiency assistance and housing.

Children who have been exposed to domestic violence can receive counseling, mentoring, supervised visitations and safe exchanges between parents. Treatment and counseling are available to abusers.

For non-emergency information and resources, call the Longmont Ending Violence Initiative at 303-774-4534 or visit www.LongmontDomesticViolence.org. For emergency counseling and shelter, call Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley at 303-772-4422. In an emergency, dial 911.

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