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Signs of domestic violence can be seen early

By Pierrette J. Shields

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LONGMONT — While the signs can be subtle and difficult to see from within a relationship, a new romantic partner can give hints at future abuse, according to local experts on domestic violence.

Still, Cheryl Swanson of the Longmont Ending Violence Initiative said sometimes it is up to friends and loved ones to spot potential problems and help out, especially as instances of domestic violence are seen in younger people.

She said victims locally have been identified as young as 12 and 13 years old.

"The kids are just getting involved in relationships much younger," Swanson said.

LEVI and Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley have events and displays scheduled in October in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month to offer residents information and resources, including displays at the Longmont Public Library.

Swanson and Sarah Gail, outreach coordinator for Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley, said "whirlwind" romances, jealousy, possessiveness and controlling behavior can hint at future abuse. Women or men who

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Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Upcoming events and activities:

- Shelley Mann, children's advocate for Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley, will receive the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Community Impact Award at the Capitol in Denver at noon Tuesday.
- 14th Annual Beth Haynes Award to recognize a Boulder County law enforcement officer's effort in domestic

violence, 2 p.m. Oct. 18, at the Boulder Public Library auditorium.

- Steps of Hope Candlelight Vigil is a memorial walk and candlelight vigil honoring victims and survivors of domestic violence, 6 p.m. Oct. 26, at Isaak Walton Park, 18 S. Sunset St., Longmont, near Boston Avenue. For details, call 303-772-0432.

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recognize the symptoms should seek help and reconsider the relationship, they said.

For adolescents who may be suffering at the hands of a boyfriend or girlfriend, parents may be the first to catch on to troublesome behaviors.

"He calls 20 times a day. Isn't that cute? No, that's kind of creepy, Mom," Swanson said.

Potential victims of domestic violence may be flattered by intense interest from new love interests, which could prevent them from seeing problems and have them fall into routine acceptance of their partner's demands and behaviors, they said.

Parents should consider talking to children about appropriate dating expectations, Swanson and Gail said.

"Talk to them way earlier than you think you should have to about healthy relationships," Swanson said.

It also is important for friends and family of anyone who is worried about their relationship to listen and believe someone who may feel trapped or victimized.

"Just listen to them and believe them at the very least," Swanson said.

Gail said supporters should talk to potential victims in an environment where they feel safe.

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Domestic violence red flags

- Quick involvement
- Jealousy
- Isolation
- Controlling behavior
- Verbal abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Hypersensitivity
- "Jekyll-Hyde" behavior
- Blaming others for problems
- Blaming others for feelings
- Using force during an argument
- Threats of violence
- Rigid sex roles
- Sexual abuse
- Breaking or striking objects
- Cruelty to animals or children
- Past battering

Source: Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley

Local assistance

■ Longmont Police Department, 911 in an emergency, or 903-651-8555

■ Longmont Ending Violence Initiative, 2336 Summitview Drive, Longmont 80504; 303-678-1490;

www.longmontdomesticviolence.org

■ Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley, 24-hour Crisis Line, 303-772-4422; office, 303-772-0432; www.safeshelterofstvrain.org