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Isolation Is The Real Danger

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness month. Statistics reveal that domestic violence occurs in one of every five families. That means that in every fifth house on your block, or apartment in your complex, someone lives in fear of getting hurt or killed by an intimate partner.

The numbers are no different in the Jewish community.

I have been working with victims of domestic violence for more than 20 years. I have come to honor their struggle. In seeing the world through their eyes, I understand their shame, which fuels their silence. I have also worked with batterers for many years. I also honor their struggle. In

seeing the world through their eyes, I understand their shame, which fuels their desire for control and need for revenge.

Yes, that is correct. At the heart of domestic violence is shame, for both victim and perpetrator.

Before we can understand why one person responds with silence and isolation and another with control and revenge, we must first understand how gender socialization plays a role in this dynamic, creating disproportionate numbers of women as victims and men as perpetrators in heterosexual relationships.

Gender socialization is how, as children, we are taught what it means to be a boy or a girl. Many of us grew up in families where girls and boys were held to different standards when it came to emotions.

I remember watching many Little League baseball games when my kids were growing up. I noticed that when the girls struck out, their teammates would rally around them, hug them and encourage them for next time. When the boys struck out at bat, they would hang their heads, kick the dirt or say something negative and go to the end of the bench in the dugout, where they would sit in solitude, waiting for the next chance to redeem themselves. They might have been told to shrug it off or to get over it or even

worse, to “man-up” and get a hit next time. Rarely were they offered comfort or support.

How does this example relate to domestic violence? Let me explain.

The boy that got no support when he struck out learned that he was on his own in the world, and that when

things don't go his way, he is alone at the end of the bench, in shame. It is a painful place he wants to avoid.

In many aspects of his life, he may be capable of accomplishing this, especially if he has a career that allows him to make the rules. But intimate relationships are different. Conflict is unavoidable; even in the most committed relationships, we hurt, disap-

point and frustrate each other. If each of these occurrences feels like the end of the bench, avoidance of shame is achieved by blaming the other person.

For her, the private and personal shaming of being a disappointment to her partner isolates her from support or opposing points of view that might empower her. She is stuck at the end of her own bench, a place where she has little experience. The danger in these relationships is the isolation, as it keeps each of the partners dependent on each other to reduce their own shame.

As parents, it's our job to encourage our kids when they're up at bat—whether on the ball field, in the classroom or in the workplace. We must teach our daughters that they are valued people—even when they make mistakes. We must teach our sons that they are valued people, even when life doesn't go their way.

If we want our sons and daughters to have healthy adult relationships, we have to start today. *



Ellen Yashinsky Chute

details

For concerns about domestic violence, call Ellen Yashinsky Chute, JFS chief community outreach officer, at (248) 592-2666.