

HOLIDAYS MIGHT NOT BE THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

December 16th, 2022

The holiday season can be a time to create lasting memories, but for some, those memories are connected to violence and abuse. As we move further into the holiday season, we want to take a moment to remind our community to prioritize your mental, emotional and physical health.

At The Center for Empowerment and Education (CEE), we are reminded daily of the trauma triggers that can pop up when a person returns to a home where prior domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse occurred. The holidays aren't always associated with positive memories. You might be attending a gathering and forced to see a family member that has been the source of your abuse. You might be returning to the source and increasing the chance of repeated abuse or enduring the triggers of your past as memories flood your mind.

What can you do about it? Set boundaries. You don't need to attend every event you are invited to attend. However, we know that not everyone has the ability to set that boundary or isn't ready to decline the invite. If you are forced to return to where the abuse occurred, you can try a few recommended options from RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):

- Try to avoid being in the location where the abuse occurred.
 - o Plan to stay with friends or family of the non-offending family member;
 - o Stay at an offsite location like a hotel and keep the location private from your abuser.
- If you can't stay away from the family home, try to find activities that could get you out of the house for extended periods of time.
- Reach out to your advocate at CEE and safety plan. Having a plan and working through the logistics can help you feel more comfortable and prepared to return home.
 - o If you don't have an advocate, please call our Sexual Assault Hotline at 203-731-5204 for help. (RAINN, 2016)

In addition to the trauma triggers of going back home to an abuser, we know that victims of domestic violence continue to experience violence. While we know violence doesn't take a holiday, according to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, "Information on the number of calls received by the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) for the past ten years indicates that the number of calls drops dramatically during the holidays, including on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day." (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2020).

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Just because the calls decrease, we know that violence and the threat of violence continues. The reason someone reaches out for help is personal and unique to their survival story; the same is true as to why they might not reach out for help. Perhaps they want just one last Christmas where their family is intact before changing the landscape of their family forever. Perhaps their abuser has promised to get help this time and is hopeful for change. At CEE, we believe in supporting and empowering victims to make the right choice for them at that moment. At that moment, safety and security might mean safety planning or safekeeping documents and saving money to flee; it looks different for each person.

What we also know is that the holidays, in general, can be stressful. Holidays don't typically match the holiday movie with the picture-perfect moment where all the goodness falls into place. Holidays can be ugly and messy. Abusers tend to be home with their victims more during the holiday season than at any other time during the year. While they are home more, there are increased holiday stressors surrounding finances, traveling, seeing family and friends, and hosting holiday festivities. Holidays can be a time when abusers set unrealistic expectations to create the "perfect" holiday experience. Financial pressures to keep up with expectations may fall short and increase anxiety. A tight budget may bring on more financial strain and escalate an incident. Holiday festivities often include drinking and/or drug use that can increase violent behavior. The holidays for some, might not be the most wonderful time of the year.

What can you do about it? If you are in an abusive and violent relationship, know that help is available. We are available 24/7/365. By calling 203-731-5206, you can connect to an advocate that can help safety plan and connect to resources. In addition, practice self-care. Self-care is not a selfish act; it is vital to your well-being. "Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact." (NIH, 2022). It may seem strange to do things that make you happy, so your first step might be to identify the things that make you happy. Think of a time when you felt relatively happy and optimistic about life; it doesn't matter how far back this was. What about that time made you happy? What can you recreate now?

Ashley Dunn, President & CEO

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Please know that regardless of where you are on your path to living the life you deserve, a life free from violence, CEE is here to help. Please call or visit our office for support if you want to connect. If you want to learn more about resources in your community, please visit www.thecenterct.org and connect with an advocate at CEE. All direct services are at no cost and confidential.

Do you have a loved one that you think might be in need of help? What can you do about it? Suppose you'll be gathering this holiday season with loved ones. In that case, there are several things to watch for if you suspect abuse: injuries or bruising, tension or nervousness around their partner and/or frequent texts or calls from their partner if they aren't present, and an urgency to respond quickly. If you know someone you think might be in an abusive situation, listen and believe in what they say. It took courage for them to speak up. Reach out to them, but ask about the best way and time to communicate. Provide resources that can help, like CEE.

We want to remind our community that we are here. If you or someone you know needs support, our no-cost confidential hotlines are available 24/7.

24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline (203)731-5206

24/7 Sexual Assault Hotline (203)731-5204

For additional resources please visit the following websites:

- For additional ideas and resources surrounding self-care, visit the National Institute of Mental health at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>
- If you want to learn more about the types of domestic violence, please visit the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) at <https://www.ctcadv.org/information-about-domestic-violence/what-domestic-violence/>.
- If you want to learn more about resources available for sexual violence, please visit the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence at <https://endsexualviolencect.org/get-help/for-victims-survivors/>.

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