It is about RESPECT

We have a cultural problem in the United States… the decline of civility and devolving of human behavior. It is a lack of respect. As Executive Director of Siuslaw Outreach Services and Siuslaw School District volunteer and coach, I have noticed over the years we are losing respect, forgetting the word “respect.” I recently asked a group of young adults and teens to define the word “respect.” There was a puzzled look and silence from the group. Silence finally came from a young individual who said, “Respect means you say or do anything mean or tell someone they are wrong.” Our youth are fast and hard by computers and the media and entertainment. The message being taught to our youth is you can say or do just about anything you want without consequences. If there are consequences or repercussions in action or reaction, it doesn’t mean ‘respect’ to me. Social media and entertainment is not the sole cause of this decline. As you look through history, social media and entertainment is somewhat reflective of what is going on in homes and schools today. Although it is not necessarily the main cause for a lack of understanding what respect means, social media and the entertainment industry often perpetuates and reinforces this unbecoming view. It is more reflective of a darker cause, that our youth are being raised in homes where domestic violence or other forms of abuse are prevalent. I believe this is partly why we think this is how everyone else lives. For many of their peers it is the norm. Like all forms of abuse, it is cyclical. Later in their adulthood they handle their relationships with the same level of control and treat their significant others as a partner. Youth who witness domestic violence are times more likely to physically abuse their own children.

Some statistics from the US Census Bureau and US Department of Health to consider;

- 60% of couples born in the United States were born to unwed mothers and fathersless families.
- 46% of all marriages end in divorce. Many are forgetting marriage altogether out of fear of divorce.
- The average length of marriage is 8 years.
- 75% of those in substance abuse treatment programs report witnessing or experienced domestic violence.
- 3 million youth witnesses domestic violence each year.
- 62% of males aged 11 to 24 years who being mother was being abused were injured while trying to protect their mother.
- 25% of youth who attempted suicide experienced some sort of domestic violence.
- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men have reported being a victim of domestic violence. It is estimated that over 100,000 victims report such violence for a variety of reasons. They say… “It was easier because they grew up in a home filled with violence.”

The decline of the stable home is evident. I could read such statistics national statistics did not demonstrate what is going on in our quiet peaceful community back. I could state that these state are right in line with what we are seeing in our own community. In 2017, Siuslaw Outreach Services and Siuslaw School District responded to 299 victims of domestic violence and 61 sexual assaults. In some cases, it was youth reaching out for help.

The realization of how domestic violence is somewhat reflective of what is going on in homes.

I could write about various stories involving domestic violence that have stayed with me over the years, and I could relate some of the very personal issues that I have noticed over the years we are losing respect, forgetting the word “respect.” I recently asked a group of young adults and teens to define the word “respect.” There was a puzzled look and silence from the group. Silence finally came from a young individual who said, “Respect means you say or do anything mean or tell someone they are wrong.” Our youth are fast and hard by computers and the media and entertainment. The message being taught to our youth is you can say or do just about anything you want without consequences. If there are consequences or repercussions in action or reaction, it doesn’t mean ‘respect’ to me. Social media and entertainment is not the sole cause of this decline. As you look through history, social media and entertainment is somewhat reflective of what is going on in homes and schools today. Although it is not necessarily the main cause for a lack of understanding what respect means, social media and the entertainment industry often perpetuates and reinforces this unbecoming view. It is more reflective of a darker cause, that our youth are being raised in homes where domestic violence or other forms of abuse are prevalent. I believe this is partly why we think this is how everyone else lives. For many of their peers it is the norm. Like all forms of abuse, it is cyclical. Later in their adulthood they handle their relationships with the same level of control and treat their significant others as a partner. Youth who witness domestic violence are times more likely to physically abuse their own children.

When I was asked I would contribute an article about respect, I could not say yes… respect means something. And as I thought about going over my thirty years or so in law enforcement, I thought ideas come to mind. I could write about various stories involving domestic violence that have stayed with me over the years, and I could relate some of the very personal issues that I have noticed over the years. You learn early in your police career that some of the most urgent and unforgettable calls are related to domestic violence. That’s because it is left only to the offenders to demonstrate this type; and mentally, that would surprise most people. The real eye opening scenario is when the situation has been involved, sometimes in the most minor of ways, but nonetheless they would really only be checked by the police.

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One of the most important social issues we are currently facing is domestic violence. In the United States, 48% of children born in the United States were born to unwed mothers and fathersless families. Many of us are in a position to help strengthen families, to the extent possible, for any violent experiences, the country must be aware of the victims themselves. We must be aware of the families who remain hidden within the family, not be the first to be expected damaged and broken families and people need our services and support. An important social problem in our community is domestic violence. The crux of the matter is that it is not a necessity, it is awareness of the need. It not only harms those involved in its cycle but whole communities as well. During Domestic Violence Awareness Month let’s begin the conversation and the work needed so that ultimately healing is possible.

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Every officer has a story about a domestic violence call they have responded to. We are taught in the basic academy and by our field training officers that they are one of the most dangerous calls an officer has to respond to, and it only takes a couple to find out that is true. Emotions are running high, often alcohol or some other substance is involved, and a lot of the time you as the officer are seen as the enemy by everyone involved. But my biggest question as a young officer was always “Why doesn’t she just get out?”

I have responded to numerous domestic violence calls during my years with the Florence Police Department involving couples from all walks of life, types of employment and financial resources. After investigating those cases, being involved in the prosecution and investigating those cases, being involved in an abusive relationship, but now that the trial date is over, I’ve asked myself if I had to do it all over again, would I do it differently? would I do it at all? Why doesn’t she just get out?”

It’s hard to understand the control an abuser has over the victim and the amount of time and effort they have put in to gaining that control. Fear and Love are very powerful and often times the tools used by the abuser. The fear of losing your home or being able to care for your kids to the fear of being abandoned or “left out” makes a lot of abuse victims stay. They love their for their family, even the abuser when he is not “angry”, makes abuse victims stay. There are just a few of the reasons why a victim might stay in an abusive relationship but having that basic understanding allowed me to see the reality behind the decision to stay. Knowing this, also allows us as the police to understand why we may not get the cooperation from a victim that we think we should. It helps explain why we may get some cooperation at the beginning, when the victim is in crisis, but how that cooperation may end when it comes time for the victim to follow through and hold the abuser accountable for what they did after the crisis is over.

I’ve asked myself if I had to leave forever right now, with kids and limited access to my finances, what would I do? My answer is always I don’t know if I could do it and that is without all the emotional baggage that comes along with being an abuse victim.

Some officers from our department are currently involved in an investigation, with all too often circumstances, of a domestic violence case. On the night of the incident the officers contacted the victim, who due to her history was not real supportive or trusting of the police. She had been previously assaulted by her abuser and eventually confided in the officers what happened. Between the time of the incident and now that the trial date is approaching the victim and abuser have reconciled once again and are back together. The victim has changed her statement about what happened several times, to include saying the abuser wasn’t even in Florence at the time, and called department supervisors in an attempt to stop the case from moving forward, even accusing the investigating officers of harassment because they won’t stop their investigation.

It would be easy for our officers to ask themselves “Why doesn’t she just get out?” and not put the work in to this case that they have, but then what would be the outcome be??????

John Pitcher
Commander, Florence Police Department

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Come march with SOS End Domestic Violence Sunday September 30 Gather by 12:45 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial on Bay Street march begins promptly at 1:00 p.m. and continues through downtown Florence