

HAPPY THANKSGIVING



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TODAY'S OUTLOOK

Sunny. Highs in upper 50s to mid-60s. Lows in upper 20s to mid-30s.
WEATHER: B2 LOTTO: A2

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Kenn Hicks knows that holidays are the worst time of year for domestic violence. And the winter holiday season is the worst of all.

"This time of the year there is high stress and high expectations," said Hicks, a licensed clinical social worker who developed a presentation about the 11 building blocks of domestic violence prevention.

"Many batterers have a history of expectations they couldn't fill. The battered may expect a good Christmas, but in the back of their minds they know that Christmas is a time of alcohol, battery and abuse."

Hicks said for children in families affected by domestic violence, Christmas is a time of love, hope and fear.

"They believe in the love of Christmas and the hope everything is going to be nice," Hicks said. "But in the back of their minds they know something is going to happen."

A difficult time

A few years ago at a Christmas holiday breakfast party organized at Valley Oasis Domestic Violence Shelter in Lancaster, children from abused families visited with Santa Clause.

The children were ecstatic about Santa's visit. Their moms were

Christmas should be a time of love and hope, not fear

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subdued—they knew the reality of their situation.

"The shelter having this breakfast, and Santa coming, shows these children that people have concern, care and loving sides to them, not just a violent one," said a mother of three.

"It's important to teach the children about love, and hope that this will help them keep violence out of

their own lives."

The children's playhouse coordinator at the domestic violence shelter, said the woman's words rang of guilt.

"Many of these children have never had a safe or happy holiday," she said.

"The holidays are supposed to be filled with happiness and smiles, not anger. But as so often is the case in

domestic violence families, holidays mean anger, guilt and unhappiness."

The mother said that the Christmas holidays are the most difficult time of year for her and her children. Many bad things have happened during this time of the year, she said.

"Hopefully this will be a loving, happy Christmas. Not like last Christmas, or the Christmas before that. Christmases, since I've been a little girl, have not exactly been great," the mother said as she watched her children put ornaments on a Christmas tree.

"I hope this Christmas will break that pattern of the Christmases we're used to."

The mother said it seemed that every holiday meant something bad was going to happen. The previous year, her abuser wouldn't let the children play with the toys they got for Christmas.

"The highlight of my Christmas was that he left for two weeks after he destroyed the house," she said.

"The Christmas tree was on the floor. All the ornaments were broken. That was our Christmas—tears and headache. But he was gone for a while, and that was the best present we could have."

Holiday abuse ...

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That kind of Christmas story motivates Hicks to action.

As a parole agent, Hicks developed and implemented a successful parolee domestic violence prevention program. He is an approved facilitator certified by the Los Angeles County Probation Department Monitoring Unit.

Hicks' holistic approach to domestic violence prevention has been successful with batterers who have extensive criminal histories.

"I wanted to take a program to a more generic level, and that's the 'Eleven Building Blocks of Domestic Violence Prevention.' I want to educate people about what is, and isn't, domestic violence," Hicks said.

"There are many forms of domestic violence, not just physical abuse. There's emotional abuse—isolation from family and friends, controlling the money, where one can go. Property abuse—destruction of property in order to gain control, pet abuse, spiritual abuse..."

Hicks said the intention of his program is to keep batterers from

battering and abusing again.

Batterers have to take full responsibility for their actions, no matter what the victim may or may not have done to 'trigger' them. Agitation can go back and forth between the batterer and the victim before the battery occurs. At no time is the battering justified," Hicks said.

"Some people who are 'in love,' don't know they are being battered. Unfortunately, affection camouflages some of the abuse. There is a need to raise the self-esteem of both the victim and the batterer."

Hicks said he worked on the 11 building blocks for a year, and he recently published a book on the subject—"Eleven Building Blocks of Domestic Violence Prevention."

"Right now I'm going around the Antelope Valley looking for victims groups, batterers groups or other organizations to talk to about domestic violence prevention," Hicks said.

"I also want to talk to groups of high school students and young adults because date abuse and battery is increasing."

Anyone interested in lectures on the Eleven Building Blocks of Domestic Violence Prevention should phone Hicks at 661/267-7110.

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PHOTO