

Pay attention to “gut feeling” to prevent abuse **By Christina Chapman**

Reprinted from
The Herald News Southwest Weekly
Friday, May 16, 2008

The eighth class of the Morris Police Citizen's Police Academy was probably the most sensitive class in the series.

But that doesn't mean it doesn't have to be taught. As a matter of fact, for those who listen, they could save a life.

Detective Alicia Weber covered crimes against persons on May 6. Due to another assignment I had to miss this class, but Weber caught me up at a later date.

Crimes against persons include domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and elder abuse.

"These crimes are where someone is directly affected by being approached or touched," Weber said.

For instance, when someone breaks into a house and the person who lives there is not home, they are still affected by having their stuff stolen or damaged, but they are not directly approached.

Weber said if she could only get one thing across to the academy students, it would be that you should follow your gut.

"I want to make people aware of what the crimes are mainly so they report them," she said. "When you have a gut feeling something is wrong a lot of people don't want to get involved in other people's business. But you are never bothering us by calling us and your gut feeling is usually pretty accurate."

Domestic violence

This is when a person intentionally or knowingly without justification by any means causes harm to any family member or household member or makes physical contact of an insulting or provoking nature with a family or household member.

A couple does not have to be married for violence to be considered domestic battery. It also occurs in same-sex couples. But it's not only couples, either. Violence between siblings, parent and child, stepchildren, former spouses, people who share a child together, people who were previously in a relationship and people with disabilities and their caregivers is also considered domestic abuse.

From Jan. 23 to May 4, Morris police had 27 domestic battery calls, three of which were from the same couple, Weber said.

"On average a woman has to get hit seven times before she feels able to report it," she said.

It is important to note that not of all domestic calls are men hurting women.

"These kind of calls stereotype men are the offenders, but women are just as likely and men generally don't report it," she said.

Sexual assault

Here is where the class tends to get quiet and uncomfortable, but it happens and needs to be addressed. These crimes include rape, criminal sexual abuse and criminal sexual assault.

There are three types of rape: stranger rape, where the victim does not know the rapist; date rape, where the victim is familiar with the rapist; and spousal rape, which is when the victim's spouse forces him or herself on them when they did not consent.

"At one time people didn't think (spousal rape) was a crime. But you have the right to say no, even if you're married," Weber said.

The most common type of rape is date rape, although television makes it seem that stranger rape is, she said.

Criminal sexual abuse is classified as any unwanted touching of a sexual nature. But criminal sexual assault is an act of sexual penetration by the use of force or threat. Penetration is considered any contact, no matter how slight, between the sex organs of one person by an object, sex organ, mouth or anus of another person.

The acts alone of these crimes are horrendous, but what is even scarier is the number of these crimes that go unreported, Weber said.

"There is a failure to report these because the victims are afraid they'll come back, their afraid of the social stigma (if people know) or they blame themselves, which is mostly what I see," Weber said.

She said victims often say they were drinking, or they shouldn't have gone home with him or her or they shouldn't have dressed the way they did.

"No one deserves to be violated in such a personal way," Weber said.

Child and elder abuse

The first report of child abuse in this country was in 1847. Mary Ellen Wilson, a 10-year-old, was being abused by her caretakers, which are similar to today's foster parents. A neighbor witnessed the abuse and when she tried to get her help the only organization that would do anything was the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Obviously every state, if not every town, now has numerous organizations to help with these cases now, but think of all the children who weren't helped before Mary Ellen Wilson.

Children between the ages of 2 and 15 are the most commonly physically abused, Weber said. Child abuse also includes emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

The same types of abuse are done to elder people, but they also have to worry about financial abuse, the most common crimes seen against elders, Weber said.

Usually an elder may have an adult child or grandchild who lives with them claiming to be taking care of grandma or grandpa. But usually it's actually that the adult child or grandchild has some sort of addiction and they do not have a job so they are spending the elder's money to feed their addiction.

No matter the circumstances the one thing to remember is that the police are there. Whether you actually witnessed a crime or if you have a gut feeling, the police can listen and most likely help.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather feel like an annoyance to the police than not say anything and live with the guilt if something happened to another person and I could've stopped it.

For more information or to report a crime in Morris call Morris police at (815) 942-2131.

Listen to reporter Christina Chapman discuss Southwest Weekly at 4:40 p.m. Wednesdays on WJOL-AM (1340).