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### Parents must display healthy love

Published: Tuesday, April 27, 2010 1:07 AM EDT

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Hands of Hope

Chaotic love -- that is how a survivor of domestic violence described her parent's relationship.

"They loved each other, but they didn't respect each other," she said. She grew up in an environment where yelling, screaming and fighting were a routine part of her parent's marriage.

On one particular early morning, she recalled waking up to hearing such violence that she escaped out her bedroom window, running a mile and a half to a friend's house. She was 15.

When it was time for her to fall in love, she said, subconsciously she found a man who would treat her just how her parent's treated each other. It didn't start right away, though -- the violence. It was an accidental slap. An unintentional put down until before she realized it she could fit inside his pocket.

She says he found that piece of her that was vulnerable and moved in, taking over her self-esteem and self-worth, taking over her sense of who she was.

It wasn't until a life circumstance literally separated her from him for a period of time that she was able to step back and realize just how distorted and dangerous her relationship had become.

Today, after some intensive counseling, this woman is currently in a healthy relationship, one with respect at its center.

As we recognize April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, those of us who are parents, I implore you to take time to evaluate your relationship with your spouse or partner, even if they are your ex-partner.

What kind of environment are you raising your child in? Is it one of respect and healthy communication or is it one of chaotic love.

I do not believe anyone would ever intentionally predestine their son or daughter to a life of violence, but that is what we are doing if we are not modeling good communication and healthy love. It is healthy for children to see their parents display conflict, as long as the parents work out that conflict in a positive manner.

Often times a child who lives in a home of chaos, will gravitate to that kind of relationship as a young adult. Let's break the cycle of violence in each of our homes so our children will have a chance to experience just how wonderful a non-violent relationship can be.

For more information call 664-0701.

*Linda Wilk is director of Hands of Hope, a division of Family Service Society, Inc., a United Way Agency*