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Speaker 1 (00:05):
Thank you for joining us for today's webinar, Domestic Violence Awareness, brought to you by Cigna. Please note that copies of the presentation file and handouts are available for download in the drop down box on the lower left side of the player window. Our presenter today is Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas. Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas is a licensed clinical mental health provider. She holds certifications as a trauma-informed therapist, a certified employee assistance professional and master addition counselor. Doctor Lisa completed her Doctorate level studies in Counseling Psychology from The School of Professional Psychology in Washington D.C.

Speaker 1 (00:43):
In addition to the aforementioned certifications, Doctor Lisa is also a trauma-informed mental health first aide responder to local and national disasters, including the 9/11 attacks. And now, Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (00:57):
Thank you. And welcome everyone. Understanding that today's topic can be a difficult one, we're starting the conversation. Because with many issues, as well informed people, we can respond in ways that are life saving. So let me talk a little bit about where we are today. The impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic can be felt in our homes, workplaces, and nearly every facet of our lives. The directive to shelter-in-place in our homes, with our partner and families is meant to keep us safe and healthy, helping to curb the spread of a threat that we cannot see or hear. But for many, who found themselves in a domestic violence situation whose stay safe strategy may put them in increased danger of a much different, more over kind of threat, their partner or another family member.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (02:04):
Domestic violence is an issue that many people grapple with each and every day, not only during a pandemic. Today, we'd like to explore the important issue of domestic violence, giving you a greater understanding of the scope of this pervasive, and widespread issue. And an idea of how you might help yourself or someone in your own life who may be impacted.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (02:37):
To do this, we'll need to address some very specific goals. We want to increase awareness so that the responses can be informed, can be planned, and can be very focused and specific. We're going to explore the impact of this additional co-pandemic on domestic violence. And we are also going to review the potential warning signs of an abusive relationship that you may already have observed, but maybe not really registered what it really is. And then, understanding the barriers that can stop someone from, from leaving and getting the help who's in an abusive relationship and finding out what to do if you or someone you know is experiencing violence in your home.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (03:40):
So the best place to start is describing and giving a foundational definition. Most of us have, have conflicts with a significant other or partner or spouse. And sometimes big fights that blow up out of proportion to a seemingly small problem. And sometimes big fights happen because of a truly big problem. Domestic violence, however, is different. Domestic violence has many names. Domestic abuse, relationship abuse, intimate partner violence. It's a physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current,
or former partner or spouse. This pattern of behavior is used by one person to establish power and control over another by using fear, intimidation, and the threat or use of violence.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (04:41):
People of all backgrounds, ethnicity, lifestyles, and religions can be victims of partner violence. Age is not a factor. Children and elders can also be victims, and perpetrators, of domestic violence. It can occur in all types of relationships. Married, unmarried, straight, gay, monogamous, polyamorous, short-term, long-term, sexually active or abstinent.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (05:15):
The behavior to include physical violence, property damage, pushing, slapping, kicking, hitting, actual violence like assault, rape, and most definitely physical intimidation, verbal abuse, emotional abuse like insults, humiliations, threats against the partner, or the children. Stalking and controlling behaviors, social isolation, financial abuse, monitoring, social media restrictions, and invasions of privacy are all wrapped into this behavior that results in harm.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (05:59):
This behavior tends to intensify over the course of a relationship. For example, it may start out as name calling or threats of violence in your presence or even damage to your property. It could include stalking and harassment through social media, which today is a very easy and convenient way of controlling. There can also be media abuse, or related to immigration and status and the abuser has control because the victim can't, can't move freely in this country. Or outing a partner's sexual orientation to friends and family and coworkers or just threatening to do so.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (06:51):
It can also escalate to physical assaults and the use of weapons. Either of which can be life threatening. Studies have shown that when abusers have access to a fire arm the risk of homicide in domestic violence situations increases by 400%. Partner violence is not just a disagreement or a marital spat. It, it's not. It is not just a problem with anger management. It isn't a problem that will get better on it's own. It's about one person in the relationship believing they are entitled to controlling over another one by any means necessary.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (07:46):
This pandemic has exposed an old problem. Unfortunately, domestic violence has been around for many, many, many, many, many decades, but for most of us dealing with this pandemic, we don't see it. The measures taken to protect our physical health, such as isolation and working from home to avoid the spread of the disease, have got an issue that has existed for a very long time with a sharper focus. But why?

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (08:27):
Domestic violence tends to rise when certain factors are present. Stress, economic anxiety, isolation, alcohol and substance use which has increased significantly since COVID-19. The presence of firearms and feeling a lack of control are just a few of the examples that have brought this issue to light. For some of these factors the reasons why are biological during times of stress. For example, our bodies
trigger the stress hormone cortisol which research has shown can be associated with an increase in aggression.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (09:11):
For others, such as economic anxiety, the reason may be more psychological. Abuse is an attempt to regain a sense of control in a situation that feels helpless or chaotic. With stay at home protocols in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 those at risk of domestic violence are forced to stay in a potentially dangerous situation, their homes. Other measures taken to reduce the risk of spreading the disease such as decreasing the numbers of misdemeanor arrests, which includes most domestic violence cases or even releasing prisoners from jail can also put victims at risk or further isolation. Or perhaps reluctance to report an incident to police. Added to these challenges, resources such as domestic abuse shelters and medical care facilities may be at a reduced capacity. All of this is coming together at such a critical time. Particularly in rural areas.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (10:26):
What this amounts to is a frightening and escalating problem. One that may have an impact that you or someone you know is experiencing. So let’s review what the data tells us about how prevalent domestic violence really is in our communities. Take a moment and in your mind picture what you think an abuser and a victim may look like. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one in five women and one in seven men report having experienced several physical violence acts by an intimate partner. The rates may be even high for people of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (11:31):
Emotional correlations against domestic violence recourse, but one in 15 children are exposed to domestic violence each year whereas 90% of those children having witnessed the violence themselves. Research shows that many children exposed to domestic violence are also victims of abuse themselves. And on the other end of the spectrum, 4 million older Americans are victims of abuse and neglect every year. What this all amounts to is a significant and widespread problem.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (12:11):
In normal times, and that would be pre-pandemic, domestic violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime in America. While some types of crime have harbor damaged in the wake of home isolation, some communities have reported a 20 to 30% increase in calls related to domestic violence. It's the start of the pandemic. United Nations warns that on a Global scale, just three months of lockdown due to the pandemic could result in 15 million more cases of domestic violence worldwide.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (12:51):
Now that we have an awareness of the true scope of this issue, let’s dive a little deeper by discovering some of the myths about domestic violence you might be familiar with. There are some some common misconceptions about domestic violence and believing any of these myths can be very, very harmful for the person being abused and it keeps others from intervening. It keeps others from providing support. Domestic violence is caused by external factors. Not caused by job stress or financial problems, marital conflict or substance abuse and while these factors might be linked to an increase in domestic violence, getting rid of them may not stop the violence.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (13:43):
The violence continues because the abuser wants control. I know that we've mentioned some of these factors, however there is not being contributions, they do set the stage. Victims provoke the violence is an awful myth that many have contended with. No one has the power to make someone else do anything. Any form of domestic violence is the result of a choice, made by the abuser.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (14:20):
It's not just an anger management problem. Domestic abuse is about power and control. Not an anger management issue. If anger were the primary issue, you would likely see the abuser being violent in their work and in all relationships. (laughs) And this is not typically the case. Treating it as an anger management problem, supports the abuser's denial and minimizes their behavior. Well, wouldn't a protective order solve everything? Well protective orders may not solve the problem of domestic violence or protect the victim.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (15:02):
It does not stop an individual from harming you. Remember that a protective order can only be enforced when it's violated and then reported. After a victim has already had potentially dangerous with the abuser. So if the victims leaves, would it be safe though, you ask. Well, the process of leaving can be extremely dangerous. When a victim makes the decision to leave, their violent partner feels a loss of control. Abusers tend to escalate their level of violence after their partner leaves or while their partner is leaving. It's a way to regain control.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (15:49):
But how about putting abusers into treatment, won't the victim be safe then? In fact, research that spans the last few decades has found mixed results on the effectiveness of treatment programs for domestic abuse. Success in treatment may be based on many factors such as the type of program or motivation of the abuser. But treatment is no guarantee that the person being abused will be safe. Even if the abuser is in treatment, the victim should do what they need to do to ensure their own safety and the safety of their family.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (16:29):
Letting their guard and remaining with the abuser could simply feed into the cycle of abuse. So what are the warning signs of an abusive relationship? How would you know? It's difficult to know early in the relationship whether a person is abusive. There isn't a typical profile of an abuser. It could be your child's prom date or your friend's wife or neighbor or coworker, even a parishioner. Abuse often happens behind closed doors and is kept secret out of fear. But certain characteristics can be potential warning signs that a relationship is abusive.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (17:18):
Isolation is one of those indicators that violent partner often increases the isolation of the victim from the family, and friends, and support systems. Wanting to control everything their partner does and who they spend time with. They might monitor the partner's mileage, spending habits, phone calls, emails. They may demand passwords to social media or even install tracking software to track any online interactions. That's why this information is extremely important and critical.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (17:57):
However, as an ally, being mindful of how you share this information with someone who you may suspect may be in a threatening situation. Emotional abuse is a part of this whole scenario. Abusers will use guilt or shame to manipulate their partner. For example, they may say things like, "If you, you really loved me..." (laughs) "...well you would" fill in the blank. Whatever that may be. Or it... really just shaming them. You, you're such a disappointment, you're lucky I keep, or keep you around. They will humiliate their partner or put them down in front of friends and coworkers and family and do so on social media as well.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (18:44):
All this is a form of intimidation. They may attempt to make their partner afraid using words, looks, or gestures, displaying weapons. They may provoke fear with displays of aggression like destroying their partner's property or even abusing pets. Physical abuse or threats will use [inaudible 00:19:07] violence in response to problems. They can also threaten to harm their partner if they don't do what he or she wants them to do.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (19:18):
Potential warning signs of an abusive relationship: isolation, emotional abuse, intimidation, physical abuse and threats. It doesn't end there. Economic abuse, it can be hard for people to leave a violent partner if they have no source of income. Or their accounts are controlled by their partner. The thought of not having any financial support may be more terrifying than the abuse itself. Financial abuse can be an overlooked part of partner violence. And today, when so many jobs are dependent on customer traffic, there are a lot of people who are financially compromised at this point.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (20:08):
And we also consider the rigid police about gender roles. And the abuser may have rigid ideas about what a man should be and what a woman should be. Ultimately these beliefs assign control. Control of the relationship to the abuser. For example, telling a woman it's not her place to make important financial decisions or telling the victim to be a man and not disclose abuse. They may also make negative comments about men or women or behave inappropriately toward them. And then there's the distortion of truth.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (20:52):
Abusers often deny or minimize the extent of their abuse. Making excuses, or often place the blame on their partner. For example, they may things like, "You asked for it." "You made me mad." It's just justify the abuse. The abuser may even use children to maintain control over their partner, making them feel guilty for thinking of leaving or threatening to take the children away if they don't stay. These are just some of the examples of what an abusive relationship might look like.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (21:26):
There are hand outs associated with this webinar, one is entitled Are You in an Abusive Relationship? The takeaway with behaviors that may be of concern, however, if you are in an abusive relationship or you have someone that you'd like to pass this information on to, ensuring their safety is number one. Be mindful that this information doesn't wind up in the hands of their partner is a critical piece of their safety. Now we're talking about no longer being a safe place. And during a pandemic, control tactics can be amplified or take on a new form.
Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (22:17):
Monitoring behaviors using today's modern technology. An abuser can monitor the websites you visit or what you do on your personal devices. Home cameras are common place and inexpensive and making home monitoring possible from anywhere. With stay at home orders in place many families in close quarters by necessity, it becomes difficult to make a safety plan in the event of an abusive situation. Even if they have a safety plan in place, it may be challenging to implement. Maybe the victim has no privacy and maybe even no resources. If the pandemic has impacted the availability of shelters in the area, that's another major obstacle.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (23:11):
Domestic abuse can also be seen in the form of threats to your health and safety. For example, withholding cleaning or medical supplies from their partner or threatening to cancel health insurance. Those are tactics designed to scare victims, prevent them from leaving. Abusers may also deliberately feed misinformation about the virus. Telling lies about how it spreads or who's at risk in an effort to isolate their partner from others. We can easily now how the response to the pandemic, while designed to keep us safe and healthy, can make a domestic violence situation even more isolating and exponentially more unsafe.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (24:08):
There are many barriers to leaving. It may be difficult for people not in violent relationships to understand why the victim doesn't just leave. Let's keep in mind that domestic violence involves layers of abuse and control that are designed to make the victim feel entangled in the relationship. That they are unable to leave due to numerous barriers that... these can come in many forms. These layers are built over time and the structure of them appear to impenetrable. Emotional barriers can be some of the strongest a victim can experience. Victims feel loyalty and love to their partner, and even if their behaviors are unacceptable, they may deny that the behavior constitutes abuse.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (25:09):
There's a lot inherent in the emotional barriers. It's often intermittent and they may believe that their partner is capable of change. They may have many fears, including being harmed or killed, harm to their children, the unknown. The abuser will often make threats toward the children. Going to court et cetera can lead to an even more emotional barrier that adds to the levels of shame and guilt and embarrassment. Most victims don't want anyone to know what is going on and they also feel like they are somehow to blame for the abuse.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (26:01):
Taking together, these emotional barriers can amount to a sense of learned helplessness, essentially victim taught and no way out. Many times we don't see all the ways someone in a violent relationship has thought and planned to leave. They may not have the resources or can't see a safe way out. When an individual doesn't find a way to change their situation, they just, they give up. Barriers may also be situational, often stemming from the control tactics we discussed earlier.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (26:45):
This pattern of controlling behaviors and violence can make the option of leaving seem a, absolutely impossible. These can include economic dependence, isolating the victim from financial resources that
might help them leave. Isolation may also be more literal, cutting them off from family and friends. They may also experience family pressure and some victims come from families where domestic violence is learned and accepted as part of a normal relationship. Prescribing to the belief that they should stay and work it out.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (27:27):
There are also logistical challenges to leaving. Planning and preparing to leave in a safe way, well, it takes time and resources. Luxuries a victim may not have, especially if their partner accounts for every minute of their time. They may not have the knowledge of resources or legal options available to them. Immigration status can also be a barrier to leaving. Individuals who don't have legal residency or citizenship or have a language barrier, they have a variety of challenges in leaving the situation. Lack of financial resources, worry over the outcome of reporting your situation. Or fear of deportation if they are... or household or extended family member's undocumented.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (28:23):
If there are legal aspects to your situation, that are stopping you from getting to safety, the National Domestic Violence Hotline may be able to connect you to legal resources. And that's something that is an ally you need to keep in mind and make sure that the victim that you are aware of, has the information. We also have additional handouts that can help with that. Victims of domestic violence may question themselves and can become confused about who is responsible for their worsening situation.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (29:05):
Many are relying on cognitive distortions to help them cope and survive with the abuse, which can also serve as barriers to leaving. Every marriage has it's ups and downs, right? If I didn't forget to fix dinner, he wouldn't hurt me. Calling the police will only make it worse, right? Remember, the abuse is not the victim's fault. The cycle of violence is a contributor to some of this type of thinking. After a violent episode, a partner may be very remorseful and apologetic. They may be very calm, romantic, and make promises in order to convince their partner not to leave them. Many victims will stay or drop the charges, in hopes that their abuser, or partner will really, really do what they say they're gonna do.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (30:07):
This is part of the abusive cycle. We have another handout entitled Effects of Partner Violence with Children. It's specific to how it impacts children adversely and provides some additional insight. Not just to the victim, but also to allies. Providing support from a distance sometimes is the only empowerment an ally may have. So let's look at how you can respond if someone you know is being abused, especially when stay at home orders are in place or personal contact is limited.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (30:52):
First, knowing the signs of abuse is essential. Many of which we've covered. In these stay at home protocols, you may need to look and listen for clues and actually look for what you think might be going on. And this may all be virtual. If they are consistently worried about making their partner angry, stopped reaching out, or seem depressed, anxious, or another marked change in their mood, these may be signs of an abusive relationship. Doing regular check ins with them is important. If you can, visit in person or on a patio or other safe space. Or check in via video chat. However, recognize that their
partner might be monitoring their electronic communications. Or they may be present in the home
during this time.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (31:51):
So be mindful of how you're checking in on them and text messages may be a good way to communicate
more openly and honestly. But again, be mindful that if their electronics are being monitored, text
messages won't be safe either. Listen without judging. Keep in mind the victims may already have
negative feelings about themselves and likely feel shame and embarrassment about their situation.
Don't pass judgment. It will only add to those feelings. Ask permission before you make any suggestions
and don't take it personally if they don't take your advice.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (32:36):
Try phrases like, "Well, have you thought about..."? It's a good way to open up the conversation. Be
ready to act if they leave or ask for help. If they do express fear or concern for their safety, it's important
to validate this and provide support. If their life has been threatened, ask for their permission to get
additional help. If a victim does decide to leave, they may need help finding a place to stay, a place to
store belongings, and help with child care or help getting to a shelter.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (33:17):
Think about what you are willing and able to provide when the time comes. This also means keeping
your own safety and safety of those in mind. You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline,
which is in a handout that we've provided. Make them aware of local resources. You can be a big help by
providing information to the victim about those resources and safety plan. Many victims are unable to
safely research this information so if a victim um, has that issue, suggest that they call the National
Domestic Violence Hotline.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (34:07):
We have another handout entitled How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship. Which for you as
an ally, is a good resource to give you some ideas about how to better assist. Domestic violence is a
situation that is rarely resolved with a single decision or a single course of action. Victims need support
and understanding in the long-term. There are several important things to keep in mind as you consider
how best to support someone you know who may be in an abusive relationship.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (34:47):
It's a difficult, scary situation. The fears and worries we discussed as barriers to leaving are very real
concerns. And are escalated even more if the victim chooses to leave. Leaving can be one of the most
dangerous times for a victim of domestic violence as they attempt to take some control by leaving. The
abuse may retaliate in a violent and destructive ways. There can be many reasons a person believes they
need to stay in an abusive relationship. And these reasons are definitely legitimate and can cause
significant barriers to making a plan.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (35:29):
Try to suspend your judgment of what you should do or what you would do. It is impossible to know
how we would react until we are in the same situation. They may not be ready to share with you or take
action. So be patient. Let them know that you are a source of support for them. But don't rush them or
push them to do anything they may not be ready to do. Attempts to force them to do something that they're not ready to do, even if you think it's for their own good, could be seen as a continuation of their partner's abusive and controlling behavior.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (36:13):
You need to meet them where they are. Confidentiality and privacy are extremely important. If the victim chooses to tell no one except you, respect their privacy. It can be a matter of safety as well as confidentiality. If you have concerns that keeping the situation private may be endangering them or the children, or others in the workplace, you can ask for their permission to involve someone else they trust or encourage them to disclose to a trusted manager or human resource representative for directional workplace safety.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (36:53):
If you are told of, or learn that children are being abused, the county you live in has a child protection department. And usually in the social services department. Give them a call. They have professionals staffed with information and availability to walk you through your thoughts and plans. And remember, you cannot fix the situation for them. What you can do, as an ally, is be a trustworthy and supportive friend. Remind them of their value, which can easily get lost in the complex cycle of power and control.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (37:41):
Make sure they know that what their partner is doing is not okay. And that they don't deserve it. Be ready to provide support in whatever form they are ready for, a listening ear, sharing concern, or perhaps as a liaison for needed resources and support in their community. Encourage them to develop a safety plan and take care of themselves, especially if they are sheltering in place. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, it is important to take every possible step to ensure your safety.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (38:33):
Making the decision to leave is a vital step, but it can increase the risk. The following resources we have can help you develop a plan for staying safe. Developing a personal safety plan, and a workplace plan is really critical. We do have a handout, safety planning handout that will be helpful to flushing this information out. During the stay at home and shelter in place protocols, your safety plan may need to include strategies for creating physical distance between you and the abuser, where you are. Which could be a small living space.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (39:22):
So consider how you might include virtual tools such as chatting or texting or messaging to get help, such as creating a code word for your safety plan that you can text to a trusted support person. Be prepared with basic supplies that are stashed and a set of car keys readily available to allow you to leave quickly. Check in advance for shelters and resources that are open and offering services during this time. And the emotional safety plans are particularly important when isolating at home when aspects of your personal safety plan may not be feasible.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (40:03):
Emotional safety planning helps you feel more accepting of your emotions and decisions in an abusive situation. And remember, you are not to blame for someone else's abusive behavior. Explore the
options for a restraining or protective order. A restraining or a protective order is a legal document that's issued by a magistrate or a judge in order to protect the health and safety of a victim or family of abuse. There are different kinds of protective orders and each offers a different level of protection for a different period of time.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (40:43):
Protective orders must be enforced to be effective. If your partner violates or attempts to violate a protective order, you, you should follow what you have been told by the court to do in this particular situation. If you don't know what to do, contact local law enforcement for direction. While a protective order can be a deterrent, it can't guarantee your safety. The abuser may have a violent reaction to a protective order. So be sure to contact the Domestic Violence Hotline or counselor and ask specific questions regarding your situation.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (41:31):
Complete understanding of protective orders should be based or in your state and local laws. Contacting a Domestic Violence Hotline, or Domestic Violence Counselor, especially at a local shelter would be helpful in interpreting those laws and the next steps. Can help you understand how this tool can work in your favor. If domestic violence enters your life, the stress can be intense. And the outcomes tragic. Whether it's happening to someone you know, casually or to a close friend, coworkers, family members, to you or if you recognize that you could be an abuser. Know that help is available.

Doctor Lisa Cooper-Lucas (42:25):
We can all be a part of breaking the cycle of partner violence. We thank you for joining us today and hope that you have taken all of this information into account as you move forward with protecting yourself, your family, those within your circle as an ally, and yourself.

Speaker 1 (42:58):
Thank you Doctor Lisa. And thank you everyone very much for being with us today. That concludes today's webinar.