

## Local Experts Raise Awareness and Educate Others About Domestic Violence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and two agencies in Tuscaloosa tackle the needs of domestic violence victims here in our community.

Turning Point and Family Counseling Service are staples in West Alabama. As we bring awareness to the issue of domestic violence this month, the directors of these agencies, Equiller Mahone (Turning Point) and Larry Deavers (Family Counseling Service) answered questions about the issue, including what you can do to help.

### What do we need to know about domestic violence that we may not know?

**FCS:** Domestic violence affects people across every socio-economic level and, even though it does not seem to garner the media attention it did 20 years ago, it still occurs, and many victims suffer in silence.

**TP:** Domestic violence encompasses more than physical abuse. It involves a continuum of behaviors which may include emotional abuse, sexual assault, economic control, and isolation. Domestic violence is about power and control.

### What are the goals during your time together?

**FCS:** Intervention for those who have committed domestic violence revolves around safety of the victim. The FCS approach to protecting the victim is to help the abuser examine his or her own behaviors and beliefs and, with the group processing approach, facilitate an en-

vironment where they can develop the skills to change what they believe and how they act in their relationship.

**TP:** Safety is the first goal. Each client has different needs. Our staff works to create individual safety and case plans to address each client's needs, including safety goals, employment, housing, and individual counseling.

### What can members in the community do to help your agency, or raise awareness about the issue?

**TP & FCS:** As a community, it is essential that we all send the same message about domestic violence. Whether you are an elected official, or just a neighbor with concerns, communicating loudly and clearly that abuse will not be tolerated is critical to creating a safe community for would-be victims of abuse.



Left: Equiller Mahone is Executive Director of Turning Point Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services. Right: Larry Deavers is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Executive Director of Family Counseling Service in Tuscaloosa.

### Why is it important?

**FCS:** Without taking a stance as a community that domestic violence is unacceptable, many victims in our community will never realize they are not alone. Those who commit violence will continue to believe they are entitled to do so and that their behavior is not their own responsibility. To stop the violence, it takes a commitment from all of us to change what the victim and the abuser believe is acceptable.

**TP:** Often, victims are made to feel responsible. We have to shift the conversation away from, "Why does the victim

stay in the situation?" Domestic violence will continue to be an issue unless we look at how it affects the individuals involved and the community as a whole.

**Turning Point** is located at 2110 McFarland Boulevard E, Suite G and can be reached at 205-758-0808. Learn more at [turningpointservices.org](http://turningpointservices.org).

**Family Counseling Service** is located at 2020 Paul Bryant Drive. You can reach them at 205-752-2504 and learn more at [counselingservice.org](http://counselingservice.org).