

THE COLUMBIA CHRONICLE

Illinois gets it right helping domestic violence survivors



Carolyn Bradley, Copy Chief

JAN. 23, 2017—Illinois legislators have started the year by implementing a way for beauticians to more effectively protect their clients. A new law, effective Jan. 1, requires stylists to undergo one hour of training in recognizing the signs of domestic abuse and stopping the abuse from progressing as part of the licensing process, according to a Dec. 16, 2016 Chicago Tribune article.

To develop the training, titled “Listen. Support. Connect.,” Cosmetologists Chicago partnered with Chicago Says No More, a coalition of domestic violence advocacy groups, according to a Jan. 1 NPR article. The Professional Beauty Association’s website also provides a list of domestic abuse signs and appropriate responses, including both the physical and emotional signs of abuse and the characteristics of abusers. Having these and similar guidelines for stylists to reference is a positive step toward addressing domestic violence.

It is beneficial that the list includes signs of emotional or psychological abuse because abuse does not always manifest in physical ways such as a bruise or scar. The list also, most importantly, tells stylists to believe their clients who say they are being abused and to be a confidante to assist the victim in finding help outside the salon.

Places such as beauty salons serve as safe spaces; therefore, clients feel more inclined to open up to their beauticians about their personal lives. This makes it easy for beauticians to recognize signs of abuse such as sudden behavior changes or allusions to controlling partners. With this law, stylists are able to provide resources for domestic violence survivors, such as hotlines to call or support groups.

Although many clients trust their stylists, they may still be hesitant to bring complex issues like domestic violence to light. South Side stylist Joan Rowan told NPR that clients in the past have made up stories about injuries they sustained to disguise abuse. Rowan told NPR that clients who open up at length about their lives might be embarrassed because they think they have revealed too much or assume they would be judged for staying with their abusers.

Another side of the law protects beauticians from liability and does not mandate them to report to the police, according to the Guardian article. This gives clients an opportunity to confide about their situation without having to worry about authorities automatically finding out.

However, a domestic abuse situation will not stop with a pamphlet or a heart-to-heart confession. Survivors may need a more powerful professional or legal resource. While this state law is an effective start, there needs to be a dialogue about how stylists can more directly get help from domestic abuse professionals, or in serious cases, the police. A stylist should not let knowledge of their client’s abuse sit idle when something more needs to be done.

Domestic violence will never be easy for a survivor or for a survivor’s supporters. Offering an ear to listen is always important in these situations, but having someone who also provides resources is a powerful step in supporting domestic violence victims and survivors and directing them to the help they need.