A team of researchers at UT-Arlington is working to develop new technology that can tell a person he or she is getting angry before they realize it.

If they're successful, they say this could be a game changer for domestic violence prevention – a topic in which Dr. Anne Nordberg has a keen interest.

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"The cost to [domestic violence] victims is incalculable," said Nordberg, who is a professor of social work at UTA and a member of the research team.

Their goal is to create a wearable device that could send a signal before an outburst takes place.

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"Not only does that help offenders learn more about their own behavior when it comes to emotion, but it could help the people around them – their children, their spouses, their partners – potentially warning them," Nordberg said.
But before they can do that, engineering professor Dr. J.C. Chiao has to figure out how you teach a computer to detect anger.

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“So this is a very complicated because we’re talking about recognizing emotion from brain signals,” said Chiao, who is also a member of the research team.

The team is looking for signals the brain sends as a person gets angry, hoping to discover some kind of pattern, which they could then digitize.

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“What we’re thinking is if we can detect a signature – somebody is about to get angry – that will ring your phone or ring your Apple Watch to remind you to calm down,” Chiao said.

They’re also working with faculty members in the psychology and education departments.

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It’s not easy or fast work – but then again, most worthwhile breakthroughs aren’t.

“‘That’s the way research is done properly – slowly, one step at a time, carefully,’” said Nordberg.

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