



BUTTERFLIES



BILL OF RIGHTS

“I have the right not to be abused”

“I have the right to anger over past beatings”

“I have the right to change the situation”

“I have the right to freedom from abuse”

“I have the right to request and expect assistance from police and social agencies”

“I have the right to share my feelings and not be isolated from others”

“I have the right to want a better role model of communication for my children”

“I have the right to be treated like an adult”

“I have the right to leave the abusive environment”

“I have the right to privacy”

“I have the right to express my own thoughts and feelings”

“I have the right to develop my individual talents and abilities”

“I have the right to legally prosecute the abusing spouse”

“I have the right not to be perfect”

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BUTTERFLIES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is not everyone else's problem. It can happen in any home to anyone. All it needs is a family member who believes that they have a right to solve problems using violence. You could be a victim in a few years if your friends/family are displaying tendencies.

So beware of the following methods of control used by someone using statements like:-

- : No you can not learn to drive a car, I'll take you where you want to go.
- : You are not getting your hair cut, I like it long.
- : You can not go to College, I love you too much and I will miss you.
- : You can not go out with your friends, what will I do while you are away.

BEWARE OF A PERSON WHO USES VERBAL OR PHYSICAL VIOLENCE TO GET THEIR OWN WAY.

If someone has already started hitting you, then leave them. They have **NO RIGHT** to hit you. **IT IS A CRIME.** They have a problem and need to get help. Their behaviour will not change unless they receive at least six months counselling. Even then there is no guarantee they will change. You **ARE NOT** responsible for their behaviour but **YOU ARE** responsible for **YOUR SAFETY.**

"KEEP YOURSELF SAFE"

If you want to talk, or need more information, call us on: (03) 5021 2130.

No need to give your name if you choose not to.

ALL INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL

EVERY FAMILY MEMBER SUFFERS

FROM

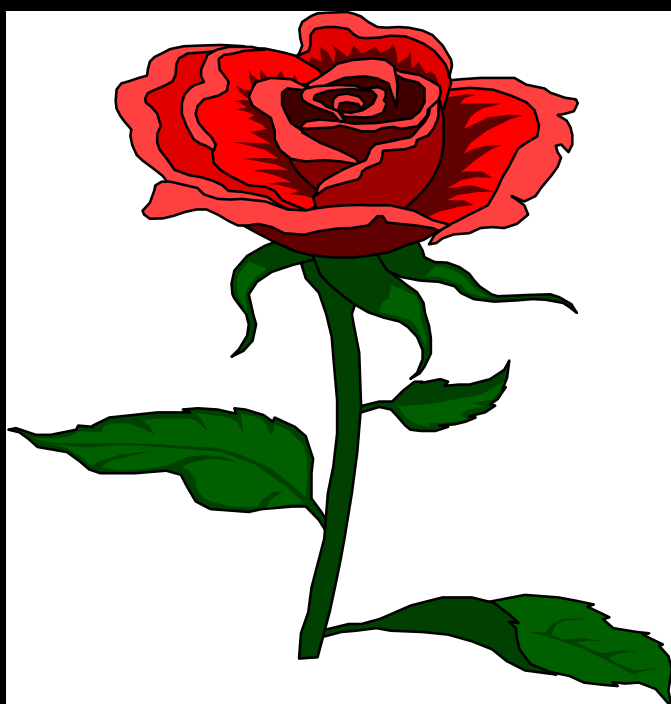
FAMILY VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE tends to be a VICIOUS CIRCLE:-

A spouse who abuses their partner may also abuse the children.

An abused spouse may take out frustration's on the children.

Children who are abused or who witness abuse may abuse each other and in adult life may become abusers or victims.



THE DEFINITION OF SPOUSE ABUSE

If there is to be any common understanding of what interventions are to be made in cases of spouse abuse, we must have a clear definition of what we mean by that term.

In this workshop we will be referring to four (4) basic forms of abuse:-

1. PHYSICAL

The most obvious form of violence is physical abuse. On a continuum, this begins with lack of consideration for a physical comfort or needs of others. It escalates to actions like shaking, punching, bruising, twisting the limbs, breaking bones, denying sleep and nutrition, denying needed medical care, causing internal injuries, using household objects as weapons, causing permanent injury and finally murder.

A part of physical abuse is sexual abuse. On a continuum this begins with the objectification of a victim through jokes, humiliating or degrading comments or unwanted touching. It escalates to demands for sex or punishment by rejection of them as a sexual partner, degrading them while having sex, forcing sex, forcing sex after a beating or under threat of a beating, using penetrating household objects in sex, causing injury during sex.

2. VERBAL

This consists of the “putting down” of the victim. It is an attempt to demean and de-power the victim to become dependent on the perpetrator. It ranges from snide, joking comments such as “I should have married the bloody freezer”, or “You can’t even boil an egg properly”, through to fearsome haranguing “You’re a stupid, mindless, no hoper”. “You’re a slut, a whore”. “You great ugly ape.....”. The purpose is to humiliate, degrade, demean and subjugate. Threats of killing all the pets, suicide, turning the kids against you, murder, child abuse are all means to this end.

3. ECONOMIC

Two (2) very common forms are encountered. One is when the perpetrator hands over money (whether large amounts or small) and demands that you do the impossible. “I give you \$ 80.00 a week!!!”. “Why can’t you feed and clothe us on that?” (Including four children). Or, “What’s this final notice?”. “I gave you the \$ 500.00 to finish paying off the car!”. (There was \$ 1,800.00 owing). The other form is when you do paid work and they insist on controlling the money.

4. SOCIAL

There are three (3) main manifestations of this. First there is the verbal abuse of the victim in company. They are laughed at, set up, put down - maybe in a joking way, maybe with cool purpose. The victim is thus humiliated in front of friends, relatives or strangers.

Second, there is the sometimes socially accepted “smothering” of the victim. They take you to work, rings you twice during the morning, takes you to lunch, rings you twice in the afternoon, picks you up, takes you home, drives you to the gym at night and sits in the car and waits to take you home. They even get you to change firms (for your sake of course) when one of the (opposite sex) supervisors comments on your attractiveness.

Third, there is social abuse through isolation. The victim is not allowed to see their friends. (“they’re troublemakers”) relatives (“they fill your head with stupid ideas”) nor is the victim allowed to go out, (“there’s plenty to do at home”) thus the perpetrator effectively isolates the victim from all other reference points, making themselves the only reference point the victim has.

Using these means, the perpetrator is able to convince the victim that the victim is responsible for the perpetrator’s violence or abuse.

In talking about spouse abuse and violence we are dealing with the de-powering of a person. We are not talking about a heated domestic argument. To differentiate between the two, let us put the domestic argument at the low end of the violence continuum and spouse abuse at the high end.



At the low end there is no identifiable victim. As we move to the right, a victim is increasingly easy to identify and less likely to provoke the incident or inflict harm on the other person.

If we add the dimension of power to our diagram, the differences become more obvious.



WHEN WE TALK ABOUT VIOLENCE

1. PHYSICAL

Tissue Damage: from holding you against your will through pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, punching, kicking, twisting limbs, using weapons.

Sexual: from demanding sex, through treating you as an object, bondage, rape, using objects.

Objects: from throwing crockery, through breaking furniture, smashing doors, destroying household goods, ill treating or killing family pets.

2. VERBAL

Threats and intimidation - shouting abuse.

Put downs regarding your body shape, grooming, intellectual capacity, parenting ability, constant erosion of your self-esteem.

3. SOCIAL

Isolation: from constantly criticising and being suspicious of family and friends, through not allowing you to have your own friends, keeping you isolated.

Smothering: from keeping in touch "to see how your going" (when its really to check-up on what your doing) through to doing everything together so you have no life of your own.

Put-downs: from making snide remarks about you in company through to making blatant verbal attacks on you in public.

4. ECONOMIC

"Keeping you poor" - controlling the money so that you have to ask for and in detail account for any money spent.

Constantly telling you, you are a "free loader" etc.

Refusing to involve you in financial decisions.

Having unrealistic expectations.

ON VERBAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Definitions of battering and abuse can be confusing. Many researchers have primarily defined battering as the use of physical violence. Yet it is clear that for many battered people, psychological abuse is as detrimental as physical abuse.

How many of these things has your partner done to you?

- : ignored your feelings
- : ridiculed or insulted the opposite sex as a group
- : ridiculed or insulted your most valued beliefs, your religion, race, heritage, or class
- : withheld approval, appreciation or affection as punishment
- : continually criticised you, called you names, shouted at you
- : humiliated you in private or public
- : refused to socialise with you
- : kept you from working, controlled your money, made all decisions
- : refused to work or share money
- : taken car keys or money away from you
- : regularly threatened to leave or told you to leave
- : threatened to hurt you or your family
- : punished or deprived the children when angry at you
- : threatened to kidnap the children if you left
- : abused, tortured, killed pets or hurt you
- : harassed you about affairs they imagined you were having
- : manipulated you with lies and contradictions
- : destroyed furniture, punched holes in walls, broken appliances
- : wielded a gun in a threatening way

Many of us do some of these things when we're in a bad mood. When is the behaviour classified as abusive? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you doubt your judgement or wonder if you are "crazy"?
2. Are you often afraid of your partner and do you express your opinion less freely?
3. Have you developed fears of other people and tend to see others less often?
4. Do you spend a lot of time watching for your partner's bad moods, before bringing up a subject?
5. Do you ask your partner's permission to spend money, take classes or socialise with friends?
6. Do you have fears of doing the wrong thing or of getting in trouble?
7. Have you lost confidence in your own abilities, become increasingly depressed and feel trapped and powerless?

If you answered YES to many of those questions, it is probable you have been abused and have changed as a result of being abused.

If you have friends or relatives who give emotional support and believe you are a good person, you may trust your judgement. But if you feel your batterer is far more important or knows you better than they really do, you will not hear the supportive, positive messages that come your way. If you spend little time with people other than your batterer - a common situation - there will not be other messages to hear.

One way to begin to help yourself is to change the messages you give yourself. You do have a right to a life free of verbal, emotional and physical abuse and you do not deserve or have to tolerate abuse. It is easy to get into the habit of coaching yourself for failure, but that can be changed. Begin to modify the things you say to yourself about yourself. You may not be able to change the batterer's behaviour, but at least you can start giving yourself positive, empowering messages.

..... if you are abused, or think your partner may be abusive, you can contact your local Domestic Violence Services for confidential support/counselling.

This material was adapted from Ginny NiCarthy's book, "Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships, by National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Washington D.C.

PATTERNS OF THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR OFTEN DISPLAYED BY ABUSIVE PEOPLE

These patterns were observed by counsellors working with battered women and with abusers; all examples were actually reported.

EXCUSE MAKING

The person gives excuses instead of accepting responsibility for behaviour, especially when confronted by others. Attempts to justify behaviour with the excuse:-

*Example - "I couldn't stand it when I came over to see you and you weren't home."
(Telling why damage was done to a girlfriends home)*

BLAMING

Blaming shifts responsibility for the behaviour onto someone else. This allows the person to both deny responsibility for the behaviour and to justify being angry at the other person for "causing" it.

Example - "What's wrong with you? Why can't you understand how much it upsets me when I see you talking to someone else? What was I supposed to do?"

JUSTIFYING

Attempting to explain and justify the behaviour as necessary, unavoidable, or caused by factors outside the person's control.

Example - "You know you wanted to, you didn't really mean "no", you just like to say that." (After sexual abuse)

REDEFINING

Having an idea of what's "really going on" that shifts the focus from what the abusive person did.

Example - "How can you do this to me? Are you that cold? (After the abused person told friends about the violence)

LYING

Lying is used to maintain control over information, to confuse, to make a fool of the other person and gain an advantage in the situation. Lying can be by saying things that are untrue, by leaving out parts of the truth, or by pretending to agree with someone's statements or requests when the person really doesn't. An abusive person may often lie and appear to be telling the truth, lie and appear to be lying, tell the truth and appear to be telling the truth, or tell the truth and appear to be lying. All this creates uncertainty and confusion for other people and control of the situation for the abusive person. (This can be a very large, complex, and significant pattern in an abusive relationship)

MAKING FOOLS OF OTHERS

This may include several behaviours. It may include agreeing to things the person has no intention of doing, setting other people up, causing conflict, getting other people upset to watch their reactions and take advantage of them.

Example - "See I told you, you were too emotional. You just proved it."

BUILD UP

Abusive people often believe that everything good about themselves means that they are better than other people. They often build themselves up by putting others down. Frequently they feel "put down" in a situation where they don't feel they are "one up".

Example - "The abusive person may often criticise and resort to name calling like lazy, immature, etc., or might always redo what the other person has done (or make them redo it).

ASSUMING

Abusive people often believe they know what other people are thinking, feeling, doing (without real information). This allows them to justify their behaviour based on what they assume someone else's motives are.

Example - "I know you want him/her. I know you want to sleep with him/her".

I'M UNIQUE

Abusive people often believe that they are different from other people, that nobody else is like them, and that they are not bound by the same rules as other people.

Example - "I don't need help to stop drinking. AA is okay for some people, but I don't need it".

INGRATIATION

Phoney niceness to other people, excessive or phoney interest in the other person's opinion. This may be done to manipulate the other person.

FRAGMENTATION

This is a pattern where various parts of the abusive person's life don't seem to match.

Example - "The person is abusive one night, goes to church on Sunday (is maybe even a minister)."

BUTTERFLIES

MINIMISATION

Tries to make behaviour seem less important than it is, or making the impact of behaviour seem less serious. This is another way of refusing to take responsibility.

Example - "I was only joking, it didn't really hurt you".

VAGUENESS

Being unclear and not specific to avoid being found out or avoid taking responsibility.



CYCLES OF VIOLENCE

Because of the higher statistics reported, of men being the perpetrator, we have used the male as the abusive party and the female as the victim.

Most men experience their violence as following a cycle. The cycle has three (3) phases and identifying these can be helpful to both men and women. It is the beginning of the process of the man starting to understand his violence and it can be the point at which the woman understands that his behaviour follows a cycle that is not influenced greatly by anything she does.

The cycle consists of:-

1. BUILD-UP

The build up is the time when the man's behaviour is seen to escalate from abusive to dangerous.

The build up period can take place over any time period - from days to minutes. During this phase there will be verbal and/or economic and/or social abuse evident.

He experiences his anger as growing more intense and there is nothing she can do to quell this.

The man displays:-

- : Poor communication skills
- : A "rigid pattern" of interacting with his partner, repetition of past behaviour that is part of an escalation likely to end in violent behaviour ensures that domestic violence will probably occur in the future.
- : Issues of dependence/independence - feelings of being threatened when he feels his partner is too distant emotionally or too close "You don't care about me?" "All you care about are the kids". "For god's sake get off my back, all you do is nag me".

2. EXPLOSION

The explosion takes the most dangerous phase and can involve physical violence, verbal violence, serious threats and destroying objects.

He may describe this phase as being out of his control. Some counsellors have seen some of these men as schizophrenic, however the violence is often in the following context:-

- : takes place within the home (it's a safe environment for him with no witnesses except possibly the kids).
- : he may hit her where the bruises etc. cannot be seen, demonstrating that he does have control over his behaviour.
- : he may have been drinking but this is not a prerequisite for an explosive outburst. He may use this as an excuse.

3. REMORSE

The remorse phase of the continuous cycle often is characterised by the following:-

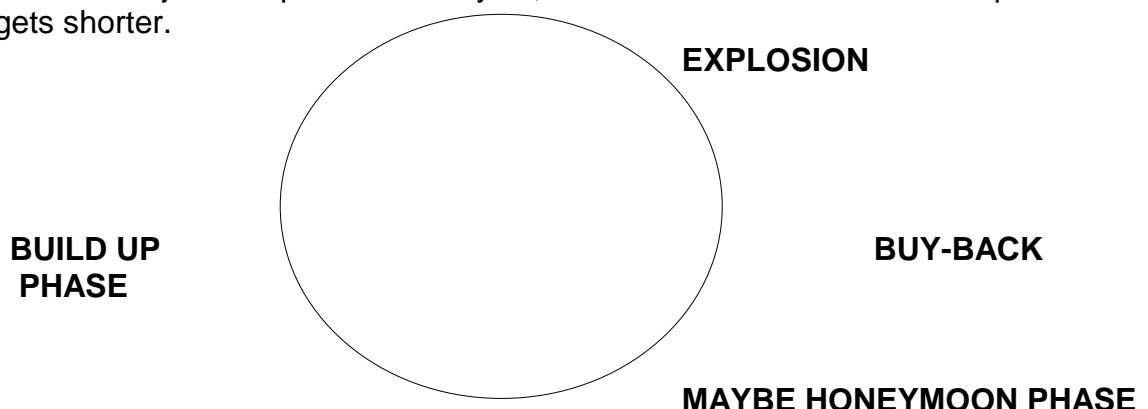
- : he experiences and expresses feelings of remorse/helplessness/guilt
- : he believes and tries to persuade her that it will not happen again by making promises that will probably not be kept, as he will probably not take the necessary action to interrupt the pattern.
- : he says he lost control and did not know what he was doing. He does not accept responsibility for his behaviour, partly because the implications of his responsibility for the violence are too difficult and painful to face.
- : he attempts to show his sincerity by buying gifts, taking outings, fixing things, etc.. (sometimes termed the “buy back”)
- : she may forgive him, trying to cover her own distress and fear and accept his sincerity and promises in the hope that things will improve this time.

Nothing has been resolved at this point. During the remorse phase he is more likely to seek assistance for his violent behaviour, as he is most in touch with his distress.

In some relationships a time of closeness may become part of the cycle (sometimes termed “the honeymoon”) once the woman forgives. There may be initial vigilance to maintain communication and a sense of closeness. The man may wish to have sex to show his love and reassure himself of hers. The man may be more open and compliant with the woman’s suggestions. As time passes conflicts rear and control issues become more important, tensions rise and the rigid patterns of interactions re-emerge as old habits take hold and the build up begins.

The perpetrator and the victim will often recognise the cycle once it is described to them. They will also acknowledge that:-

- : over time the explosion phase becomes more and more dangerous. Some men have said, “I started just after we married, by just holding her on the bed and shouting. It’s got so bad now that last Saturday I punched her repeatedly”.
- : without some major disruption to the cycle, the time taken between each phase of the cycle gets shorter.



CYCLE OF ABUSE

HONEYMOON/FORGET ME'S

- : He expresses feelings of remorse/helplessness/guilt/forgetfulness.
- : The violence may create a closeness for him with his partner if she forgives him.
- : It therefore serves a purpose if he felt his partner was previously too distant or independent.
- : He tries to persuade her that this will never happen again, promises that will more than likely not be kept.
- : He may try to "buy you off" eg. money, flowers, a holiday.
- : He says he lost control and didn't know/remember what he had done eg. it's the drink, job, worries. HE DOESN'T ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS ACTIONS/FEELINGS/BEHAVIOURS.
- : If she forgives him she acknowledges this "helpless" behaviour. If she doesn't, she may be hurt again.
- : During the period after the crisis has passed, he may be the model husband, a truly terrific guy - this does not last as his rigid pattern of behaviour ensures that the incident will be repeated.
- : Nothing has been resolved.

TENSION BUILDUP

- : Where domestic arguments take place - no physical violence.
- : It can build up over varying periods of time - days to minutes.
- : During this time there may be verbal, social, emotional or financial abuse.
- : Women express that it doesn't matter what they do, the man remains rigid in allowing/making an escalation occur.
- : This rigid pattern of interacting with his partner - repetition of past behaviour ensures that Domestic Violence WILL HAPPEN.
- : This may be triggered by:-
 - work stress;
 - feeling he is too close/distant from his partner;
 - he feels she doesn't care;
 - the weather;
 - drink;
 - being told what to do;

- in fact, any excuse will do

ABUSE/VIOLENCE

: Happens at the other end of the violence continuum and features the use of verbal, emotional etc.....abuse, may or may not be physical abuse/violence.

: The physical violence:-

- usually takes place at home (this is a safe place for him with no witnesses possible, except the kids)
- hits usually where bruises can't be seen, showing that he DOES have control over his behaviour/anger/violence
- he may destroy objects at the same time, using this as a threat to his partner
- he may have been drinking, but this is not always the case and is always used as an excuse

DENIAL

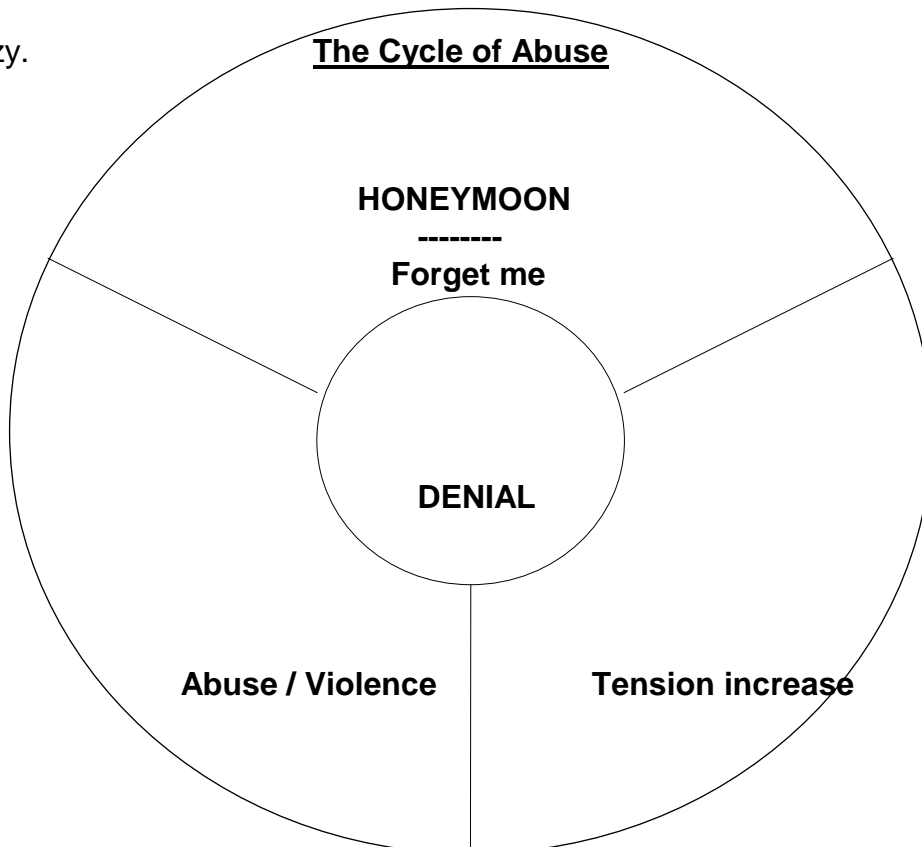
: It's not him, it's me.

: I deserve it.

: It doesn't really happen.

: I can't do anything about it.

: I'm crazy.



THE PURSUING PERPETRATOR

Front line workers are most likely to see a perpetrator who has a problem with violence after their partner/victim has left them. They have a high level of emotional dependency and is likely to be desperate to have the partner/victim return. The perpetrators attempt to convince the partner/victim(s) to return, can be separated into three(3) classes. All the attempts are aimed at reducing the perpetrators desperation as immediately as possible, by reuniting the family and are largely effective. These attempts must be recognised as part of the pattern.

1. “Buy Back” relies on guilt or goodwill for a result. The family may be “showered” with presents, promises of holidays, extensive apologies and promises that the perpetrator is a changed person. This may convince the victim(s) that he really does care.
2. “Violence” relies on outright force to obtain the goal. The perpetrator may threaten the victim(s), also the children with bodily harm or death if they do not return. If the perpetrator knows the victims whereabouts they may tell the victim to be watchful as they may drive past regularly: they may visit ; may behave violently by breaking things; forcing entry or further abusing the victim by threatening to destroy the house and all the victims belongings. Threats to make separation as difficult as possible financially or legally with regard to maintenance, property settlement, custody and access of children may be made. The victim may return in terror of the uncertainty of what might happen next.
3. “Helplessness” relies on the victim feeling obligated for the perpetrators well-being, and guilt to achieve its ends. The perpetrator may neglect himself by not eating, not showering, not sleeping, ignoring their work and claiming that they cannot manage without the victim. This may escalate to claims that they cannot live without the victim and that they’ll kill them if the victim does not return. The victim may return because they feel needed and fears the guilt of taking responsibility for the perpetrator’s inability to cope.

The perpetrator may engage in these pursuit behaviours in succession or in any order until either the desired effect is achieved and the victim returns or the perpetrator eventually accepts that the victim is not returning and gives up to look for another partner.

WHY DO HUMAN'S ABUSE

Why would a human being use the person he loves as a punching bag? It's a cliché that there's a fine line between love and hate and that "You always hurt the one you love". Intimate relationships cause some people to feel vulnerable and dependent. If one person loves or seems to love more than the other, those feelings will be exaggerated in the one who loves us the most and will contribute to his or her giving the partner power over us. For men, who aren't supposed to be either dependent or powerless, love sometimes produces feelings of resentment, even rage, especially when the loved one who holds that power is "merely" a female, a person who's supposed to be inferior. It can be experienced as intolerable humiliation, though it may seldom be expressed or recognised as such. The more vulnerable the man feels and the more important invulnerability is to his idea of masculinity, the more he may hate the one he loves.

PERMISSION TO BATTER

Another important contributing factor is that in the past, men have had society's implied permission to hit their wives or girlfriends. It's probably true that most people would say men shouldn't hit the women they love (or anyone else they care for or who is smaller and weaker than themselves). But we've seen that historically this idea exists side by side with the traditional assumption that men should be able to control their wives by whatever means necessary. Traditional ideas die hard.

Friends may blame the victims for being in the situation at all. Family members may not believe that it's happening and therapists are likely to ask what the person did to provoke it. Although none of these people state in so many words that they approve of the violence, denial of the battering or the implication that the victim is at fault has the effect of giving the perpetrator a "hitting licence" especially if the batterer is the victim's spouse. The perpetrator can be quite confident that their friends and family - and perhaps even the victims will stick by them and probably won't go to jail or even be questioned by the police. The social sanctions that keep most of us from acting on violent impulses don't operate in the arena of marriage.

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS AND STRESSES

The question of why perpetrators abuse is often confused with why perpetrators become angry at the person they love. A relationship between lovers or family members involves a continual chain of action and reaction, so that it's easy for a perpetrator who hits to say it's the victim's sarcasm (or coldness, drinking, poor housekeeping, extravagance) that caused it. Therapists have often taken this view and focused on what the victim can do differently to cause change in the perpetrator.

Certainly couples trigger feelings in each other and often they are related simply to expectations, needs and wants at the moment the exchange takes place. They're just as likely to be the result of a history or exchanges between the couple, mother/father, third grade teacher etc.. Often it can be a result of stress....real world problems like job loss or a sick child can cause tension that easily explodes in anger given the slightest opportunity. Yet one person's stress is another's challenge; one becomes angry, another depressed, and still another works it out in therapy.

Any of these situations can help explain why one person becomes explosively angry and another merely irritated or hurt or worried. None of them explain why one angry person hits his wife, another his child, why one goes out and gets drunk, another verbally lashes out and still another cries or becomes silent and cold or covers up his feelings with jokes. None gives us the answer to why men batter.

Research indicates somewhere around 60% of men who batter grew up in homes where they were beaten or they witnessed one parent battering another. However, this is not an explanation either. What about the other 40%? And what about those who grew up in abusive homes who didn't batter anyone? Children model parents behaviour, but they interpret what they see and connect it with other events, ideas and feelings. Its unpredictable how they'll use what they see and which parts of it they'll mimic. (This means that if your children have seen their father batter, there is a possibility of helping them interpret that battering in such a way that they won't want to imitate it).

What makes a man hit the woman he loves is a varied and complicated mix: internal stress; society's permission to hit interpreted as an individual right; mimicking of violent parents or role models; interpersonal struggles with the woman and others; feelings of anger; vulnerability; powerlessness and inadequacy; and very few clear actions by the woman, the justice system, or others that unequivocally state "VIOLENCE IS NOT ALLOWED".

"Getting Free"
A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships
by Ginny MiCarthy 1982

“MYTHS AND REALITIES OF SPOUSE ABUSE”

ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION IS AFFECTED BY SPOUSE ABUSE

Incidents are seriously under reported. It is seldom identified as a separate crime and therefore doesn't show up in statistics. Studies indicate that up to a third of the population may be involved.

BATTERED WOMEN ARE MASOCISTIC

Others do not understand why the battered woman does not leave and assume the woman in some ways gets pleasure from the beatings. Psychological studies of the woman involved do not support this belief. There are many reasons for staying but pleasure from the abuse is not one of them.

BATTERED WOMEN ARE CRAZY

This myth again focuses blame on the woman and her negative personality characteristics. Again it is not supported by psychological studies. “Crazy” behaviour adopted by the woman is usually her best attempt to survive in a very difficult situation.

WIFE BATTERING IS PREDOMINANTLY A LOWER CLASS PHENOMENON

Statistics do not accurately reflect the distribution of this problem as lower class women are more likely to come to the notice of helping agencies. Middle class women fear embarrassment and damage to their husbands careers. Increasing media attention is resulting in more and more middle class women revealing the extent of the problem for them.

IT IS A PROBLEM THAT OCCURS MORE IN MINORITY GROUPS THAN WHITE ANGLO-SAXON SUB-CULTURES

Recent American studies show that patterns do not vary between the different sub-cultures.

BATTERED WOMEN ARE UNEDUCATED AND HAVE FEW JOB SKILLS

The education of battered women ranges from the basic to Doctorates. Most look at their home lives for status and satisfaction rather than their careers. They are often willing to change or give up jobs if it will curtail their husband's violence.

BATTERERS ARE VIOLENT IN ALL THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Only about 20% of wife batterers exhibit violence in other relationships. Most appear very reasonable and “respectable” outside the family.

BATTERERS ARE UNSUCCESSFUL AND WITHOUT RESOURCES TO COPE WITH THE WORLD

Many batterers have educational, professional and work related resources and skills which they use well outside the home (eg. Doctors, Lawyers, Politicians etc.). They do typically lack personal resources necessary to form and maintain relationships.

DRINKING CAUSES VIOLENCE

In an American study over 50% of the women felt there was an association between drinking and their husband's violence. There is no evidence of a causal relationship however, there is plenty of violence that occurs without alcohol being involved.

POLICE CAN PROTECT THE BATTERED WOMAN

Most battered women do not experience the police as protective. The attitudes of some police preclude effective intervention and their presence can often make things worse.

THE BATTERER IS NOT A LOVING PARTNER

The batterer is often loving, sensitive and playful and it is this side of his personality which induces the woman to stay.

ONCE A BATTERED WOMAN, ALWAYS A BATTERED WOMAN

This is attached to the belief of the woman as a masochistic victim who will continue to seek violent relationships. Studies of women who have left show that they are very careful to choose a different relationship next time and many choose to remain alone rather than risk another violent relationship.

THE RELATIONSHIP WILL GET BETTER (IF YOU IGNORE IT - IT WILL GO AWAY)

These relationships are stubbornly resistant to change and rarely change spontaneously. Even with the best therapeutic help change is usually a slow and difficult process.

BATTERED WOMEN DESERVE TO GET BEATEN

It is widely believed that the woman's "nagging" or other unreasonable behaviours pushes the man to breaking point. Studies do not support this. Even if the woman does nag or act unreasonably there is no justification for the use of physical force.

BATTERED WOMEN CAN ALWAYS LEAVE HOME

It is difficult for many people to understand why the woman does not leave. There are many factors that operate to make her leaving very difficult. Women are brought up to believe that their true fulfilment comes from being wives and mothers; family and counsellors often encourage her to stay; they do not feel they have the physical resources (money, house) to provide for the children. Finally many women are pursued and further abused when they leave and are kept in a double bind whereby they are beaten if they stay and killed if they leave.

VIOLENT MEN ARE PSYCHOPATHS

There is no evidence to support the belief that violent men have this degree of pathology. Common personality traits are emerging, but they are amenable to change.

VIOLENT MEN ENJOY THE ABUSE

They typically feel genuine remorse about the abuse and get no pleasure from doing it.

VIOLENT MEN WON'T/CAN'T CHANGE

Whilst it is usually difficult to get them into therapy there is a good possibility of change once they are in therapy.

REGRET AND REMORSE ON THE PART OF THE MAN MEANS HE HAS CHANGED

The regret and remorse, whilst genuine, is part of the cycle and is not indicative of change. The man usually has little insight into the complex motives for his behaviour and does not realise that change does not follow automatically just because he says he'll never do it again.

IT IS BEST TO KEEP THE FAMILY TOGETHER TO WORK ON THE PROBLEM

The family system in violent relationships is extremely enmeshed. Often it is necessary to have a physical separation of at least six (6) months before the dynamic change. Work with the family can be done very effectively if the family is apart.

ONCE YOU SPLIT UP YOU'LL NEVER GET BACK TOGETHER

Separation can be a significant means of creating a new basis for the relationship which will enable productive reconciliation.

VIOLENCE MEN CANNOT CONTROL THEIR VIOLENCE

They often believe this. It is the belief of this myth which enables them to continue to avoid taking responsibility for it. They are quickly able to take control when taught some strategies.

VIOLENCE IS A HEALTHY RELEASE AND IS UNDERSTANDABLE

It is arguable that it is healthy for people to be aware of and to deal with their anger. There are strategies for doing this which achieve the "release" without endangering people.

LOVE AND VIOLENCE - ARE YOU A VICTIM?

They met at a friend's place, Mandy and Chris, and from the start the relationship was strong and enduring. Apart from all the common goals they shared, they each had a need of the other that seemed to go far beyond the norm. He was reserved and shy, although inwardly strong, she was warm and outgoing but emotionally unstable. Together they created a whole: nurturing, loving and supporting. Together they gave and took of each other.

When Mandy finished her degree at University, Chris moved to the city with her, each to pursue separate careers in intertwined lives - this leading ultimately to marriage, they hoped. The life they lived was one many would envy - each spending their days in jobs they loved, nights spent seeing the latest movies. Weekends were spent with their friends - all of whom thought that they were the perfect couple; made for each other.

But they weren't. Underneath those common interests and goals, underneath the excitement and the day-to-day pleasure, underneath the happy smiles they showed to the world, was an ugliness no one could ever know. For he beat her. Not badly, not frequently, but with a regularity that became alarming.

The first time it happened was on a Sunday morning. "We woke up to a really great day," Mandy remembers. "We'd made plans to meet friends for a picnic. I had made a quiche the day before and wine was chilling in the refrigerator. It was getting late and I was anxious to go. But Chris was dawdling and I began getting annoyed. And then he wanted - I suppose you could say he demanded me to make breakfast for him. Suddenly we were in the middle of this huge argument and just as suddenly he had me in his arms, shaking me, before he threw me across the room. I was shocked, terrified, unbelieving. How could he do this to me? He was supposed to love me."

That fight reconciled, he swore it would never happen again. And yet it did. Every couple of months an argument broke loose, and every time he would slap her, shake her or throw her across the room. He never left a mark on her, only painful silent bruises. And every time it happened set their relationship back a long way.

Mandy never seriously considered leaving Chris, even though she felt nothing but contempt for his behaviour. "I loved him," she explains. "And I needed him far more than I needed not to be beaten".

Those words astonish and amaze. We're familiar with the wife beating syndrome, but we also know that what often holds battered wives in these relationships is lack of money, love for the children and such basic questions as to where to go and where to live. But a woman such as Mandy - young, financially secure, and with no legal ties?

In reality, Mandy is not so unusual. According to a survey undertaken at Oregon State University, more than half of the couples who've been through a violent episode stay together. Although the reasons such relationships go on are complex, many have a lot to do with a woman's hidden needs and fears, with her early upbringing and ultimately, with that deep sense of self that in some of us has been maimed or is missing altogether.

And, although the details of Mandy's life are particular to her, the dynamics of how she got where she is today are the same for many of the victims - and perpetrators - of courtship violence.

THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF

There is, at root, for every Mandy and Chris, a sense of self-worth that is damaged. No matter what image they present to the outside world, inside they carry a very different picture of themselves. At worst it is one of lackness, a negative print of all that we believe makes a human being good and worthwhile. "I am bad, ugly and evil," such a person believes. "Whatever I do is wrong; whatever I touch becomes tainted". At a less extreme level, the picture is not so black but rather grey and vague. "I never do things right. I'm not much of a person, I'm unlovable".

These gloomy portraits, for the most part, originate in childhood. What others thought of us when we were young, how they treated us, whether they respected us, all becomes part of how we feel about ourselves. "The self is a looking glass" says Dr. James Makepeace, associate professor of sociology. "We internalise an idea of ourselves that we get from a number of other people - from peers, siblings, teachers. But by far the most common and the most powerful looking glass is our parents".

For many of those involved in violent relationships, that early parental mirror was abusive. In one study, which examined the lives of 223 university students who had experienced courtship violence, it was discovered that three-fifths of the women and two-thirds of the men had experienced violent childhoods. Chris, for instance, was beaten frequently by his father, never for any particular reason, just it seemed because he was there, in his father's way, a powerless target for rage. And while Mandy was never actually hit herself, she watched as her violent parents abused each other.

However, whether the parental mirror was physically violent or verbally so, the image it reflects still makes the child's inner version of herself a poor one. What's more, such abuse creates in the child a sense that the world is a dangerous and lonely place, where security never comes from the inside, but depends on the good will of others.

The abused child's feelings tend to be expressed differently by the two sexes, due to the difference in how we are socialised into our gender roles. Boys, who are taught that theirs is the inherent position of power and control, repress their feelings of worthlessness and insecurity, masking them with a veneer of bravado. As they grow into manhood, the veneer thickens, but underneath there is a seething mass of capable of conflicting emotions. One moment he's up, king of the world, anything - a slight, an imagined insult, is a perceived threat to his masculinity - will drive him down into the depths of self-contempt.

Girls, on the other hand, are socialised into a position of passivity and dependency. "We teach women that they are less valuable than men," says Dr. Makepeace. "We teach them that their primary route to satisfaction, happiness, fulfilment, is a man and marriage. We don't teach men the same thing, and women know that. And what that produces in women is a kind of desperation and strong emphasis on relationship seeking".

For the woman who has no inner sense of self-worth, that desperation is exacerbated. She is terrified of being alone; she believes she is nothing without a man. And so she searches for the Great Love, a relationship born in the movies and in novels, in which two (2) people are so filled with deep intense emotions that they mould together in an all encompassing unit that keeps them both safe and secure in an otherwise hostile world.

When such a woman's Great Love is a man who is equally driven by such fragile, damaged self-esteem, the stage is set for violence. Their Great Love signals, not the perfect merging of two (2) people, but an unhealthy confluence that can lock them together in destruction.

It begins innocuously enough with that first incident of violence. The event itself may be an argument over anything, although the most common have to do with drinking, jealousy or sex. Often the people cannot remember what started that first fight, just that it shocked them both. She feels betrayed and hurt; he feels ashamed and guilty. They both see it as an isolated incident that grew out of the circumstances and will never happen again. But it does, of course. Because what tipped him over the edge to violence was much more than his having had too much to drink or her flirting with another man or, as in Chris' case, Mandy not making him breakfast.

What sets the man off, that first time and every time there-after, is an intolerable feeling of worthlessness. The incident that provokes this feeling can be real or imagined and, to the woman, it often seems arbitrary. "I never knew what would provoke Carl" says Paula, a 22 year old secretary. "Once he said I talked to someone else too long at a party; another time I didn't show up on time for a movie; or I'd worn a dress he didn't like. Sometimes he'd get mad at something that hadn't fazed him at all the time before. No matter how hard I tried to avoid provoking him, I couldn't because I never knew when or where his rages would come from"

Carl himself probably wasn't sure either. Sometimes it was clear-cut case of jealousy, a real threat to his self-esteem. But sometimes just observing Paula at a vulnerable moment would spark his own feelings of vulnerability, in his eyes an intolerable weakness. At other times, he would project his feelings of self-contempt on her, a common dynamic of this kind of repression. He himself wasn't bad and mad, miserable and worthless - she was.

Whatever the source of his intense, negative motions, Carl dealt with them in the only way he knew how. He dissipated the energy of his emotions by punishing Paula; he regained his power by controlling her. For the violent person that is standard operative procedure.

And Paula played her own role in perpetrating the violence. Notice how she said that she provoked him. This, too, is standard behaviour for the victim. "Because women have been taught to look to themselves for the cause of their troubles, the woman begins to search her conscience to see how she may have contributed to the mans reaction" says Dr. Emerson Dobash and Dr. Russell Dobash, in their book, "Violence Against Wives" (the Free Press, 1979). "She attempts to comprehend the violence in terms of her own behaviour: to see her own "guilt", and both to forgive him and to seek a solution by changing her behaviour so as to give him no further reason for hitting her".

She doesn't have to look too far to find her "guilt". It's lurking in her unconscious. "That's true" says Paula. "Deep down, I knew that Carl was only giving me what I deserved. I knew that trying to avoid provoking him was useless. I believed that he could see inside me to all that I tried to hid from the world. And from what he saw, he knew that I deserved to be punished.

The woman also accepts the violence because she feels she has no choice. Remember this is her Great Love; she cannot lose it. If she does, she will be alone, empty, nonexistent. She must maintain the relationship at all costs, so she does what anyone else would tend to do. She rationalises what is happening to her so that it becomes consistent with her needs. One form of rationalisation is to interpret anything her partner does as a sign of his love.

“Right from the beginning, I believed that Alex’s abuse was a clear indication of his love for me” says Philippa, 25, of her former relationship with her history professor. “I was sure that if he didn’t care so much about me, I couldn’t possibly have got him angry enough to hit me. He would have just walked out. And since I knew he had a hard time showing his emotions, I decided that part of the problem was he could only show his passion for me by getting mad. So in some ways I welcomed his anger; I just equated it with love and therefore the greater his rage, the more he must love me.

This is not such an unusual misconception; we all do it to some extent - and we’re all primed for it by our parents. Our parents, well-intentioned though they may have been, conditioned us to accept violence as part of an intimate relationship. When we misbehaved, they slapped us or shoved us or spanked us and that taught us that violence is an acceptable way of solving problems. And when they hit us, they said "only doing this because I love you..." and that taught us that it is OK to hit or be hit by someone we love.

VIOLENCE AS AN APHRODISIAC

It is during the honeymoon period that it becomes clear how far sex is a part of the whole dynamic of violence. And much of it has to do with the abuser’s insecurity and fear of his own sexuality. Because their low self-esteem naturally includes doubts about their attractiveness, he/she is ultra-sensitive to any real or imagined insults to it. That is one reason why, on the surface level, jealousy is so often a trigger for violence.

Closer to the core, however, is the fear of feelings of intimacy and vulnerability associated with sex. They signal repressing his/her sexuality. Ultimately, that repressed energy can explode in violence. Moreover, the violence itself is a strong defence against vulnerability. The anger involved makes him/her feel less threatened by his/her sexual feelings: instead of love the abuser makes war.

The victim, too, is petrified of the intimacy and vulnerability that are the hallmarks of healthy sex. To let go totally, to lose yourself in your sexual feelings is something you dare not do. You fear you will relinquish your shaky identity totally, and so you repress your sexual feelings or anaesthetise them to a level where they can be handled safely.

In different ways, both the victim and the abuser deny their feelings so effectively that the rage arising from their violent confrontations is often the strongest passion they ever feel. Borrowing from that intensity of feeling, it’s relatively easy to convert the passion of rage to the passion of lovemaking. Not surprisingly, the aftermath of violence is often explosive sex. As Mandy put it “If I could have graphed our sex life alongside the violent episodes, it would have charted out perfectly. We’d go through a period of no sex and then we’d have a huge, violent fight and then we would make love. It was that syndrome you read about, instead of foreplay we had violence”.

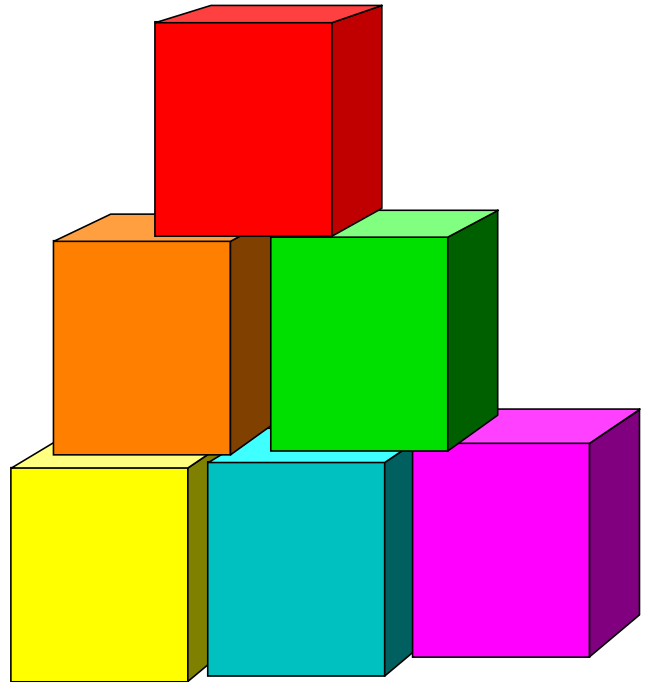
THE LONELY TRAP

When the dynamics of abusive relationships are seen as a total picture, it is easier to understand why the victim finds it almost impossible to break away. You are trapped by your conditioning, by your battered self-esteem and by your ultimate need for this Great Love. Each incidence of violence sends you deeper and deeper into the bog of humiliation and self-hate. Off on a downward spiral of depression, you become more and more in need of his/her Great Love, more and more willing to do whatever it takes to maintain it.

Your isolation intensifies. If you had friends at the beginning of the relationship, you have most probably dropped them by now. You are too ashamed to let them see into your life. And, too you believe that by clinging to your lover, by excluding the outside world, the violence will stop.

Then, there are the positive parts of the relationship that keep you hooked to them. No relationship is violent all of the time. What takes place between the violence is often extremely satisfying. By the time the victim realises what is really happening to them, if they ever do, the cage has slammed shut. Leaving would take a strength of will, an intrinsic belief in yourself and your ability to make it on your own, that the victim never had in the first place. After months/years of abuse, what little self-esteem you had has eroded, your depression has led to inertia and you are trapped in the ultimate vicious circle. To break it, something must snap, bring you back into reality and make you see that you are fighting not for love, but for your life.

For some victims reality surfaces when the violence gets so bad they truly believe they may be killed. For others, it arrives when they discover what they themselves are capable of. For Mandy, that came the day her anger finally emerged and she hit Chris back. "I became hysterical. I suddenly realised that the next time I lost control and there had to be a next time, it would be total. I would pick up a knife or something and kill him".



Fear sent Mandy into therapy. Fear propels others into shelters for battered victims where they can get help and a sense of hope. Either way, the road to health carries with it, in Mandy's words, this realisation.

"We chose each other for specific reasons, Chris and I. And we fulfilled a lot of negative needs for each other. He chose a neurotic, needy woman and I chose a man who would beat me. I know that you don't get into these relationships by chance. You get yourself into them by making choices even if you pretend to yourself that you haven't".

SEPARATION - HOW WILL IT FEEL?

Separation is not easy. It will take you several months to work through the steps, and a couple of years to become freshly established.

Knowing what to do and what to expect does not stop you from feeling. You will probably feel all your emotions more strongly than ever. You may feel betrayal, grief, anger, joy, freedom, weakness and strength, often at the same time. You may feel that you are going mad because of all the emotions you have which are sometimes overwhelming, contradictory, and unexpected. You are not mad. This is a normal process. Remember that your emotions are just a part of you, a changing part, and they are not "you the whole person".

Let yourself feel your emotions fully. Do not judge yourself for having them. You will pass through each one in time.

GRIEF

Grief is a large part of the process of letting go of a relationship. When you feel grief, let yourself cry. You may feel like you will never stop. You are facing a death, the death of your relationship. You will stop crying when the mourning is over. Until you finish grieving, you will not have let go of the relationship. You may not understand why you are sad, especially if you were badly abused. There were probably some good things that you will miss. This is the reality. Remember you did have to pay a price for those good things - a very high price.

EUPHORIA

You may experience a great euphoria when you leave the relationship. This may last for months. This is usually felt if you have made a clear decision. This euphoria can help give you energy to get yourself on your feet again, independently. Don't be surprised if, a year later, you feel grief or anger or depression. This is normal, and part of the process of change and separation that it is now safe to work through. You will have to work through all the stages at some time. The timing may vary with each individual, and the process is usually finished in three (3) years if you have let yourself feel fully at each stage.

"I felt euphoria for three (3) months after I left. I had freedom to think my own thoughts, breathe my own air, follow my own rules whenever I chose".

"I never had so many friends. I was lonelier when I was in the marriage than I am now. Now I have to learn how to cope with too many friends".

A good time to make friends is in the euphoric period. It's easier to make new friends when you are feeling good.

"About three (3) months after I left, reality hit, and it was a depressing time. My new friends helped me through the difficult period".

There are times in the separation when you are more vulnerable than others and more likely to re-evaluate your position. This is a time you can ask your friends for help, so that you will not go back for the wrong reasons.

ANGER

You may feel more anger after separation than you have ever felt before. You may suddenly feel all the anger that is stockpiled and denied during your relationship along with the built-up frustration at not getting your needs met, and the powerlessness of your position. It is safe to feel angry now. Accept that your anger is normal. Anger can give you power and motivation. Anger can help you separate and act for yourself. Use it to your advantage. Eventually, you may be able to forgive the person you are angry with and thus totally let go of the relationship. You will be able to forgive yourself for all the anger and depression (anger turned into yourself) you have felt.

The goal of letting yourself feel anger is to express it constructively, so that you become free of it. Do not use it for revenge. This will keep you tied to the relationship. You can keep your self respect if you use your anger to help you live independently. Acting in revenge may destroy your self respect in the long run. Fantasise about revenge instead. Do what you have to do to make a fresh start. Work on building your own strengths and your own future. Focus your energies on your survival, on your future, not your past.

FEELINGS OF FAILURE

You may feel that admitting "failure" in your relationship confirms your inadequacy. This is not true. You have probably done all you could to make it work and it is not your fault that your efforts failed. Relationships take two. It is not reasonable to expect yourself to feel free and loving with a person who abuses you. You will probably surprise yourself at your ability to open up to someone once you do not have to be on the defensive all the time. It's the relationship that makes the difference.

YOUR IDENTITY

You may have identified yourself with your relationship. Your role as wife/husband or mother/father may be the way you see yourself, and how you are known in the community. If you leave your relationship, you will experience a real sense of loss of your self identity. The process of moving from a role of wife/husband and mother/father to a single competent person is painful and not always as fast as you might want it to be. It involves getting to know yourself in a new way.

You may make it easier for yourself if you find another person who have gone through similar situations. They will be more understanding of what you are going through. They will service as models for you to develop a new identity.

"Looking back, I can see how my life was always coloured by my partners presence. Whatever choices I made about friends, Clothes, where I went, I worried about their reaction. I lived on eggshells all the time. Yet no matter what I chose, I was hardly ever right. It was so confusing. I could never figure it out".

Now you can become your own boss and your own person. Being on your own is as wonderful a feeling as it is a scary one. It may be the first time you have had the freedom to experience this responsibility. It sometimes takes many trials to discover who you are, and what you want in life. This is normal. It's okay to learn from your mistakes and learn from what you do well.

ANXIETY AND LOSS OF CONTROL

You are probably accustomed to judging your safety by predicting your partner's mood and picking up the signals from them, so you could anticipate and react. When you leave, the absence of your partner may feel frightening. You may feel that you have lost control. Your feelings of safety are gone when you lose your signals.

"At least when they were around, I knew what to expect".

Many victims try to see their partners at this time, because knowing what they are feeling makes the victim feel safer than "not knowing". Sometimes this meeting stirs up their partner's anger. You are safer if you either stay away from your partner, or meet them in a public place and have someone with you.

To regain a feeling of control in your new environment, you can develop a daily routine, you can set and accomplish small goals each day, you can control where you go and who you are with so that you are safe.

The feelings of loss of control are normal in transition. You are moving the centre of your control from your partner to yourself. It can be as frightening as it is freeing, and it takes time.

DISORIENTATION

"When I was with him/her, I really thought he/she was wonderful, and I quickly forgot the bad times. Now, it seems all I can remember are bad times. Was I fooling myself? What was my life really like? I'm confused. What's worse, if my life was different than I thought, how can I trust myself now?"

Changed memory can create a feeling of disorientation, disbelief in yourself, and betrayal from your partner. You are not mad if you see your past, yourself and your partner differently. You are simply freeing up feelings which you no longer have to deny to survive. It's all right to look at yourself, your partner and the world in a new way. You have new and different information. You are simply expanding your awareness.

LONELINESS

Your friends will probably change over time. Your situation is now different from theirs. Your interests may become different. They may feel threatened by your position. The shakier their marriages are, the quicker they will leave you. They may take sides with your partner. It may hurt you a great deal if your former in-laws reject you. Family blood is often thicker than you want to believe. One-sided relationships are not worth fighting for.

Friendships are very important. Supportive friends are especially important at this time. Don't sit around waiting to be asked out. Make new friends, who are in the same situation, and go out with them. It is important to enjoy yourself. You can find people in similar situations by joining a local single parents group. Join interest groups and find women and men who have similar interests to you. You will likely find more lasting relationships here because they are built on similar interests rather than a common situation (which is changeable). Follow your instincts about who you want to be friends with. It is up to you. It may take you a while to trust, or to have energy for anyone else. This is normal and self-protective.

Take your time. Make casual acquaintances with whom you can enjoy yourself. Watch out for the “easy pick-up” attitude at singles clubs.

Remember, it is your power to say “NO”.

The first step towards learning to trust another is learning to trust yourself. When you feel strong enough that you can live independently, that you can live through a disappointment or a hurt, you will be able to trust another. You have to feel that you are a worthwhile person and that you have the power to choose only those friends who are good for you, and to reject those who are not good for you.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

New relationships may trigger memories of your old relationship. It takes hard work, a great deal of commitment and communication to be in a relationship. A second relationship has different problems from a first. Be sure you feel strong enough to live independently before you make the choice of living with someone again. This way, when you have a choice, you will not be as likely to make the same mistakes. You will be better able to stand up for your rights. Talk to others who are in second relationships to find how to deal with common issues.

“Your sense of humour will help you to cope better!”

CHRISTINE.....

How do I feel now that I am out of my relationship? To be honest, when I first came to the Refuge I didn't feel that I deserved to be there. After all here were women who had been beaten. I was physically threatened and there was a constant barrage of verbal abuse until my head felt that it would explode. But he didn't beat me. He kicked me only once oh, he did attempt to strangle me which left me frightened of him.

At that time I thought that I was mad, I thought that it would be better to be committed to escape the torment. It was a few weeks after leaving home before I felt “normal”. I can go shopping now and not think everyone knows I'm nutty. I can look shopkeepers in the eye again.

No longer do I run excuses through my mind for every move that I make. Still I can't say that I'm more assertive. I do know that nobody has the right to intimidate me, mix up my head and make a slave of me any more. I am a person with rights.

Also now I know that women can get help, someone, people, care enough to do something to help other women in trouble. I know that I no longer have to struggle on alone. It has unleashed a heavy burden.

Our little boy is a different child, louder smiles, not frowns. I think and hope that he is happier. I know to “stay in the marriage for the sake of the child” is rot and I don't feel guilty about leaving any more. My husband is a better father too now.

And how do I feel down inside me? Relieved, happier, lighter most days. Never get so depressed as I used to. Most important of all, I don't have to compete with other women any more. I can “feel” again, my emotions aren't numb any longer. I am me.

Christine and her two-and-a-half-year-old son recently returned to their home with an occupation and non-molestation order after a stay in Supportline's Refuge. She was married for three years after living with her partner for seven years. Supportline counsellors have watched her grow from a frightened, timid woman into a woman with self-respect and strength to face the future.



CLAIRE.....

At long last we were able to be more like normal loving human beings. My children and I could laugh and joke with one another out in the open. I didn't have to rush them off to bed to protect them from the abuse. We were no longer full of fear and terrified of opening our mouths.

I knew I could go shopping with the kids and if we were held up, I no longer got into a state of ear, panic and sweat about what would happen if he came home before us without his dinner being ready.

I was now able to have friends visit me without fear of him coming in and being rude to them so that they didn't come back again. And I could now go to sleep at night and actually sleep instead of tossing and turning in fear that he would come in drunk and abusive.

Losing the fear didn't happen straight away after I left him. It took a few years. If he were to walk up the driveway now, I wouldn't like it, but I would not be frightened. I feel more of a person.

Claire was in her violent marriage for 20 years and nine months. She didn't wait for her 21st wedding anniversary, though it was the only one her husband ever remembered! She has lived on her own with her five (5) children for the last 10 years, her three (3) older children already having left home. Claire is now a counsellor and runs a Refuge for Supportline.



ANNETTE.....

I left my relationship three years ago. I am 5'3" and then weighed six stone and could not hold a conversation with anyone. I did a lot of crazy things and believed I was mad and that I caused my boyfriend to act like he did. I suffered mostly mental abuse; I didn't have any bruises or scars so who would believe this illogical mess?

The first months after I left were like a nightmare and when I think of that period now, I don't know that woman. I remember the day I started to climb out of that nightmare. I spoke to a woman who told me about her ex husband. She was talking about the man I lived with. I wasn't mad. I was no longer alone. Since then my life has been exciting, challenging and free. We now have pop music in the house (he wouldn't allow that). I am not frightened when the phone rings and no one keeps me awake at night banging on the wall.

I had been involved in the feminist movement for years before I was abused. I had worked in a Refuge. I knew it all and still it happened to me. I can now use my experience to help others and I like who I am and the strength I now have is part of my growth.

After knowing her partner for two years, Annette lived with him for only six months when she attempted suicide believing she was mad. She sought psychiatric help but was very quickly made aware that she was not mad; she was not the one who should be getting the help. Annette now shares a house with her daughter and a variety of cars and dogs. She joined Supportline as a counsellor soon after it began, and is now the legal co-ordinator.



FAY.....

I was overwhelmed by this amazing sense of freedom and not knowing quite what to do with it. I could see my children expanding as people without my husband's control over them. The same thing was happening to me. We missed out on some very good years of our lives. It was a waste of life.

I felt very guilty the first night I went to the Refuge. I didn't even tell him I was going. I left a very dramatic note on the kitchen table. I felt that perhaps I should have said something to him; I was running away, being a coward. Those feelings lasted approximately three days, till we were tracked down and we lived in constant fear for 48 hours, locked away in a tiny flat. I then thought, well, how silly to feel guilty. It was not me that was doing the battering. My kids and I had done nothing to provoke the attacks.

For years I was constantly physically abused. The beatings were irregular, unpredictable, I was bashed in the head, breasts, shoulders. He pulled chunks of my hair out. He would pull me out from the bed if I was asleep (or pretending to be) and beat my head against the bedhead when he came home late. I was given very little money to keep house and was usually beaten whenever bills came in. My children were also assaulted and it was only when I talked to my daughters about leaving that I was told about the sexual abuse. He said he would kill them if they told.

I don't feel bitter and angry towards all men. I have since remarried and my daughters and I are now very happy; something I had begun to think would never be possible again.

Fay stayed in her marriage for 17 ½ years before getting out. She planned her escape carefully with her six daughters then aged between 9 and 16. Over the last seven (7) years she has built a new life in Auckland and helped start Supportline where she is now the counselling co-ordinator.



PREPARING TO LEAVE

MAKE A REALISTIC ESTIMATE OF THE DANGER YOU WILL BE IN WHEN YOU LEAVE.....

This is the most important. There are danger signs and it is absolutely essential that you recognise these. If you ignore them you could end up dead. More than a few victims have been murdered trying to escape from the control of disturbed and violent perpetrators.

- : If your partner is extremely possessive and has few friends then you are in much greater danger than if your partner has friends of the opposite sex.
- : If your partner engages in premeditated assaults (for example, locking the door or taking the car keys before they start) then you are in much greater danger than if they just fly off the handle from time to time.
- : If your partner has ever assaulted you in public or in front of witnesses then you are in much greater danger than if they only ever assault you in private.
- : If your partner has assaulted other people then you are in much greater danger than if you are the only person they have ever assaulted.
- : If your partner has ever threatened your life or threatened you with any kind of weapon, then you are in much greater danger than if they have not.
- : If your partner is both extremely possessive and has made threats against your life then you are in the greatest danger of all.

DO NOT REVEAL YOUR PLANS TO YOUR PARTNER

Once you have decided to leave it is absolutely essential that you do not reveal this decision to your partner. Completely ignore anybody who tries to advise you "to talk things over with your partner". Do nothing which might indicate to your partner that you are thinking of leaving. Do not under any circumstances attempt to manipulate your partner by threatening to leave. If you mistakenly reveal your plans to your partner, they will immediately begin to do whatever is necessary in order to make you change your mind. If you mistakenly reveal your plans to your partner then the danger to you will increase very considerably. More than a few victims have reported to us that their first serious attempt to leave provoked the most severe battering that they had received up to that time.

TRY TO SAVE A LITTLE MONEY BEFORE YOU LEAVE

This will not be easy. Violent partners usually give their victims little if any money. If you can save even a little money, then you will be much more mobile and you will be able to act.

THE VALUE OF SEPARATION

In a relationship where violence is involved both people are encouraged to appreciate the value of spending time living separately.

Separation encourages each person to become more aware of their individuality and to accept responsibility for themselves. Victims learn more about their ability to cope alone and may begin to explore their own potential's.

Perpetrators are confronted with their urge to control their partner and have to learn to give personal space.

Separation, if it is to be successful will help the victim to stand up for themselves in the relationship and out of it, and will teach the perpetrator to be less dependent on their partner for emotional support.

In encouraging separation the counsellor must understand that a couple could decide to stay apart or that one (usually the victim) may decide not to return to the relationship. However, there is a possibility that through separation the couple may be able to renegotiate for a satisfactory ongoing relationship.

The therapist has no investment in keeping the relationship alive, but does have an investment in finding the safest and most successful way to stop the violence.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER BEFORE RECONCILIATION

1. Do both partners wish to reconcile and do they share a commitment to work together for a better relationship?
2. Are they willing to accept ongoing professional help during reconciliation?
3. Has separation been of sufficient duration and quality to allow for learning and practice of new skills?
 - a) ability to recognise own flash points;
 - b) appropriate ways of dealing with anger;
 - c) a belief in own personal power;
 - d) increased self-esteem;
 - e) sense of autonomy (eg some interests outside of the relationship);
 - f) effective communication, conflict resolution and assertiveness skills;
 - g) ability to recognise needs and clearly state them to partner (eg need for intimacy and also separateness).

FIVE (5) RATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

1. : I can survive without the sincere love, approval and/or respect of those around me.
: I can accept myself whether or not others accept me.
: I cannot control how others feel about me, that is their decision. If I treat others with love and respect they will generally treat me the same way. Sometimes however they will not. I can live with this.

2. : I can accept myself whether or not I am always competent, adequate and achieving.
: I can choose not to put my total effort into any task no matter how important.
: I can accept myself even if my behaviour is unacceptable to others.

3. : When things do not go the way I want them to, it is not awful or terrible but just the way things are.
: My best bet is to try to change things to be the way I want them to be or, if I can't or won't do this, place my energies elsewhere.
: I will do little good continually complaining to myself or others.

4. : People who do wrong by me or others generally have their good points and bad points (somewhat like myself)
: Spending my time continually blaming or punishing them is unlikely to change their behaviour or make me feel any better.

5. : If something is dangerous or fearsome, my time would be well spent finding ways of dealing with it or avoiding it.
: My time would be unwisely spent dwelling on it or catastrophising about the worst possible thing that could happen.