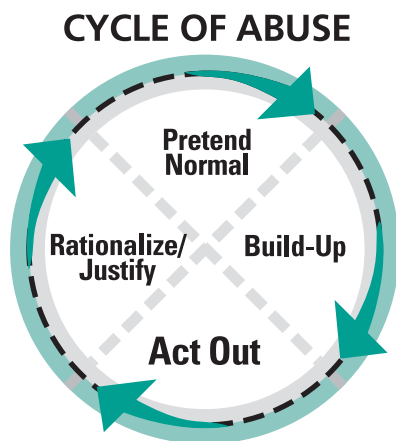


The Cycle of Violence and how you can break it

You're not alone.

A victim of domestic violence will often feel like the only one being abused. That isn't true. Abuse happens to people from all backgrounds and all neighbourhoods. Domestic violence is a reality countless people face on a daily basis.



Understanding the cycle of violence is the first step towards breaking it.

Most of the time, abuse doesn't occur continually, but rather in a cycle. The cycle of violence is made up of four phases:

Build-Up:

- Some stress (ex: job, money or bills) begins this part of the cycle. The stress causes the abuser to feel powerless. The abuser chooses to act out toward a spouse or partner through name calling, insults, accusations.
- As tension builds, the victim tries to calm the abuser and anticipate his/her every need.
- The tension becomes unbearable... like "walking on eggshells".

Act Out:

- The tension that builds up leads to severe verbal abuse, violent physical, or sexual attacks.
- It may happen once or again and again.
- Abuse is always intentional and never an accident. The motivation for any type of abuse is to hurt, humiliate or have power and control over an individual.

Rationalize/Justify:

- In this phase the abuser uses defense mechanisms such as blaming others or minimizing violence.
- Defense mechanisms are used to turn blame away from the abuser and make him/her feel better. The abuser defines the abuse and interprets how things "really are". The abused partner begins to believe this interpretation.

Pretend Normal:

- Once the rationalize/justify step is in place, both partners try to make the relationship continue in a normal way by pretending that everything is all right. However, the cycle of abuse will continue, if the problems in the relationship are not addressed.

A NEW CYCLE OF VIOLENCE BEGINS.

It doesn't get better – it only gets worse. The cycle is very hard to break without outside help.

The cycle can cover a long or short period of time. Often, as the pattern continues, the violence increases. The assaults can also become more serious.

Often, a victim caught up in the cycle becomes isolated from family and friends. The victim may feel ashamed to see them, or is told by the abuser not to communicate with them. The abuser may also make it more difficult for the victim to communicate with family and friends. In this way, the victim becomes more dependent on the abuser, and has few or no other people to help.

Characteristics of Abusers:

- Probably witnessed abuse or was abused as a child
- Possessive and jealous – often imagines you are having affairs; may be jealous of your friends, family and children
- Bad temper – either flares up at every little thing or lets the anger build and then explodes
- Blames others – does not accept responsibility for own anger or actions; tells you it is your fault
- Minimizes the seriousness of abuse or may deny it completely
- May blame alcohol or drugs for abusive behaviour
- Jekyll and Hyde personality – charming to people outside the family and tries to keep the abuse hidden
- Has rigid ideas of the roles of men and women
- May have other problems with the law (ex: criminal record)
- May behave in an intimidating or threatening way
- Tries to isolate you – discourages you from seeing friends or family; discourages you from working or going to school
- Tries to control you – tells you what to do or think
- Verbally abuses and insults you and tells you whatever you do is wrong
- After an explosion the abuser may cry and tell you he/she is sorry. The abuser feels better and cannot understand why you may remain angry or upset
- When physical abuse occurs, it follows a characteristic pattern – some always hit in the face while others are careful to hit where the bruises won't show

Is Your Partner Willing to Change? Ask Yourself...

- Does your partner admit what s/he has done to you without blaming you?
- Does the abuser recognize the impact of his/her behaviour, besides being arrested or jailed? This may be a difficult question for abusers to answer because they will need to reflect on their own actions.
- Does the abuser understand which actions were really hurtful and how you have been affected? Doing this is a lengthy process.
- Does the abuser listen to you or does s/he get even angrier and shout at you, threaten you or call you down?
- Does the abuser use time-outs or similar anger management techniques?
- Does the abuser blame you, at least in part, for his/her behaviour?

Do you feel safe with your partner? How secure? How confident? How happy?

For more information contact:
Manitoba Justice
Victim Services Branch

In Winnipeg: 945-6851
Toll free: 1-866-484-2846

Toll free province-wide Domestic Abuse Crisis Line **(24 hours) 1-877-977-0007**