



helping an abused woman

101 things to KNOW, SAY and DO



a **Helping Hands** Guide
on Skill Building and Tools
for Helpers and Healers

Authors:

Linda Baker, Ph.D. C.Psych.
Executive Director
Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System

Alison Cunningham, M.A.(Crim.)
Director of Research & Planning
Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System



200 - 254 Pall Mall St.
LONDON ON N6A 5P6 CANADA
info@lfcc.on.ca • www.lfcc.on.ca

For ordering information, please see **www.lfcc.on.ca** or contact
helpinghands@lfcc.on.ca

On-site training is available on the topics addressed in the
Helping Hands guides.

Cover Design: Synapse Communications

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Baker, Linda L. (Linda Lillian), 1955-
Helping an abused woman : 101 things to know, say & do / Linda Baker, Alison Cunningham.

ISBN 978-1-895953-41-1

1. Abused women--Counseling of. 2. Family violence. I. Cunningham, Alison J., 1959- II. Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System III. Title.

HV1444.B37 2008

362.82'92

C2008-905715-5

Welcome

This book is written to all help people who help and advocate for women, especially women with controlling or abusive partners or ex-partners. Mistreatment can take many forms – emotional, financial, spiritual, sexual or physical – but coercive control engendering fear is the hallmark of abuse as we use the term here. When a woman is ready to reach out for help, we must be ready to understand her situation, prepared to use words that comfort and guide, and able to advance her safety and healing.

Why 101 things?

The 101 format reflects our commitment to producing training material to help busy people learn or up-grade skills in a convenient way, respectful of their multiple commitments in life. There are no recipe approaches or cookie-cutter prescriptions for working with abused women and their children. And we don't want to imply by the 101 title that there are. But there is a lot to know about this field and usually no post-secondary educational or training program teaches everything people want to learn. Each woman is unique and at a singular place in her life. She deserves advocacy and support matching and meeting her needs. Instead of prescriptions, we offer principles to guide interventions, flexible tools for practice, and guidance on skill building. We assume that you know the woman best so what you need and want are tools and tips to use flexibly as the situation dictates.

Who could use this guide?

Anyone called upon to help or advocate for women. Those people might work in what is called the “violence against women” (VAW) sector, comprising women’s shelters, refuges, transition houses and community-based agencies advocating for women. Equally as important, people who work in other social service settings or helping professions should be aware of abuse dynamics. People working in the legal system will meet many abused women and their children, in criminal prosecutions and family law matters such as divorce. Users of the guides could work in a paid role, a volunteer role or even as a concerned family member, co-worker or friend. If you are experienced in this field, material in these guides should encapsulate your observations and the knowledge gained from working with abused women. If you are new to this field, the material in each guide helps you understand what a woman might need from you. We aimed to make these guides useful and relevant across many countries and legal jurisdictions.

Our hope in writing this guide

We produced several training resources in the past and each year meet tens of thousands of people like you at training sessions across Canada and the United States. We've been invited to speak and train in Japan, Hong Kong, Guam, England, Wales, Brazil and Sweden. Wherever we go, we're asked to develop more material about how to work with children. We will do that. The material here and in the next guide – about working in residential settings such as shelters -- is the foundation of information about women and woman abuse which informs our work with their children. Here is our assumption: to understand and help children who live with abuse and violence, you must understand the dynamics of abuse and how it impacts women as women, women as mothers, and family dynamics. These topics are the focus of our first guides. We articulate our assumptions and the principles we bring to the work. This material forms the bedrock of our work with children.

Features you see here

As you read, you encounter little boxes of information to enhance your work or understanding.



In boxes like this one you find references to further readings. There's a lot of information out there so we'll point you in the direction of helpful places to learn more about a topic.

RESEARCH FILE



If a specific research project helps illustrate a point, we talk about it in boxes like this one. You'll also find the citation, in case you want to find and read the entire study.

TOOL BOX IDEA



These boxes have ideas for work with women and suggestions for using the handouts in individual and group work. You will find the handouts for women at the end of the guide.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Caution boxes flag safety issues to keep in mind when helping abused women. The likelihood of serious assault or death increases in the period immediately before, during and in the months after a separation from an angry, controlling or abusive partner.



This icon refers you to material in the second Helping Hands guide called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*. That guide provides more suggestions for working with women, in the context of a residential program such as a shelter, refuge, transition house or second-stage housing facility.

Table of Contents

10	Assumptions About Abuse of Women in Intimate Relationships (page 1)
5	Reasons All Helping Professionals Should Understand Abuse Dynamics (page 6)
5	Destructive Consequences of Abuse for Women's Lives (page 10)
10	Principles Informing Work with an Abused Woman (page 11)
5	Paradoxes of Abuse (page 20)
10	Features of Listening to Abuse Disclosures (page 27)
10	Common Control Tactics (page 29)
10	Points About Rationalizations for Abuse (page 35)
5	Common Characteristics of Controlling Men (page 39)
10	Points about Coping with Abuse (page 42)
10	Feelings and Thoughts Blocking "Emotional Leaving" (page 47)
10	Promises Not to Make to Women (page 49)
1	Final Thought (page 52)

HANDOUTS

Ideas for Using the Handouts
Myths About Abuse in Relationships
The Power & Control Wheel
The WEB Scale: What Abuse Feels Like
The Equality Wheel
Rights for Women in Intimate Relationships
My Wheel for My Life
Thinking About My Safety
You Know What You Need: Ask for it!
Excuses, Excuses
I'm not Crazy, I'm not a Liar, and I'm not Stupid
What "Entitlement" Looks Like
What I Can and Cannot Change
What is "Coping"?

ABOUT THE SECOND "Helping Hands" GUIDE

Assumptions About Abuse of Women in Intimate Relationships

Here are our assumptions about male abuse of women in intimate relationships.

1. Most bruises are invisible

Abuse as we define it may involve physical contact such as hitting, but more commonly takes the form of cruel words or hurtful attitudes. Abuse can be emotional, financial, spiritual, physical, or sexual. All forms are painful, whether it causes visible bruises or whether it damages the soul.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Key Messages



Some people believe a relationship isn't abusive unless there's been physical abuse. Or they believe if physical abuse stops, the relationship is no longer abusive. The "myths" handout on page 54 helps women describe if they held that myth or hold that myth as true today, or if other people in their lives believe them. What are the implications for her when people believe the myth instead of the reality?

Here are some messages about physical abuse for emphasis with women.

- Some of the most controlling and abusive men never physically assault a woman or do so only once or twice.
- Abuse or the threat of violence can continue after a relationship ends. It can even start after a relationship ends.
- A man can physically abuse his partner and not the children, or vice versa.
- A man who uses physical abuse typically blames the woman (e.g., she was nagging) or the circumstances (e.g., stress at work)
- However, the use of violence is a choice for which he is 100% responsible.

2. Coercive control is the hallmark of abuse

Some relationships are unhappy, but not abusive. Abuse is an on-going (and sometimes escalating) pattern of control over a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Coercive control may involve physical violence but usually it does not. However, the threat of physical violence may be ever-present. Control is used instrumentally, to humiliate, engender fear or emphasize one's superiority over another. Many features of coercive control are described in a model called the Power & Control Wheel which can be used as a handout for women (see page 56)

TOOK BOX IDEA: Wheel Variations



You can find on the Internet these variations of the original wheel.

- Family Violence in Later Life
- Immigrant Power & Control Wheel
- Lesbian/Gay Power & Control Wheel
- Military Power & Control Wheel
- Muslim Wheel of Domestic Violence
- DeafHope Power and Control Wheel
- Police Perpetrated Domestic Violence
- Teen Power & Control Wheel
- Violence Against Native Women: Battering

3. Coercive control tactics are used primarily by men

Studies of the general population repeatedly show that pushing, slapping and other forms of less serious physical violence are used as frequently by women as by men in relationships. This is called “gender symmetry.” “Abuse” as we define it, focusing on control tactics engendering fear, is predominantly used by men against women. When abusive men use violence, they do so instrumentally. Within the context of a coercively controlling relationship, women’s use of violence is often retaliatory or defensive.

RESEARCH FILE: Violence and Conflict Reported by Couples



This study is a recent example of a survey of the general population finding roughly gender symmetrical rates of intimate partner violence. The sample was selected carefully to reflect married and co-habiting couples in the United States. Interviews were conducted with 1,136 couples with the option to be interviewed in either Spanish or English. Each person was separately asked to report the occurrence in the previous year of 11 behaviours listed on the Conflict Tactics Scale, specifically if their partner threw something; pushed, grabbed or shoved them; slapped; kicked, bit or hit; hit or tried to hit with something; beat up; choked; burned or scalded; forced sex; threatened with a knife or gun; used a knife or gun. For the majority of couples (87%), none of these acts was reported. Eight percent of couples reported “mutual violence,” 4% reported male perpetrated violence only and 2% reported female perpetrated violence only.

Raul Caetano, Patrice Vaeth & Suhasini Ramisetty-Miklet (2008). Intimate Partner Violence Victim and Perpetrator Characteristics Among Couples in the United States. *Journal of Family Violence*, 23(6): 507-518.

RESEARCH FILE: Situational Aggression versus Coercive Control



This author’s framework explains research such as the above-cited study showing gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV). The situational and episodic use of aggression in a bitter argument is used by men and women in equal proportions. Much less common, but far more serious, “intimate terrorism” is the use of violence as part of a pattern of control and intimidation. This form of IPV is used mostly by men.

Michael Johnson (2008). *A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence*. Northeastern University Press.



Evan Stark (2007). *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Gender-neutral Language at Intake



While most violence occurs within heterosexual relationships, it is a feature of some lesbian relationships. Lesbians may be reluctant to identify themselves as such when approaching your agency for service and some may describe their abuser using male pronouns. Using gender neutral language, such as “your partner” instead of “he,” may help her feel comfortable identifying herself as a woman being abused by a woman.



Cheryl Champagne, Ruth Lapp & Julie Lee (2003). *Assisting Abused Lesbians: A Guide for Health Professionals and Service Providers*. London Abused Women's Centre.

4. Any woman could find herself in an abusive relationship

This is true. However, some women are more vulnerable to entering or being trapped in abusive relationships. This vulnerability is often related to situations reducing a woman's options in life, such as poverty, homelessness, physical disability, or certain mental illnesses. Another feature of abuse trapping women is how control tactics can look like love and caring (e.g., possessive jealousy), can be subtle, can be episodic, or can escalate slowly over time.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Early Warning Signs of an Abusive Relationship



While we don't completely understand the complex reasons for this fact, research shows that women who have been in an abusive relationship may find a subsequent partner to be abusive as well. Psychologist Lundy Bancroft, who spent years studying the distorted thinking of abusive men, developed a list of early warning signs. Women often report that their partners were so charming and attentive early in the relationship. Can they avoid another abusive partner in the future? Dr. Bancroft believes there are always red flags if you know what to look for, including these:

- he speaks disrespectfully of his former partner or partners
- he is disrespectful towards you
- he does unwanted favours or puts on a show of generosity making you uncomfortable
- he is controlling and/or he is possessive
- nothing is ever his fault
- he is self-centered
- he abuses drugs or alcohol
- he gets serious too quickly about the relationship
- he intimidates you when he is angry
- he has negative attitudes toward women
- he treats you differently around other people

His red flags have been organized into a handout for women which can be found in the "Helping Hands" guide about women in shelters

5. Abuse changes how a woman thinks and feels about herself

"Because it's my fault, improving myself will prevent it from happening again." "I'm lucky to have a man so I shouldn't be so critical of him." Coercive control is abusive in and of itself, but the impact adds up over time as thoughts and feelings become barriers to having a balanced view of her own life. Feelings are inextricably linked to thoughts. Because I *think* I am to blame for the abuse, I *feel* guilty. Other common emotions: sadness, hopelessness, confusion, embarrassment, anger or feelings of inadequacy. A woman who feels responsible for triggering her partner's mistreatment does not see the real cause. As an adult, he is responsible for this words and actions.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The WEB Scale



A big part of our work is offering women a lens to see control tactics. Without that lens, some forms of coercive control look like love or well-meaning concern. The WEB Scale (page 57) lets a woman ignore for a minute what abuse looks like and focus on how it makes her feel. The next "research file" describes a study using the WEB Scale.

RESEARCH FILE: What Abuse Feels Like



Researchers asked 1,000 women if their partners had ever physically assaulted them. Ten percent of the women said “yes.” Then the women completed the WEB Scale (Women’s Experience of Battering, see handout on page 57). Instead of focusing on the partner’s behaviour, these questions ask how his actions made her feel. A score of 10 or higher means there are enough control tactics to suggest that a woman is being abused in the relationship (or was abused in a former relationship). How many women scored 10 or more? 18%. The researchers’ conclusion was that asking about physical abuse alone misses about half of all abused women. Put another way, 45% of the women were abused by our definition but had not been physically assaulted.

Ann Coker, Brian Pope, Paige Smith, Maureen Sanderson & James Hussey (2001). Assessment of Clinical Partner Violence Screening Tools. *Journal of the American Women's Medicine Association*, 56(1): 19-23.

6. Surviving and coping within an abusive relationship can look like problems

Life inside an abusive relationship is frightening and isolating and confusing. Sometimes having a beer is the best way to get through the day. It quells the anxiety and numbs feelings. Smoking might help, or taking extra shifts to avoid going home. On pages 42 to 45, we talk about coping within abusive relationships and also after the relationship ends. The label “problem” could be applied to some common coping choices. Looked at another way, they are survival strategies. Some strategies are aimed at stopping the abuse, like calling the police. Some strategies help her feel less anxious about a situation she isn’t able or ready to change.

7. Surviving and coping strategies can become problems

Even when a coping choice looks like a problem, we mustn’t minimize its importance in enabling daily survival in a difficult situation. The “problem” comes if and when her coping starts to interfere with life in general. Social drinking can become problem drinking. Recreational drug use can become an addiction. She might be arrested for assault if she tries to defend herself physically. An abusive partner can pressure a woman into committing criminal behaviours, like shoplifting, work in the sex trade or drug trafficking. She could find herself charged with a crime and perhaps even imprisoned. A problem may also occur if she employs a costly coping strategy to respond to stress in other contexts like school or the workplace. In other words, negative consequences of coping can spill out into other parts of her life and also endure after the relationship ends.

8. A woman is more than her choice of partner or his choice of how to treat her

People living with cancer protest when others define them by the disease and miss the essence of the person beneath the label of “patient.” Let’s not make that same assumption with an abused woman. By assigning her the status of “victim,” we could reduce her to a single issue and miss the richness of who she is as a unique person. The choices her partner made do not define who she is.

9. An abusive partner makes it difficult for a woman to be the mother she wants to be

The dynamics of coercive control permeate every aspect of daily life at home. Family members change how they think, act and feel as they react to abuse or try to prevent its recurrence. Inevitably, this dynamic affects how women parent their children. A mother may be harsh or too permissive with the children, to compensate for her partner’s parenting style or to keep the children quiet to avoid his angry reaction to the noise. She may lose confidence in her parenting ability and feel undermined in her attempts to exercise parental authority.



Alison Cunningham & Linda Baker (2007). *Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as they Grow*. Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

10. The opposite of abuse is not the absence of abuse

The opposite of an abusive relationship is a healthy, equal relationship. As illustrated on the Equality Wheel (see page 58), features of an equal relationship include respect, trust and support, honesty and accountability, and economic partnership. A relationship can be non-abusive but not equal. The handout on page 59 defines the rights women should expect in intimate relationships. Women often want information to assess a potential new partner. It's not enough to know warning signs of abuse, although that is important information. It's also helpful to know what she should expect and aim for in a relationship. The Equality Wheel can help with that.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Equality Wheel



It's a big step for a woman to label her experiences as "abuse," a partner as "abusive," and herself as "abused." If she's not comfortable with this idea, the Power & Control Wheel might be overwhelming. Introduce her to the Equality Wheel on page 58 instead. Ask if these features describe her partner. After reading it, she may express an interest in seeing the Power & Control Wheel.

TOOL BOX IDEA: My Wheel for My Life



Here's an idea when using the Power & Control Wheel in either an individual or group exercise. Let her draw "My Wheel for My Life" using the handout on page 60. Guidance for this exercise could be:

- include only the slices that are meaningful for you: maybe your wheel has 3 slices or maybe it has 12
- add any other slices you want, to reflect other things that happened
- some slices might be small and others might be big
- label each slice and add some words or a description that is meaningful for you

Encourage her to add types of abuse not mentioned on the original wheel, such as spiritual abuse, and to use any of the control tactics described later. Provide any relevant wheel variation listed on page 1 to guide her choices. Or encourage her to include any applicable slices from the Equality Wheel to show the presence of both good and bad features in the relationship.

She could make several versions of the wheel, like these:

1. How frequent the tactics were in my relationship (i.e., biggest slices for types of abuse that were most common)
2. How much they affected me in the relationship (with the biggest slices for tactics with the greatest impact, even if they were not common)
3. How much they affect me today
4. Two wheels to reflect 1) what family and friends saw from the outside and 2) what really happened at home

The size of her slices might suggest a priority for your work with her. For example, sexual abuse was perhaps infrequent but she rated it as having the greatest impact on her today. You could also ask her to draw a wheel at the outset of your involvement and at various points during your intervention, to look for changes in her thoughts and feelings about her life and her relationship.

Reasons All Helping Professionals Should Understand Abuse Dynamics

1. Because any woman you meet might be impacted by abuse

Practitioners, interning students and volunteers across all the legal and helping professions will meet women who are being abused at home. Many or most of those women will keep this information to themselves. She may not be ready to tell a professional about her situation, or not ready to recognize her experiences as outside the norm of relationship problems. She might feel it's none of anybody's business, that no one would understand, that she would be judged, she'd lose custody of her children, or that she can't be protected from his retaliation.

2. Because your intervention may not be effective if the abuse is unrecognized

A common example of this point is how women are prescribed anti-depressants or other medications to treat "symptoms" of mental health problems that are really linked to abuse or are evidence of coping within an untenable situation at home. Prescribing a pill for depression won't work if the "depression" is a logical reaction to life circumstances. Other presenting issues that could be indicators of abuse include anxiety, chronic pain, fatigue, or child behaviour problems.

3. Because your intervention may not be effective if she can't feel safe

Can she concentrate on what you say and do when pre-occupied with what happened last night? Or what will happen when she gets home? Addressing her need for safety is the priority for now.



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters*, the section called "Issues with Which a Woman Might Want Assistance" reviews some ways you can help her be safe. She can't solve all her problems at once. Help her prioritize her basic needs and make safety the first task.

4. Because even a well-meaning response could make her situation worse

The Medical Power and Control Wheel (page 8) was developed by the Domestic Violence Project in Kenosha, Wisconsin, for use in health care settings. However, the principles apply anywhere. It shows how some reactions by professionals could make a woman feel blamed, not believed, or even put her at greater risk of harm by escalating the danger or increasing her sense of being trapped. It takes a lot of courage to reach out for help. After a dismissive response by a professional, years might elapse before she tries again. If her partner learns she tried to disclose, his need to control may trigger an escalation in his threats or violence. He has a lot at stake and needs to keep her quiet.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION ● PROCEED WITH CAUTION ● PROCEED WITH CAUTION

An abusive partner may go to great lengths to cut a woman off from people who might recognize what is going on at home. His attendance with her at medical appointments, for example, looks like a caring response but it could be his attempt to monitor what she says and to whom. Asking questions about abuse in front of her partner (or her children) can put her at risk. If she discloses to you, don't confront her partner or tell anyone else without first getting her permission. Ask what she wants and needs from you to help her be safe.

5. Because violence against women is not the sole responsibility of VAW services

When we think about helping abused women, we may think primarily about “violence against women” services, such as shelters or organizations like the police with jurisdiction over criminal offences. But all the helping professions play a role when women need and reach out for help. Health care providers have regular contact with women, especially during pregnancy and when her children are small. Dentists also see women privately and on a regular basis. Marriage and family therapists can recognize when “relationship problems” are linked to coercive control. Other groups playing a role are her children’s teachers or school counsellors, staff at child care centres, lawyers, judges, faith leaders, psychologists, and child protection workers. Know signs that a woman is in crisis, be prepared to respond in a sensitive way, and refer her to the services in your area best matching her needs.

RESEARCH FILE: Abused Women’s Views on Universal Screening for Abuse



One approach recommended for health care settings involves routine, universal screening of all women. This means asking every woman about abuse, not only those who fall into so-called high risk groups or those with obvious signs such as bruises. In this American study, women members of an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) were asked about any physical or sexual abuse they experienced in the recent past. The answers of 202 women who self-identified as abused were compared with those of 240 others. They were all asked this question: “Do you think doctors and nurses should ask all women at all visits if they are being physically or sexually abused?” About half (55%) of the abused women said yes, compared with 42% of the women who did not report abuse. Asked about the consequences of this approach, 97% of the abused women agreed women would be glad someone took an interest and 85% said it would be easier for abused women to get help. Importantly, 40% stated that such questioning might increase an abused woman’s risk of harm from her partner.

Andrea C. Gielen, Patricia O’Campo & others (2000). Women’s Opinions About Domestic Violence Screening and Mandatory Reporting. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19(4): 279-285.

RESEARCH FILE: Partner Interference with Access to Health Services



In a survey of 2,000 American women in health care settings, 17% of those who reported physical abuse in the previous year also reported that a partner had prevented them from going to a clinic, seeing a doctor when they wanted to, or otherwise interfered with their access to health services. This figure compared with 2% of women not reporting abuse. The rate of partner interference was higher among women accompanied to the medical setting by a man. The authors suggest health care providers be alert to signs of patient non-compliance or missed appointments as stemming from partner control tactics.

Laura McCloskey, Corrine Williams & others (2007). Abused Women Disclose Partner Interference with Health Care: An Unrecognized Form of Battering. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 22(8): 1067-1072.

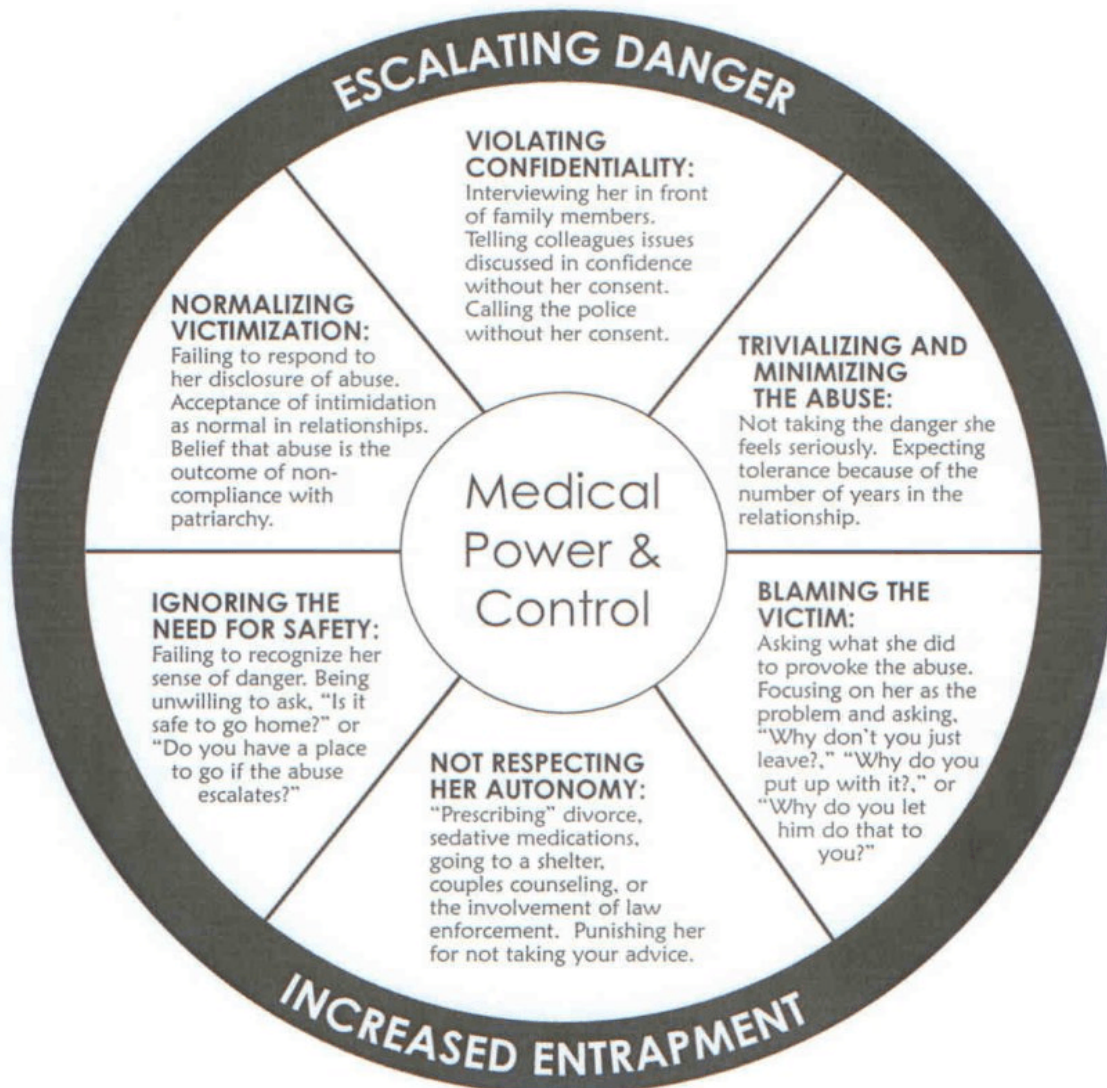
RESEARCH FILE: Women’s Preferred Responses to Abuse Disclosures



Abused women gave their opinions on the ideal response when doctors learn or suspect that a woman is being abused: Treat me with respect, concern and without judgment; protect me (e.g., see her privately from partner, don’t talk to him, help with referrals to a shelter); document what you see and learn; give me control; make your response immediate; give me options; and be there for me later (i.e., follow-up in a few days).

Jacqueline Dienemann, Nancy Glass & Rebecca Hyman (2005). Survivor Preferences for Response to IPV Disclosure. *Clinical Nursing Research*, 14(3): 215-233.

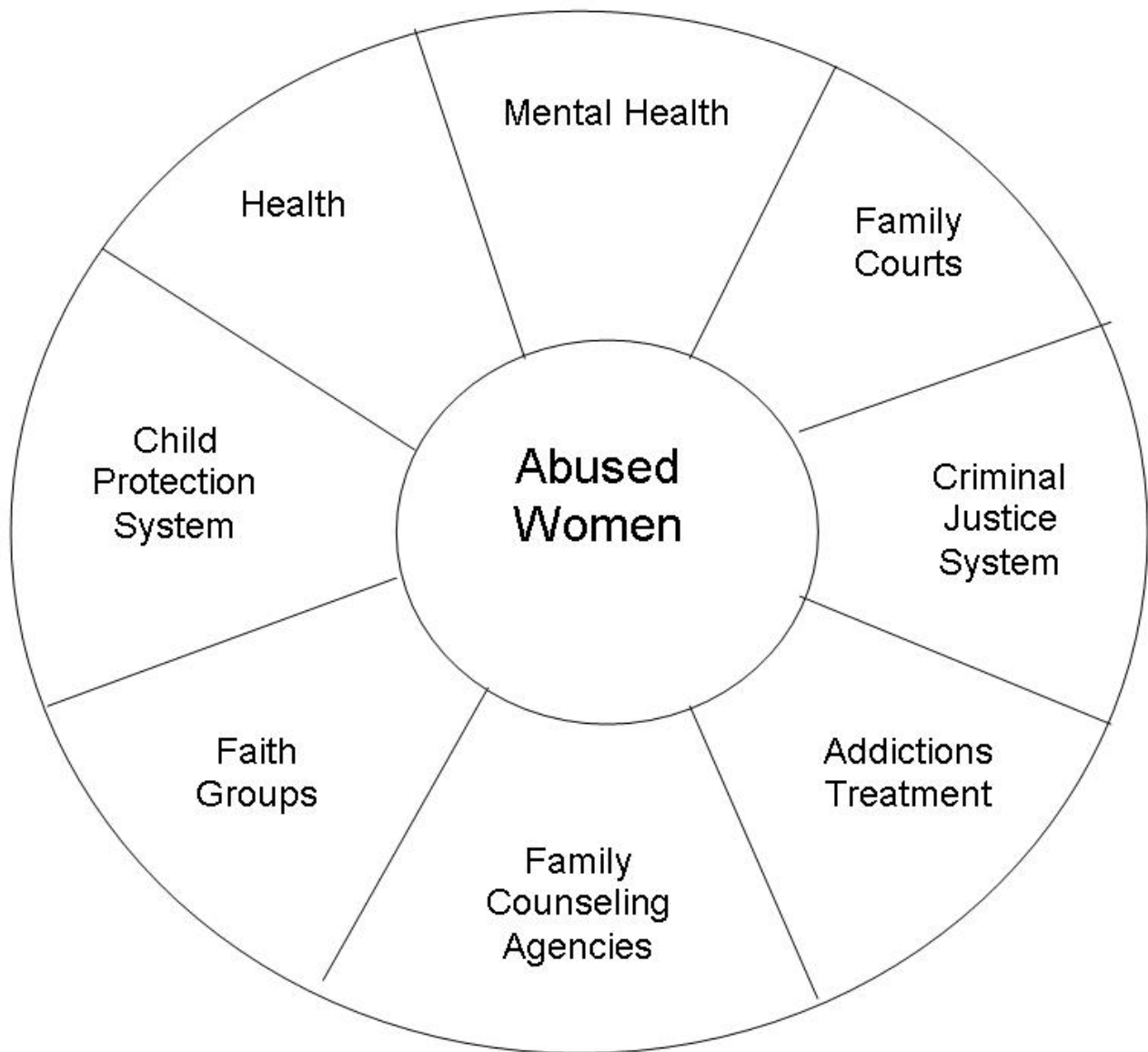
The Medical Power & Control Wheel



Developed by the Domestic Violence Project, Kenosha Wisconsin

“No Wrong Door”

People in all helping professions will meet women who are being abused or have recently been abused. It's important that we all feel knowledgeable and comfortable with the issue, deliver our service with full understanding of how abuse affects women, and can refer women as appropriate to abuse-specific or other services. The “no wrong door” label describes a service-delivery system that is accessible, integrated, and welcomes people who have multiple “problems” without making them shop around for the “correct” service. Another way to conceptualize such a system is to imagine that women can find their ways to abuse-specific services through any service door they enter.



Destructive Consequences of Abuse for Women's Lives

Abuse is hurtful in and of itself. It's injurious and compromises a woman's health. But there are more insidious consequences as well. You can help her find housing or upgrade job skills. When abuse damages the core of her being, these things are harder to change.

1. Abuse can feed a core belief that she doesn't deserve happiness

You see this consequence in women who can't see anything valuable in themselves, can't find any areas of strength (except perhaps as a caretaker for others), can't envision themselves as ever being happy, can't imagine why anyone would like them or want to be their friend. Any flicker of joy or optimism was long ago extinguished. Hoping for anything good is pointless because disappointment is inevitable. Re-building, or building, core self-esteem is a lengthy process.

2. Abuse can compound the damage or prevent healing from childhood abuse

The scars and consequences of childhood abuse take years to heal, if ever. Cascading from an abusive childhood home into one or more abusive relationships, there's no time to recoup emotionally. The consequences of the earlier abuse can compound and grow. A woman might end up seeing the world as a toxic place where abuse is inevitable in relationships.

3. Abuse can reduce a woman's opportunities and quality of life

Another consequence you may see is when a woman's day-to-day capacity to live and work is compromised by the context or consequences of abuse. Early school leaving, difficulty getting or keeping a job because of his need to control, residential instability, accumulated debts, poor credit, chronic health problems, low self-esteem, lack of a support network, or alienation from family. These things may continue to play out in negative ways long after the relationship ends.

4. Coping with abuse can set into play longer term problems

We noted earlier that survival within abusive relationships calls upon women to develop coping techniques that help at the time but may become costly in the long run.

5. Abuse can compromise the bond of trust and affection between women and children

We previously observed that abuse compromises a woman's ability to be the best mother she wants to be. An abusive partner might undermine her efforts to set and enforce rules, contradict her, and sap her confidence as a parent. She may change her parenting style in reaction to his, being too permissive or too rigid. Over time, in some families, children can see her as ineffective, vulnerable, emotionally unavailable, or as someone needing to be cared for. It's a paradox but true that some children may blame her as much or more for the abuse as they blame their father. They may believe his rationalizations, for example, that his abusive behaviour is her fault. Children may be angry that she stays with him or afraid she'll go back if the relationship does end. Maybe they don't trust her to keep them safe or even doubt she loves them. They may be ashamed of her and even come to see her as a legitimate target of his and their own abuse.



Linda Baker & Alison Cunningham (2004). *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers*. Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

Principles Informing Work with an Abused Woman

Whether you call it “feminist” or are more comfortable with another label, woman-centred practice places the woman at the centre of all efforts. The Advocacy Wheel (page 19), from the Domestic Violence Project in Wisconsin, is a good model of principles. Below are ours.



The Helping Hands guide for shelter workers contains a model code of conduct for people working with women in residential settings that applies in other contexts: respect confidentiality and a woman’s right to privacy; maintain appropriate boundaries; model non-violence, non-abusiveness, tolerance and respect for others; be aware of your own biases and do not impose them on others; be conscious of distributing your time and attention to all women [in the agency]; do not pathologize a woman and her coping strategies; be aware of the power imbalance inherent in a helper/helped relationship; take responsibility for self-care and monitoring your own emotional balance; don’t encourage a woman’s dependence on you or the agency; and, avoid conflicts of interest.

1. Each woman is the expert on her life: respect her choices

You will see common themes and patterns, but each woman’s experience is unique. She has her own journey and the direction she takes must be defined by her. She could make decisions that worry you, like staying with or returning to an abusive partner. You may not agree with everything she says or does but this is her life, not yours.

2. Safety is the priority

A crucial first step in any intervention with a woman is to think about the likelihood of on-going or escalating harm. Inquests held to examine intimate partner homicides often conclude that the victim suspected her partner or ex-partner had the potential to kill her. Other work suggests that abused women’s sense of risk is distorted by chronic victimization or the socialization of women to be polite and non-assertive or to hope for the best. She may need an outside perspective to grasp the gravity of her situation. Or she may readily recognize the danger and look to you for help. Work collaboratively with partner agencies such as the police and court system for restraining orders and other legal protections. But don’t count on them 100%. A truly dangerous man will easily ignore these restrictions.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

If a woman has recently ended, or is about to end, an abusive relationship, this is a time statistically correlated with elevated risk for being hurt or killed. You will find on page 62 a checklist of issues found in retrospective analyses of intimate homicide cases. If she plans on leaving, help her develop an exit plan. If she has already left, help her identify ways she can protect herself and summon help in an emergency. An Internet search with the terms “safety plan” and “abuse” or “violence” will locate guidance on the specifics.



Gavin de Becker (1998). *The Gift of Fear: Survival Strategies that Protect us from Violence*. Dell.

3. Seek to understand each woman, in all her complexity

Before starting to deliver your service, check if yours is the service she wants. Don't assume abuse is the only problem in her life. Her needs may encompass a variety of issues perhaps including health concerns, mental health issues, need for legal advice, housing, or any of a dozen other areas. In her mind, relationship issues may be the least of her worries at this moment. Help her tell you what she needs and be prepared to refer her elsewhere if necessary.

RESEARCH FILE: Mental Health Needs of Abused Women



A large birth cohort in New Zealand was assessed psychiatrically at ages 18 and 26. At age 24 to 26, they were asked about abusive partners (defining abuse as injury, need for medical involvement or agency intervention). The women involved in abusive relationships at ages 24 to 26 were more likely than the others to have been diagnosed at age 18 with major depressive illness. The relationship was present but less strong for generalized anxiety disorder (panic disorder, phobia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder) and marijuana dependence. The second observation was that, taking into account any pre-existing illness, women in abusive relationships had higher rates of later marijuana dependence, post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive illness and generalized anxiety disorder. They concluded that psychiatric disorder leaves women vulnerable to abuse and abuse is a contributing source of psychiatric disorder.

Miriam Ehrensaft, Terrie Moffit & Avshalom Caspi (2006). Is Domestic Violence Followed by an Increased Risk of Psychiatric Disorders Among Women but not Among Men? A Longitudinal Cohort Study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 163(5): 885-892.

TOOL BOX IDEA: She Knows What She Needs so Help Her Ask for It



On pages 64 and 65 you will find a handout to help identify her needs at this point in time. Helping a woman find safety takes many forms of advocacy, including legal advice, educational or vocational upgrading, various child-related issues, help completing forms and applications, or liaison with immigration officials.

4. Be aware of the power imbalance between the helper and the helped

Abuse is the misuse of power. Advocacy means working with her and on her behalf. But there is a power imbalance inherent in the helper/helped relationship. To minimize its effects, acknowledge and be aware of the power differential. Explain everything you will do including any drawbacks of your service, clarify limits on your promise of confidentiality, emphasize that your assistance is optional and she can opt out, share with her information you have about her or her situation, proceed at her pace, and let her take the lead. She is an active participant in a mutual learning process, not a passive recipient.



Domestic Violence Victoria (2006). *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children*. Melbourne AU: Domestic Violence Victoria.

5. Don't give advice: help her identify and assess her choices

Giving advice is essentially telling her what to do. Perhaps that's what her partner did. Giving advice also accentuates the power imbalance between you (the expert) and her. She may have choices and options of which she is not yet aware. Or she may need help assessing the pros and cons of the available options. Help her have enough information to choose.

RESEARCH FILE: Tailoring Interventions to Women's Experience of Violence



In the literature on typologies of battering men, psychological assessment and behavioural profiling of treatment clients yields three to five categories of violent men, organized by patterns of their violence or their psychiatric diagnosis. The assumption is that physically abusive men are not a homogeneous group, so prediction and treatment should not be one-sized fits all. Can this concept be applied to women? To explore this possibility, 501 abused women were interviewed, drawn from a variety of settings including shelters, police files, and a prison wherein they interviewed 105 women who killed battering partners. Looking at the duration and severity of physical violence, five categories of women fell along a continuum.

Short-term

These women ended the relationship early, after a few incidents of violence and usually during the dating phase or in the first year of courtship. The violence was less severe and rarely resulted in injuries. The men were not likely to have mental health issues. Suggested interventions for women were crisis intervention, support groups, restraining orders and perhaps brief psychotherapy. They usually had good support systems and coping resources, as evidenced by their success at ending the relationship.

Intermediate

Women in this group were involved with an abusive partner for a few months or up to two years and experienced perhaps a few dozen incidents of violence perhaps escalating in severity over time. Some of those incidents involved serious violence and injuries may have resulted. She was able to end the relationship, probably after a sudden or severe attack. Intervention could look similar to that for the short-term violence category.

Intermittent long-term

These women were typically in long-term relationships with a man who was violent once in a while, in an unpredictable way. Over the years, there may have been dozens of incidents, or only a few. However, there would be long periods of time between violent episodes. The violence was severe and intense and she would have no warning. She might never discern his motives or see a pattern. She may have lived on the edge, waiting for the next incident. These women were typically educated and middle-class or higher. If she leaves, it's probably after the children have grown up and left home. Intervention could take the form of intensive psychotherapy, trauma assessment and treatment, problem identification and prioritization, goal setting, cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization, visualization, ego bolstering and role-playing.

Chronic and predictable

These women experienced long-term relationships in which the violence was frequent, severe, and could result in injury and need for medical attention. Their partners may have had serious alcohol or drug problems and the violence had a predictable pattern. It was usually his arrest or death that caused the end of the relationship. Women were likely depressed, suicidal at times, and suffered from trauma symptoms. Intervention strategies could be similar to those suggested for the previous category of women.

Homicidal sub-type

This category included women who killed a partner. They experienced numerous and severe acts of violence including death threats. Any restraining orders were violated and weapons were accessible. These relationships had endured many years and most women suffered post-trauma symptoms, depression, insomnia, and suicidality.

Kimberly Bender & Albert Roberts (2007). Battered Women Versus Male Batterer Typologies: Same or Different Based on Evidence-based Studies? *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 12: 519-530.

6. Be aware of messages hidden in well-meaning words

Having good intentions doesn't guarantee our words and actions are helpful. "Why didn't you leave?" A person using those words intends to say that a woman's situation was intolerable or unacceptable. The woman hears it differently as she decodes the messages packed up in that question. She could feel *judged*: other (normal) people wouldn't put up with that treatment, or you are crazy to love a guy like that. She could feel *blamed* for being a victim: the victim must leave home, not the person who makes the relationship intolerable. She could feel alone and *misunderstood*: that person doesn't know how difficult leaving is, how many factors I weighed, how much I still question myself. Well-meaning words can create distance, convey judgment, prevent rapport building and exaggerate the power differential between the two of you.

	Intention	What she might hear	Other options
Do you think that's a good idea?	To help her appreciate the down-sides to a decision that may not be in her best interests	You (a professional) thinks she is making a mistake; You think she is a person who makes bad decisions	Let's list the pros and cons of that decision
I know how you feel	To be caring and sympathetic; to help her feel not alone	You know her situation better than she does	Tell me how you're feeling about all this
Your partner is dangerous	To keep her safe	You think she is stupid because only a stupid person would be with him (or a desperate person, crazy person, etc.)	I'm scared for you
Children living with violence against a mother will have emotional and behaviour problems	To leverage her love for the children to help her make a difficult decision	You think she is a bad mother who doesn't care about her children's future; You think her children have problems	What's it like from your children's point of view when he gets abusive with you?
You should... You need to... If I were you I would... Why don't you try...	To suggest some helpful options	You know what's best for her; she doesn't know what's best for herself	What do you need from me?
You need a safety plan	To keep her safe	She must live in fear; she is responsible for keeping herself safe because her partner is not being held responsible; no one can protect her	He must be held accountable and have legal limits on him. In case that doesn't work, let's think about some precautions.
Did he ever hit you?	To show concern about what happened to her	Only physical violence is abusive; she is not abused enough to use your services unless he hit her	What was the worst part about your relationship?
Did he hurt the kids?	To express concern for her children's welfare	Did you let your children get hurt?	Is it safe for kids to be around him?
Did you tell anyone?	To understand her better	You don't believe her or want proof; you think it is easy to tell someone	Was there someone in your life whom you felt comfortable telling?
Look on the bright side	To help her feel better; help her see positives	You are minimizing her situation's seriousness	Will anything good come from all of this?

7. Listen more than talk

At various places in these guides, we emphasize the importance of respecting a woman's choices and letting her direct your service. Applying these principles implies we understand what she wants, and this understanding requires listening. As helpers, we want to offer insight, solutions or helpful suggestions. So it can be difficult to stay quiet. Use the steps of active listening to ensure accuracy in your understanding. Listening also sends a powerful statement that she is worthy of your time and attention, you are interested in her situation, and someone understands her without judgment. And don't forget how cathartic it can be just to talk.

TOOK BOX IDEA: Active Listening to Aid Advocacy



The best listening is an active rather than a passive process. The goal of *active* listening is for the listener to understand the speaker, without judgment, and not necessarily to suggest strategies to solve her problem. Put another way, active listening prevents a listener from misinterpreting, missing or dismissing what the speaker wants or has to say. There are several steps in the "active listening" process.

Suspend judgement

It's difficult to listen if we already believe we understand what she needs, assume we know what she wants, prematurely decide what she will say, presume we know what is best or how she feels.

Focus: be in the minute with her

Distraction also blocks listening, true for both activities happening nearby and thoughts pulling our attention away. If you can't focus on listening, arrange another time to talk, quickly address the distraction before you begin, or at least name the distraction so she knows what to expect (e.g., "the telephone will ring at 4 p.m. because my son checks in when he gets home from school. It'll just take two minutes and then we can carry on.").

Wait and watch

Give her time to explain herself and don't rush her. Watch her body language for clues of distress. Nod and acknowledge you are listening but don't interrupt.

Restatement / para-phrase

In the form of a statement rather than a question, summarize your understanding: "It sounds like ..." Maybe you don't agree or even clearly understand her. That's okay. Keep your tone even and descriptive, not skeptical, surprised or confused.

Reflection

What she tells you likely has three components: facts, her thoughts and also her feelings. Repeat the facts as you have heard them, and let her correct you if necessary. Make an observation if appropriate to underline your appreciation of the importance of her words or what she is thinking or feeling, as in "I hear how upset you are." If appropriate, add your thoughts or observations here, briefly (e.g., "you have every right to be angry").

Clarification

At some point before ending the discussion, clarify your understanding of what she wants, needs or expects from you now.



The Helping Hands guide for working with women in shelters has a section addressing motivational interviewing. MI helps people explore their ambivalence about an issue, such as ending an abusive relationship, and define for themselves a change or resolution.

RESEARCH FILE: What Makes a Good Listener?



Medical researchers in the Netherlands set out to measure active listening. They defined 14 dimensions:

1. Uses inviting body language and facial expressions
2. Shows not to be distracted during the discussion*
3. Is not off-hand or hasty*
4. Is obviously relaxed and confident
5. Is not detached
6. Adjusts language to that of the speaker / avoids jargon
7. Listens attentively*
8. Gives speaker time and space to present the problem*
9. Uses exploring (open-ended) questions*
10. Creates an open atmosphere during the conversation
11. Spends time on social talk*
12. Is good in leading the conversation* (takes initiative where appropriate, such as establishing agenda of the discussion in collaboration with the woman, paraphrasing)
13. Expresses understanding non-verbally* (nodding, smiling, sympathetic eye contact)
14. Verbally acknowledges woman's feelings and emotions

* These seven items were incorporated into the final version of the Active Listening Observation Scale.

Thijs Fassaert, Sandra van Dulmen and others (2007). Active Listening in Medical Consultations: Development of the Active Listening Observation Scale. *Patient Education & Counseling*, 68(3): 258-264.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Interviewing versus Listening



Sometimes you interview and sometimes you listen, depending upon your role and your goal. Being mindful of the difference keeps you task focused and defines boundaries.

What is your role?

You may speak with a woman in any of a variety of roles: therapist, assessor, intake worker, investigator, judge, researcher or advocate.

What is your goal?

Your role in this interaction defines your approach to the conversation.

therapist:	stimulating a process of insight and growth
assessor:	gathering information to inform decisions about her or someone else such as her children
intake worker:	gathering information to inform an intervention plan
investigator:	gathering evidence, maybe for use in court
judge:	determining if something is true or what weight to give someone's input
researcher:	using her to learn something to help other people (not necessarily her)
advocate:	learning her perspective to inform advocacy on her behalf

Why are you asking her for information? To help with an immediate need? To form an opinion? To make a decision that may or may not be in her best interests? To help her feel better or calmer or not alone? Make your role and goal clear to her and define any limits on your confidentiality that result. Her choice about what to share with you must be made with knowledge of how you use that information.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Questions to Start a Conversation About Abuse



There are many valid reasons why a woman may not talk about the abuse in her relationship. She may deny abuse even if asked a direct question. She may choose not to acknowledge the abuse in her life, or maybe she doesn't know what you mean by "abuse." In many cultures, speaking about private family matters is neither comfortable nor encouraged. She can decide whom to tell and how much to reveal. However, there are times when a service provider suspects abuse and needs some acknowledgment of that abuse to justify a protective measure. If you must have a disclosure of abuse, these questions might start a conversation:

- How does your family feel about your husband/partner?
- How does he react if something doesn't go his way?
- How would he describe you to other people?
- What are the things about you that he wants you to change?
- When you two disagree about something, how do you resolve your differences?

Some guidelines:

- limit the number of questions so it doesn't feel like an inquisition
- minimize the use of closed-ended questions demanding yes or no answers
- ask the question and stop talking: give her time to formulate an answer

8. Do not pathologize coping and survival skills

To "pathologize" is to define an issue as a physical or mental illness rather than a logical, expected or natural process. Solutions to illnesses might involve medication, hospitalization or other treatment. Some women experience true and serious mental disturbances requiring medication. To ignore full-blown psychosis or life-threatening clinical depression is a disservice to women. We must be open to seeing major mental illness where it manifests. But more typically we meet women whose coping and survival skills look from the outside like problems or have started to get in the way, making her life more difficult. We talk more about coping on pages 42 to 46. Instead of seeing coping as something to be fixed, we can help her identify her own effective coping strategies, concentrate on using the healthiest ones, and find a new repertoire of effective coping that doesn't come with costs to her health and well-being.

9. Adopt a strength-based approach

It is easy to slip into pathologization because the helping professions are typically problem-focused businesses. The police focus on criminal acts, child protection workers look for parenting deficits and evidence of abuse, health care professionals diagnose disease and sickness. In our training or post-secondary education, we learn to help people largely by spotting, assessing and fixing problems. So adopting a strength-based approach may require practice. In strength-based intervention, the goal is to increase the frequency of healthy and positive behaviours while decreasing the frequency of less desired behaviours and the attitudes driving them. When working with abused women, less desired behaviours and attitudes could be poor self-image, lack of confidence, or pessimistic view of the future. Women can move from a reliance on costly coping strategies by adopting coping that is effective but doesn't have a downside. The essence of strength-based practice is to find the strengths inherent in the person and build on them.

10. Bring a message of hope and healing

You must validate and acknowledge the harm done to her. Don't minimize what she's been through. But at the same time, you can instill a message of hope for a better tomorrow. Healing is a journey and speaking with you is a solid step on that path. Women can blossom and grow once freed from criticism and fear. When appropriate, introduce the concept of equality in relationships, so she knows what to expect from a healthy, equal relationship or can chart her partner's progress while in a treatment program for abusive men.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Strength-based Intervention



The strength-based approach is a widely-supported practice but there is some confusion about its definition.

- it is NOT simply praise in response to desired behaviour (although this may be helpful)
- it is NOT ignoring undesirable words or behaviour (although strategic ignoring can be useful)
- it is NOT simply putting a positive spin on something troubling (e.g., her suicide attempt was an accidental overdose)
- it is NOT ignoring serious problems by hoping for the best or looking at life through rose-coloured glasses (although optimism is also a good thing)

The strength-based approach is sometimes linked to the positive psychology movement, a recognition of how that discipline focuses on fixing problems rather than nurturing our emotional assets. It is premised on the assumptions that everyone has strengths, everyone can learn to grow and maximize their strengths, and that growing strengths is an effective way ultimately to reduce the effects of problems. It also reminds us of the potentially negative power of some diagnostic categories and labels such as “victim.”

Practise recognizing strengths

Strengths take many forms: features of character (e.g., honesty, courage, integrity, kindness), creativity, ability to nurture and form healthy relationships, emotional strengths (e.g., optimism, insight, compassion), intelligence, ability to problem solve or make decisions, work ethic and ability to provide financially, educational credentials, social support, and survival skills. The flip side of this is to banish stigmatizing labels from our vocabulary (e.g., non-complaint, dysfunctional, resistant, lack of insight, etc.).

Learn to see strengths in adversities

Sometimes strengths are hard to see. She may be suicidal, but is still alive. She is addicted to drugs, but hasn't used in five days. She struggles with parenting, but loves her children. She is aggressive, but learned that skill to survive on the streets.

Help her see her own strengths

Work with her on a list of her strengths or catch her saying or doing something well and name it for her. Ask her to describe how that strength has helped in the past when she was faced with other stresses or problems.

Connect that strength to something else

Capitalize on that situation by linking it with another issue with which she is struggling. For example, her diligence in pursuing a school course indicates she can apply that trait in her search for housing. Her patience with a friend's child learning to tie a shoe indicates she can be supportive when dealing with her own child (or herself).



Elsie J. Smith (2006). The Strength-based Counseling Model. *Counseling Psychologist*, 34(1): 13-79.



The Helping Hands guide for working with women in shelters talks about opportunities to apply a strength-based approach in a residential environment such as a shelter. With 24/7 contact with women, you find many “reachable moments” to help her recognize her own strengths.

The Advocacy Wheel

This model was developed by the agency that developed the Medical Power & Control Wheel. It demonstrates the principles of advocacy countering the use of power and control in health-care responses to abused women.



Developed by the Domestic Violence Project, Kenosha Wisconsin, U.S.A.

Paradoxes of Abuse

A paradox is a statement that seems false or defies common sense but is true. Many features of abuse are paradoxical because they seem to make no sense.

In an episode of *The Simpsons*, Bart Simpson was mistakenly enrolled in a school program for gifted children. Regular viewers of the show know that Bart is not academically inclined but savvy in other ways. He struggled in most tasks at his new school but cleverly defined a “paradox” when asked: “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.” That’s a paradox: true but not logical. Abused women recognize that one. “If I spent all day cleaning the house, he’d come home and say, ‘You look like shit.’ If I made an effort to look nice, he’d say, ‘If you spent less time in front of the mirror, the house wouldn’t be filthy all the time.’”

Common assumption: a real man would never hit a woman

Hitting a woman is taboo in our society. People would think the man is weak and pathetic.

Reality: men do hit women

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control report that 1,200 women are killed each year and two million injured by an intimate partner. The National Domestic Violence Hotline in the U.S. links 18,500 callers each month to over 5,000 shelters and programs. Figures from other countries are similar. Generally, in Westernized countries, 1 to 4% of women could report a criminal incident of domestic violence in any given year, although most of them choose not to call the police.

Reality: some people think that’s okay

Most people believe hitting is wrong. But some people – quite a good proportion actually – have exceptions to that rule. Doing a Google search of the phrase “never hit a woman,” we got more than 16,000 hits along with over 3,000 for the variant “never hit a lady.” It must be said that you’ll find some sound and balanced statements, like it’s never okay for anyone to hit anyone. But you might be surprised how often you see phrases like this: “I was taught never to hit a woman, but...” In the search results, people defined circumstances making it okay, as when she hit him first, if he warns her first or if she is bigger than he is. Sometimes, it seems, a man must hit a woman or risk being seen as weak or unmasculine. It’s wrong for a man to hit a woman, but it’s understandable if she is unfaithful or if he is drunk or stressed out, for example. Work-related stress or financial pressure explains violence in some people’s minds, as do losing his temper, his own abuse as a child, or mental illness. In other words, the man did it – but there was a logical reason so it wasn’t truly his fault.

PARADOX: Many people assume that it’s unmasculine and embarrassing for a man to hit a woman.
BUT: some men do hit their female partners – and other people might see their actions as justified or excusable

TOOK BOX IDEA: Excuses, Excuses



Like other members of society, women can believe a man’s excuses for abuse, missing the fact that he is responsible for his choices. If a woman has been physically abused, you can introduce the concept of “rationalization” using the handout on page 66. Help her articulate any excuses he used, find the extent to which she buys into them, and (if necessary) re-direct any feelings of responsibility from herself onto the person who chose to use violence.

RESEARCH FILE: Justifications for Hitting a Woman



In the early 1980s, sociologist Cathy Greenblat interviewed 80 newly married men and women in New Jersey as part of a study about love in modern relationships. When asked if there were any conditions making it acceptable for a husband to slap his wife, 41% of the men and 16% of the women could describe reasons, including self-defense of himself or a child, if she hit him first, if she said or did something “wrong,” if she was unfaithful or he sees her with another man, or if she’s “hysterical.”

Cathy Greenblat (1983). A Hit is a Hit is a Hit... Or is it? Approval and Tolerance of the Use of Physical Force by Spouses. In David Finkelhor and others (eds.) *The Dark Side of Families: Current Family Violence Research*. Sage Publications.



Jackson Katz (2006). *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*. Sourcebooks Trade.

Consequences of this paradox for women: victim blaming and minimization of harm

How is a woman punished by this paradox? She’s blamed for the actions of another person. Being hit is her own fault. His behaviour is justifiable. Or people see him as a person with a good reason to be violent. Maybe he was abused as a child so his own abusiveness is expected or predictable. Does it feel different to be hit by someone abused as a child versus someone who wasn’t? Is the damage different? She might feel guilty for being upset at him, or believe that accepting his behaviour is a way of being sympathetic and supportive with his problems.

There are at least five paradoxes about violence in intimate relationships.

1. Many people assume that a woman who is being abused could recognize it immediately. **BUT: an abused woman may not interpret her partner’s actions as abusive for some time**
2. Many people assume that a woman who experiences minor abuse might not leave, but someone who experiences serious abuse – for sure she would leave. **BUT: the more severe the abuse, the harder it is to leave**
3. Many people assume that a woman would protect herself from further abuse by leaving. **BUT: staying can be safer than leaving**
4. Many people assume they would know if a close friend or family member were abused at home. **BUT: Abuse in a relationship can be completely hidden**
5. Many people assume a true victim is perfect and an abuser is bad in every way. **BUT: People are complex: abusive men can have good qualities and abused women can have flaws**

From the outside, the actions of an abused woman can seem illogical. Seeing the paradoxes gives us a lens to understand her decisions and choices. Failing to appreciate the paradoxes, we could make wrong assumptions and judgements about her, or make her feel worse by reinforcing the common assumptions.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Consequences of Paradoxes for Women



The concept of a paradox is difficult to explain and difficult to understand. So it’s not important that women understand the paradoxes (although some might find the concept helpful). Focus on the consequences of these paradoxes. The handout on page 67 helps her articulate the ways she felt blamed, misunderstood or even sometimes crazy.

PARADOX 1: Many people assume that a woman who is being abused could recognize it immediately. BUT: **an abused woman may not interpret her partner's actions as abusive for some time**

This assumption could be made by equating "abuse" with physical acts like hitting.

Common assumption: anyone who is being abused would realize it immediately

Abuse is so awful and obvious, the woman would know it the second it starts. She would see herself as abused and her partner as abusive. She would know immediately to leave.

Reality: it can take years to recognize the tactics and dynamics of coercive control

Control tactics are difficult to see. In fact, many features of coercive control can look and feel like love, such as possessive jealousy, continuous need to know her whereabouts, or demanding all her time and attention for himself. A man's use of control tactics may grow over time. Subtle change is more difficult to see than sudden change. Even after she's aware of problems, it's natural to explain away the hiccups. All relationships have them. Even a hit could be an isolated incident, she hopes. He apologized and only did it because he was drunk. She may defend him to others and accept his excuses, at least initially. If abuse begins on the first date, no abusive relationship would ever get off the ground. But it often takes hold after she develops an emotional commitment to the relationship or has children with him. She wants and needs to believe that everything will work out for the best.

Consequences for the woman

The consequences of this paradox include how people fail to appreciate her reality so she feels ashamed for staying so long. Family and friends may be frustrated by how she makes excuses for him or fails to label his behaviour as unacceptable. People may see her as having consciously chosen to stay in an abusive relationship, perhaps because of masochism. As with many of the paradoxes, the length of time she stayed and her silence can be mistaken for lying about the abuse when she eventually reaches out for help. They assume if the abuse really happened that she would have left sooner.

RESEARCH FILE: Counterintuitive Victim Behaviour and Criminal Prosecutions



This monograph from the National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women recognizes that a woman's behaviour during and after domestic violence may be "counterintuitive" and puzzling to the general public, including people who form juries. The public holds myths about "battered women" including that they are masochistic and provoke abuse and that they must like it or they'd leave. Counterintuitive victim behaviour includes actions or statements made in the aftermath of an assault appearing illogical or as a poor decision. Jurors have an expectation of what a victim should do. Anyone who varies from that expectation must be unreliable or not worthy of belief. So there is a disconnect between public expectations and actual victim behaviour. Victims may live with batterers for many years, end the relationship and reconcile several times, delay reporting, recant allegations made to police, minimize injuries, make inconsistent statements, engage in self-defensive behaviours which can appear to be aggression, and request charges be dropped or refuse to testify. This author advises prosecutors to engage expert witnesses to explain counterintuitive behaviour to juries in ways that respect the victim's integrity.

Jennifer Gentile Long (2007). *Introducing Expert Evidence to Explain Victim Behavior in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Cases*. National District Attorneys Association.

PARADOX 2: Many people assume that a woman who experiences minor abuse might not leave, but someone who experiences serious abuse – for sure she would leave. **BUT: the more severe the abuse, the harder it is to leave**

Not all women are the same. It's equally true that not all abuse is the same. Women make stay/leave decisions by balancing many factors including the severity of abuse.

Common assumption: a woman would get out if abuse was severe

Minor or isolated incidents of inappropriate behaviour might be forgiven. In relationships, you take the good with the bad. But serious violations would not be forgiven or tolerated and the woman would have little choice but to leave.

Reality: severe violence makes it difficult to leave

Research demonstrates that women who leave easily or early in a relationship tend to be those who experience minor or infrequent physical abuse, especially if it was predictable like when he binged on alcohol. They could see the pattern, probably had good social support, and left before an intense emotional bond or debilitating financial dependence had developed. Women who experience severe physical abuse are trapped by fear long after the point when they want to leave. Their daily focus is to predict or prevent his violence and they develop placating or avoidance strategies that at least sometimes appear successful. They may be trapped by the fears of "what if," perhaps a belief he will exact revenge, kill himself or her (or both), or hurt the children if she leaves. Previous attempts to leave may have consolidated her belief that his threats are realistic. Leaving can be quite dangerous as we discuss in the next paradox.

Consequences for the woman

This paradox affects women when people don't believe their allegations of abuse. After the relationship ends, she may speak with police or representatives of the legal system, as in the context of a criminal prosecution or custody application. She describes abuse so severe that people don't believe it or feel she exaggerates for purposes of revenge or to enhance her custody case. Her recounting of incidents may be spasmodic, as more and more events come back to mind. Her "disclosure," in other words, may elapse over several interviews which is taken by some to indicate embellishment and fabrication. Police records might show that she denied abuse during successive law enforcement visits to the home. Now ready to tell all, she may be silenced because she "had her chance to speak." Some people believe women who don't leave should be willing to accept the consequences of their choice. Anyone holding this view may be restrained in any support they offer or have a derisive tone. One consequence of this paradox is that the women who experience the worst abuse may have the most difficult time accessing safety and support from the legal system and allied support systems.

RESEARCH FILE: Severity of Violence as a Predictor of Leaving



In this American study, 100 abused women were followed up for 10 years. At the outset of the study, they had been in the relationship for 8 years on average and for the first 3.4 years, on average, there had been no abuse. Over the follow-up period, about half entered a shelter at least once. After ten years, 71% were no longer in the relationship. Of all the variables used to explain timing of departure, it was the severely abused women who took the longest to leave, if indeed they left at all. They concluded: "men who escalate their violent tactics succeed in preventing women from exiting."

Subadra Panchanadeswaran & Laura McCloskey (2007). Predicting the Timing of Women's Departure from Abusive Relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(1): 50-65.

PARADOX 3: Many people assume that a woman would protect herself from further abuse by leaving. BUT: **staying can be safer than leaving**

From the outside, the stay/leave decision looks like a no-brainer. It's not as easy as it looks.

Common assumption: your best protection is to leave (and it's easy to leave)

Most people believe a woman is an idiot to stay with an abusive man. "If my partner were ever abusive to me, I'd be outta there so fast." In relationships, no one is perfect and we take the good with the bad, but some actions are intolerable and abuse is one of them. So I would get out.

Reality: leaving is the most dangerous time of an abusive relationship

In the long run, it's best to terminate a relationship with an abusive man who is not ready to attend batterers treatment and work to change his value system and choices. In the short run, a woman's risk for injury dramatically increases. Violence continues after a separation, or violence can start after a separation. When she leaves, he loses control and may take drastic measures to re-gain it. Any signal she gives for ending the relationship can be met with an escalation in his threats or use of physical violence. Some women must develop elaborate escape plans just to get out. Even when she leaves, fear can drive her back. Mothers can stay in abusive relationships to protect their children. The woman believes she can run interference and protect the children but would not be with them on weekend visits with their father. In the extreme, consequences for women include death. The probability of a woman being murdered increases dramatically in the days, weeks and months following a separation. Abduction of the children, or even their murder, is more likely at this point. Some women leave the relationship only to reconcile later for safety reasons, or because she has difficulty providing for or managing the children. Some women leave multiple times before finally being able to sever ties with him.

Consequences for the woman

This paradox means that most people will not understand her reasons for staying. From the outside looking in, the danger is not always apparent. Or the danger is apparent and her friends and family are frustrated at her for finding excuses to stay. When she can leave, the length of time she stayed is used to discredit her allegations of abuse. If it was so bad, why did you stay? Why didn't you tell someone? Why did you tell the emergency room staff that you fell down the stairs? Women who raise issues of past violence in child custody disputes may be disbelieved and seen as trying to sabotage the children's relationship with their father. People may not understand how much she is at risk (or people understand the risk and don't invite her to stay with them, reducing her options and potentially necessitating her admission to a shelter).

RESEARCH FILE: Predictors of "Leaving"



The 11-city case-control study called *The Chicago Women's Health Risk Study* confirmed an oft-observed reality: leaving or attempting to leave violent partners is a risky time for some women. Seventy-five percent of femicide victims in their sample, 85% of severely abused women, and 66% of women who experienced less severe abuse had left or tried to end the relationship in the previous year. Leaving was a direct precipitating factor in 45% of the femicides.

C.R. Block (2000). *The Chicago Women's Health Risk Study: Risk of Serious Injury or Death in Intimate Violence (Final Report)*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice.

PARADOX 4: Many people assume they would know if a close friend or family member were abused at home. BUT: **Abuse in a relationship can be completely hidden**

Because abuse happens behind closed doors, outward appearances can be deceiving.

Common assumption: relationship abuse is obvious to see from the outside

We can assess relationships by how they appear to us on visits and during ongoing contact. If something were wrong, we could see it or she would tell us.

Reality: abusive men can limit their inappropriate behaviour to private spaces

It's true that some men are abusive in front of others or use violence both in and outside the home. This is not the most common pattern. Typically, abuse occurs only in private. Some women speak of the Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde presentation where he seems to become a completely different person. The public always sees Dr. Jekyll and only she sees Mr. Hyde. Keeping the abuse private is important because public knowledge of his true behaviour can ruin his image as a nice guy or get him arrested. Some men work hard on shining their public image. He may be outwardly generous, active in his faith community, and hard working. You often read in the news about an intimate femicide where neighbours and co-workers are in shock because he was "such a nice guy."

Reality: women can go to great lengths to hide the reality of abuse in a relationship

Women can have good reasons to maintain the secrecy, including embarrassment, hope the situation will improve, fear of his reprisals, the patriarchal views of her religion or culture, or concern for his welfare if people discovered the truth. For example, he might be arrested or lose his job, which would affect family finances. She will hide bruises, explain away visible injuries, call in sick to work, and keep up the pretext that all is harmonious at home.

Reality: it's difficult to tell someone or ask for help

Even once she decides to tell, it's difficult to break the silence. She may worry about not being believed or being judged by others. Shame and desire for privacy continue to be factors as is a fear of retaliation. She may have no one to tell or no one to tell safely. She may have attempted to tell in the past with negative consequences or have no place to go if she must leave her home.

Consequences for the woman

After years of silence and perhaps even denial, a woman who makes a disclosure may not be believed. From the outside, her relationship might have appeared normal, perhaps ideal. Her efforts to "keep up appearances" are now held against her. If she accesses the legal system after leaving, her delayed disclosure is taken as an attempt at revenge, lies to further a custody application, or an effort to alienate her children from their father. If the visible parts of his abuse are her attempts at self-defence, she may appear to be the abusive partner.

RESEARCH FILE: Incomplete and Delayed Disclosure



In this general population sample, one third of the abused women had not told anyone yet. Among those who had told someone (more likely to be a friend than a family member), one third of them left out details.

Katherine Dunham & Charlene Senn (2000). Minimizing Negative Experiences: Women's Disclosure of Partner Abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15(3): 251-261.

PARADOX 5: Many people assume a true victim is perfect and an abuser is bad in every way. **BUT: People are complex: abusive men can have good qualities and abused women can have flaws.**

Sometimes the victim must defend her actions.

Common assumption: nice men don't hit women

A man who is well regarded by co-workers and friends, who performs well at work, who is successful financially or educated, he could not possibly be abusive to his partner. Put another way, an abusive man is obvious to spot based on his behaviour at work or in the community or by his low educational or employment status. He would have an anger management problem evident outside the home, be a drunk, probably have a criminal or prison record.

Common assumption: women with flaws will lie about abuse

If a woman gets caught in a lie, drinks too much, or admits abusing her kids, her allegations of abuse are probably fabricated or exaggerated. Besides, if she were truly abused, it was probably her own fault (e.g., she was drunk) so the man should not be penalized for her mistakes.

Reality: seemingly nice guys can be abusive

An abusive man can be a reliable employee, give money to charity, go to church, volunteer in his community, be well liked by the neighbours and co-workers. All these things can be true and he could still be abusive to his wife and maybe his kids. In reality, many abusive men – perhaps most – are successful, well liked and kind to people they don't live with. They can also be kind and considerate to their family at times and be good breadwinners.

Reality: women with flaws can be abused

An abused woman might lie once and a while, like we all do. Maybe she drinks too much sometimes, cheats on her taxes, or loses her temper and yells at the kids. She might hit her kids. She might even hit her partner. None of these things means that she cannot be abused.

Consequences for the woman

She is punished by this paradox when it's used to discredit her allegations of his abuse, especially when she seeks custody through the courts or calls the police. Sometimes the legal system assumes that complainants who lie about other things will *ipso facto* lie about allegations of abuse. Denials of his abuse on previous police visits to the home might be taken as an example of her lying, for example. If she hits him in defence or retaliation, this can be seen as evidence of her violent tendencies. Mutual violence cancels itself out and no one is responsible. Or maybe he defended himself or she was drunk. In the extreme, she herself is charged with assault. In a custody battle, he can line up character witnesses willing to swear to his exemplary character. This tactic may be successful if the judge holds this common assumption as true.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Reinforcing Reality



Ensure not to inadvertently reinforce the paradoxes by questioning her choices or seeming judgmental or disbelieving. Reinforce the realities so she doesn't blame herself in retrospect for past choices. Frame them as coping under difficult circumstances.

Listening to Abuse Disclosures

Here are some guidelines for professionals when a woman relates details of abuse. A “disclosure” as we mean it is the first time she tells someone about the abuse, or the first time she tells you.

1. Take a breath

Think for a few seconds about your responsibility here. She is choosing you as the person to tell some very personal and potentially embarrassing information. Your reactions over the next few minutes determine the fullness and completeness of her account. Your reactions also determine how comfortable she will be telling someone else in the future. Also, be aware of how an inappropriate response could put her at greater risk.

2. Clarify any limits on confidentiality

If you cannot keep what she says in confidence, because of the nature of your role or because she may reveal something about children at risk, quickly let her know. If she chooses to tell you this information, she must know the potential consequences for herself and others. If she tells you after knowing you can't keep a confidence, this means she expects or wants you to take action or tell someone else.

3. Ensure privacy

If this is not already true, scan the immediate area to ensure you have privacy. For example, if the door is open, say: “I can close the door to give us some privacy. Is that okay?” and wait for her reply before doing so.

4. Stay quiet and listen

Faced with awkward pauses, our natural inclination is to jump in and fill them with talking. Give her as much time as she needs to choose her words.

5. Monitor your body language and facial expressions

She will read your physical reactions for clues. Do you believe her? Is she shocking or disgusting you? Is she boring you? She may stop talking if sensing any of these things are true.

6. Monitor her body language and facial expressions

Talking or even just thinking about past traumas may trigger the same feelings of fear and helplessness from when first living through those events. In the extreme, a woman could experience a flashback or dissociative episode removing her from the here-and-now and transporting her mentally to somewhere else. Fortunately, this is rare. Watch her rate of breathing and other visible signs of distress or evidence she is overwhelmed by a flood of emotions. Talking through past painful events can be cathartic and liberating. But be prepared to encourage her to stop talking about the past and start focusing on the present, to calm herself.

7. Use touch only with her permission

If you feel a hug or a touch of the hand might be calming and supportive, ask before reaching out.

8. Normalize her experiences

When appropriate, convey these concepts: what happened was not your fault, I'm glad you felt comfortable telling someone what happened, you are not alone in having these experiences or in feeling this way. Reflect on what she seems to be feeling, as in "I can tell it's difficult for you to talk about this."

9. Clarify the next steps

Before she leaves, outline what happens next or ascertain what she expects from you. If you will be telling others what she said, such as colleagues at your agency, let her know.

10. Debrief with a colleague if necessary

Be prepared for the emotional reaction you may feel when hearing the disclosures of women. Their stories may leave you feeling sad, angry, or shocked. While these feelings are normal, it is not helpful to share your reactions with the woman. When needing to process your response to abuse disclosures, find a supportive colleague or seek out the guidance of your supervisor.



"Vicarious trauma" and "secondary trauma" are two of the terms describing how work with trauma survivors has a cumulative impact on our own thoughts and emotions. We discuss this topic in the Helping Hands guides called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters*.

RESEARCH FILE: Feedback from Women on How NOT to Respond to Disclosures



Canadian researchers interviewed 27 women survivors of child-sexual abuse about their experiences accessing health services. Among their many observations, they offered suggestions for what NOT to say or do as a woman describes the abuse she experienced. DO NOT:

- remain silent, because you may be perceived as ignoring her
- spout a list of directive statements ("shoulds")
- offer pity (e.g., "Oh, you poor thing") or insincere concern
- tell her to "Look on the bright side"
- dwell on the negative
- smile (a neutral or concerned expression is more appropriate)
- touch the person without permission even if you intend it as a soothing gesture
- interrupt (let her finish speaking)
- try to say something that will "fix it"
- say anything that invalidates her decision to disclose or her experiences of abuse (e.g., "Don't tell anyone about it" or "But don't you think your parents did the best they could?")
- tell the person to forget about it (e.g., "Put it behind you." "Get over it!" or "Don't dwell on the past.")
- minimize the potential impact of past abuse (e.g., "I know a woman that this happened to and she became an Olympic gold medalist." "Let's just concentrate on your back pain." "What's that got to do with your sprained ankle?")
- ask intrusive questions that are not pertinent to treatment
- talk about yourself, your experiences, or someone else's experiences
- disclose your own history of abuse
- give the impression that you know everything there is to know on the subject.

Candice Schachter, Carol Stalker & Eli Teram (2000). *Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Professionals: Lessons from Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. Ottawa ON: Health Canada.

Common Control Tactics

Coercive control is the defining feature of “abuse” as we use that term here. Physically assaultive men and emotionally abusive men have much in common because they use similar control tactics and for similar reasons. They have an intense need to meet their needs by controlling and manipulating how others think, feel and act. The Power & Control Wheel (see page 56) describes several control tactics, including intimidation, coercion and threats, isolation, using male privilege and minimizing or denying harm. Here are 10 different but similar control tactics to help women label their experiences and feelings. It’s not likely that any one man uses all ten tactics, but every abused woman will identify with many of them.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Master of the Remote Control



If your attempt to start a conversation about control tactics is not going well, ask her this: “How did he use the TV remote control at home? Did you two discuss which channels to watch and when to change the channel?” Follow-up questions could include:

- Did his use of the remote control change when other people were present, people from outside the family?
- Why did he need so badly to control the remote control/TV viewing, did he ever say or can you guess?
- Did he ever ask what you wanted to watch?
- Why did he believe his remote control use was okay?
- Did he criticize you about your choice of TV shows?
- If you really wanted to watch a particular show and he didn’t want to watch it, how did you deal with that? How did he react?

Use the remote control example to talk about his motives for control, rationalizations, ability to empathize, and how she placated the situation. Once establishing these concepts, you can transfer them to other domains such as family finances.

1. Orchestrating public image of himself

An abusive man can take great pains to present an image of himself as a “great guy” by attending his place of worship, volunteering, being affable and gregarious in social situations, being a good employee, or mowing the neighbours’ lawn when they’re away. As we discussed previously under the paradoxes, seemingly nice guys can be abusive at home. Or abusive men can have good qualities in some contexts. He may publicly criticize men who are abusive to their families. The manipulation of his image starts with the woman herself, as he denigrates his ex-partners as vindictive or mentally unstable. He is their victim. Women often report that he is a great guy to have at a party, is generous with friends, is charming and charismatic. Indeed, this charisma is probably what attracted her in the first place. The positive feedback he gets from others feeds his ego. He may send the family into debt to purchase the toys and status symbols he believes he deserves, such as a fancy car or speed boat. The toys make him look successful. How does his “image management” make her feel? At first, she might believe she is crazy to have negative thoughts about such a popular man. She may be reluctant to reach out for help, fearing that no one will believe her. He might use his good image in court, as a defence against assault charges or to seek child custody. The judge may disbelieve her allegations because he isn’t the “type” to be an abuser. A variation on this tactic is when he links his inappropriate actions to mental illness, childhood abuse, or other personal tragedy. He is a victim to be pitied.

2. Orchestrating public image of his partner

Creating a negative public opinion of his partner, he gets sympathy for “putting up with her” and he’s guaranteed the moral high ground if she leaves. If he casts her in the role of emotionally unstable liar, her later allegations of his abuse are discredited. “She abuses me” is the classic claim of an abusive man, so “I was just defending myself.” He may use backhand compliments like describing her as sweet but not so bright, nice to look at but always complaining. He may describe her as depressed, troubled, and in need of his guidance just to cope on a daily basis. She is such a lousy mother that he must make up for her deficits so the kids don’t suffer. His calls to the child protective services create an image of himself as concerned parent and a file record of her as suspect parent. He may encourage her reliance on drugs so he has a “buddy” to party with or, in the extreme, not take drugs himself but control her by controlling her access to drugs. He might criticize her for being an addict and hold himself up as a noble guy who stays with her despite her problems. Some abusive men take their partners to a psychiatrist or take them to the hospital as “suicidal.” Shelter workers can tell you about men calling up to report the “real story” on their troubled partners, trying to manipulate even workers in the anti-violence field. He may hold himself up as a hero for rescuing her from a bad situation such as an abusive ex-boyfriend. “I treat her like a queen compared with her ex-husband.” If the police are called in the heat of conflict, he might “calm down” quickly leaving the appearance of a reasonable man dealing with a distraught woman. Consequences of this image management include that she might initially believe his portrayals of her or be confused by his mixed messages, she could have difficulty getting support from friends and family after leaving, and her attempts to get custody of the children may be compromised.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Power & Control Model for Women’s Substance Abuse



If you know a woman struggling with addictions who was cast in the role of drug buddy by an abusive partner, use the Internet to find the Power & Control Model for Women’s Substance Abuse. Tactics listed there include: encouraging her drug dependency, forcing her to sell drugs, preventing her from attending treatment, belittling her for having a drug problem, and threatening to hurt her if she doesn’t get high with him.

3. The ever-present potential for “a scene”

Only the most toxic man will be abusive 24/7. Periods of “normal” life inevitably elapse between incidents. At the back of her mind, she well knows how the peace can end in an instant. She stage manages life to avoid the situations which experience suggests will trigger an abusive episode, especially when other people might see it and she will be embarrassed. Don’t disagree with him about even a trivial issue because it’s not worth the inevitable argument. Avoid conflict at all costs, keep family from visiting when he’s home, have dinner ready on schedule, keep out of sight when his drinking buddies are over, stop attending social events, anticipate even his unexpressed wants. She walks on eggshells trying desperately to do everything correctly, but inevitably he erupts at something and she is left guessing what to do differently next time. Even more destabilizing are men whose abuse is always unpredictable with no apparent pattern. The ever-present potential to erupt, especially when other people are present, is an extremely successful strategy to get his own way and keep all attention focused on his needs. He appears to lose control to stay in control.

4. The ever-present potential for escalation of the control tactics

Some of the most dangerous men are the least likely to use physical abuse. They don’t have to. A menacing look is an effective control tactic if she knows he’s capable of hurting her. Driving through the countryside pointing out places he could bury her body where she’d never be found. Completing passport applications for the children, forging her signature, and leaving the papers out in plain view. These are highly controlling tactics because they threaten a horrible consequence for non-compliance with his wishes.

5. Creating dependency (real or imagined)

The Power & Control Wheel lists isolation as a control tactic, like how he discourages her from seeing friends and family, especially anyone critical of him. The flip side of isolation is how a woman comes to believe she cannot survive without him. He creates an emotional dependency if she believes she's lucky to have him, no other man would want her, or she needs him to guide and manage her life. Creating financial dependency is another tactic, one that might keep her from leaving. He can prevent her from working, prevent her from learning English or developing other job skills, tell her she's not good enough to get a job, sabotage her efforts to keep a job, threaten to report her illegal job if she doesn't give him her income. He can destroy her credit rating by running up debts in her name or refuse to return a dowry to her family if she wants a divorce. Fearing abandonment and destitution, she is desperate to keep him happy. If she does leave, financial pressures could force her return, especially if she has children.

6. Misusing and distorting religion

Some research suggests that religiosity is associated with lower levels of domestic violence in men as a group, but anyone who works in this field has seen men justifying abuse with religion. Most if not all religions, except those linked to matriarchal societies, condone if not encourage male domination of women. At the same time, the one shared ethic across religions is the ethic of reciprocity: "treat others as you would like to be treated." Like others who distort religion for twisted ends, men who cite scripture cherry-pick the bits justifying their actions and ignore the bits condemning them. Her partner's image as devout can cause a woman to worry that no one will believe he mistreats her. A woman might use her own faith as a coping strategy to deal with the stress and confusion of religious rationalizations. Seeking the counsel of faith leaders, she may be treated with great understanding, or admonished to suffer in silence. A man who acknowledges wrongful behaviour can still use religion to escape blame. A Christian might ask his partner, "Christ has forgiven me, why can't you?"

7. Surveillance and monitoring

Another visible manifestation of control is the need to know her whereabouts at all times. This is often accompanied by the need to know whom she is with or whom she speaks with. Like the other tactics described here, it is a common occurrence but not a universal one and can range in intensity. Attempts at monitoring can include frequent, random calls through the day to ensure she's where she's supposed to be, dropping by her work place unexpectedly, checking the details of her Internet usage or e-mail, or checking the car's mileage to see how far she travelled. He might forbid her from leaving the home unless accompanied by him or an approved chaperone. Relatively old-fashioned electronic monitoring via listening devices or hidden cameras has been joined by new computer-based devices. Key logging software once installed is virtually undetectable by the user and will periodically e-mail a log of everything typed including chat and web surfing. Web cams can be activated surreptitiously by a remote user, who can hear all conversation in the vicinity of the computer. Most conversations on mobile phones or cordless phones can be eavesdropped on. The GPS features of mobile phones have the potential to monitor a person's location and movements. Surveillance contributes to a paranoia-like feeling in a woman when he seems inexplicably to know private details of her life. She may lie about her whereabouts just to have coffee with a friend, for example, which amplifies his need to control. Many women lose jobs because of partners disrupting the workplace with frequent calls and visits.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

After separation, surveillance is "stalking" and a red flag to trigger concern for her safety. Be especially cautious if he breaks into her home to augment his monitoring. Even if he instigated the break-up, he may be fixated on the idea she is "cheating" with other men. Jealousy is a feeling. Stalking is a behaviour. Men who act on their feelings are more worrisome than men who talk about them.

RESEARCH FILE: A Typology of Stalkers



In this Australian study of 145 stalkers from a forensic context, five categories emerged. The harassment involved repeated, persistent and unwelcome attempts to communicate (at least 10 times) over at least four weeks, most commonly with telephone calls, letters, notes left on the victim's property, and e-mail. Stalkers maintained contact by approaching victims in public, surveillance, persistent following, leaving unsolicited gifts, ordering goods and services in the victim's name (e.g., pizza), damaging property (most often cars) and, less commonly, with electronic equipment. About half assaulted their victims at least once. The variables most highly correlated with assault were prior criminal record and substance abuse. Overall, 30% of these stalkers were ex-partners. As the authors note, being stalked by a stranger, especially someone with a mental illness, is fear-inducing. However, the highest rates of violence were observed in the rejected ex-partners. The smallest category, called "predators," were strangers who stalked women for a sexual purpose. The other categories, defined based on motivation and context, were these:

Rejected

This was the most common type in this sample. They were typically, but not always, former romantic partners and most (85%) were male. They felt a loss of the relationship and could cycle between a desire for reconciliation or for revenge, of sadness and anger, and of jealousy and vindictiveness. About half (54%) assaulted the victims and these assaults were always preceded by threats of harm. About 20% made threats but were not assaultive. Most were employed (71%) but half had criminal records and almost a third had histories of substance abuse. They were the most persistent of the stalkers, the average duration being 41 months, and they used a wide variety of methods to communicate and follow their victims. They were the most likely to use frequent telephone calls for harassment. Included in this group were men termed as "morbidly jealous" and cases in which custody disputes figured large. It was noted that prosecution was less successful in ending the stalking if either of these elements was present.

Intimacy seekers

These stalkers have an intense, delusional fascination with a person they saw as their one true love. Into this group fell those diagnosed with erotomania who believed, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that their love is reciprocated. When spurned by the objects of their affection, they could become angry but they were the least likely to be assaultive. Prosecution alone was generally not successful and psychiatric treatment was usually required. They stalked their victims for an average of 39 months.

Incompetent

This group, predominantly unemployed men, included people who acknowledged that the objects of their affection did not reciprocate their desire for a relationship. Nevertheless, they hoped the attention would be endearing and ultimately a successful strategy at winning the victim's love. People in this group could be intellectually delayed, not sophisticated in courtship etiquette, or people who felt entitled to a relationship without having the skills or patience for conventional dating. About a quarter assaulted their victims. They tended to have a history of stalking because they might use the same strategy on multiple victims. The average duration of stalking was 16 months.

Resentful

The goal of this group (81% men) was to be frightening and upsetting often because of a perceived grievance that may or may not be reality-based. They could show considerable self-righteousness or a sense of persecution. Sometimes the victim was known to them but sometimes the victim was chosen at random. Threats of harm were common (87%) and one quarter of them did assault their victims. Engaging the legal system to protect victims can deepen their sense of grievance.

Paul Mullen, Michele Pathé & others (1999). Study of Stalkers. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156(8): 1244-9.

8. Emotional blackmail to inspire guilt

By inducing guilt, he keeps her focused on his needs and he hopes to prevent her from leaving or entice her to reconcile if she does. Emotional blackmail takes many forms, ranging from the silent treatment or pouting when he doesn't get his way through to threatening suicide. If sensing she plans to end the relationship, he may amplify the guilt: "you owe me because of X," "I helped you with Y so you must return the favour," "if you leave I'll start using drugs again." He may get mutual friends to lobby on his behalf, saying "tell her I can't live without her." He may do self-destructive things to prove that point, like drink and drive. He may enter therapy, saying: "see, I'm trying."

9. Obsessive jealousy and possessiveness

As part of objectification, dehumanization and sense of ownership, an abusive man may be obsessed with maintaining his right to proprietary sexual access to his partner. This attitude manifests in obsessive jealousy that usually has no foundation in reality. No matter what she does – dressing like a frump, walking with eyes aimed at the ground – nothing can convince him that she is not flirting or seeking sexual liaison with other men. So distorted can be this thinking that a woman giving a police statement may be accused of having sex with the investigating officers. Or the man can see the police officers as having a sexual motivation for believing and aiding her.

10. Denying her right to have thoughts and feelings different from his

In great measure, this is linked to the low capacity for empathy discussed later. She must share his opinions and may be criticized for voicing a feeling he doesn't believe she should have.

RESEARCH FILE: Control Tactics Involving Children



Children can be used in control tactics both when they live together as a family or after a separation, to gain her compliance with his demands, prevent her from leaving, or continue abuse and monitoring after separation. He can threaten to involve child protective services, encourage the children to disrespect her, mount a sustained custody battle, use the children to monitor their mother, harass the woman during child transfer for visitation, or threaten child abduction (e.g., take them to his country of origin). In this American study of 156 women in social service settings, most of whom had ended the abusive relationship, 88% reported at least one of these child-related control tactics:

- used children to stay involved in the woman's life (70%)
- used children to keep track of the woman (69%)
- used children to harass the woman (58%)
- used children to intimidate the woman (58%)
- used children to frighten the woman (44%)
- tried to turn the children against her (47%)
- tried to convince children she should reconcile with her partner (45%)

These tactics were more commonly used by biological fathers and likelihood of their use was positively correlated with severity of abuse, especially emotional abuse.

Marisa Beeble, Deborah Bybee & Cris Sullivan (2007). Abusive Men's Use of Children to Control Their Partners and Ex-partners. *European Psychologist*, 12(1): 54-61.

RESEARCH FILE: Fear of Child Abduction



In a U.K. study of mothers using child custody centres to facilitate visitation with physically abusive ex-partners, 65% worried about abduction of their children.

Christine Harrison (2008). Implacably Hostile or Appropriately Protective?: Women Managing Child Contact in the Context of Family Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 14(4): 381-405.

RESEARCH FILE: Profiles of Abusive Men



Psychologist Lundy Bancroft has treated thousands of abusive men and documented his observations in several excellent books. In this one, written for abused women, he outlines myths about abusive men and answers questions commonly posed by women. Abusive men share many commonalities, especially how they think and rationalize their actions, but there exists wide variation in styles and intensity. He devised these 10 descriptive profiles. Some men fall neatly into one but most straddle two or more.

The Demand Man

Needs to be catered to, life must revolve around him, highly critical of partner but feels he is above criticism, feels partner is lucky to have him, is nice to others if it serves his needs.

Mr. Right

Feels superior in all respects to partner (and others), she is stupid or always wrong, he knows what is best for everyone, can list all your faults, is an expert at everything.

The Water Torturer

Has a calm, low key presentation, sarcastic, derisive, uses constant but low level insults.

The Drill Sergeant

Must control a woman's every move because otherwise she will do everything wrong, highly critical, constantly monitors her whereabouts, isolates her, possessive and jealous, sends mixed messages (I love you but you disgust me), potentially very violent.

Mr. Sensitive

He seems superficially like a great guy, needs endless discussion about his "issues" and focus on his emotional needs, uses therapy jargon, sees his abuse as a reaction to an emotional wound, cries easily, denounces macho men who are abusive.

The Player

Often good looking, can be intensively romantic at on-set of relationship but ardor cools, initially builds up her self esteem and then withdraws interest, may set women in his life against each other, chronically unfaithful, women are playthings, may claim sex addiction.

Rambo

Aggressive with everyone, likes to intimidate people, woman can initially feel safe and protected but eventually he turns on her because he doesn't respect women. Men shouldn't hit women but his partner is an exception because of her behaviour.

The Victim

Feels persecuted, unrespected, taken advantage of, wants sympathy, feels abused.

The Terrorist

Terrorizes partner with threats of what he might or could do, sadistic, likes to see her afraid, highly dangerous, highly controlling, may stalk a woman who leaves him.

The Mentally Ill or Addicted Abuser

Like all humans, abusive men can have mental disorders or abuse drugs or alcohol which exacerbates but does not cause abusive behaviour. Some forms of mental illness can increase dangerousness, such as paranoia or delusions, and medication alone will not prevent abuse. It is necessary to treat the illness alongside the treatment for abusive thinking styles. His patterns of abuse can take the form of any of the other nine profiles.

Lundy Bancroft (2002). *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. Berkley Books.

Rationalizations for Abuse

A man may not see his abusive actions and words as wrong. He sees the behaviour as normal, random mistakes, or even necessary. In other words, he can *rationalize* it.

1. A rationalization is an excuse for doing something which is wrong

“Rationalization” is a fancy word for an excuse or permission to justify doing something that is objectively wrong. Rationalizations help a man see his unacceptable behaviour as acceptable: it was justified (“she hit me first”), misunderstood, or the victim lied or exaggerated. If he does actually recognize his actions as wrong, rationalizations help him believe it was not his fault or not a bad reflection on him, as when he claims stress or alcohol was the cause.

2. Abusers use rationalizations to explain their actions to others

Rationalizations are not *reasons* man uses abuse. They are *excuses* he uses to convince himself (and others) that his behaviour is justified or that he meant no harm. For example, a man can rationalize hitting his wife and children as something his religion mandates. “God requires me to do this” is a rationalization.

3. Rationalizations protect a man from seeing himself as a bad person

Rationalizations help defend and protect a man from seeing himself as an “abuser” or “batterer” or a man with a problem. “I’m not the type of person who would hit a woman or make her feel afraid of me.” There is a strong societal taboo against men hitting women. It’s almost fashionable these days to admit being an addict or being bi-polar, but it’s not cool to say you’re an abuser of women. In batterers’ treatment programs, the first task is to encourage men to understand these things: yes, you are in the right program; yes, you are like these other men; and, yes, you have a problem that needs to change. This is a tall order for someone who spent years believing his behaviour is justified or normal. If he does recognize the wrongness of the actions, rationalizations help him see the behaviour as out of character and not a reflection of his true, core self. “Everyone makes a mistake now and again and I said I was sorry.” “Everyone does stupid things when they’ve had too much to drink.” His is incensed when arrested and/or made to attend a treatment program and feels misunderstood and persecuted.

4. Most rationalizations focus on the woman’s behaviour

She won’t stop nagging, she gets on my nerves, she was flirting with that guy, she won’t keep those children quiet, she gained too much weight, she never cleans the house, she spends too much money, she won’t listen to me, she embarrassed me in front of my friends, she disrespected me, she’s lazy, she made me angry by doing X when she knows I hate X, she hit me first, my life sucks because of her, she knows I have a temper so it’s her choice to stay. I criticize her because I care and I want her to be a better person. Yelling is the only way to get her to listen to me. I get crazy because I love her so much.

5. So a woman might see his rationalizations as valid criticisms of her

Being blamed for his actions, she might feel responsible for “causing” his abuse. Maybe I could lose some weight, be a better mother, keep the house cleaner, not ask him to do household chores (I’ll do them all), or be more careful spending money. The message is that changing herself could prevent future abuse. She has the power to make him change. He is powerless. He is a victim of her choices.

RESEARCH FILE: Men's Accounts of their Abusive Behaviour



How do men explain their abusive actions to their partners after-the-fact? A man's account to a partner can be a good predictor of her continued presence in the relationship. Women may be more likely to stay if he apologizes and promises to change, or if he links his behaviour to a personal or temporary problem such as job stress. Another goal of these accounts is for the man to distance himself from the role of "batterer" by seeing his actions as externally or situationally driven rather than as a representation of his true core self. In fact, in his mind, he may be a victim of the situation, or of his partner. While his account may not be true or valid, it represents how he perceives his behaviour and explains it to others such as the police.

This researcher defined four categories of accounts she heard from men in treatment. In this framework, men's accounts vary in terms of their acceptance of responsibility and whether they see anything wrong in what they did. In providing accounts to partners, men can start with one and move to another, as in apologizing but then offering an excuse. Over the course of a relationship, their accounts for successive incidents can change, as when the likelihood of an apology declines over time.

Excuse

He admits his actions were wrong but claims it wasn't his fault. He denies responsibility. Examples include, he was drunk or under a lot of stress at work. In the absence of those external factors, he would not have done it so he can continue to think of himself as a "good guy." Any harm he caused was unintended.

Justification

He accepts responsibility for his actions but denies they were wrong. Examples include "sure I hit her but she wouldn't shut up" or "she was hitting me and I had to calm her down." He tries to remedy a shortcoming in his partner or reacts to her actions. His bad actions are trivial relative to all the good things he does.

Apology (to partner) or Confession (to police, courts)

He accepts responsibility and admits his actions were wrong. This may preserve his sense of being a "good guy" because he is owning up to a mistake. There can be an implicit or explicit promise to change.

Dismissal / Minimization / Repudiation

He acknowledges no responsibility for an act he regards as acceptable (i.e., no accountability is required). This may be called denial. May use passive description as in "she got hit" or "her face ran into my fist," minimize the act ("it was a little push") or describe what he didn't do ("I never used my fist"). Only "batterers" hit women so he preserves a sense of himself as being different from the other men in the program.

The author spoke with 14 men during intake into a batterers' treatment program. She originally intended to ask about three incidents: the first, last, and most remarkable. However, most of the men said the incident triggering referral to the program was the only incident. They were anxious to talk to her, to "set the record straight." The most common account type given to her was "justification" and the men typically blamed their partners for causing them to use violence. The second most common account type was "minimization" followed by "excuse." She asked them to describe how they explained their actions to the partners. They were reluctant to discuss this topic. They mostly blamed the women. Two-thirds said the women apologized to them, making it safe for some (but not all) of the men to apologize back.

Jamie Mullaney (2007). Telling it Like a Man: Masculinities and Battering Men's Accounts of their Violence. *Men & Masculinities*, 10(2): 222-247.

6. Other rationalizations focus on circumstances or on his problems

I'm under a lot of stress at work, the kids were so noisy I couldn't hear myself think, I had way too much to drink, it's my job as the man to keep order at home, it's my right as the breadwinner to decide how the money is spent, I have a bad temper, we always argue about money and sometimes I lose it. The message of these rationalizations is that he is not responsible for his actions. Things might get better when the situation changes (e.g., he gets a better job), but he generally sees these external factors as being beyond his control to change.

7. Rationalizations send messages

The messages of rationalizations can include that the man is blameless or misunderstood, the woman is at fault or chose to trigger his abuse, preventing future incidents is within the woman's power, and preventing future incidents is out of his control. Some rationalizations can look and feel like love, as when he is obsessively jealous. A man can block a woman from working while at the same time denying her money from his income to meet the children's needs. This is economic abuse. His excuses might include things like, "it's my job as the breadwinner to handle the money," or "she'll just waste the money." Messages hidden in these rationalizations are that the man is superior and the woman is incompetent or cannot be trusted to make good decisions.

Rationalization	Message	What Woman Might Think
I was drunk / I was abused as a child	I have no control over my actions; my bad behaviour is logical	It's not his fault; I shouldn't take it personally
I have a drinking problem or a drug problem	This illness makes me do it	He has a problem and I must be patient and supportive
She was looking at another guy and made me jealous	I don't trust her; she is my possession	He loves me deeply
I have a bad temper and she knows it	Take me as I am or get out, I'm not willing to change	You must take the good with the bad in relationships
She pushes my buttons by doing X	She chooses to make me abusive	What he did is my fault: I should try hard to stop doing X
She hit me first	A man can't allow himself to be disrespected by a woman	What he did is my fault; it's not fair that he was arrested
I lost control	I need to be more in control	He couldn't help himself
I'm under stress because I'm trying to quit drinking	If you push me too far, I'll have to start drinking again	If he starts drinking again, it will be my fault
I made a mistake but I said I was sorry	Apologizing makes everything okay	He feels bad so I should forgive him; he won't do it again
God demands that I keep the family in line	If you have an issue, take it up with God not me	I have no option because God chose this life for me
Only men should be in charge of family finances	Women are not competent to handle money	I am not competent to handle money; I'm lucky to have him to help me with money issues
I earned the money so I can spend it any way I want	What you need to buy is not important to me; It's my money not our money	I don't deserve to have my basic needs met; I can't participate in financial decisions

8. A man's ability to rationalize his actions prevents him from taking responsibility

A person who sees his behaviour as a logical and reasonable response to the behaviour of someone else or to life circumstances will always see the cause of this behaviour as lying outside himself. It's someone else who needs to change, either themselves or their expectations.

9. His abusive behaviour will not stop until he takes responsibility for his choices

Knowing that smoking is bad doesn't make it easy to quit. But we aren't likely to quit until we appreciate that fact. It's the same with changing the attitudes and values that drive abuse.

10. Rationalizations can lose their power if a woman sees them

If a woman accepts male rationalizations as valid, she feels guilty, unworthy, or any number of emotions that sap her spirit. Eventually, perhaps helped by a supportive friend or counsellor, she can see the messages underlying the rationalizations, stop believing them, and stop internalizing them into her core beliefs about herself. She can understand how they work to undermine her sense of self-worth, and how they reveal more about the man himself than about her. When a woman understands the process of rationalization, they lose their power to control how she feels and what she believes. She can see that abuse is never justified by her behaviour.

RESEARCH FILE: How Men Explain their Violence



Australian researchers asked men to explain their use of violence in relationships. Explanations always focused on the woman and how his behaviour was a logical or reasonable reaction to her behaviour. The researchers defined four categories of men:

The Martyr

- he sees himself as rescuer of woman from a bad situation (e.g., bad parents, abusive ex-boyfriend, work in the sex trade, homelessness, drug abuse)
- sees the woman as ungrateful if she criticizes him, stands up to him, seeks greater freedoms, makes "excessive" demands or has "unfair" expectations
- uses anger, violence or threats to assert his dominance over an ungrateful woman, often after a period of slowly building resentment

The Victim

- he sees himself as taken advantage of by her, perhaps even abused by her
- sees her as abusive to him, unstable, moody, alcoholic, addicted, or self-centred
- uses anger, violence or threats to show how unfairly he is treated, how unhappy he is, how disappointed or unloved he feels, or to "defend" himself against abuse by the woman

The Patriarch

- he sees himself as dominant over his (ideally) submissive partner
- his partner deserves abuse by not meeting his expectations or standards
- uses anger, violence or threats to punish the woman for not conforming to his rules, to show he is in charge, to get his own way, or to prevent her from leaving

The Rescuer

- like the "martyr," believes he rescued the woman from a bad situation
- sees the woman as needing guidance, unable to make decisions on her own, a possession or trophy, something that he has shaped, or someone who should be grateful to him
- he uses anger, violence or threats in the same way as the "patriarch"

K. James, B. Seddon & J. Brown (2002). *'Using it' or 'Losing it': Men's Constructions of their Violence Towards Female Partners*. Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse.

Common Characteristics of Controlling Men

A woman will have questions about her partner's behaviour, chief among them being "Why does he do that?" The short answer is this: he thinks it's okay, he rarely suffers a negative consequence, and it gets him what he wants, like attention and being catered to. For the long answer, read Lundy Bancroft's book on how abusive men think.



Lundy Bancroft (2002). *Why Does He Do that? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. Berkley Books.

As you read there, abusive and controlling men don't have anger management problems. Their behaviour is not caused by mental illness or substance abuse, although they are both popular excuses and the presence of those factors can increase his dangerousness. An abusive man has an intense need to control, driven by a deep sense of entitlement. "I want to be the centre of attention and I deserve to be the center of attention in this family." Maybe that's the arrangement his father demanded and achieved. Male privilege and entitlement are reinforced by society and popular culture, when boys grow up hearing messages that males are better than females and men must be in charge. But all boys don't grow up to be abusers, and this is true of most boys with abusive fathers. The recipe to make an abusive man is a complex stew of factors we don't completely understand. It takes many years to create those thinking patterns and it's difficult to undo the damage. The features of his character permitting the mental gymnastics of rationalization are deep and strong. These five features are traits common in men ordered into treatment for abuse. Not all men have all five characteristics, but they are fairly common.

1. Self-centredness

Abusive men are usually self-centred. This characteristic goes by several labels: egotistical, selfish, narcissistic, immature, or arrogant. Whatever label is used, it means he sees himself as unquestionably the most important person in the family and his needs and desires come first. He is the centre of the universe. Or, he sees himself as an egalitarian partner but his actions say otherwise. It's common that problems first emerge when a baby enters the equation. Now having to share his partner's attention with this newcomer, he feels slighted and ignored. He may see the baby as purposefully competing for his rights or trying to get on his nerves. This trait is often accompanied by a sense of superiority over others, or at least a sense that his partner is far inferior to him. Possible consequences for women include being treated like a servant, focusing 100% on his wants (and 0% on her own), and feeling pressure to anticipate his wishes. She may describe him as being "like having another child," with constant demands for attention and temper tantrums when not getting his way. Most types of psychotherapy aren't effective with abusive men because talking about themselves, their problems and the injustices they endured, such as childhood abuse and vindictive ex-partners, feeds their intense ego needs and preference to blame others for their problems.

2. Externalization of blame

Blaming other people for their actions and problems is the second common feature of abusive men. This may be called blame shifting. Everything bad is somebody else's fault. It's why – in his mind – the woman is to blame for her own victimization, or it's stress or booze or God's will or his unreasonable boss at work, or his mother who abused him or his father who abandoned him. As we said earlier, when he clings to rationalizations that excuse or justify his choices, he can't believe he can control and change his behaviour.

RESEARCH FILE: I Didn't Do it and, if I Did, it Wasn't My Fault



Interviewing 14 men ordered to attend a treatment program, these authors listened to them describe the behaviour resulting in charges against them. In their minds, having to go to the program was an unfair punishment and absolved their partners from any blame in the incident. They saw their behaviour as misunderstood, exaggerated, the allegation was fabricated, or the incident was a mutual “argument.” Men who admitted the behaviour linked it to factors beyond their control such as work stress, self-defense, provocation, or a logical reaction to the victim’s behaviour. They minimized the severity of their actions or described their behaviour as normal and saw themselves as victims of the justice system.

Marilyn Smith & Elizabeth Randall (2007). Self-deception Among Men Who are Mandated to Attend a Batterer Intervention Program. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 43(4): 193-203.

3. Low capacity for empathy

The flip side of self-centeredness – being absorbed entirely with one’s own needs – is the inability to discern the needs of others. Empathy is the capacity to understand the situation, feelings or motives of another person. It’s often described as the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. So lack of empathy is the inability to see things from the point of view of other people or to be truly concerned about what happens to others. When an abusive man tells his partner what to think, it’s in part because he can’t imagine why anyone could or would think differently than he does. He projects his own thoughts and feelings onto others because he can’t appreciate what they might actually be thinking and feeling. It’s also why he assumes his partner can divine his unexpressed wants. Treatment programs for abusive men focus intently on teaching men to understand what their partners logically think and feel in response to their intimidation and abuse. The inability to empathize is also a major detriment when it comes to fathering.

4. Threat sensitivity

An abusive man might be defensive, take everything as a personal attack, or have a thin skin. You could say “he can dish it out but he can’t take it.” He takes offense easily and quickly feels rejected or slighted or taken advantage of in situations that others would slough off. His partner’s innocent conversation with another man is perceived as flirting or as humiliating to him because other people thought she was flirting and making him look bad. He may have a deep fear of abandonment, much stronger than the average person.

5. Resists authority

One final category we will present here is how abusive men can have difficulty living within externally imposed constraints. Speeding laws don’t apply to him because they are stupid or they only apply to unsafe drivers. He’ll drive as fast as he likes and feel persecuted if given a ticket. He may accumulate dozens of unpaid tickets. Some abusive men irrationally fail to inhibit behaviour repeatedly leading to consequence or punishment. Rules don’t apply to them. They apply their well-honed skills of rationalization to explain away the decisions of police to arrest them or of judges to incarcerate them.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

The inclination to resist authority is a factor to be taken into account when he is considered for bail, non-carceral sentences or conditional releases such as parole. A history of flouting the justice system (e.g., failure to appear in court or breach of probation) is a red flag for the possibility that a restraining order or non-association condition will not be adhered to. These legal protections do not protect all women.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION ● PROCEED WITH CAUTION ● PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Rating tools to predict “risk” of future dangerousness are developed by studying some of the characteristics of groups and deriving averages and correlations. They serve an educational function to help us ask better questions, determine client profiles of agencies, prioritize access to services, etc. But these scores should never be used to predict the behaviour of a specific individual. Be aware that prediction of this type inevitably leads to false positives (predicting harm when none happens) or the more concerning false negatives (not predicting harm when harm is the result). Moreover, they cannot take into account the unmeasured contextual variables and random factors often precipitating tragic incidents. Finally, it is often true that insufficient information is available to complete accurately these risk instruments. Use them responsibly as a guide in conjunction with other prudent safety precautions.

RESEARCH FILE: Psychopaths vs. Abusers



A trend in the psychological literature is to develop typologies of abusive men based on physiological responses or on psychiatric diagnoses. Much is written on the idea that partner abusive men suffer from personality disorders, such as border-line personality disorder or anti-social personality disorder (which *some* people also call psychopathy). This mental-health lens is rightly viewed with caution by women’s advocates because it reduces male accountability. However, the driver to find a typology is an idea with merit: that the overall effectiveness of interventions would increase if we match treatment types to categories of abusers. There is also the real fear that traditional batterer interventions teach some men to be more dangerous and sophisticated abusers. Insight-oriented treatments or those aimed at increasing capacity for empathy are not likely to be successful with a sub-group of men, who learn to cloak their abuse by, for example, mimicking therapy jargon. Some people believe it is the “psychopaths” who fall into this category. Women’s advocates will recognize the diagnostic features of a “psychopath” as matching closely the profile of highly controlling men. Compare the tactics from the Power & Control Wheel with these concepts measured with the Hare Psychopathy Checklist: superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathological lying, cunning manipulation, lack of remorse or guilt, insincerity/shallowness, callousness or lack of empathy, failure to accept responsibility for own actions, promiscuous sexual behaviour, need for stimulation/proneness to boredom, poor behavioural control, impulsivity, irresponsibility, defying rules of the criminal justice system, and having many short-term relationships. Descriptions of “psychopathy” also speak of a sense of entitlement, narcissism, reckless disregard for the safety of others, poor judgment and inability to learn from experience. In this Swedish study, 164 femicide cases were studied including in-depth psychiatric assessment of the 136 men available for interview (e.g., 39 had killed themselves). Among them, seven met the diagnostic criteria for psychopathy, both confirming that some abusive men could be labelled as psychopaths but also suggesting that the proportion is low, at least among men who commit intimate homicide.

Henrik Belfrage & Mikael Rying (2004). Characteristics of Spousal Homicide Perpetrators: A Study of All Cases of Spousal Homicide in Sweden. *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, 14: 121-133.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Closing the Door Slowly



Before moving on with life, women often need to understand their ex-partner’s behaviour. Why did he do that? That’s a difficult question to answer but we can help her describe and put labels on what he did. The handout on page 69 helps a woman articulate some of the ways her partner expressed his attitude of entitlement. As she nears the end of her process of closure, the handout on page 73 lets her think about what to let go from the past and what lessons to bring forward.

Points about Coping with Abuse

We all live one day at a time, embracing life's joys and dealing with the problems that inevitably come our way. When living in an abusive relationship, coping becomes a matter of survival.

1. "Coping" is how we react to situations taxing our capacity to manage

Problems arise every day, like the car needs new brakes or the cat coughs up a fur ball on the expensive rug. For most little problems, we deal with them and move on. Coping, as we define it here, comes into play when a situation is not manageable or a problem taxes our ability to function. The death of a loved one is an example. We are forced to cope with the grief and loss. We have no choice. *How* we cope is our choice, to some extent.

2. The purpose of coping is to feel better

We use coping strategies either to solve the stressful problem, or to manage its emotional effects. We consciously or unconsciously seek ways to feel better. Otherwise, we would feel agitated and worried all the time. Coping can involve thoughts that make us feel better (e.g., my recently departed loved one is in a better place now or free from pain) or actions that make us feel better (e.g., attending a bereavement group to speak with others in a similar situation).

3. Different people have different types and levels of resources to access for coping

A problem easily dealt with by one person can be insurmountable for another. We draw from our internal and external resources when needing to cope. Having money in a savings account helps when the car needs new brakes, for example. Resources can include supportive family or friends, life experience giving us perspective, intelligence, self-confidence, good health, optimistic outlook on life, social skills, knowledge gained from past success at solving the same problem, or a strong religious faith. Some people also refer to the concept of "coping skills" or "coping choices," meaning a repertoire of skills such as problem solving or denial we access when needed.

4. Our ability to deal with problems can be compromised by multiple stressors

A stressor easily dealt with one day may be overwhelming on another day. Life stresses can include losing a job, confronting a major illness, or ending a relationship. Maybe we could deal with one thing but when they come together they are overwhelming. The cumulative effect of multiple problems can reduce our ability to manage situations that we usually deal with easily.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Concept of Coping



When a woman is aware of her own coping strategies, she can identify which ones are effective or ineffective and which ones are effective but at a cost to her in the long-run. One way to conceptualize coping is to think about how some problems in life are things we can "deal with" or manage and some problems tax our ability to function. Using the diagram on page 75, help a woman identify past problems she had success in coping with and list ways she responded to those problems. Her list can include effective, ineffective, and effective but costly strategies (e.g., getting drunk). Encourage her to see her own strengths, like dogged perseverance, chutzpah, reaching out for help, venting to cool off, complaining to authorities, etc. For each, ask: Did it help you feel better? Did it solve the problem? Did it make things worse? Then ask about issues she currently struggles with. Help her make a list of possible actions that could solve the problem or help her feel better. Which ones could be effective without a downside for her?

5. An abusive relationship calls upon a woman to use her coping resources

Living with abuse and control tactics challenges anyone's ability to cope with daily life. Over time a victim is pushed off her emotional balance by unpredictable and irrational demands and "damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't" expectations. Either the criticism is constant and wearing, or she lives on edge not knowing what will trigger an outburst or when. She copes with the churning emotions of fear, self-doubt, guilt, helplessness, vulnerability and shame. Practical matters of daily life require her attention and she may be exhausted with maintaining the household to his standards. She juggles his demands and needs with those of the children, and keeps up the appearance that all is well at home, to maintain her privacy and her dignity.

6. Trying to stop or avoid the abuse is one way to cope

Trying to solve a problem is one way to cope with that problem. Solving the problem eliminates its negative effects, including the overwhelming emotions and turmoil it creates. The category of "engagement coping" includes placating a partner to avoid abuse and trying to end the relationship. The need for problem-focused coping may continue after separation, in the form of self-protection and healing. A review of the research literature shows these techniques of engagement coping observed in abused women:

- physical avoidance or withdrawal (e.g., not going home or going out if he's in a "bad mood" or drinking)
- conflict avoidance: not expressing her opinions, ignoring the abuse, refusing to argue or not contradicting him for fear of triggering violence
- trying to please him with attention, praise, food, sex, etc.
- self-defensive violence or pre-emptive aggression or homicide in the extreme
- help seeking (e.g., counselling, legal advice, going to a shelter)
- calling the police or threatening to call police
- formulating plans for leaving (e.g., hiding money) or seeking economic independence to leave (e.g., getting a job, upgrading education)
- using the legal system for protection (e.g., restraining orders)
- changing herself to make him happier (e.g., getting breast implants)
- using prayer may be an engagement coping strategy if a woman believes it will rescue her or help him become a better person.

These active and passive attempts to avoid or stop abuse are not always effective.

7. Some coping strategies involve feelings or thoughts

Another type of coping is called "disengaged" coping because it doesn't change a bad situation but the user tries to reduce her levels of stress and tension by how she thinks or feels about the situation. Techniques can include these:

- avoiding thinking about the bad situation
- distraction / focusing on something else to forget about the bad situation
- minimization: "I can deal with it," "it's not so bad"
- distancing herself mentally
- self-criticism: "his abuse of me is my fault so I guess I am to blame for feeling this way"
- wishful thinking: "maybe he'll be hit by a bus"
- escape fantasy: daydreaming about a happier life for herself
- lowering expectations: "maybe all men are like this so I shouldn't expect more"
- selective attention: "he's a good provider and the kids adore him"
- positive comparisons: "he isn't as bad as my first husband," "my father was worse"
- re-framing a negative as positive: "years of his financial control taught me good budgeting"
- suicide to remove herself from the situation
- numbing by self-medication (drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, food) or self-injury
- seeking sexual encounters for self-soothing
- dissociation / pretending not to be there
- maintaining the "secret" of abuse so she doesn't have to be embarrassed or ashamed

RESEARCH FILE: Coping Strategies of the Women who “Stay”



These authors interviewed 38 American women ages 55 to 90 (average age 58) who acknowledged they were or had been in long-term abusive relationships of 20 years or more. The women described using internal and external resources to maintain a sense of self-respect over years of demeaning treatment. They relied on a variety of coping strategies to find new meaning and assert boundaries to make the situation tolerable. Some reappraised their situations and expectations and learned to think of themselves, their partners and the relationships in different ways. For example, some accepted what they couldn't control, objectified the abuser (he does it because he's an "X"), learned to name the abuse in order to understand it, or created autonomy by developing separate lives and activities from their partners. Some women immersed themselves in activities associated with the role of wife, homemaker or mother. All of them reached out to others for the support, emotional connection and fulfilment absent in their relationships. Most of them portrayed to outsiders an image of conjugal connection or unity. It worked for them.

Therese Zink, C. Jeff Jacobson and others (2006). A Lifetime of Intimate Partner Violence: Coping Strategies of Older Women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(5): 634-651.

8. All coping works to some extent at the time but there can be a cost in the long run

We naturally gravitate to coping strategies that help us to feel better or solve a problem. So all coping is to some extent successful. It gets us through a bad time. But some coping strategies have a cost. Drug use is an example. It works because it numbs the pain or aids forgetting. But it doesn't solve the problem and it stops working when the high wears off. As a coping strategy, to maintain its effectiveness, it must be repeated over and over so that casual drug use becomes an addiction. Or a person resorts to drugs for any stressful situation, and life is full of stress. Use drugs in reaction to workplace stress and you'll have a new problem: unemployment. Use drugs when the kids get on your nerves and one day that problem is over: the kids are taken by child protection services. A strategy effective for one type of stress can itself become a problem to be coped with.

9. The need for coping may continue after an abusive relationship ends

Some people might assume that a woman's problems are solved once the abuse stops. However, even the transition toward a life free of abuse can be a bumpy road with much uncertainty, disruption, second-guessing, loneliness and a myriad other thoughts and feelings.

10. When a woman can't use one effective strategy, she may need to rely on another

Sometimes women are forced to abandon a costly coping strategy, like when entering a shelter with rules against alcohol use. To give up a costly coping strategy is usually to give up an effective coping strategy. Having no access to it impairs her defences against the thoughts and feelings she kept at bay – and to any new worries and problems that arise. This flood of emotion may be overwhelming and will be unbearable for some. Whether conscious of it or not, she will be looking for another effective way to cope. This might be a good time to start a discussion about her coping choices and their consequences. Encouraging the adoption of less-costly coping is arguably a good place to start when seeking to reduce a person's reliance on costly styles of coping. Like rationalizations, we can't see coping without knowing what to look for. When women can identify their own coping strategies, it's easier to separate the ones worth keeping from those not helpful in the long run. Help her develop her problem-solving skills so she doesn't get stuck in disengaged modes of coping. But don't denigrate her disengagement coping strategies. They're neither inherently good nor bad but are healthy or costly.

TOOL BOX IDEAL: Having a Conversation About Coping



Recognizing, naming and assessing our own unique coping strategies helps us build a repertoire of effective and healthy coping. A nice, but not guaranteed, consequence is that some costly strategies may fall away as the healthier ones take hold. That's a long process. Here are some guidelines for any conversation about coping.

Name the problem(s)

We only need to “cope” when a problem taxes our ability to manage. Problems can be *situations* (like up-coming eviction) or *overwhelming feelings* (like anger at being evicted, fear of what happens next, sadness at being in this situation, guilt for how it affects the children). The process of problem-focused coping is aided by defining the problem. It's also important to verbalizing the feelings generated by the problem.

Make a list of possible coping responses

Support her as she lists some ways she might solve that problem and also deal with its emotional consequences. Talking with you might be one of the things on the list.

Link to past successes

Guide her to remember times in the past where she was in a tough spot but everything eventually worked out. What personal qualities and strategies worked then?

Avoid value judgments

No strategy she suggests is inherently “good” or “bad” but some are effective and some are not effective or have a temporary benefit (e.g., having a smoke feels good at the time). Guide her to link the strategy (e.g., eating chocolate) with the consequences both positive (I feel good while I'm eating it) and not-so-positive (I feel bad about myself).

Accentuate positive coping and “harm reduction”

Don't focus solely on extinguishing the “bad” strategies, perhaps an unrealistic idea at a time of crisis and transition. Giving up smoking, for example, may be an overwhelming thought. Moreover, smoking cigarettes is better than smoking crack.

Validate how tough this is

When she's coping with a serious problem, encourage all her efforts no matter how small.

Self-care is an important part of coping

Self-care alone does not solve problems and it's trite to suggest that a bubble bath helps in the long run. However, it's important to get enough sleep and meet basic needs.

Build on her natural strengths and comfort levels

What works for one woman may not work for another. Reading a trashy novel can be either a great distraction or an insurmountable challenge (for anyone with literacy deficits).

Encourage success with gentle prodding if necessary

In times of stress and crisis, she may be inspired to great effort or immobilized by procrastination, avoidance, hope for rescue, and other features of human nature.

Break the big problem into chunks

Breaking a big problem into pieces makes it more manageable. For the woman facing eviction, she may have these tasks: amassing boxes, packing and moving her belongings, finding storage, finding someplace to live temporarily, and finding a new place to live. She may have legal options if the eviction was inappropriate. By prioritizing the tasks and tackling one at a time, she could feel less overwhelmed and gain satisfaction from the series of small victories along the way. Check in with her periodically so she can share her progress.

RESEARCH FILE: The Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index



These authors examined the coping strategies women use to control violence. Drawing upon a variety of sources including focus groups with women, they developed a list of strategies and then organized them into categories.

Resistance

- ended the relationship
- refused to do what he said
- fought back physically
- slept separately
- left home to get away from him
- used a weapon

Legal

- called police
- filed for protection order
- helped to file criminal charges
- tried to get legal assistance

Placating

- tried to keep things quiet for him
- tried not to cry
- did whatever he wanted

Seeking informal help

- talked to family members
- stayed with family or friends
- sent kids to stay with family or friends

Seeking formal help

- talked to a domestic violence program
- tried to get him counselling
- talked to a doctor or nurse
- stayed in a shelter
- called a mental health counsellor
- tried to get help from clergy / employer
- tried to get help for alcohol / substance abuse

Safety Planning

- hid money/valuables
- kept important telephone numbers
- kept the house or car keys close by
- hid important papers
- kept a weapon accessible
- worked out an escape plan
- developed a danger code
- kept a supply of basics available
- removed or hid weapons

Placating and resistance were the most commonly used strategies but also reported to be the least helpful. However, 75% of women reported that calling the police had been helpful.

Lisa Goodman, Mary Ann Dutton and others (2003). The Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index. *Violence Against Women*, 9(2): 163-186.

Feelings and Thoughts Blocking “Emotional Leaving”

Ending an abusive relationship is not so much an event as a process, one with at least two stages: physical leaving and emotional leaving (sometimes called closure). Those two stages may elapse over a few days or take years. Some women leave emotionally long before they leave physically, while some women leave physically – maybe even entering a shelter – but continue to feel emotional pulls to the relationship.



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters*, you find several handouts for any woman struggling with the emotional leaving process. She can chart where she is in the leaving process, identify her barriers to physical and emotional leaving, and list the factors she is weighing in the stay/leave decision.

Barriers to physical leaving include financial factors, lack of support, fear for personal safety or that of others, child-related fears, and various legal concerns related to property rights, child custody and maybe immigration issues. Below are some of the barriers a woman might experience to emotional leaving. These ten feelings and thoughts can keep her in the relationship long after deciding to leave. Or maybe they compel her to reconcile after leaving.

1. Hoping for change / deferred happiness

As illustrated on the “ROAD to Here” diagram (page 67), most relationships start out happy, even blissfully so sometimes. He is charming and romantic and she feels special and loved. It’s only over time that little problems creep into her awareness, ones she dismisses at first, optimistic that better days do lie ahead. At some point, she could re-assess her expectations of what a relationship should be. In this phase of decision making, a woman knows she’s not happy but hopes things will improve. Maybe he’ll be happier or nicer when he gets a job or stops drinking. Maybe his emotional problems will respond to counselling, like needing to heal from childhood abuse. When he blames her for his inappropriate actions, she’ll try to change something about herself: lose weight, be sexier, have a baby, nag less, keep the kids quieter. “Maybe I’m not happy today, but staying put is my best chance for future happiness.”

2. Commitment to and investment in the relationship

A woman struggling with the stay/leave decision might take into account the time and energy she invested in making the relationship work. She’ll have good memories along with the bad ones, and have built a comfortable home, become close with his family (or maybe not), or have developed a familiar routine. All that is lost is she leaves. Age may be a factor here, if she feels too old to “start over” with someone else or she hears the ticking of a biological clock. “I’ve given him the best years of my life.” In some religions and cultures, divorce is discouraged or forbidden. Even without those factors, some women see the marriage vows as a commitment for life.

3. Trade-off / minimization of harm

A woman might cope with abuse by minimizing the severity of the consequences or accepting them as a reasonable trade-off for a perceived benefit. She might think, “sure, he’s no saint but he’s a good provider and the children love him.” She decides to tolerate the bad parts to gain continued access to the good parts, for her or for her children. You may hear women express these sentiments: “as long as the kids don’t know, I can put up with it,” “I’d rather be with an abusive partner than be alone,” “he only gets abusive when he drinks and the other times he’s a great guy,” “I’ll stay as long as he doesn’t injure me badly” or “I love him so it’s worth it.”

4. Anticipation of loss

The end of any relationship is associated with many losses. There are practical losses, like decline in standard of living and the need to parent on your own. There are also emotional losses, like living alone for the first time in a while (or ever). Even where there is abuse in a relationship, there can also be times of physical affection and closeness. There are other more odious worries, such as deportation if he sponsored her immigration, or she might worry he will report her illegal job or turn her in for welfare fraud. The possibility of losing custody of her children, real or imagined, is also a powerful loss she'll do much to avoid.

5. Resignation

Not true of every woman, there are some women who resign themselves to having no choice in how life evolves or who expect nothing but hardship and unhappiness. It's best not to hope for something good because then you won't be disappointed. Marriage is forever so I'm stuck with him no matter how bad he is. This is the life God chose for me. All men are like that so another guy won't be any different. I'm not worthy of a partner who would treat me with respect.

6. Shame and embarrassment about "how it looks" to others

Another series of thoughts that might block a woman from leaving is a concern for appearances. Does being single make you a failure? Will people say "I told you he was no good!"? Will divorce bring shame on her extended family or signal that she is a loser because she's been divorced before? How could she have been so stupid to get involved with him in the first place? Women might be embarrassed to reach out and confide to others about their struggles or ask for help.

7. Child-related guilt

Many issues fall into this category including the belief that children need two parents, the commitment to stick it out so the children don't experience parental divorce, knowing how much the children love and would miss their father, the idea they would hate her if she left, knowing they would have to move and change schools, and worrying they might want to stay with him rather than leave with her. There are myriad fears related to fighting for custody through the courts and worrying about taking care of them financially on her own.

8. Circumstances blocking emotional closure

Sometimes circumstances beyond her control mean she can't emotionally process the end of the relationship. A sudden departure on his part denies her an opportunity to talk things through, leaving her with much she wants and needs to tell him. Not having an opportunity to confront him about the abuse leaves some women hanging with unresolved issues. Love can't be turned off in an instant, no matter how much you want it to. Being replaced easily and quickly with a new woman is always emotionally painful, especially when she believed that she tolerated a great deal in the relationship.

9. Concern for him if she leaves

Another factor weighing into the stay/leave decision of some women is how leaving will be unfairly negative for her partner. She might feel this way if he has a problem, like addiction, so she should be supportive and not "abandon" him. Or maybe she is the breadwinner or holder of a pension that supports them. Or maybe she's the caregiver to an abusive man with a health condition. Who would look after him once she leaves?

10. Lack of confidence in herself

Finally, a woman may plainly believe that she could not take care of herself, is lucky to have him, couldn't do any better, or could never find anyone else to love her.

Promises Not to Make to Women

These statements may reflect your true belief but should be voiced with caution.

1. Don't promise everything will be better as soon as she leaves

The leave/stay decision is usually an agonizing one. It's typically best for a woman – health-wise and emotionally – to stop living with an abusive partner until he addresses his problems. But the challenges don't evaporate once co-habitation ceases. Before life gets better, she can face many difficult days and lots of changes and uncertainty. A woman might experience a reduction in her standard of living, need to move residences (disrupting the children's lives), suffer loneliness and self-doubt, be ostracized by former friends, or suffer harsh criticism from his or her family. Perhaps they'll be "worth it" in the end when life is better, but there will be some hard days until then.

2. Don't promise that talking about "hurts" automatically makes things better

We all have variable comfort levels with personal disclosure. Some of us find catharsis in talking about painful issues. Others are overwhelmed with embarrassment and want to guard our dignity by preserving our privacy. Ask yourself, is it necessary that I know all the details? For some types of intervention it is necessary, as when taking a police statement. For others, she chooses how much to reveal and at what pace. There is also a tremendous cultural bias in the suggestion that disclosure is always cathartic. The need for privacy about personal matters, especially concerning the family, is intensely ingrained in most non-Westernized cultures.

RESEARCH FILE: Abused Women from Collectivist Societies



These authors observe that interventions for abused women in Western countries evolved in a context valuing individualism while many women live in countries where collectivism is the dominant cultural pattern. In individualist societies such as North America, Western Europe, and Australia/New Zealand, models of intervention share an understanding of gender role inequality as a socialization process. Most interventions emerged in a context that assumes collective well-being is an outcome of individual well-being. In collectivist societies of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and the Pacific, individuals define themselves as members of a collective, be that a family, tribe, caste, or ethnicity. This self-identity can continue after emigration if a community forms a collectivist minority with an individualist majority culture. Their first obligation is to the collective and an individual's well-being is dependent upon the survival and growth of the collective. The success or failure of one person is of broader concern because his reputation reflects the group. Individuals may deny their own needs and aspirations in favour of the family needs. This reality intersects with the vertical power hierarchy where men are above women in status. A woman will be blamed for being abused but so might her family, especially her mother, who did not raise her daughter to be a good wife and mother. Without information to the contrary, abuse is assumed to be a husband's legitimate response to a woman's failure to meet conjugal expectations. So a man's abuse of his wife is also directed at the reputation of her family. She may return to her family of origin but will be under strong pressure to reconcile. The authors explain a number of reasons that an abused woman is unlikely to disclose abuse even to family members and will be unlikely to voluntarily involve outsiders in her problems.

Muhammad Haj-Yahia & Elisheva Sadan (2008). Issues in Intervention with Battered Women in Collectivist Societies. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 34(1): 1-13.

3. Don't promise that a batterer intervention program will make the abuse stop

At least for a time, most women want to preserve the relationship but have the abusive parts stop. To this end, they hold out hope that counselling will make things better. If only he would “talk to someone” or “get help.” Recognizing that anger management programs or marital counselling don’t address the underlying drivers for male violence – which are a sense of entitlement and deep belief that his actions are normal, acceptable or justified – many communities created specialized programs for male violence. While going by various names, they are generically called “batterer intervention programs” (BIP). This intervention technique has been much evaluated and conclusions are not generally optimistic. The same thought patterns and character traits fuelling their abusive behaviour make these men difficult to engage in treatment and resistant to change. Benefits measured as reductions in abuse are often short-term and limited to certain categories of men such as the educated and employed. The drop-out rate is high. Some men even become more sophisticated abusers as their manipulation skills are honed. The safest conclusion we can gain from the research is that a percentage of men who complete the program (optimistically as high as 30%) will stop at least some forms of abuse. Here is the crux of the matter: as we interact with a woman, we have no idea if her partner will be among those 30% of men, or if her partner will be among the group for which there is no change (or if his abusive behaviour will get worse). Indeed, most programs go to great lengths to warn that a man’s attendance in the program (even completion of all sessions) is no guarantee she will be safe from abuse. Program staff will explain how physical violence can temporarily stop in the face of external controls such as bail conditions or probation supervision. Also, emotional abuse and other control tactics may worsen as the physical tactics decline. A man’s entry into treatment can be a positive step for the family and is something to be encouraged, but help women have realistic expectations about the outcome.

RESEARCH FILE: Men’s Treatment as the “Last Hope”



These authors conducted in-depth interviews with a small sample of women whose partners attended a batterers’ treatment program. As expected, women hoped to maintain the relationship but wanted the abuse to stop. They felt powerless, afraid, subject to his double standard of expectations, trapped, and emotionally in turmoil. They used various strategies to cope, including changing their expectations, but none was successful. These women came to a realization: they could not control the abuse and could not continue to live with the abuse. Some worried they might be killed. They reluctantly called the police to seek outside help believing this was their last hope and his last chance to take steps to preserve the relationship. They hoped he could learn and change. After reviewing the literature on program effectiveness, these authors warned that practitioners should be frank about the limitations of batterer treatment and encourage women to take protective measures such as safety planning in the event the intervention is not successful in creating change in his thinking and behaviour.

Marilyn Smith & Elizabeth Randall (2007). Batterer Intervention Program: The Victim’s Hope in Ending the Abuse and Maintaining the Relationship. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 28(9): 1045-1063.

4. Don't promise that everything she shares will be held in confidence

Creating trust and building a therapeutic alliance demands that you respect her privacy and hold her personal information in confidence. Depending upon where you live and work, there are probably ethical or legal restrictions on what you can and cannot hold in confidence. Be up front with her about any limits to your promise of confidentiality. If a court subpoenaed your file records, would you have to comply? If you learned about child abuse, would you have to report it? If she told you she plans to kill herself, how would you legally and ethically be required to respond? Or would you maintain her confidence about a suicide threat? Sometimes people tell you things hoping you will report it. So be clear.

5. Don't promise that the children will thank her for leaving an abusive partner

It's true that the children are better off if not living with abuse. But their support for a separation is not guaranteed. It's a paradox, but children can love a father who abuses them or their mother. Children can blame a mother more for the abuse than they blame their father. Men who are abusive to women can be seen by the children as good fathers (at least some of the time) and the emotional and behaviour problems of children can flare up or be exacerbated in the weeks and months after separation from an abusive father. Some children desperately pray for a separation and some live in fear of it. Two children in the same family may fall into different camps. Because you can't know how children will react, it's best not to make this promise.

6. Don't promise she'll get custody of the children just because he was abusive

We talked a lot about this topic in the section on paradoxes. Myths about domestic violence permeate the legal system because the legal system is staffed by human beings. Like average people, they make "logical assumptions" about abuse and people's reactions to it. But abuse is illogical and doesn't make sense. As experienced as you may be in your local legal system and how it works, no one can predict how a judge will rule.

7. Don't promise that involving the justice system will guarantee her safety

Calling the police may be followed by a reduction in at least physical abuse. Or it can have no effect or make the abuse worse. So you can't make this promise. Resisting authority is a common trait in abusive men. Where this trait is present, a man may not show up for court, ignore restraining orders, violate probation conditions and stop involvement in court-mandated treatment. Often, the most dangerous men are most likely to ignore court orders. If he's planning to kill her, the thought of reprimand by a probation officer holds little threat. There are pros and cons to involving the police or seeking a restraining order which you can explain to her. Be realistic about the benefits and honest about all possible consequences.

8. Don't promise 100% that she'll be glad she left

Maybe this will be true for her, because it's true for most women. Today is difficult but tomorrow will be better. You will also meet women whose lives spiral downward and who never gain the even footing they seek. No one can predict the future.

9. Don't promise that getting an abusive partner out of her life solves all her problems

We wrote earlier about how some coping strategies may cause on-going problems for her well after he's gone. She may continue to struggle with personal challenges even after abuse ends.

10. Don't promise that you know how she feels

Maybe you've had a similar experience, but did anyone really, truly know how you felt?

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

On page 41, we cautioned against using risk instruments to predict what a man will do. This has a fancy name, called the "ecological fallacy," because you make a conclusion at one level of analysis (individual) using information from a different level of analysis (group). The same applies to understanding women. If a study says most abused women are X, don't assume the woman sitting in front of you is X. Each woman is an individual so don't make assumptions about her by generalizing from research that uses correlations and averages.

Final Thought

1. Be kind

We've tried in these pages to present a sound and grounded base of understanding about how abuse affects women. If one thing above all is clear to us, it is that women can blossom and thrive once free from abuse and fear. The compassionate support of the helpers and the healers they meet along the way hastens their journey toward peace. One idea underpins all the principles and assumptions here. The Dalai Lama said it well: "My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness." To listen with respect and without judgment, to give her choices and to provide hope that better days lie ahead – these are the essence of service and the essence of kindness.

Ideas for Using the Handouts

Throughout this guide, you will find “tool box ideas” about using the handouts that follow. You’ll also devise other creative ways to weave them into your work to respond to “reachable moments” as they arise. Make photocopies to use as appropriate in the context of one-on-one work with a woman. If you want to organize groups for women, these are some suggested topics. Augment the handouts with other material you have found helpful.

Topic: What is Abuse?

- Myths About Abuse in Relationships
- The Power & Control Wheel
- The WEB Scale
- The Equality Wheel
- Rights for Women in Intimate Relationships
- My Wheel for My Life

Topic: Being Proactive About Self-protection

- Thinking About My Safety

Topic: Control Tactics

- The Power & Control Wheel
- The Equality Wheel
- What “Entitlement” Looks Like

Topic: Rationalizations and their Messages

- Excuses, Excuses
- I’m not Crazy, I’m not a Liar, and I’m not Stupid

Topic: Coping

- What is “Coping”?
- You Know What You Need: Ask for it!
- What I Can and Cannot Change



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters: 101 Things to Know, Say and Do*, you find 13 handouts addressing the process of ending an abusive relationship, ideas for self-care, and red flags for abuse in relationships.

Myths About Abuse in Relationships

Myth: If there's no physical violence, my relationship is not abusive

Reality: Men can be extremely abusive but never physically violent

How often have you heard (or thought) this sentiment: “if he ever hit me, I’d leave him in a second.” For many women, physical violence – a slap or punch – is the line dividing an *unhappy* relationship from an *abusive* one. But physical abuse may be a poor way to tell if a relationship is abusive. It’s really the destructive exercise of power – be it physical, sexual, economical, or emotional – to control others that best defines abuse in a relationship or a family. To maintain this control, a man might use isolation, emotional abuse, intimidation, threats, or whatever tactic works. Find a copy of the Power & Control Wheel to see some examples of control tactics. They include demeaning comments, insults, taunts about being useless, lazy, fat, ugly, or stupid, dictating how she dresses, threats of suicide, threats of taking the children, surveillance, baseless jealousy, cutting her off from family or friends, abusing pets, destroying sentimental or valued possessions. Hurtful words leave bruises on your soul.

Myth: If there's been an incident of physical violence, the relationship is abusive

Reality: Using control tactics is what defines a relationship as “abusive”

Research shows that relatively minor incidents of physical violence are actually fairly uncommon in relationships. At least 25% of people ever in a relationship can report one or two incidents – a push or shove, throwing something at a person that could hurt them, a slap, or a hit. These incidents are reported as frequently by men as by women, typically occur during a bitter argument. Incidents like this may take place against the backdrop of prolonged marital unhappiness and conflict. Or they can come out of the blue in an argument. Assault is a crime and it is never right or justified. But you need to see that assault against the entire history of the relationship. Without a history of the power and control tactics described in the Power and Control Wheel, one slap or push does not mean a relationship is “abusive.” It is the on-going pattern of control, disrespect and intimidation that makes a relationship (as opposed to an action) abusive. The abusive dynamics of power and control typically involve a man abusing a woman.

Myth: As long as he doesn't hit me, I'm okay

Reality: Non-physical abuse is extremely toxic for women

It's easy to see the consequences of physical violence – bruises, cuts, scrapes, sprains, broken bones, burns, internal injuries, miscarriage, and even death. Injuries caused by non-physical abuse are less obvious but no less real. It is harder to see the slow erosion in self-confidence, how a woman loses touch with her own opinions and desires, abandons her dreams for the future, resigns herself to being unhappy, or comes to see herself as worthless, incompetent, and undeserving of anything better. Injuries on the inside are just as painful.

Myth: If he doesn't hit me again, the problem in our relationship is solved

Reality: Men can stop using physical abuse and continue to be abusive

The end of physical violence doesn't always mean the end of abuse. Counselling helps some men stop using physical violence. Arrest or going to prison works for others. But a man who stops the hitting can carry on with emotional abuse and other control tactics.

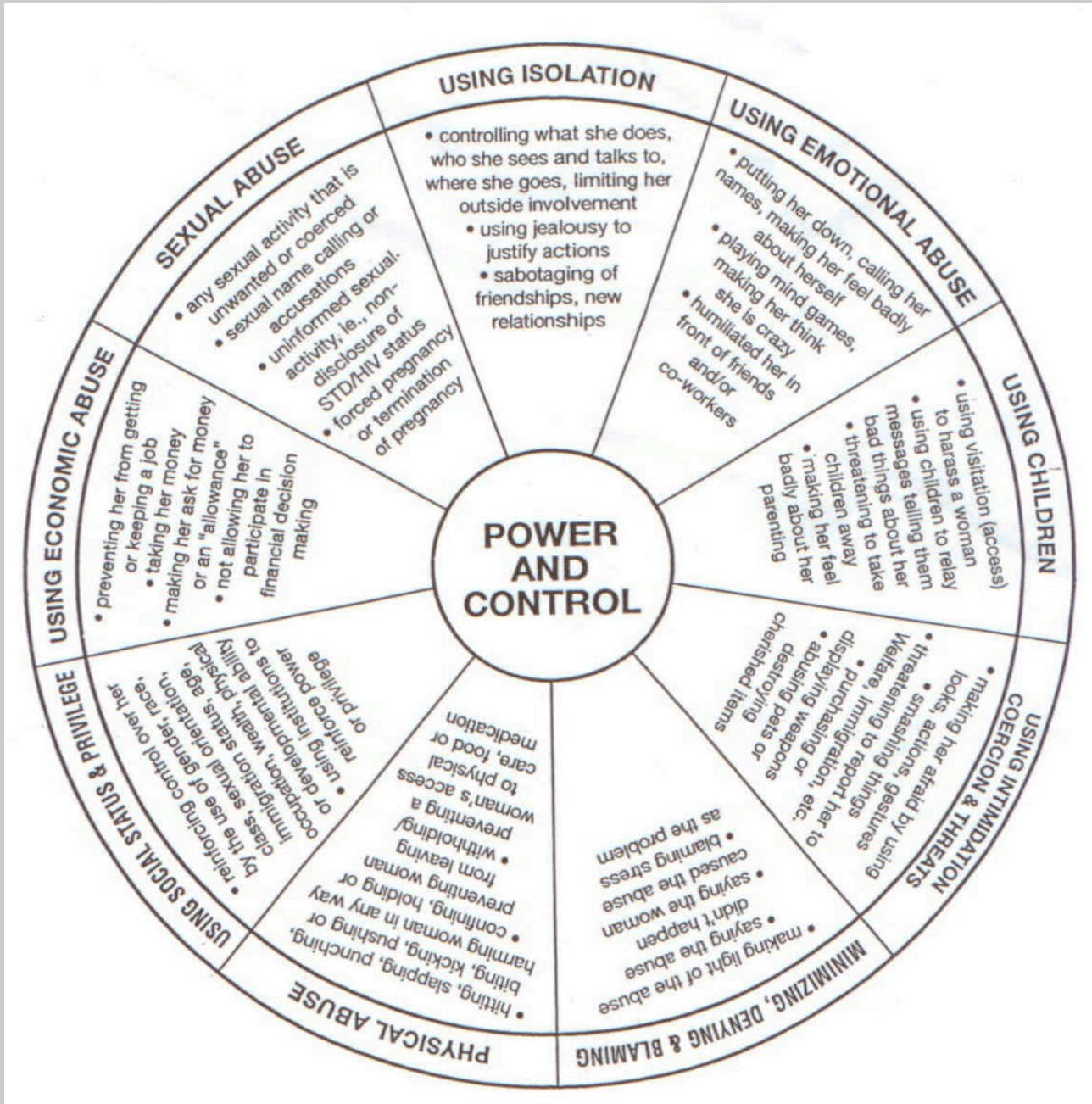
Myth: As long as he doesn't hit me, the kids are not badly affected

Reality: Children can be detrimentally affected by non-physical abuse at home

Yes, watching your mother being harmed in a physical way is not healthy for children. But it's also true that a daily climate of worry and fear is not healthy either. Family life shapes a child's core beliefs about him or herself (e.g., I'm different from other kids or I don't deserve to be happy). Abusive men are bad role models, distorting children's sense of what men and fathers should be. When a woman lives with an abusive partner, she may not be the best parent she wants to be. Some child will believe the twisted excuses used to justify hurtful behaviour (e.g., men are superior to women) or they can adopt some of the negative thoughts victims use to blame themselves (e.g., if Mom were a better housekeeper, he wouldn't get so angry). In short, children are definitely affected when they live control tactics and non-physical abuse at home.

The Power & Control Wheel

The original Power & Control Wheel was developed at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Minnesota and this version is an adaptation by the London Abused Women's Centre.



- a relationship can be "abusive" even if there is no hitting or other physical violence
- some men exhibit one or two of these controlling behaviours while others may exhibit more
- patterns of abuse can change over time through a relationship
- a man can be abusive from the beginning of a relationship, or abuse can start later
- control tactics over time erode a woman's confidence and leave her second guessing everything she says or does

The WEB Scale: What Abuse Feels Like



This questionnaire called the WEB Scale measures the coercive control tactics that define abusive relationships. Answer these 10 questions and then see how your score compares with those of other women.

For each of these 10 items, circle the number best describing how your partner makes you feel, or how your ex-partner made you feel when you were together.

		Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Agree a little	Disagree a little	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree
1.	He makes me feel unsafe even in my own home	5	4	3	2	1	0
2.	I feel ashamed of the things he does to me	5	4	3	2	1	0
3.	I try not to rock the boat because I am afraid of what he might do	5	4	3	2	1	0
4.	I feel like I am programmed to react a certain way to him	5	4	3	2	1	0
5.	I feel like he keeps me prisoner	5	4	3	2	1	0
6.	He makes me feel like I have no control over my life, no power, no protection	5	4	3	2	1	0
7.	I hide the truth from others because I am afraid not to	5	4	3	2	1	0
8.	I feel owned and controlled by him	5	4	3	2	1	0
9.	He can scare me without laying a hand on me	5	4	3	2	1	0
10.	He has a look that goes straight through me and terrifies me	5	4	3	2	1	0

Source: Ann Coker, Brian Pope, Paige Smith, Maureen Sanderson & James Hussey (2001). Assessment of Clinical Partner Violence Screening Tools. *Journal of the American Women's Medicine Association*, 56(1): 19-23.

Your Score

Add up the numbers you circled and put the total here: _____.

The lowest possible score is 0. The highest possible score is 50. A score of 10 or higher means there are enough control tactics to suggest that a woman is being abused in the relationship (or was abused in a former relationship).

About 18% of women will score 10 or higher.

Equality Wheel

This model defines a healthy, equal relationship. It was developed by the Domestic Abuse Program in Duluth, Minnesota, to help people to recognize the opposite of an abusive relationship, or those features of a relationship to encourage or expect. Control tactics are described in another model, called the Power & Control Wheel.



MYTH: If there is no hitting or physical violence, then a relationship isn't "abusive"

REALITY: In some of the most abusive relationships, there is no hitting or the physical violence was used once or twice. The opposite of abuse is not the absence of abuse. The opposite of abuse is equality in a relationship.

Rights for Women in Intimate Relationships

Source: The London Abused Women's Centre (London, Ontario, Canada). www.lawc.on.ca

The right to live free of violence from your intimate partner.

The right to be respected, valued and appreciated for the contributions and talents you bring to the relationship.

The right to have and express opinions that are different from your partner without fear of criticism or other repercussions.

The right to share equally with your partner in all decisions related to your relationship, children, home and finances. The right to a fair and negotiated distribution of labour in the home.

The right to be an independent person able to explore your own goals and needs without feeling guilty, selfish or afraid.

The right to have friendships with both women and men outside of your relationship.

The right to self-determination of your body -- to enjoy or refuse sexual activity, to expect and participate in safe sexual practices, to choose to use birth control, to choose when to have children or become pregnant, as well as to determine your comfortable body size, dress and appearance.

The right to have your emotional, physical and intellectual needs be as important as the needs of your partner.

The right to expect your partner to listen to and participate in resolving the difficulties in the relationship in ways that are not threatening, coercive or abusive.

The right to seek out professional help or other forms of support with your relationship.

The right to freedom of movement.

The right to terminate the relationship regardless of whether your partner may be promising to change or go to counselling.

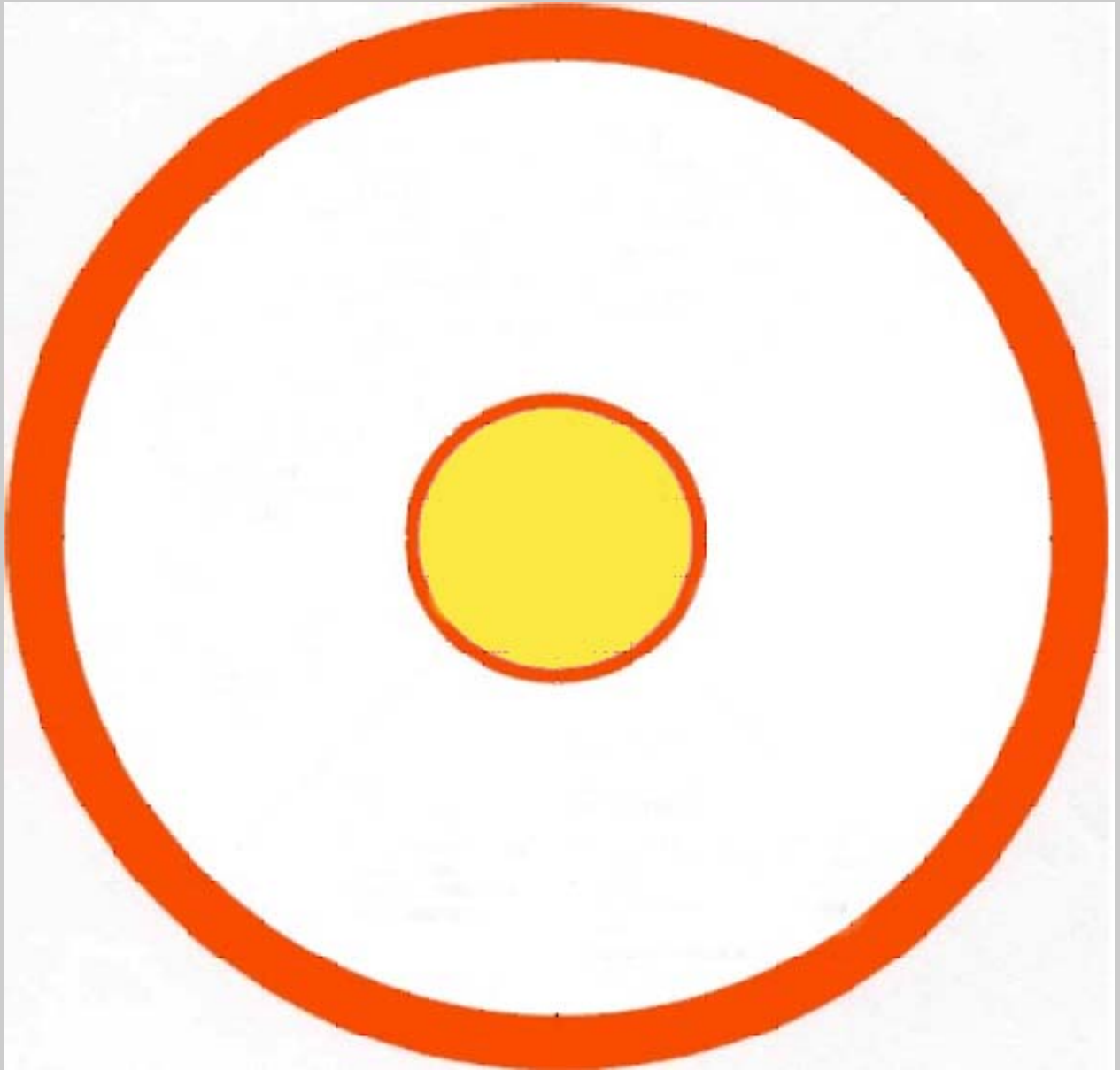
The right not to blame yourself if the relationship you have invested in ends.

The right to take action to end the abuse by your partner without guilt or self-blame.

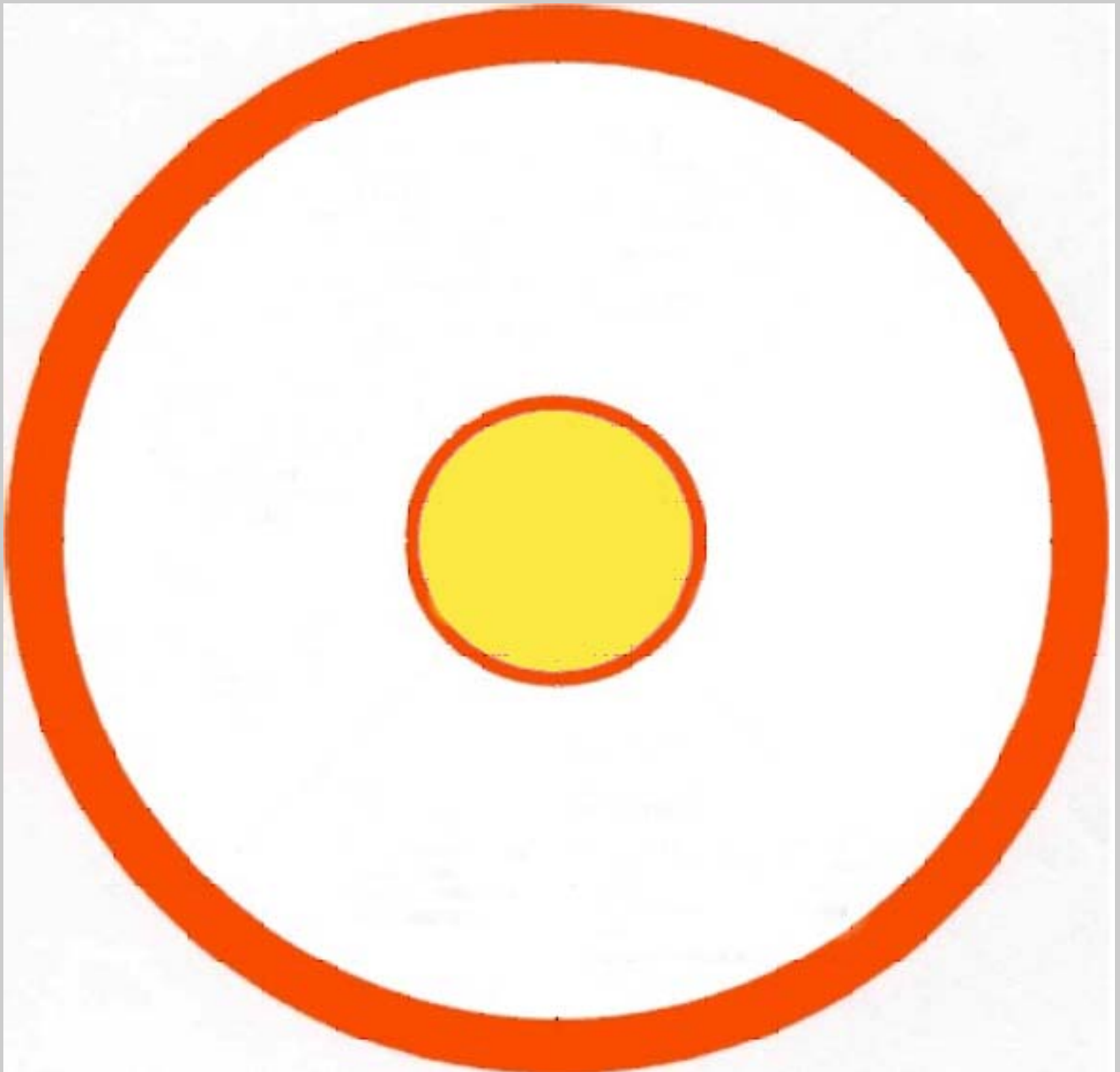
The right to expect and pursue a fair and equitable distribution of assets, property and support payments where necessary.

My Wheel for My Life

The “Power & Control Wheel” has “slices” describing control tactics women might experience in abusive relationships. Your own personal wheel describes *your* life. Maybe you have 3 slices or 10 slices. Some slices could be really big and some very small. In your Power & Control Wheel, maybe one slice takes up half the wheel. It’s your wheel, to reflect your life.



Title: _____



Title: _____

Thinking About My Safety

We know from research and sad experience that when a relationship ends, even when it was his idea, some men pose a risk to their partners. So let's take a few minutes to see if you should be taking steps to protect yourself. Notice how some questions ask about your partner but some questions ask about his and your current situation.

When looking at the potential for a man to seriously hurt or kill a woman, we consider the ABCs: his attitudes or opinions on certain topics, his past behaviour, and the current circumstances or context. These factors describe men who can be dangerous. No one (not even you) can predict what will happen in your case. *However, the more items you check off, the more important it is to get advice and support about safety precautions.*

Attitude

- ☐ he is extremely and obsessively jealous of other men in your life (real or imagined)
- ☐ he believes he has the right to control all aspects of your life
- ☐ or, he wants *you* to control all aspects of *his* life
- ☐ he is terrified of being abandoned or rejected (more than most people)
- ☐ he believes the two of you are destined by fate to be together
- ☐ he believes you shared past lives or will be together in future lifetimes
- ☐ he believes that if he can't have you, no man can
- ☐ he believes he could never survive if the two of you separated
- ☐ your separation is an extreme embarrassment in his culture, peer group or family that makes him look bad or inadequate as a man
- ☐ he believes you are his property
- ☐ he believes the children are his property and/or believes he has more right to custody of them than you do
- ☐ or he feels that way about your son or sons but not your daughter or daughters

Does he have other attitudes or opinions that worry you today?

Behaviour

- ☐ he has been physically violent towards you in the past
- ☐ he has been arrested for a domestic crime against you or someone else
- ☐ he has used severe violence in the past such as choking or threatening with a gun
- ☐ he threatened to kill himself if you ever left him
- ☐ he threatened to kill you and/or the children if you ever left him
- ☐ he hurt or killed pets or other animals
- ☐ he has hurt you (or threatened to) during previous separations

Are there other actions or behaviours that worry you?

Context / Current Circumstances

- ☐ you once lived together but separated in the previous year
- ☐ he is not adjusting well to the separation (even if it was his idea)
- ☐ he wants desperately to get back together, or runs hot and cold
- ☐ his controlling behaviour has continued even though you are separated
- ☐ his threatening or physically abusive behavior towards you has started since your separation, is getting more serious, or is getting more frequent
- ☐ he has broken into your residence when you were not there
- ☐ he has broken into your residence when you are at home
- ☐ he violates legal orders such as restraining orders, peace bonds or bail conditions
- ☐ he threatens to kill you and/or the children
- ☐ he threatens to kill himself
- ☐ he says he has dreams or fantasizes about killing you
- ☐ he is obsessing over your new boyfriend (real or imagined)
- ☐ he has or can get his hands on a gun or other weapon that can kill people
- ☐ he is depressed or suffering from another type of mental illness
- ☐ his use of alcohol and/or drugs is worrisome or has increased recently
- ☐ he is following you, spying on you, leaving notes or messages on your answering machine or other types of stalking
- ☐ he is unemployed or otherwise “down on his luck”
- ☐ people tell you they are worried about your safety
- ☐ you believe he may hurt you or try to kill you

Are there other aspects of your current situation worrying you?

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Worried about his potential to hurt you? You need a domestic violence advocate or police officer to help you make a safety plan, access the legal system for protection, or take other precautions such as entering a shelter or refuge. **These efforts should be your number one priority right now.** If you don't know where to start, find a telephone directory and keep calling until you find help. Many cities have hotlines or helplines for crime victims or specifically for domestic violence.

You Know What You Need: Ask for IT!

To help us meet your needs, please think about what you want and need from us and other service providers. Use this list to show what you need and where to find those things.

	I need this (✓)	Where can I find it? (Write down names, addresses, web sites, etc.)
Someone to talk with		
Help finding a job		
Legal advice / a lawyer		
Help finding a lawyer		
Help paying for a lawyer		
Help finding a place to live		
Help getting welfare (social assistance)		
Help with immigration issues		
Help learning English		
Help finding a doctor		
Help going back to school		

Help upgrading my job skills		
Counselling for me		
Counselling for my partner		
Counselling for my children		
Help finding day care		
Help finding a woman's shelter or refuge to stay in		
In need a break once in a while from taking care of my kids		
Help registering my kids in school		
Moving to a new place		
Help being a good parent		
Help to get off or stay off drugs		
Other		
Other		

Excuses, Excuses

Ever heard this phrase: “a real man would never hit a woman.” If your partner was ever physically abusive to you – a shove, hit, slap, choke hold or punch, for example – did he ever use any of these excuses to justify his actions?

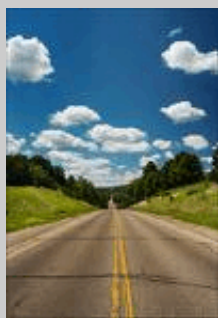
- ☐ She hit me first
- ☐ I was defending myself
- ☐ She knows I have a temper so it's her choice to stay
- ☐ It was just a little shove – what's the big deal?
- ☐ I warned her first
- ☐ My hand slipped
- ☐ She walked into my fist
- ☐ Women want equality but then they complain if we treat them like a man
- ☐ Hitting her is the only way to get her to do what I say
- ☐ Hitting her is the only way to get her to listen to me
- ☐ She's bigger (or stronger) than I am so it's a fair fight
- ☐ She likes rough sex
- ☐ My religion demands that I use physical discipline with disobedient family members
- ☐ In my country/culture, hitting your wife is completely acceptable
- ☐ It was just my hand – I didn't hit her with a belt or use a weapon
- ☐ I apologized so that makes it okay
- ☐ I was drunk or under a lot of stress
- ☐ I was abused as a child so my behaviour is my parents' fault
- ☐ Others:

Excuses such as these are called “rationalizations” meaning a justification someone uses to explain why they did something wrong. Having an excuse makes him feel it was not his fault, or that no damage was done.

Did you know other people who agreed with these excuses?

Use this space to describe how those excuses made you feel, about him and about yourself.

I'm not Crazy, I'm not a Liar, and I'm not Stupid



The ROAD to Here

Romance:	Boy meet girls. They fall in love. Most relationships start with romance, even the ones that end badly.
Optimism:	On this leg of the journey, you recognize that life isn't perfect but still hope things will get better.
Adjustment:	At some point further down the road, you might start to think: "Well, things don't seem to be getting better. Maybe I expect too much. I should count my blessings."
Defence:	When the relationship ends, you can find yourself playing defence. Why did you stay if it was so bad? Why didn't you tell anybody? Why are you turning your children against their father? Aren't you just bitter after he left you?

When living in an abusive relationship, or trying to end one, it's great to know or meet people who understand what you're going through. You may also know or meet people who aren't so understanding or supportive. Abuse is hurtful, but so are the attitudes causing you to feel blamed and misunderstood. Did you in the past (or do you today) feel like you must defend yourself and your life? Did you know or meet people who had these opinions?

thought his abuse of me was MY fault	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
saw what he did to me but didn't call him on it	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
encouraged him to treat me badly	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
assumed it was easy for me to get out of this relationship	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
thought I liked the abuse because I wasn't able to leave	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
thought I could magically make him treat me better	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
assumed I could change something about me to make the abuse stop	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
turned a blind eye to what was going on	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
thought I was over-reacting and should put up with it	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't believe me when I told them what happened	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
thought I was lying or exaggerating about what he did	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't understand why I kept it secret for so long	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
blamed me because the relationship "didn't work out"	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that

wanted me to get back with him even knowing what he did	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't understand why I didn't tell anyone	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't understand how dangerous he was	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
thought he was a great guy despite what he did to me	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't understand what he might do to me if I left him	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
didn't believe me because my partner was so nice to them	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
Other hurtful ideas people had:	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that
	<input type="radio"/> I knew someone like that

Did you know or meet anyone who had these ideas?

- ☐ family
- ☐ friends
- ☐ neighbours
- ☐ co-workers or boss
- ☐ police
- ☐ my lawyer
- ☐ his lawyer
- ☐ judge
- ☐ doctor
- ☐ other people, _____

How did these ideas cause you to feel?

- ☐ I felt blamed for what he did
- ☐ I felt there was a double standard for men and women
- ☐ I felt isolated and alone
- ☐ I felt completely misunderstood
- ☐ I felt like no one believed me or people thought I was lying
- ☐ I felt like I should never have told anyone
- ☐ I felt no one understood how afraid I was
- ☐ other:
- ☐ other:
- ☐ other:
- ☐ other:

What “Entitlement” Looks Like

Why are some men abusive? Often the answer to that question is this: because he thinks it’s okay. He feels entitled to treat you that way. He may believe men are better than women, or he is special and can do what he wants. An abusive man may be self-centred, blame others for his problems, have difficulty appreciating the feelings of other people, or get offended easily. These pages have a list of attitudes, some of which might describe how your partner thinks and acts. No single person will have all of them. When reviewing these items, think about how you partner treats you or treated you when you were together.

	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
Sense of entitlement / comfort exploiting others for his benefit			
Daily life revolves around what he needs and what he wants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes he is the head of the house, the king of his castle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes he deserves to have an attractive girlfriend or wife	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He makes all the big decisions for us as a family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes he deserves to have anything he wants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He buys nice things for himself while the kids and I go without	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes he deserves success at work or business, even without much effort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We are in debt because he buys nice things for himself or to impress others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He treats me more like a servant than his partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he ever helps around the house, he thinks I should thank him (or he never helps around the house)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he takes care of the kids, he calls it “babysitting” instead of being a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He has to win at everything he does / avoids doing anything he cannot win at	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes men should not do housework or help with the kids	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes it’s a woman’s job to take care of men and do what men want	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He doesn’t follow the rules of society, like the speed limit or paying taxes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When he wants something, he wants it NOW (including sex)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He believes that men are generally better than women	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He can easily break the law because he thinks laws are stupid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
If I didn't do things fast enough or to his satisfaction, I'd be in trouble	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He can take my pay cheque and not feel bad that I have no money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he is dishonest to someone, he doesn't feel guilty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Needing to be the centre of attention			
He likes to show off	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He dominates most of the conversation in a group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He doesn't like listening to other people talk / interrupts others frequently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He must have the biggest TV or the most expensive car (or wants to)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He talks about himself all the time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He rarely (or never) asks about me or how I'm feeling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't remember the last time he gave me a compliment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he gives someone a compliment, it's because he wants something	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If someone doesn't compliment him, he takes it as an insult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If the conversation moves to another topic, he brings it back to be about him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Things were okay until the baby came and I had to spend less time with him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He is easily bored, especially with things that interest me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When we were dating, we spent hours talking about him and his problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he has a problem, everyone has to drop everything to help him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He justified sexual relationships with other women saying I was ignoring him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sense of superiority or arrogance			
He believes he is smarter than most other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He doesn't like to be around people who are smarter than he is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He is extremely critical of people, even his children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He makes it clear (or implies) that he is better than I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He feels hurt and rejected by a small criticism that most people would take in stride (or appreciate)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He gets angry if anyone teases him about even a small mistake	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
Putting other people down makes him feel better about himself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He always has an easy solution for other people's problems but never sees any problems that he might have	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He ignores suggestions from others about how to improve himself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He does not react well to suggestions about how to be a better father	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He says his life is so interesting that someone should write a book about him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He only plays a game if he knows he can win	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even when he plays with kids, he has to win	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He is super critical of other people, even children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He is easily offended or feels "dissed" at minor things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A small setback or problem will cause him to abandon a project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he is playing a game and starts to lose, he will quit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When something goes wrong, it's never his fault	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I did something well, he had to show me that he is better at it than I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It's important that his child is the best, because it looks well on him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He feels misunderstood by people who don't understand how "special" he is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He makes fun of me and calls me demeaning names	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He makes fun of the kids when they make a mistake	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He can never apologize or say he was wrong about anything	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-absorption / selfishness / self-centredness / seeing others as an extension of him			
He uses a lot of "I statements," like I think this, I did that, I want such and such	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He assumes I know what he wants and what he's thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He thinks anyone who disagrees with him is wrong	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He adores the kids but treats them like possessions instead of people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He spends a lot of time worrying about his appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If the baby cries or the kids are noisy, he thinks they do it on purpose to get on his nerves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
He takes everything personally, like if someone is late he thinks they are trying to make him angry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He cannot see anyone else's viewpoint if it's different than his	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he buys me a present, he gets something he likes and cannot see what I might like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
OR, he buys something expensive so he can show it off to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He can do nice things for other people – if he gets lots of compliments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If he does something nice and doesn't get compliments, he feels used	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He doesn't understand the needs of the children or assumes they need the same things he does	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He treats the children like adults and assumes they think like adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm not around, he expects one of the kids to take my place taking care of him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I kill myself working so hard and he doesn't notice or care that I'm tired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
He takes credit for things that I did, like when the house looks nice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even when I'm really upset (like somebody close to me died), he expects his daily routine will continue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If something nice happens for me (e.g., I got accepted into college) he can't be happy for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If something nice happens for me, he immediately thinks about how it will impact him (e.g., I won't be home to make dinner every night)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Here is a space to write about things not listed above, or to write the things that are most hurtful for you as you think about this today.

What I Can and Cannot Change

We can't change the past, but we can change how we understand what happened, how we think about it, and how it makes us feel today. Reviewing past choices can guide our choices in the future. Alcoholic Anonymous has a saying called the Serenity Prayer: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Check-off any thoughts, feelings, decisions, or actions you regret about your past relationship.

- ☐ that I ever got involved with him / fell in love with him in the first place
- ☐ that I believed his excuses
- ☐ that I believed he would change or things would get better
- ☐ that I accepted his apologies
- ☐ that I felt unworthy of being treated better
- ☐ that I felt I was nothing without him
- ☐ that my children saw and heard things that children shouldn't have to see and hear
- ☐ that I didn't stand up for myself
- ☐ that I didn't listen to other people who warned me about him
- ☐ that I let him make me feel inadequate as a wife/partner
- ☐ that I let him make me feel inadequate as a mother
- ☐ that I stayed with him so long / didn't leave sooner
- ☐ that I didn't pay enough attention to the needs of my children
- ☐ that I went back after leaving him
- ☐ that I believed everything was my fault
- ☐ that I let him hurt my children
- ☐ that I never called the police
- ☐ that I was a poor role model for my children
- ☐ that my children don't have a good, kind, nurturing father
- ☐ that I lost touch with some good friends
- ☐ that I fought with my family or drifted away from them
- ☐ that I quit school or gave up an opportunity to further my education
- ☐ that I stopped paying attention to my own needs and health
- ☐ that I put his career or job advancement ahead of my own
- ☐ that I became a mother when I was too young
- ☐ that I drank too much or used drugs
- ☐ that I waited until he left me when I really should have left him
- ☐ that my children haven't had a happy childhood so far
- ☐ that I covered for him and made excuses for his bad behaviour
- ☐ that I didn't reach out for help or support and kept everything to myself

Notice how the list has no items saying "I regret that HE did such and such."
There's a very good reason. You cannot control the actions of another person so you can't regret the choices he made.

Here's space for any other "regrets."

Review the items you checked off or wrote down. You can't change any of them now, because what's done is done. But – could some of the regrets be things you change or do differently in the future? Put a circle around any of the "regrets" from the past that you could change in the future. Here are some examples. Choices for my life that I can make now are:

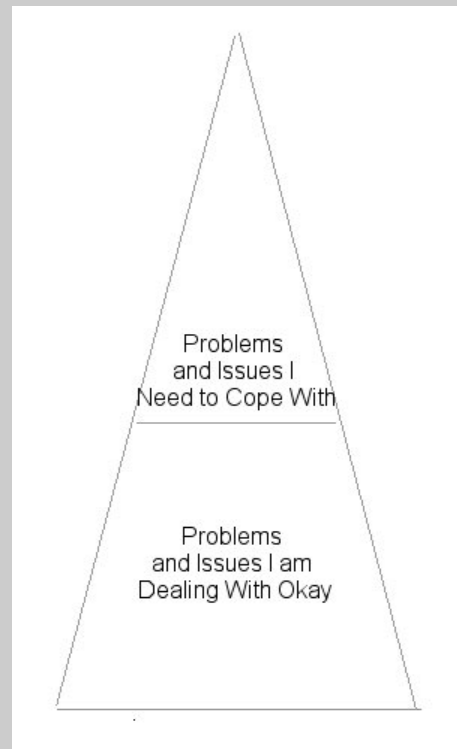
- ☐ finishing school or getting educational upgrading
- ☐ getting trained for the job or career I've always wanted
- ☐ learning to speak English better
- ☐ paying more attention to my health and fitness
- ☐ losing weight / exercising / paying more attention to what I eat
- ☐ re-connecting with my family or spending more time with them
- ☐ making the time to see my friends and start new friendships
- ☐ drinking less or not using drugs
- ☐ being more careful about the next guy I start dating
- ☐ feeling okay about not having a man in my life for awhile
- ☐ asking for help or getting support when I need it
- ☐ learning to be the best mother I can be
- ☐ other:
- ☐ other:

Thoughts and feelings about myself I can change today (or work on changing in the future):

- ☐ Instead of believing everything was my fault, I can recognize that he chose to be abusive and hurtful
- ☐ Instead of feeling like a bad mother, I can learn more about parenting and increase my confidence
- ☐ Instead of worrying about how my children were affected by the past, I can take steps to make tomorrow better
- ☐ Instead of feeling like I deserved to be treated badly, I can believe I am worthy of respect and love
- ☐ Instead of feeling like a victim, I can be a survivor

What is COPING?

We all run into problems in life. Some are big and some are small. Most days, and most problems, we deal with them. “Coping” happens when we face a big problem that is not easy to solve or fix. Or, we sometimes have to “cope” when lots of smaller problems all come at the same time. The effects of many small problems can add up.



List one or two examples of problems or issues you are managing to deal with now?

What helped you deal with or manage those problems or issue? (This might be asking someone for help, relying on your experience or knowledge, ignoring it, fixing it, paying money for someone to fix it, etc.)

What is the biggest problem you are coping with right now? Use the back of this page if necessary to make a list. For each issue, think about these things.

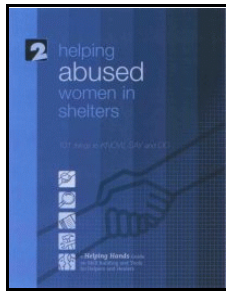
My problem:

List some ways to cope with the problem or solve it

Will that idea help me feel better? Or solve the problem?

Will coping that way get me into trouble?

About the Second “Helping Hands” Guide



Helping women in a residential program such as a shelter is a unique opportunity to provide intensive support at a time of crisis and transition. Building on the material in the “Helping Hands” guide called *Helping an Abused Woman*, the second guide is called *Helping Abused Women in Shelters*. Written specifically for shelter workers and their colleagues, this guide is grounded in an understanding of the unique context of shelters and the needs expressed by shelter-resident women.

10 Assumptions About Women Living in Shelters

10 Assumptions Guiding Work in a Shelter Context

10 Principles in a Staff Code of Conduct

5 Points About Stress Reactions in Anti-Violence Work

10 Issues With Which a Woman Might Want Assistance

10 Potential Barriers Between Your Help and Her Needs

5 Ways to Match Your Support to Her Stage in the Leaving Process

5 Challenges Faced by Women Living in Shelters

5 Types of Coping Behaviours You Might See in Shelter

10 Strategies to Intervene with Women Living in Shelters

5 Dilemmas Sometimes Facing Shelter Workers

5 Suggestions from Women as They Exit Shelter

10 Celebrations of the Work

1 Final Thought

You’ll also find 13 handouts to aid your one-on-one or group intervention with women.

Future “Helping Hands” Guides

We’re looking for sponsors to support the development of guides on these topics:

- Helping an Abused Woman as a Mother
- Helping a Child who Lived with Violence at Home
- Helping a Child Living in a Shelter
- Helping an Economically Abused Woman

Let us know if you have any ideas or want to help with funding.

About the Authors



Linda Baker and Alison Cunningham work together at the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System and have collaborated for a number of years on research about children living with violence against their mothers. Merging their respective – and very different – bases of experience and knowledge, they created a framework for understanding how mothering is impacted by partner abuse and how to help women to help their children. With a grounded understanding of the context of front-line work, they translate findings from the best research available into training packages and other helpful resources for shelter workers, women's advocates, child protection workers, judges, educators and criminal justice professionals.

Together, they produced many research reports and training resources, including: *Little Eyes Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as they Grow* (2007), *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers* (2004) and *What About Me! Seeking to Understand the Child's View of Violence in the Family* (2004).

About our Centre

The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (formerly the London Family Court Clinic) is a non-profit social service agency. Families come to our Centre for many reasons but with one thing in common. They want or need some help through an emotionally difficult time in their lives. Our services help families facing a crisis bringing them into the courts or legal system: the arrest or incarceration of a teenager, criminal victimization of a child, acrimonious divorce and custody battle, the scrutiny of child protective services, or the need for a teenager to live in a correctional or therapeutic setting for a while. We also do applied research and develop and deliver training for helping professionals.



About the “Helping Hands” Guides



You are holding the first “Helping Hands” Guide on Skill Building and Tools for Helpers and Healers. This resource can be used by anyone who supports abused women and their children. You’ll find assumptions and principles for intervention and support, concrete ideas for practice, reference to the latest research and trends, and handouts you can integrate as needed into one-on-one or group work with women. The neutral language makes them applicable anywhere. The woman-centred approach reflects the best evidence for how to offer effective and respectful service grounded in an understanding of how abuse affects women as women and as mothers.
