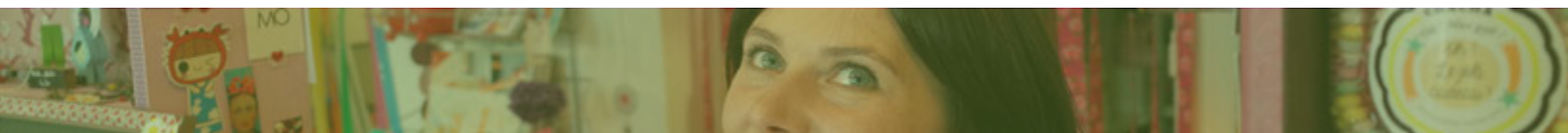


HELPING AN
**ABUSED
WOMAN**
AN ESSENTIALS GUIDE



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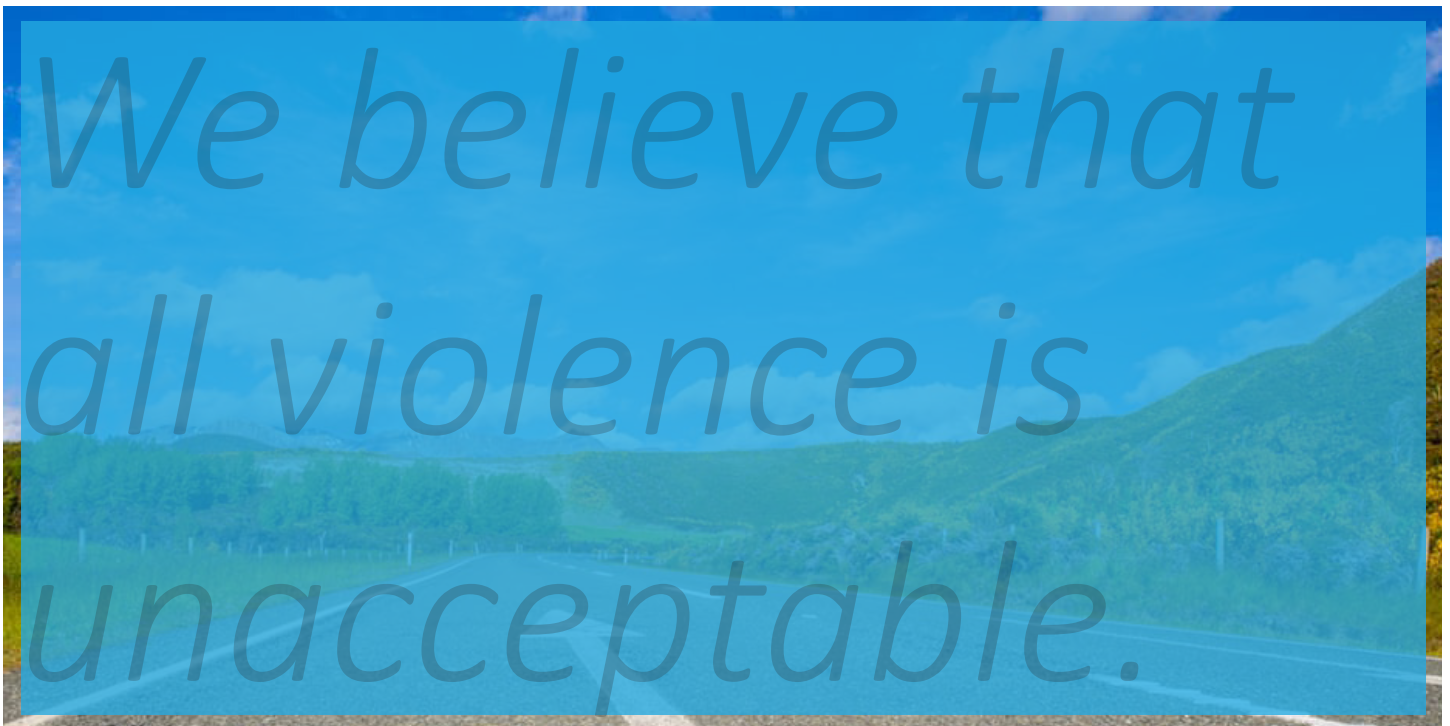


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HELPING AN ABUSED WOMAN: INTRODUCTION

AN ESSENTIALS GUIDE



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

Why an Essentials Guide?

The concept of an Essentials Guide reflects our commitment to producing training material to help busy people learn or upgrade their skills in a convenient way, while being respectful of their multiple commitments in life. There is no recipe or cookie-cutter approach for working with abused women and their children, and there is a lot to know about the field. No post-secondary educational or training program teaches absolutely everything people want to learn. Each woman is unique and at a singular place in her life, and she deserves advocacy and support that matches and meets her needs. Instead of prescriptions, we offer principles to guide interventions, flexible tools for practice, and guidance on skill building. An intended outcome of this Guide is to promote equity for women – in their relationships and in their access to effective service.

Who can use this Guide?

Anyone called upon to help or advocate for women can use this Essentials Guide. These individuals might work in what is called the 'Violence Against Women' (VAW) sector, which comprises women's shelters, refuges, transition houses, and community-based agencies that advocate for women. But equally as important, people who work in other social service settings or helping professions should be aware of abuse dynamics. Those who work in the legal system, for instance, will meet many abused women and their children – in criminal prosecutions and in family law matters, such as divorce. Users of this Guide may work in a paid role, or in a

volunteer role, or even be a concerned family member, co-worker or friend. If you are experienced in the VAW field, material in this Guide should reinforce your observations and the knowledge that you've gained from working with abused women. If you are new to the field, the material in this Guide will help you understand what a woman might need from you. We have aimed to make the Guide useful and relevant across many countries and legal jurisdictions.

The Social-Historical Context

We believe that all violence is unacceptable. The London Family Court Clinic has produced other publications, held training programs, and provided clinical services that help and support victims of violence. This Guide focuses specifically on violence against women, which has been described by the World Health Organization as an urgent public health priority. Women are disproportionately affected by violence in intimate partner relationships in every country in the world.¹ In Canada, 7 out of 10 individuals who experience family violence are women and girls.² Further, women are more likely to experience extreme forms of violence and are four times as likely as men to be victims of intimate partner homicide.

This disproportionality of violence against women in intimate relationships largely stems from the legacy of patriarchy, which situated social and economic power in the male gender and established a gender inequality. This gender inequality and sexism continue to be present in many areas of society today, including in the media, in politics, in the workplace, and sometimes in the home.

For some women, the abuse and violence that is enabled through sexism is compounded by other forms of oppression which have led to social inequality, including racism, heterosexism, classism, and religious persecution. This social context could have far-reaching effects on communication, trust, and stress for the woman that may not be evident to the helper or advocate.

Service delivery principles used in this Guide

For the professional helping an abused woman, a trauma-informed approach to service delivery that incorporates several guiding principles is essential to best practice. These guiding principles include:

- **Safety:** The primary objective is to promote the safety of women.
- **Trauma awareness:** It is important to recognize that trauma is pervasive in women who have been abused. Service providers should understand the complexity of domestic violence, and should be able to: assess risk; help women develop safety plans; identify controlling behaviours; understand which behaviours are criminal; not minimize or deny the responsibility of abusive men; appropriately address the needs of the woman (and her children).
- **Trustworthiness and transparency:** A woman's sense of trust in others may be compromised when they have been abused. In building trust with an abused woman, it is important to have an informed and ongoing consent process, to engage the woman in meaningful participation in the decision-making about her own care, and to ensure predictability in the service that she receives. Confidentiality and agency requirements about sharing of information with other agencies must be understood by all parties involved, and women must be advised of any limits on confidentiality (e.g., court subpoenas, child protection).
- **Collaboration and mutuality:** Well-meaning efforts to help sometimes actually reinforce the disempowerment of women. Therefore, efforts should be made to equalize power imbalances by allowing the woman to have a voice and choice in her own safety and intervention plan. Intervention efforts should be strengths-based in nature, and helpers should work together to support women without penalizing them for the behaviour and choices of their partner or ex-partner. Invite evaluation of your services from women, and use this information to guide your service delivery. Cooperation and consultation between agencies achieves the best outcomes for women.
- **Cultural, historical, and gender issues:** Recognize the historical context of gender-based violence. Be open to learning about and developing skills to work appropriately with clients of varying backgrounds. Ask clients about their own history and cultural background. The professional helper should strive to understand the meaning that a client attributes to their trauma experience and what healing means to them. Consider the diversity of the women (e.g., race, class, age, sexuality, abilities, culture) who might access services, and work towards eliminating barriers that may discriminate, prevent, or inhibit access.



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Coercive control:

An ongoing pattern of domination using strategies that can include irrational demands, surveillance, isolation, and the realistic threat of negative consequences (e.g., physical harm). Coercive control can be used under the guise of “discipline.” The Power & Control Wheel (as seen on page 10) shows the spectrum of coercive control tactics used against women. These can include threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimization, and denial of harm.

Child exposure to domestic violence:

Seeing, hearing, being told about, or seeing the aftermath of abuse and coercive control used against a parent.

Child maltreatment:

Also referred to as ‘child abuse,’ this is a term that can mean physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and/or physical or emotional neglect, and/or denial of medical care.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):

A term now common in the research literature that usually refers to what can be gender symmetrical or bi-directional violence in a relationship (e.g., male to female, or female to male, or same-sex).

Woman abuse:

A pattern of male behaviour that is characterized by coercive control tactics against a woman that may, or may not, involve physical assault. Many people use the term ‘woman abuse’ because it denotes

the gendered nature of domestic violence.

Domestic violence:

The abuse, assault, or systematic control of a person by an intimate partner. This is usually (though not always) a pattern of behaviour used by men against women.

Family violence:

A term used to describe any form of abuse or neglect of an adult or child within a family. This refers to an abuse of power by one person in the family to hurt or control another person in the family who trusts and depends on the abuser.

Technological abuse:

A range of behaviours where a partner misuses technology to harass, stalk, and harm the victim. These acts can range from making threats via cell phone, text messages, and email, and blocking caller ID so the victim is unaware that the perpetrator is calling. The perpetrator may reveal and publicize records of an individual, which were previously private or difficult to obtain (sometimes called doxxing). They may send and/or post pictures or videos of the victim for the purpose of distressing or harming the victim. A perpetrator may access victim’s accounts (email, phone, social media, etc.) without the victim’s consent and often without their knowledge. The use of technology to engage in surveillance and monitoring can be invasive and traumatizing.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: FACTS & FIGURES

- 80% of intimate partner violence is against women.
- 51% of women, as a result of intimate partner violence, have experienced some form of physical injury.
- About 1 in 10 women victimized by abuse were pregnant at the time of the violence.
- The rates of violence against women vary widely across Canada, with the territories showing the highest rates.
- Violence against women increases during times of crisis, such as during natural disasters and economic downturns.
- Domestic violence costs Canadians \$7.4 billion annually (e.g., policing, healthcare, lost productivity, etc.).

The General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization is an anonymous telephone survey conducted every five years by Statistics Canada. Surveyors ask male and female Canadians over the age of 15 about 'spousal violence.' The 2014 GSS revealed the following:

- 4% of respondents reported having been physically or sexually abused by their partner during the preceding five years.
- 70% of self-reported spousal violence was not reported to the police.
- Women were more than twice as likely to report the most severe forms of spousal violence (e.g., sexual assault, being choked, or being threatened with a gun or knife).
- 49% reported that the severity of the violence increased after the couple had separated.

First Nations, Inuit, and Metis women:

- There were 1,181 cases of missing or murdered indigenous women in Canada between 1980 and 2012.
- Grassroots organizations actually believe that the number is much higher (closer to 4,000).
- First Nations, Inuit and Metis women are killed at six times the rate of non-indigenous women.

How many women are murdered by intimate partners?

- 306 domestic homicides and homicide-suicides in Ontario occurred between 2002 and 2013, resulting in 426 deaths.
- 280 (80%) of those deaths were adult females who were murdered by a current or former partner.
- 30 (9%) of the homicide victims were children
- 80% of the cases reviewed by the Office of the Chief Coroner Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC), involved seven or more risk factors (e.g., history of domestic violence, control of victim's daily activities, prior threats to kill, prior suicide attempts of the perpetrator). A list of the 39 risk factors is available in the DVDRC Annual Report.

More information on woman abuse can be found online at the following websites:

- Public Health Agency of Canada's
- Stop Family Violence
- Department of Justice's Family Violence
- Status of Women's Preventing Abuse
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Family Violence
- National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence
- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Violence Against Women Learning Network
- Western University's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children
- Annual report of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ABUSE OF WOMEN

IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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

ASSUMPTION: MOST BRUISES ARE INVISIBLE

Abuse, as we define it, *may* involve physical contact such as hitting, but more commonly it may take the form of cruel words or hurtful attitudes. Abuse can be emotional, financial, spiritual, physical, or sexual. All forms of abuse are painful, whether they cause visible bruises, psychological damage, or financial hardship.

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

Reality: Non-physical abuse can be extremely toxic for women.

It is easy to see the consequences of physical violence – bruises, cuts, scrapes, sprains, broken bones, burns, internal injuries, miscarriages, and even death. But while injuries caused by non-physical abuse are less obvious, they are no less real. It is harder to see the slow erosion in a woman's self-confidence, or 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.

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

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

The end of physical violence does not always mean the end of abuse. Counselling helps some men to stop using physical violence. Being arrested or going to prison works for others. But a man who stops the hitting can carry on with other forms of abuse, including 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.

Watching your mother being physically harmed is certainly not healthy for children, but it is also true that a daily climate of worry and fear isn't 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, and they distort a child's sense of what men and fathers should be. When a woman lives with an abusive partner, she may not be the best parent that she wants to be. Some children will believe the twisted excuses used to justify hurtful behaviour (e.g., men are superior to women), or they may adopt some of the negative thoughts that victims use to blame themselves (e.g., 'If Mom were a better housekeeper, he wouldn't get so angry'). In short, children are certainly affected when they live with control tactics and non-physical abuse at home.

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

Reality: Men can be extremely abusive but never be 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 a punch – is the line that divides an unhappy relationship from an abusive one. But physical abuse may be a poor way to tell if a particular relationship is abusive. It is the destructive exercise of power to control others – whether physically, sexually, financially, or emotionally

– that truly best defines abuse in a relationship or in a family. To maintain this control, a man might use isolation, emotional abuse, intimidation, threats, or whatever tactic works. To see some examples of control tactics, find a copy of the Power & Control Wheel (see Page 10). Examples include demeaning comments, insults, taunts (e.g., 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, or destroying sentimental or valued possessions. And while physical abuse may leave a visible bruise, hurtful words leave psychological bruises.

Myth: If there has been an incident of physical violence, the relationship is abusive.

Reality: In fact, using control tactics is what defines a relationship as ‘abusive.’

Relatively minor incidents of physical violence are actually fairly common in relationships. About 22% of people report incidents of physical violence (e.g., a push or a shove, a slap or a hit, or throwing something at a person that could hurt them).³ These incidents, which are reported as frequently by men as by women, typically occur during a bitter argument. An incident of this nature may take place against the backdrop of prolonged marital unhappiness and/or conflict. Or it could come out of the blue in an argument. Of course, assault is a crime and is never right or justified. But the assault needs to be viewed against the backdrop of the entire history of the relationship. Without a history of the power and control tactics, as described in the Power & Control Wheel (Page 10), one slap or push does not necessarily mean that a relationship is ‘abusive.’ It is the ongoing pattern of control, disrespect and intimidation (as opposed to a single incident) that makes a relationship abusive. And importantly, as stated earlier, the abusive dynamics of power and control typically involve a man abusing a woman.

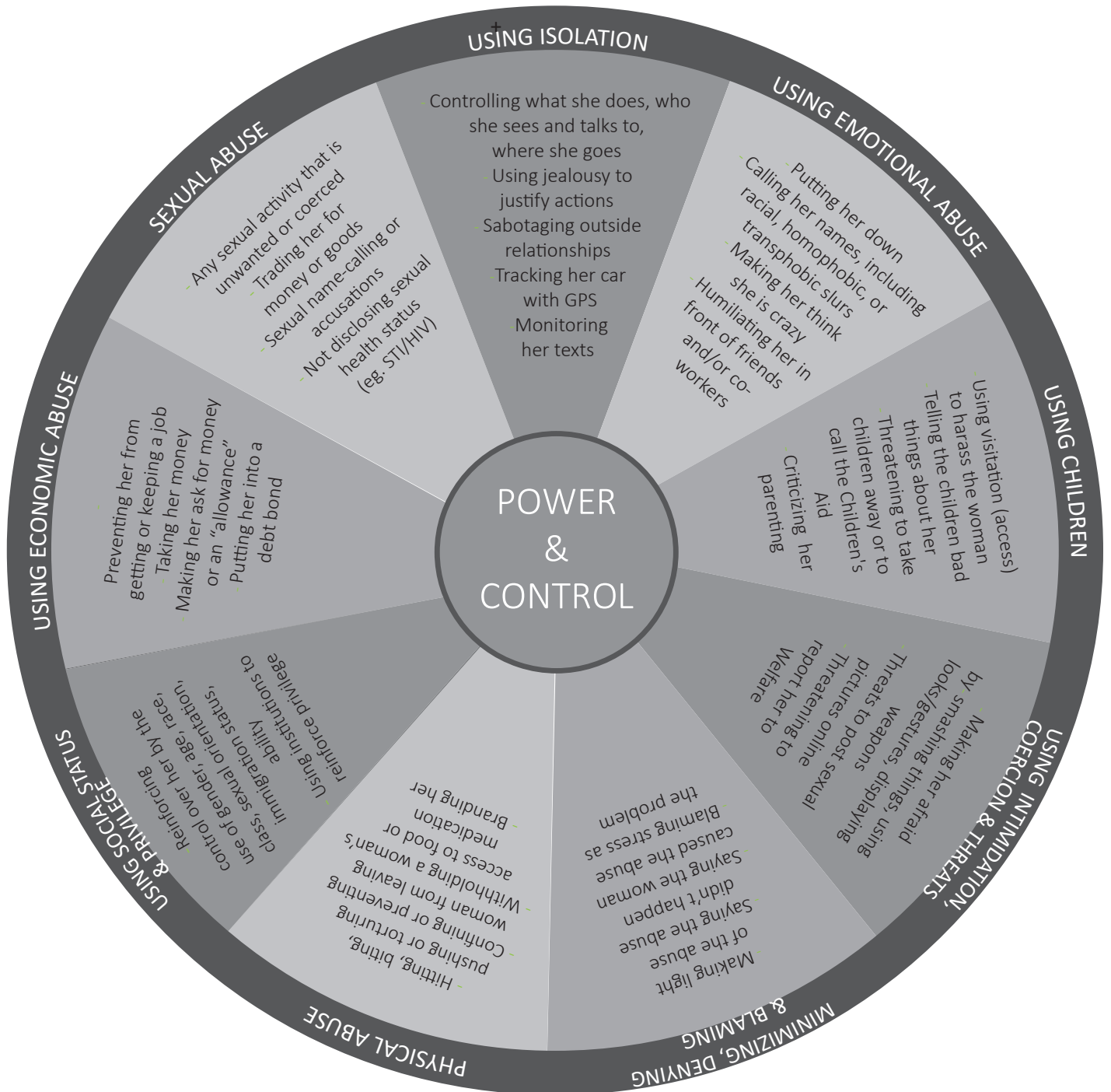


ASSUMPTION: COERCIVE CONTROL IS THE HALLMARK OF ABUSE

Some relationships are unhappy, but are not abusive. Abuse is an ongoing (and sometimes escalating) pattern of control over a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Coercive control *may* involve physical violence, but it usually 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 11 for a handout)

POWER AND 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.



ASSUMPTION: COERCIVE CONTROL TACTICS ARE USED PRIMARILY BY MEN

Studies of the general population repeatedly show that less serious forms of physical violence, such as pushing or slapping, are used as frequently by women as by men in relationships. This is called ‘gender symmetry.’

But ‘abuse,’ as we define it, which focuses on control tactics that engender fear, is predominantly used by men against women. When abusive men use violence, they do so instrumentally. When women use violence, it is often retaliatory or defensive, and in the context of a coercively controlling relationship.

The framework below explains the research showing gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV).⁴ The situational and episodic use of aggression in a bitter argument, for instance, is used by men and women in equal proportions. Much less common (but far more serious) is ‘intimate terrorism,’ which is the use of violence as part of a pattern of control and intimidation. This form of IPV is used mostly by men.

to maintain power and control over their intimate partner. In heterosexual relationships, *gender is power*. But victimization and responses to violence in same-sex relationships are also heavily influenced by power imbalances – both at societal and interpersonal levels.

There are unique stressors associated with intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships.⁶ For instance, the sexual minority status of these couples can exacerbate feelings of isolation. A victim of violence may find themselves in a ‘double closet,’ where seeking help requires not only a disclosure of their victimization but also their sexual orientation. Sometimes, lesbians are reluctant to identify themselves as such when approaching an agency for service. Some even describe their abuser using male pronouns. Using gender neutral language, such as “your partner” may help the individual to feel more comfortable identifying themselves as part of the LGBTQ2+ community. For gay men experiencing intimate partner violence, there is a significant lack of available services. Shelters and resource centres often do not permit men to enter the facility (because the intent of the shelter or centre is to foster a safe space for women who have experienced violence by men). Unfortunately, this often leaves gay men with nowhere to turn.



While most violence research has been conducted in the context of heterosexual relationships, violence is also a feature of same-sex relationships.⁵ Feminist theories of intimate partner violence are insufficient in explaining violence in same-sex relationships. The research shows that the root of the violence (regardless of sexual orientation) lies in the perpetrator’s desire

ASSUMPTION: ANY WOMAN COULD FIND HERSELF IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

This is true because control tactics can often look like love and caring (e.g., possessive jealousy). Abuse can also be subtle and/or episodic, and it can escalate slowly over time. Some women are more vulnerable to entering or being trapped in abusive relationships. This vulnerability is often the result of other vulnerabilities in a particular woman's life, such as poverty, homelessness, physical disability, or certain mental illnesses.

While we don't completely understand the complex reasons for this fact, research does show that women who have been in an abusive relationship may find a subsequent partner to be abusive as well.⁷ Psychologist Lundy Bancroft, who spent years studying the distorted thinking of abusive men, developed a list of early warning signs which suggest that a man might be abusive towards his intimate partner.⁸ Women who have experienced abuse 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. Some of these include:

- 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 that makes you uncomfortable.
- He is controlling and/or possessive.
- Nothing is ever his fault.
- He is self-centred.
- He abuses drugs and/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 when around other people.

Women who have been in an abusive relationship may find a subsequent partner to be abusive as well.

RED FLAGS IN RELATIONSHIPS

Can a woman tell early on in a relationship that a man who seems so attentive and charming may turn out to be abusive down the road? Psychologist Lundy Bancroft thinks she can. Bancroft has a list of red flags in his 2002 book, 'Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men.'⁸

He speaks disrespectfully about former partners

It is not uncommon for people to have hard feelings after a breakup, but be careful if his anger toward a previous partner (or partners) is unusually bitter and you notice any of the following:

- He describes an ex-partner in degrading or insulting ways
- He starts doing this soon after you meet him
- He paints himself as a victim of abuse by his ex-partner
- He claims that she falsely accused him of abuse
- He sees all problems in their relationship as her fault, and he accepts no responsibility
- He admits that he abused a former partner, but he has an excuse (e.g., he was drinking), or he blames it on her
- He praises you for being better than she was
- He claims that you are the first woman who really understands him

He is disrespectful to you

You may be utterly perfect at first, but he eventually finds fault with what you say or do. For example:

- He insults you or puts you down
- He doesn't respect your opinions
- He is rude to you in front of other people
- He compares you to previous partners and says that you are not as good as they were
- He blames you for things he himself does wrong
- He criticizes you if you protest against his disrespect

He makes you uncomfortable by doing favours or being generous

This sounds great at first, but pay attention to your level of discomfort. For instance:

- He insists on doing something for you no matter how much you protest
- He claims that you owe him favourable treatment because of his favours to you
- He brings up his past favours, and he makes you feel guilty if you do something that he disapproves of

He is controlling

This starts subtly and can initially be mistaken for an intense interest in you. But these are some ways control can look early in a relationship:

- He has activities all planned out for your dates
- He is not interested in hearing your ideas for activities
- He has opinions on how you should dress
- He pressures you to spend all of your time with him
- He gives you advice that you didn't ask for

He is possessive

This characteristic is easy to mistake for love, at first. For example:

- He calls several times a day to check in
- He is upset when you speak to other men
- He justifies this reaction because he is 'crazy about you'
- He wants to spend every minute with you (when it's convenient for him)

Nothing is ever his fault

This one explains itself. At first, blame lies with other people, such as co-workers or his ex-partner. Eventually, when things go wrong, it will be all your fault.

He is self-centred

While dating, you notice that he monopolizes the conversation and talks about himself. But he never asks about you, and he doesn't listen when you speak, or he changes the topic of conversation to be about him again.

He abuses drugs or alcohol

Many men who abuse drugs and/or alcohol are not abusive to their partners. However, a significant percentage of abusive men abuse drugs and/or alcohol. This does not cause them to be abusive, but it is a common excuse for their bad actions. Be careful if he positions you as the force in his life to get him clean and sober and stay that way, because when he relapses, it will be your fault.

He pressures you for sex

He doesn't listen or respect your feelings about when to become intimate.

He gets serious too quickly about the relationship

He starts to plan out your future before you really know each other. If he won't respect your request to slow things down, what does that say about how he will respond to other issues?

He intimidates you when he's angry

Intimidation is a warning sign that physical aggression might be ahead. Watch for signs like these:

- He gets too close to you physically when he's angry, or he blocks your way or restrains you
- He tells you he is "just trying to make you listen"
- He drives recklessly or at high speeds to make you fearful
- He makes vaguely threatening comments, such as, "You don't want to see me mad"
- He punches walls, kicks doors, or throws things around – even if he doesn't hit you

He has double standards

Is there one set of rules and expectations for him and another set for you? For example, he's allowed to talk with women, but you can't talk with men.

He has negative attitudes about women

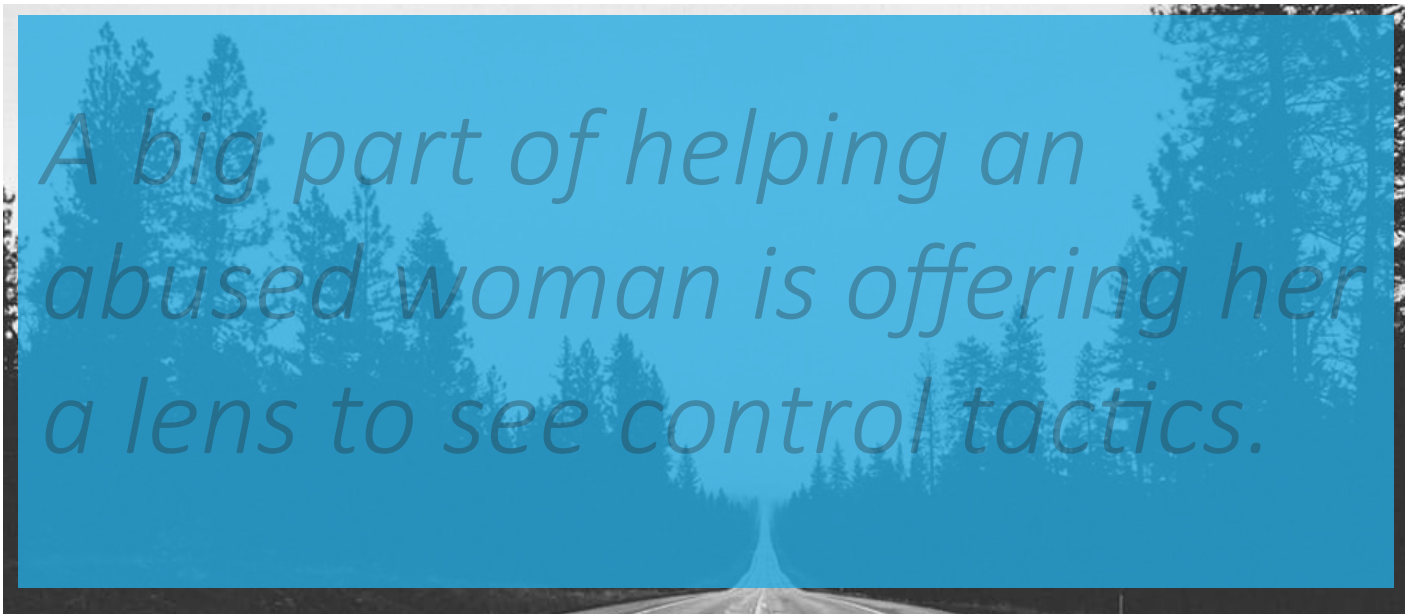
He sees women as inferior, as sex objects, or as housekeepers. Maybe, at first, he says that you are different than most women. But if he believes that women are inferior, you can tell where things will end up in your relationship.

He treats you differently when around other people

He treats you great when people are watching.

He appears to be attracted to vulnerability

Are you much younger than he is? Does he like how you look up to him? Have you recently had a traumatic experience or had an abusive partner? Does he position himself as your rescuer or protector?



A big part of helping an abused woman is offering her a lens to see control tactics.

ASSUMPTION: 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 one’s own life. Feelings are inextricably linked to thoughts. Because a woman *thinks* she is to blame for the abuse, she *feels* guilty. Other common emotions include: sadness, hopelessness, confusion, embarrassment, anger, or feelings of inadequacy. A woman who feels responsible for triggering her partner’s mistreatment of her does not see the real cause. He is an adult, and he is responsible for his words and actions.

Asking about physical abuse alone misses about half of abused women.⁹ A big part of helping an abused woman is offering her a lens to see control tactics. Without this lens, some forms of coercive control can look like love or well-meaning concern. The Women’s Experiences with Battering (WEB)

Scale, more recently referred to as the Relationship Assessment Tool (RAT), lets a woman ignore for a minute what abuse looks like and instead focus on how it makes her feel. The WEB/RAT framework outlines six domains of the abuse experience: Feeling vulnerable to future harm; using multiple cognitive distortions and overt behaviour in an effort to minimize harm; yearning for intimacy; an increasingly negative self-concept that mirrors the abuser’s negative images of her; increasingly entrapment; and growing disempowerment, as prolonged exposure to abuse changes a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

WHAT ABUSE FEELS LIKE

This questionnaire, called the Women’s Experiences of Abuse (WEB) Scale, more recently referred to as the Relationship Assessment Tool (RAT), 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 that best describes how your partner makes you feel, or how your ex-partner made you feel when you were together.

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

Source: Smith, A.G., G.E., Devellis, R., Earp, J., & Coker, A.I. (2002). A Population-Based Study of the Prevalence and Distinctiveness of Battering, Physical Assault, and Sexual Assault in Intimate Relationships. *Violence Against Women*, 8(10): 1208-1232.

Your Score

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

The lowest possible score is 10. The highest possible score is 60. A score of 20 or higher means there are enough control tactics to suggest that a woman is being abused in her relationship (or was abused in a former relationship).



ASSUMPTION: AN ABUSIVE PARTNER MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR A WOMAN TO BE THE MOTHER SHE WANTS TO BE

The dynamics of coercive control can 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 too harsh or too permissive with her children to compensate for her partner's parenting style or to keep the children quiet to avoid his angry reaction to the noise. A mother may lose confidence in her parenting ability and feel undermined in her attempts to exercise parental authority.

The impact of domestic violence on mothering and children is explored in more depth in the resource, "Helping Children Exposed to Violence at Home: An Essentials Guide," which is also part of the DELTA series." It includes information on what children might feel, think and do during violent incidents against their mothers, as well as the roles they might adopt before, during, or after incidents, strategies of coping and survival that they may use, and how violence may be experienced by children of different ages (from infancy to adolescence).

IMPACT OF COERCIVE CONTROL TACTICS ON THE MOTHER



The woman believes she is an inadequate parent:

- She is portrayed by her abuser as being an unfit mother or the cause of her children's deficits
- She fears having her children taken by child protection services
- She struggles to create structure or be consistent in her parenting
- Children may have problems at school or in the neighbourhood, which fuels her belief that she is a bad parent

The woman loses the respect of some or all of her children:

- The children may grow to devalue or be ashamed of their mother
- The children learn to disregard her parental authority, and don't follow her rules
- Some children come to see her as a legitimate target of abuse

The woman believes the man's excuses for abuse and reinforces those excuses with the children:

- She tells the children that the abuse is her fault, so she must change or improve her behaviour
- She feels responsible for the abuse, and guilty for its effects on the children
- She excuses the abuse because she thinks it is linked to alcohol or his stress
- She believes (and teaches her children) that woman abuse is culturally or religiously appropriate
- She believes (and teaches her children) that men and boys should have more privileges and power in the family

The woman changes her parenting style in response to her abuser's parenting style:

- She is too permissive in response to the authoritarian parenting of her abuser
- She is authoritarian to try and keep the children from annoying her abuser
- She makes age-inappropriate or unreasonable demands on her children to placate her abuser
- She is afraid to use discipline because the children have already been through so much
- She assumes the demanding parts of parenting while he takes the fun parts

A woman's capacity to manage is thwarted or overwhelmed:

- Depression, anxiety, poor sleep, etc. compromise her capacity to care for her children and provide for their daily needs
- If denied the use of birth control, too many children are born too close together
- She may be denied sufficient money to meet her children's basic needs for food, etc
- She may be reactive rather than proactive in her parenting, responding to crises rather than preventing problems

The woman may use survival strategies – with negative effects:

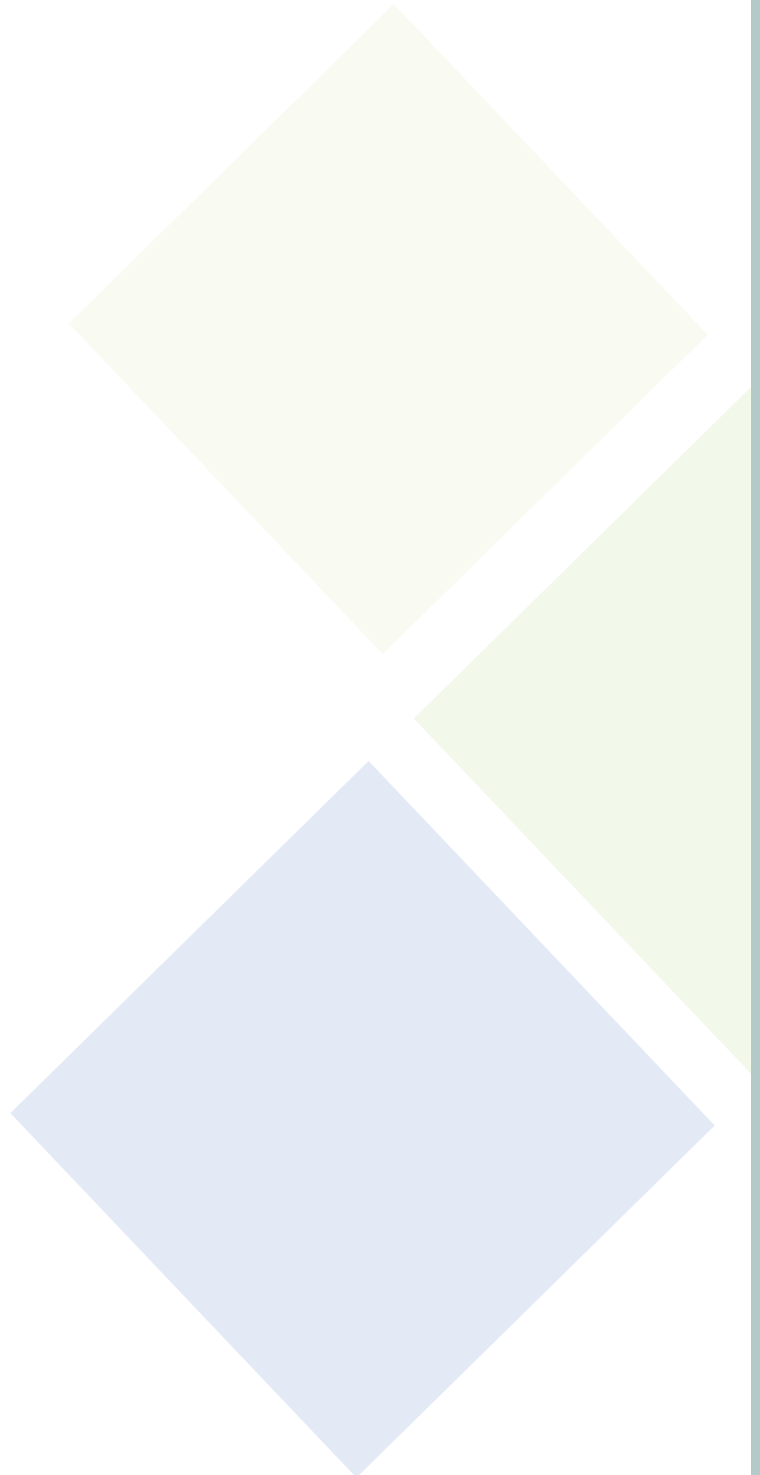
- She may leave the children with inadequate caretakers to get a break
- She may avoid being at home (e.g., working double shifts)
- She may use alcohol or drugs to excess
- She may mistreat her children (physically or verbally)

The woman's bond to her children is compromised:

- Her children may be angry at their mother for failing to protect them or to evict the abuser
- She is prevented by her abuser from comforting a distressed child
- One child assumes a care-taking role for their mother
- Children anticipating a mother's deportation or leaving may become anxious or may emotionally disengage to protect themselves from an impending loss
- Children may blame their mother for the absence of their father from the home, and for other disruptions (e.g., moving, changing schools).

The woman gets trapped in competition for her children's loyalties:

- The abuser attempts to shape the child's view of himself as good, and their mother as bad.
- After separation, her abuser entices the children to support his bid for custody with promises of a great life at his house
- During access visits, the abuser is the 'fun parent,' who has no rules
- The abuser has more money and can offer more material goods and a nicer home



ASSUMPTION: A WOMAN IS MORE THAN HER CHOICE OF PARTNER (OR HIS CHOICE OF HOW HE TREATS HER)

People living with cancer often protest when others define them by the disease and miss the essence of the person beneath the label of ‘patient.’ We should ensure we don’t make that same assumption with an abused woman. By assigning someone the status of ‘victim,’ we reduce the abused woman to a single issue and miss the richness of who she is as a unique person. Importantly, she is *not* defined by her partner’s choices.

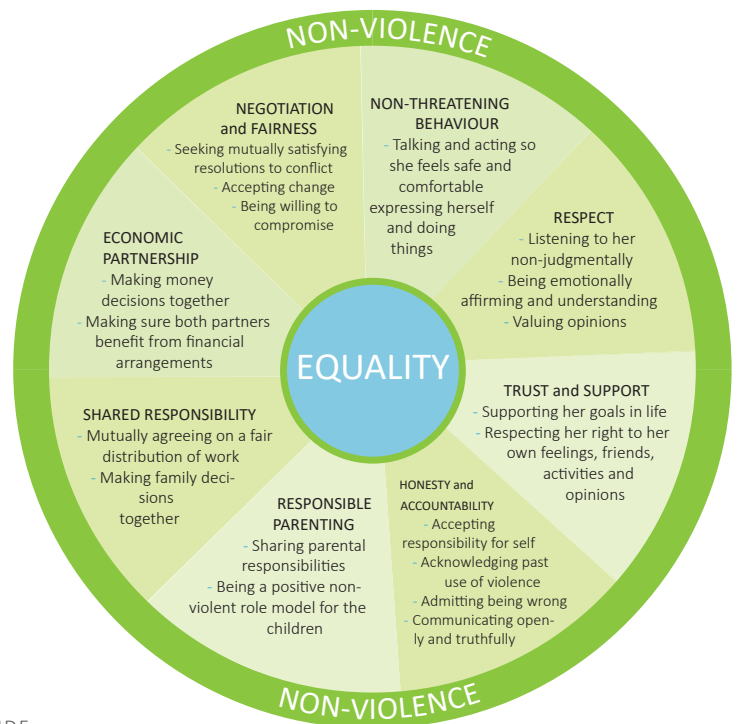
It is also important for a woman to know what she expects and aims for in a relationship. The Equality Wheel can help with that. The Wheel may need to be adjusted and/or elaborated for women from cultures with collectivist values, but it is still helpful for these women as a beginning for discussions on equity and respect. The role of the individual is fundamentally different in a collectivist community, and a person with an individualist orientation will never entirely bridge the gap between their own lived experience and the experience of a woman from a collectivist culture.

THE OPPOSITE OF ABUSE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF ABUSE

The legacy of patriarchy has impacted social norms on how we value women. These norms act on a continuum that may lead to violence and abuse. The opposite of an abusive relationship is a healthy, equal relationship that features respect, trust and support, as well as honesty and accountability. However, it is important to consider that how equality plays out in a relationship may vary depending on a woman’s culture and background. In collectivist cultures, for example, it may be more helpful to reflect on the concept of equity – where everyone has what they need to be fulfilled and successful, and is treated as a valued contributor to the overall wellbeing of the family and community. It is important not to conflate patriarchy with collectivism.

(Note: A deeper understanding of the unique challenges associated with intimate partner violence in cultures with collectivist values can be found at the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London, Ontario, which provides resources, education and support to promote culturally integrative family safety).

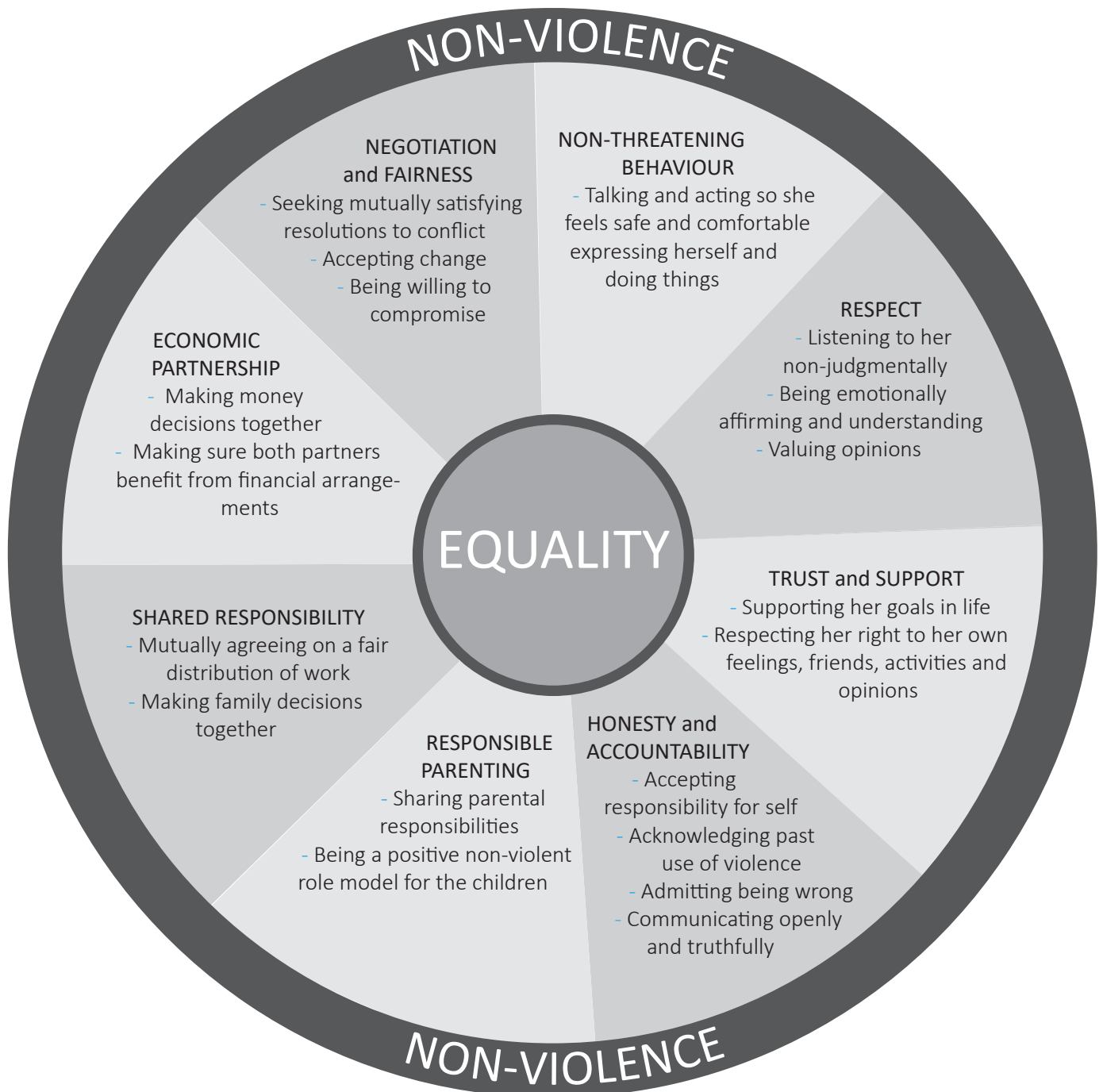
(Note: For more on social norms and how they impact violence and abuse against women, see the resource, 'Rethinking Resiliency: How understanding our world can help us bounce back,' which is also part of the DELTA series.



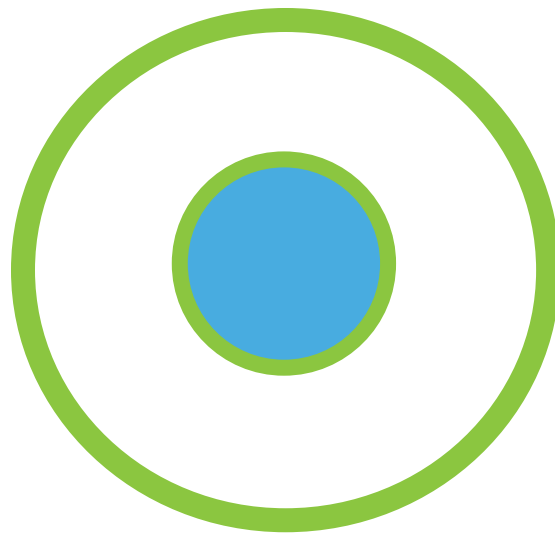
A relationship can be non-abusive but also be unequal or inequitable. It begins with respect, and while not all disrespectful attitudes lead to abuse, all abuse starts with disrespect. Women, rightfully, often want information to assess a potential new partner. It is not enough to know warning signs of abuse (although that is important information).

EQUALITY WHEEL

The Equality Wheel defines a healthy, equal relationship. It was developed by the Domestic Abuse Program in Duluth, Minnesota, to help people recognize the opposite of an abusive relationship (in other words, to recognize the features of a relationship that should be encouraged or expected). Control tactics are described in another model, the Power & Control Wheel (see page 10). The Equality Wheel may need to be adjusted and/or elaborated for women from cultures with collectivist values. For these women, it may be helpful to use the Equality Wheel as a beginning for discussions on equity and respect, recognizing that a person with an individualist orientation will never entirely bridge the gap between their own lived experience and the experience of a woman from a collectivist culture. (Note: The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London, Ontario provides resources, education and support to promote culturally integrative family safety).



TALKING ABOUT INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AS ABUSE



It is a big step for a woman to label her experiences as ‘abuse,’ her partner as ‘abusive,’ and herself as having been ‘abused.’ If she is not comfortable with the idea, the Power & Control Wheel might be overwhelming. So, introduce her to the Equality Wheel first. Ask her if these features describe her partner. After reading the Equality Wheel, she may express an interest in seeing the Power & Control Wheel.

Here’s an idea when using the Power & Control Wheel – in either an individual or group exercise: Let the woman draw ‘My Wheel for My Life.’ Guidance for this exercise could include the following:

- Include only the slices that are meaningful for you (maybe your wheel has three slices, or maybe it has 12).
- Add any other slices that you want, to reflect other things that happened.
- Some slices might be small, and other slices might be big.
- Label each slice and add some words or a description that is meaningful for you.

Encourage the woman to add other forms of abuse that are not mentioned on the original Wheel (for instance, spiritual abuse). Provide any relevant Wheel variation, as previously noted, 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.

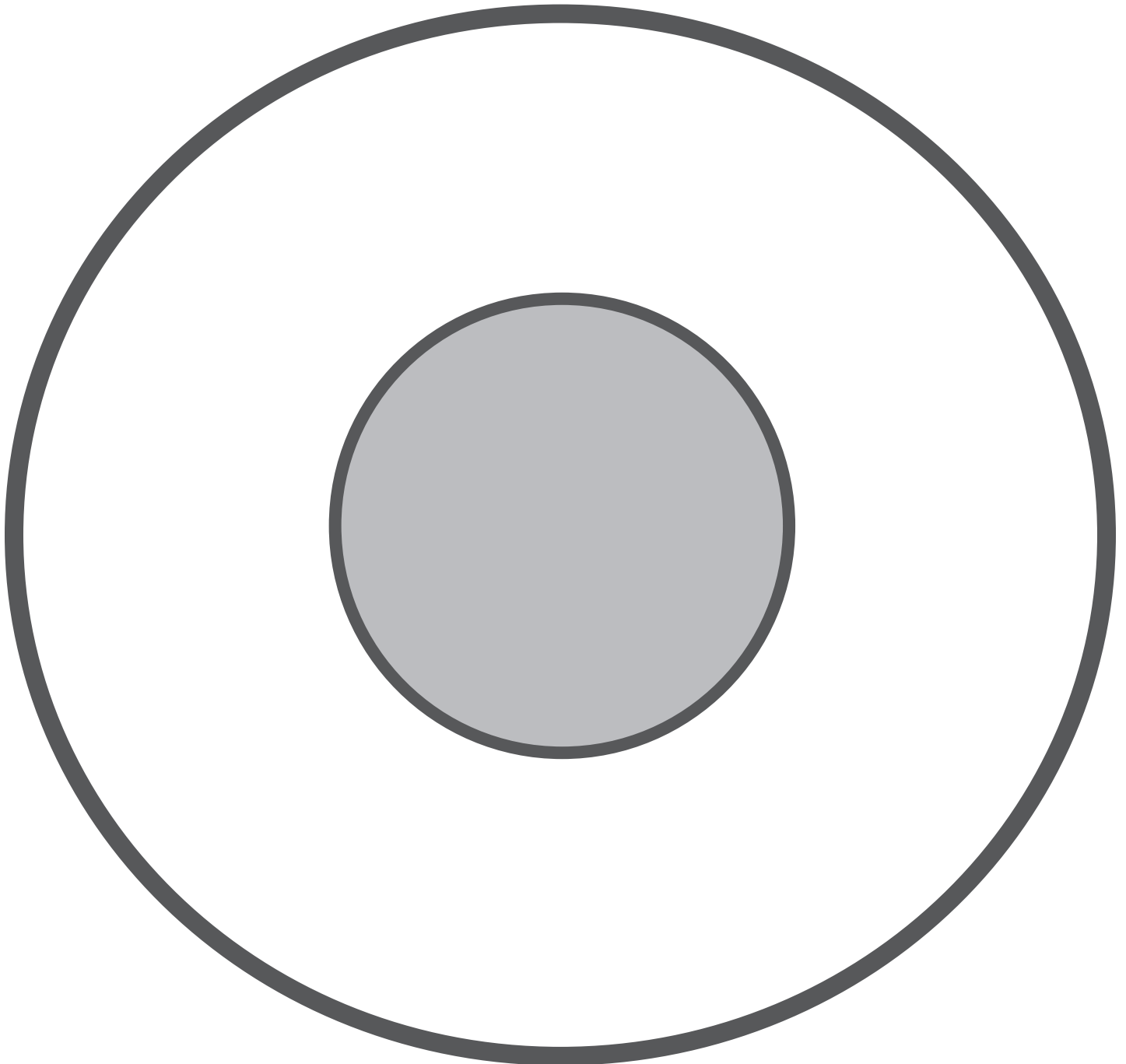
She could make several versions of the Wheel, such as:

- 1) How frequent the tactics occurred in my relationship (e.g., the biggest slices for types of abuse that were most common).
- 2) How much those tactics affected me in the relationship (e.g., the biggest slices for tactics with the greatest impact, even if they were not common).
- 3) How much the tactics 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, perhaps sexual abuse was 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 again at various stages during your intervention, and then look for changes in her thoughts and feelings about her life and her relationship.

MY WHEEL FOR MY LIFE

The Power & Control Wheel has 'slices' which describe control tactics that women might experience in abusive relationships. Your own personal Wheel describes *your* life. Maybe you have three slices, or maybe you have 10 slices. Some slices could be really big, while others could be very small. In your Power & Control Wheel, maybe one slice takes up half the wheel. It's your Wheel, to reflect your life.



PARADOXES OF ABUSE

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

Here are some paradoxes about violence in intimate relationships:

1) Many people assume that it is un-masculine and/or embarrassing for a man to hit a woman.

BUT: Some men *do* hit their female partners, and other people may even see their actions as justified or excusable.

2) Many people assume that a woman who is being abused can or will recognize it immediately.

BUT: An abused woman may not interpret her partner's actions as being abusive for some time.

3) Many people assume that a woman who experiences minor abuse might not leave her partner, but someone who experiences serious abuse would leave for sure.

BUT: The more severe the abuse, the harder it can be to leave.

4) Many people assume that a woman would protect herself from further abuse by leaving.

BUT: Staying can be safer than leaving.

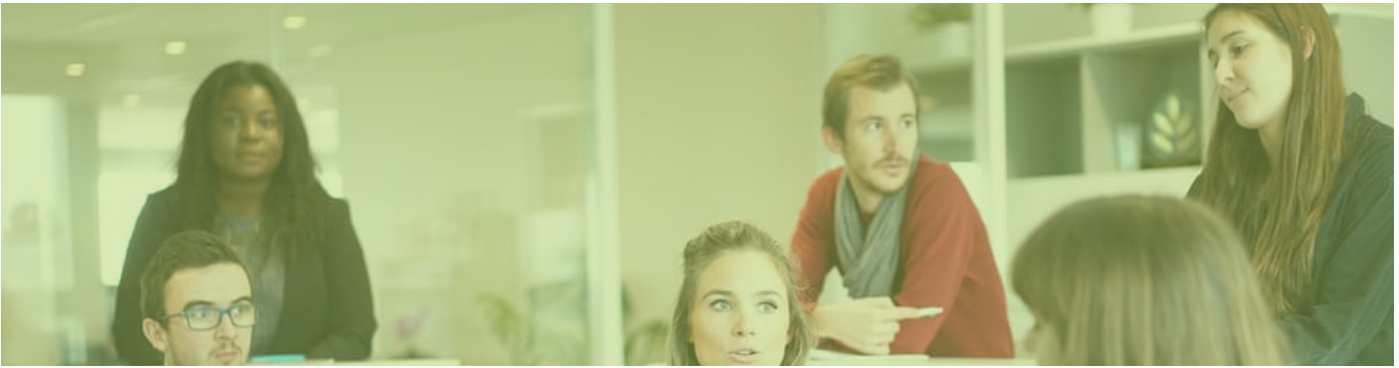
5) Many people assume that they would know if a close friend or family member were being abused at home.

BUT: Abuse in a relationship can be completely hidden.

6) Many people assume that a true victim is perfect and that 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 sometimes seem illogical. But seeing the paradoxes gives us a lens to understand a woman's decisions and choices. By failing to appreciate the paradoxes, we could make incorrect assumptions and judgments about a particular woman, or make her feel worse by reinforcing common assumptions.



Paradox 1

Many people assume that it is un-masculine and/or embarrassing for a man to hit a woman.

BUT: Some men *do* hit their female partners, and other people may even see their actions as justified or excusable.

Common assumption: A real man would never hit a woman

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

Reality: Men do hit women

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 1,200 women are killed each year and around two million women are 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 domestic violence programs. Generally, in Westernized countries, 1 to 4 percent of women report a criminal incident of domestic violence in any given year. However, most of those women do not call the police. In Canada, the Canadian Women's Foundation reports that approximately every six days, a woman is killed by her intimate partner. On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it is not safe for them at home. Meanwhile, about 300 women and children are turned away from shelters on any given night because they are already full.

In Canada, the abuse and violence that is enabled through sexism is further compounded by other forms of oppression that have led to social inequality,

including racism and classism. For instance, there were 1,232 reported cases of missing or murdered indigenous women between 1980 and 2015, according to the RCMP. Grassroots organizations and the Native Women's Association of Canada believe that the number is actually much higher.

Reality: Some people think it's okay for a man to hit a woman

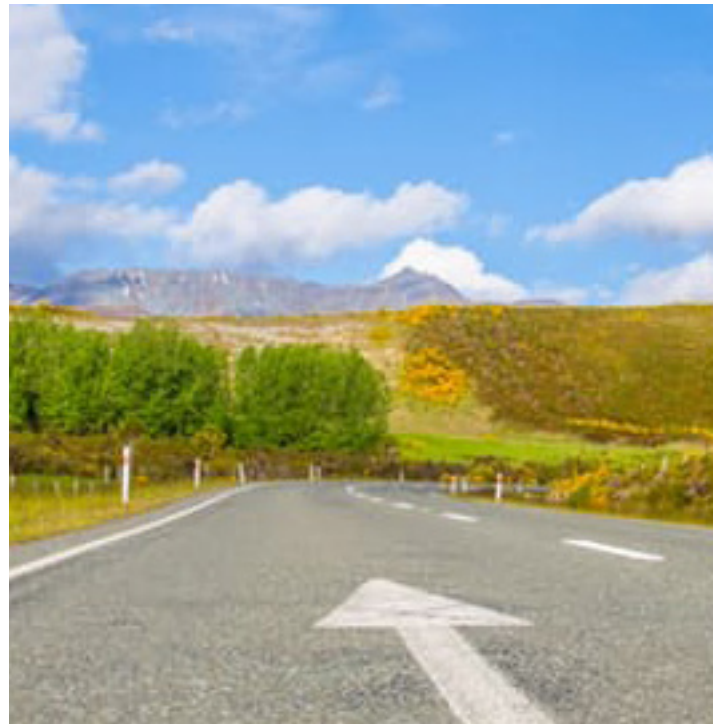
Most people believe that hitting a woman is wrong. But it is surprising how often you hear phrases like the following: "I was taught never to hit a woman, but ..." In other words, some people define circumstances which make it okay to hit a woman. Some of those circumstances include: when she hit him first; if he warned 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 un-masculine. In other words, it's wrong for a man to hit a woman, but it is understandable under certain circumstances (e.g., if she is unfaithful, or if he is drunk or stressed out). Work-related stress or financial pressure explains away violence in some people's minds, as does a man losing his temper, his own experience of abuse as a child, or mental illness. The argument is that, yes, the man did hit a woman, but there was a logical reason, so it wasn't truly his fault.

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 59. Help her articulate any excuses that he used, find out the extent to which she buys those excuses, and (if

necessary) re-direct any feelings of responsibility from herself onto the person who chose to commit violence against her.

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

How is a woman punished by this paradox? She is blamed for the actions of another person – her abuser. 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 even predictable. But does it feel different to be hit by someone who was abused as a child versus someone who wasn't? Is the damage any different? A woman might feel guilty for being upset at her partner, or believe that accepting his behaviour is a way of being sympathetic and supportive of his problems.



Paradox 2

Many people assume that a woman who is being abused can or will recognize it immediately.

BUT: An abused woman may not interpret her partner's actions as being abusive for some time.

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

Abuse is so awful and obvious, a person might say. The woman would know it the second it starts. She would see herself as having been abused and see her partner as being abusive. She would know immediately to leave.

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

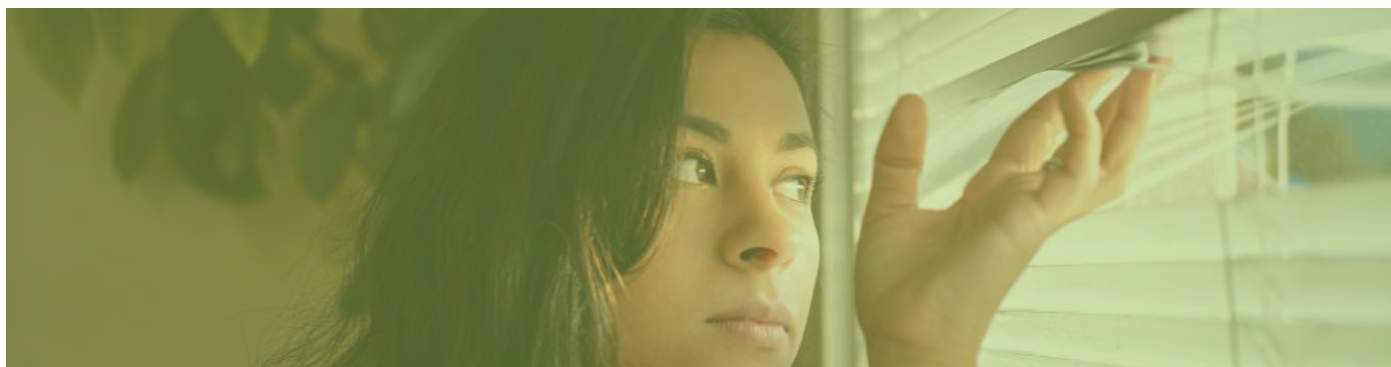
Control tactics can be difficult to see. In fact, many features of coercive control can look and feel like love, such as possessive jealousy, a continuous need to know her whereabouts, or demanding all of her time and attention. A man's use of control tactics may grow over time, and subtle change is more difficult to see than sudden change. Even after she is aware of problems, it is natural for a woman to explain them away. All relationships have problems, she might think. Even being physically hit could be an isolated incident. Or so she hopes. He apologized, after all, and he only did it because he was drunk. She may defend him to

others and accept his excuses, at least initially. But the fact of the matter is if abuse began on the first date, no abusive relationship would ever get off the ground. Abuse often takes hold after a woman develops an emotional commitment to the relationship, or after she has children with her partner. She wants and needs to believe that everything will work out for the best.

Consequences of this paradox for women

The consequences of this paradox include feeling 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 being unacceptable. But people fail to appreciate her reality. They may see her as having consciously chosen to stay in an abusive

relationship, perhaps even because of masochism. As with many of the paradoxes of abuse, the length of time that a woman stayed with her partner and/or her silence during all that time can lead people to mistakenly believe that she is lying about the abuse when she eventually does reach out for help. These people assume that if the abuse really happened then she would have left sooner.



Paradox 3

Many people assume that a woman who experiences minor abuse might not leave her partner, but someone who experiences serious abuse would leave for sure.

BUT: The more severe the abuse, the harder it can be to leave.

Not all women are the same. And it is equally true that not all abuse is the same. Women make their decisions to stay/leave by balancing many factors, including the severity of the abuse.

Common assumption: A woman would leave if the abuse was severe

Minor or isolated incidents of inappropriate behaviour might be forgiven. In relationships, after all, 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 experienced minor or infrequent physical abuse, especially if the abuse was predictable (e.g., when he binged on alcohol). In these situations, the woman 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, on the other hand, are trapped

by fear long after the point in which they want to leave. Their daily focus is to predict or prevent violence, and they often develop placating or avoidance strategies that are at least sometimes successful. They may be trapped by fears of, "What if?" Perhaps he will exact revenge, kill himself or her (or both), or hurt the children if she leaves. Previous attempts to leave may have strengthened a woman's belief that her partner's threats are realistic. Leaving can be quite dangerous, as is discussed in the next paradox.

Consequences of this paradox for women

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 may describe abuse so severe that people don't believe it or feel that she exaggerates

for purposes of revenge or to enhance her custody case. Her recounting of incidents may not be complete or linear initially, as more and more events come back to her mind and trust is built with the person she is recounting the abuse to. Her 'disclosure,' in other words, may elapse over time. This can be taken by some to indicate embellishment and/or fabrication. Police records might show that she denied abuse during successive law enforcement visits to the home. Despite now being ready to tell all, she may be silenced because she "had her chance to speak."

Some people believe that women who don't leave should be willing to accept the consequences of their choice to remain in the relationship. Anyone holding this view may have a derisive tone, or be restrained in any support that they offer. 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.



Paradox 4

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 may look like a 'no-brainer.' But it's not as easy as it may seem.

Common assumption: Your best protection is to leave (and it is easy to leave)

Many people believe that a woman is an 'idiot' to stay with an abusive man (e.g., "If my partner were ever abusive to me, I'd be outta there so fast..."). Or someone might say, "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 is best to terminate a relationship

with an abusive man who is not ready to attend batterers treatment and work to change his value systems and choices. But in the short run, a woman's risk for injury dramatically increases when leaving the relationship. Violence can continue (or start) after a separation. When a woman leaves, her partner loses control, and he 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 the use of physical violence. Some women need to develop elaborate escape plans just to get out. And even when she does get out, fear can drive her back.

Mothers often stay in abusive relationships to protect their children, believing that they can run interference and protect the children, whereas they would not be with them on weekend visits with their father (if she left). In extreme cases, consequences for women can even 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 also more likely following separation. Some women leave the



relationship only to reconcile later for safety reasons, or because they have difficulty providing for or managing their children. Some women leave multiple times before finally being able to sever ties with their partner completely.

Consequences of this paradox for women

This paradox means that most people will not understand a woman's reasons for staying in an abusive relationship. From the outside looking in, the danger is not always apparent. Or the danger *is* apparent, and her friends and family are frustrated with her for finding excuses to stay. Often, when she can leave, the length of time that she stayed is used to discredit her allegations of abuse. If it was so bad, someone might ask, 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/or seen as trying to sabotage the children's relationship with their father. People may not understand how much a woman is at risk. Or, people do understand the risk and don't invite her to stay with them, which reduces her options and potentially necessitates her admission to a shelter.



Paradox 5

Many people assume that they would know if a close friend or family member were being 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 is true that some men are abusive in front of others, or use violence both in and outside of the home. But this is not the most common pattern. Typically, abuse occurs only in private. Some women speak of the 'Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde' presentation, where her partner seems to become a completely different person when not in private. 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 could ruin his image as a 'nice guy' or get him arrested. Some men work very 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 express their shock because he was "such a nice guy."

Reality: Women can go to great lengths to hide the reality of abuse in their relationship

Women have good reasons to maintain secrecy, including embarrassment, hope that the situation will improve, fear of their partner's reprisals, the patriarchal views of the woman's religion or culture, or concern for their partner's welfare if people were to discover the truth. For example, if the abuse

became known, 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 is difficult to tell someone or ask for help

Even once a woman decides to tell about her abuse, it is difficult to break the silence. She may worry about not being believed, or about being judged by others. Shame and a desire for privacy continue to be factors in keeping quiet. As does 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, but suffered negative consequences. Or she may have no place to go if she were to leave her home.

Consequences of this paradox for women

After years of silence, and perhaps even denial, a woman who makes a disclosure of abuse may not be believed. From the outside, her relationship may have appeared normal – perhaps even ideal. But her efforts to 'keep up appearances' are now held against her. If she accesses the legal system after leaving, her delayed disclosure can be viewed as an attempt at revenge, or as lies to further a custody application, or as an effort to alienate her children from their father. Further, if her efforts at self-defense leave visible marks, then *she* may appear to be the abusive partner.



Paradox 6

Many people assume that a true victim is perfect and that 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, and who is financially successful or educated, 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. If he were an abuser, he would have an anger management problem that would be evident outside of the home, or he would be a drunk, or he would have a criminal or prison record.

Common assumption: Women with flaws will lie about abuse

If a woman gets caught in a lie, or drinks too much, or admits to 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 her partner shouldn't 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, and be well-liked by his neighbours and co-workers. All of these things can be true and he could still be abusive to his wife and/or his kids. In reality, many abusive men are successful, well-liked, and kind to people they don't live with. At times, they can also be kind and considerate to their family and be good breadwinners.

Reality: Women with flaws can be abused

An abused woman might lie occasionally, like any of us

do. Maybe she drinks too much sometimes, cheats on her taxes, or loses her temper and yells at the kids. She might even hit her kids or her partner. But none of these facts mean that she cannot be a victim of abuse.

Consequences of this paradox for women

A woman is punished by this paradox when it is used to discredit her allegations of abuse, especially when she calls the police or seeks custody of the children through the courts. Sometimes the legal system assumes that complainants who lie about other things in their lives will *ipso facto* lie about allegations of abuse. For example, denials of abuse by her partner on previous police visits to the home might be taken as an example of her lying. If she hits him in self-defence or retaliation, this can be seen as evidence of her violent tendencies. Mutual violence can cancel itself out and result in no one being held responsible. Maybe, it is assumed, that he simply defended himself. Or maybe she was drunk. In extreme cases, the woman alleging abuse could herself be charged with assault. In a custody battle, he can line up character witnesses willing to swear to his exemplary character. And this tactic may be successful if the judge holds as true this common assumption that women with flaws lie about abuse.

It is important not to inadvertently reinforce these paradoxes by questioning a woman's choices or seeming judgmental or disbelieving. Reinforce the realities so that she doesn't blame herself in retrospect for past choices. Frame these experiences as her coping under difficult circumstances.

UNDERSTANDING COPING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

‘Coping’ is how we react to situations that tax our capacity to manage problems that arise in our everyday lives – the car needs new brakes, or the cat coughs up a fur ball on the expensive rug. For most minor problems, we deal with them and move on. ‘Coping,’ as we define it here, arises when a situation or problem is not manageable and it 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. However, *how* we cope is our choice, to some extent.

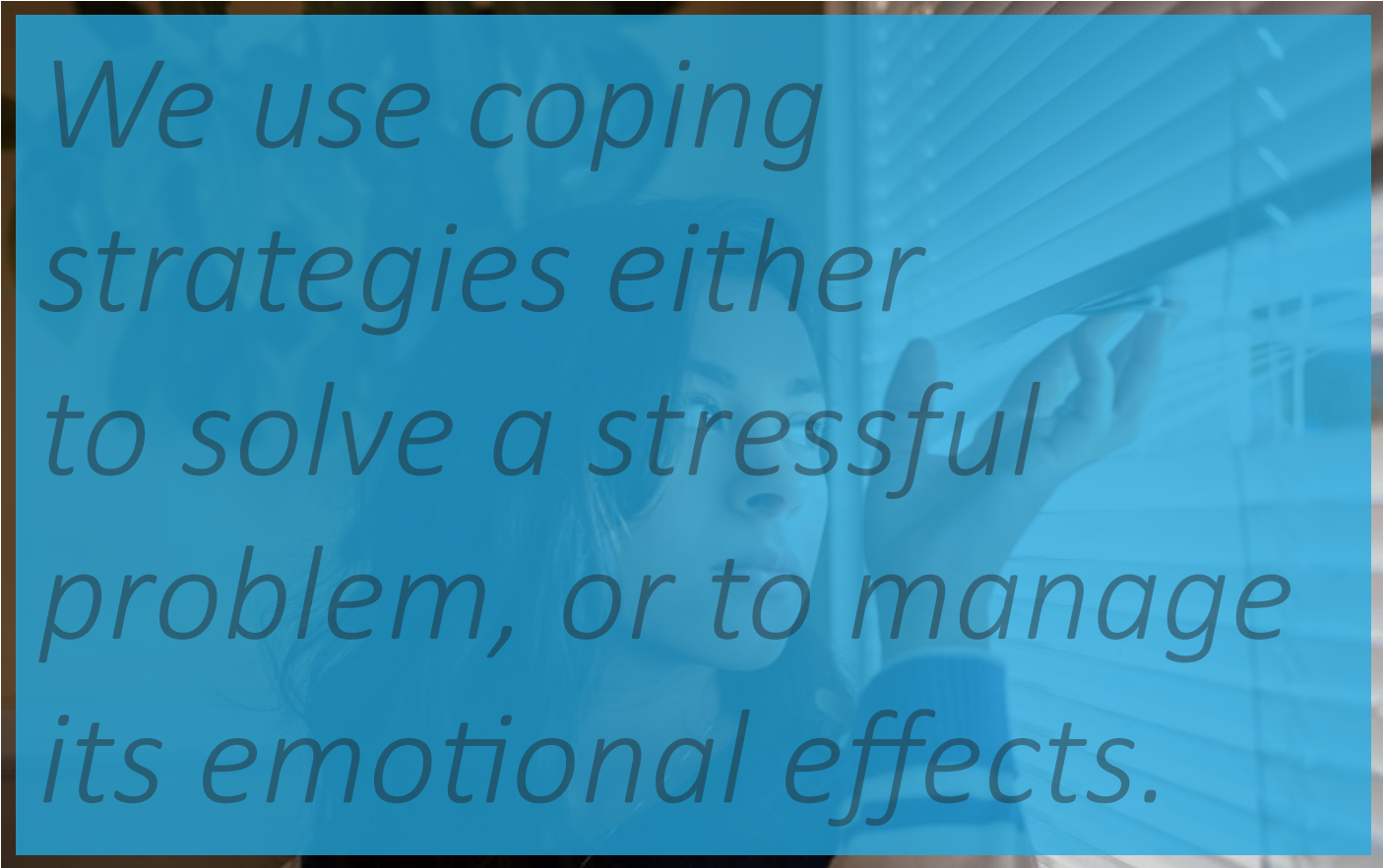
The purpose of coping is to feel better

We use coping strategies either to solve a stressful problem, or to manage its emotional effects. Consciously or unconsciously, we 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 is free from pain), or actions that make us feel better (e.g.,

attending a bereavement group to speak with others in similar situations).

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

Every person is different. A problem that is easily dealt with by one person can be insurmountable for another. When in a situation where we need to cope, we draw from our internal and external resources (e.g., having money in a savings account helps when the car needs new brakes). Resources can include supportive family or friends, life experiences that give us perspective, self-confidence, good health, an optimistic outlook on life, social skills, the knowledge gained from past successes at solving similar problems, or a strong religious faith. Some people also refer to the concept of ‘coping skills’ or ‘coping choices,’ which refers to a repertoire of skills or choices – like problem solving or from problem-solving to denial to denial--that we access when needed.



We use coping strategies either to solve a stressful problem, or to manage its emotional effects.

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

A stressor that we easily deal with one day may be overwhelming on a different day, depending on the current stressors in our lives. Life stresses can include losing a job, confronting a major illness, or ending a relationship. Maybe we could deal with one stressor, but when faced with another at the same time, it could become overwhelming. The cumulative effect of multiple problems/stressors, in other words, can reduce our ability to manage situations that we might usually deal with easily.

An abusive relationship forces a woman to use her coping resources

Living with abuse and control tactics can challenge anyone's ability to cope with daily life. Over time, a victim is pushed off her emotional centre by unpredictable and/or irrational demands and 'damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't' expectations. Either the criticism is constant and wearying, or the victim finds herself living on edge, not knowing what will trigger an outburst or when it will happen. As a result, 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 her partner's standards. She juggles his demands and needs with those of the children, and she keeps up the appearance that all is well at home, to maintain her privacy and her dignity.

Coping skills used within abusive relationships can look like 'problem' behaviours

Life inside of an abusive relationship is frightening, isolating and confusing. Sometimes, having a beer might be the best way to get through the day. It can quell anxiety and numb feelings. Smoking might help. Other options to avoid the abuse might include taking extra shifts at work to avoid going home, spending more time at a place of worship, or simply staying in bed. The label 'problem' could be applied to some common coping choices, but when looked at another way they are simply survival strategies. Some of the strategies she uses are aimed at stopping the abuse (e.g., calling the police or attempting suicide), while

others help her to feel less anxious about a situation that she isn't able to (or ready to) change.

Surviving and coping strategies can become problematic

Even when a coping choice looks like a 'problem,' we must not minimize its importance in enabling one's daily survival in a difficult situation. The real problem comes if (or when) her coping starts to interfere with life in general. Some coping strategies can have costs to a woman's health and wellbeing. Remaining in bed can exacerbate isolation and depression, for instance. Social drinking can become problem drinking, and recreational drug use can lead to an addiction. She might even be arrested for assault if she tries to physically defend herself.

An abusive partner can pressure a woman into committing criminal behaviours, like shoplifting or drug trafficking, or high-risk behaviours, like working in the sex trade. The victim 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 at school or the workplace, or if she cannot keep up appearances within her community. In other words, negative consequences of coping can spill out into other parts of a woman's life, and can also endure after the relationship ends.

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

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

Trying to solve a particular problem is certainly one way to cope with that problem. Solving the problem of abuse eliminates its negative effects – including the potentially overwhelming emotions and turmoil that it creates. Problem-focused or ‘engagement coping’ includes pacifying a partner to avoid abuse and/ or 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 the following techniques of engagement coping, as observed in abused women:

- Physical avoidance or withdrawal (e.g., not going home, or going out if he’s in a ‘bad mood’ or has been drinking)
- Conflict avoidance (e.g., not expressing opinions, ignoring the abuse, or refusing to argue or contradict him for fear of triggering violence)
- Trying to please him with attention, praise, food, sex, etc
- Self-defensive violence or pre-emptive aggression (homicide in the extreme)
- Help-seeking (e.g., counselling, legal advice, going to a shelter)
- Calling the police or threatening to call the 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 oneself to make her abuser happier (e.g., getting breast implants)
- Using prayer (e.g., if a woman believes that prayer will rescue her or help him to become a better person)

Important note: these active and passive attempts to avoid or stop abuse are not always effective.

Some coping strategies involve feelings or thoughts

Another type of coping is called emotion-focused or ‘disengaged’ coping. These strategies don’t change a bad situation, but rather are used to try to reduce a victim’s levels of stress and tension by changing how she thinks or feels about the situation. Emotion-focused coping techniques include:

- Avoiding thinking about the bad situation
- Distraction (e.g., focusing on something else to forget about the bad situation)
- Minimization: “I can deal with it,” ... “It’s not so bad.”
- Distancing oneself 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 get hit by a bus.”
- Escape fantasy (e.g., daydreaming about a happier life)
- 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.”
- Reframing a negative as a positive: “Years of his financial control taught me good budgeting.”
- Suicide (to remove oneself from the situation)
- Numbing by self-medication (e.g., drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, food) or self-injury
- Seeking sexual encounters for self-soothing
- Dissociation or pretending not to be there (in reality)
- Maintaining the ‘secret’ of abuse so as not to feel embarrassed or ashamed

All coping strategies work to some extent, but some can have a cost in the long run

We naturally gravitate to coping strategies that help us feel better or solve a problem. So, to some extent, all coping is helpful. It gets us through bad times. However, some coping strategies come with 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. And to maintain its effectiveness as a coping strategy, it must be repeated over and over. As a result, casual drug use can become an addiction. Similarly, a person might resort to drugs for any stressful situation. But life is full of stress. Taking drugs in reaction to workplace stress can create a new problem: unemployment. Similarly, using drugs when the kids get on your nerves can also create a new problem: the kids being taken away by child protection services. In other words, a strategy that proves effective for one type of stress can itself become a problem to be coped with.

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

Sometimes, women are forced to abandon a coping strategy (e.g., giving up alcohol when entering a shelter with rules against alcohol use). Unfortunately, this might mean giving up an effective coping strategy. In this example, having no access to alcohol can impair a woman's defenses against the thoughts and feelings that she was trying to avoid – as well as her defenses against any new worries and problems that may arise. This flood of emotion may be overwhelming, and it can be unbearable for some. Whether conscious of it or not, this woman will be looking for another effective way to cope. As an advocate/social service provider, this might be a good time to start a discussion with her about safer coping options and their consequences. Encouraging the adoption of safer coping is a good place to start when seeking to reduce a person's reliance on costly methods of coping. When women can identify their own coping strategies, it is easier to separate the ones worth keeping from those that are harmful in the long run. Help her develop her problem-solving skills so that she doesn't get stuck in disengaged modes of coping. However, don't denigrate her disengagement coping strategies. Coping strategies are neither inherently good nor bad, but rather fall on a continuum of increasing safety and with varying costs.



Women use specific strategies in an attempt to control the violence

Drawing upon a variety of sources, including focus groups with women, researchers have developed a list of strategies that women have used to control and/or stop the violence. They are organized 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 the 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 at 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 they were also reported to be the least helpful. Meanwhile, 75 percent of women reported that calling the police had been helpful.

Adapted from:

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

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 of other thoughts and feelings. The woman may feel sad that the relationship has ended. She may even miss her partner. Although most women who leave abusive relationships feel relieved, everyone has the right to grieve the loss of a relationship and all the hopes and dreams that she may have had for the couple and for their family. Many women would prefer that the abuse stop but not necessarily that the relationship end.



HOW TO TALK TO WOMEN ABOUT COPING



When a woman is aware of her own coping strategies, she can identify which ones are effective or ineffective, as well as which ones are effective but that come with costs in the long-run. One way to conceptualize coping is to think about how some problems we encounter in life are things that we can ‘deal with’ or manage, whereas other problems tax our ability to function. Using the diagram on page 72, help a woman identify past problems in her life with which she had success coping, and then list the ways that 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, reaching out for help, venting to cool off, complaining to authorities, etc. For each coping strategy, ask: “Did it help you feel better?” “Did it solve the problem?” “Did it make things worse?” Then, ask about issues that 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?

Name the problem(s)

We are only required to ‘cope’ when a problem taxes our ability to manage our everyday lives. Problems can be *situations* (e.g., an upcoming eviction), or *overwhelming feelings* (e.g., anger at being evicted, fear of what happens next, sadness at being in the given situation, guilt for how the

children will be affected). The process of problem-focused coping is aided by defining the problem(s). It is also important to verbalize the feelings that are generated by a given problem.

Make a list of possible coping responses

Support her as she lists some ways that she might solve a given problem (and also deal with the 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 when she found herself in a tough spot but where everything eventually worked out. What personal qualities and strategies worked then?

Avoid value judgments

No strategy that she suggests is inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but rather some are safer than others. 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, which can be an unrealistic idea at a time of crisis and transition. Giving up smoking, for instance, might be an overwhelming thought. And at least smoking cigarettes is less harmful than smoking an illicit drug.

Validate how difficult this is

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

Self-care is an important part of coping

Self-care alone does not solve problems, and it is trite to suggest that a bubble bath will help in the long-run. However, it is important to get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, and be physically active. These three basic needs have biological impacts that improve wellbeing and increase energy, which is needed for coping with stress.

Build on her natural strengths and comfort levels

What works for one woman may not work for another. Reading a trashy novel can be a great

distraction for some, or an insurmountable challenge for others (e.g., 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, or other features of human nature.

Break the big problem into chunks

Breaking a big problem into pieces makes the problem more manageable. A woman facing a move may have the following 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 them 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 that she can share her progress.



COPING

We all run into problems in life. Some are big, and some are small. On most days, and with most problems, we're able to 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 arise at the same time. The effects of many small problems can add up.

What is the biggest problem you are coping with right now?

My Problem: _____

List some ways to cope with the problem or solve it.

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

Will coping that way get me into trouble?



DESTRUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ABUSE

ON A WOMAN'S LIFE

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

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, or 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, she believes, because disappointment is inevitable. Re-building (or building from nothing) a woman's core self-esteem can be a lengthy process.

Abuse can compound the damage (and/or prevent healing) from childhood abuse

The scars and consequences of childhood abuse can take years to heal (if ever). Cascading from an abusive childhood home into one or more abusive relationships allows no time to recoup emotionally. The consequences of the earlier abuse can compound and grow. As a result, a woman might see the world as a toxic place where abuse in relationships is inevitable.

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

Another consequence is when a woman's day-to-day capacity to live and work is compromised by the context or consequences of her abuse. For instance, she leaves school early, or she has difficulty getting or keeping a job because of his need to control. Maybe she has residential instability, accumulated debts, poor credit, chronic health problems, low self-esteem, a lack of a

support network, or an alienation from family. These things may continue to play out in negative ways long after the relationship ends.

Coping with abuse can create longer-term problems

Survival within abusive relationships requires a woman to develop coping techniques that help at the time but that may become costly in the long-run.

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

Abuse can compromise a woman's ability to be the best mother that she wants to be. For instance, 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 parenting behaviours, becoming too permissive or too rigid. Over time, in some families, children can see the mother as being ineffective, vulnerable, emotionally unavailable, or as someone needing to be cared for. It is a paradox, but it is true that some children may blame their mother just as much (or more) for the abuse as they do their father. The children may believe his rationalizations – for example, that his abusive behaviour is her fault. Children may be angry that she stays with him, or they may be afraid that she'll go back if the relationship does end. They may not trust her to keep them safe, or they may even doubt that 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.



LEAVING THE RELATIONSHIP

RISKS AND BARRIERS



Feelings and thoughts that block emotional leaving

Ending an abusive relationship is not so much an event as it is a process. And it is one with at least two stages: the physical leaving and the emotional leaving (sometimes called ‘closure’). These two stages may elapse over a few days, or they may 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 LGBTQ2+ relationships, leaving an abusive relationship could include an additionally complex aspect. Because the right to marry, or partner with, the same sex has been such a challenging human right to achieve, leaving a same-sex partnership can be seen by the individual as not only a personal loss but also a failure to the greater LGBTQ2+ community.

In collectivist cultures, women may feel torn between leaving an abusive relationship and fulfilling their roles and obligations within the family and the community.

The following feelings and/or thoughts can keep a woman emotionally invested in a relationship long after she decides to physically leave (or even compel her to reconcile after leaving):

Lack of confidence in herself

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

Hoping for change/deferred happiness

Most relationships start out happy – sometimes even blissfully so. He is charming and romantic, and she feels special and loved. It is only over time that little problems creep into her awareness. Perhaps she dismisses them at first, optimistic that better days lie ahead. At some point, she may re-assess her expectations of what a relationship should be. In this phase of decision-making, a woman knows that she is not happy, but she hopes that 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 his own childhood abuse. When he blames her for his inappropriate actions, she’ll try to change something about herself (e.g., lose weight, be sexier, have a baby, nag less, keep the kids quieter). “Maybe I’m not happy today,” she thinks, “but staying put is my best chance for future happiness.”



Trade-off/ minimization of harm

A woman might cope with abuse by minimizing the severity of the consequences, or by 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 might decide to tolerate the bad parts to gain continued access to the good parts (either for her or for her children). You may hear women express sentiments like the following: “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,” ... “I love him, so it’s worth it.”

Commitment and investment in the relationship

A woman struggling with the stay/leave decision might take into account the time and energy that 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), and have developed a familiar routine. All of that is lost if she leaves. Age may be a factor here, if she feels too old to ‘start over’ with someone else, or if 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 even forbidden. But even without those factors, some women see the marriage vows as a commitment for life.



Anticipation of loss

The end of any relationship is associated with many losses. There are practical losses, like a 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). And there are more odious worries, such as deportation (if a woman’s immigration was sponsored by her partner). Or, she might worry that he’ll report her illegal job or turn her in for welfare fraud. The possibility of losing custody of her children, whether real or imagined, is also a powerful loss that she’ll do much to avoid.

Child-related guilt

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



Circumstances blocking emotional closure

Sometimes circumstances beyond a woman's control mean that 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 that 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 might 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.

Shame and embarrassment about 'how it looks' to others

Another series of thoughts that might keep a woman from leaving is a concern for outward appearances. Does being single make one 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 in others about their struggles or ask for help.



Resignation

While certainly not true of every woman, there are some women who resign themselves to simply having no choice in how their life evolves, or who expect nothing but hardship and unhappiness in life. It is best not to hope for something good, they might think, 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." ...

Concern for him if she leaves

Another factor weighing into the stay/leave decision for 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?

Barriers to physical leaving

Barriers to physical leaving include financial factors, lack of support, fear for personal safety or the safety of others, child-related fears, and various legal concerns related to property rights, child custody, and immigration issues.

An abusive man can cut a woman off from her family and discourage or prevent friendships. This control tactic isolates her from people who could recognize her situation or offer support. What factors made it difficult, or are making it difficult, to physically separate from a partner you want to leave?

Money and financial issues

- I don't have a job.
- I don't think I could get a job.
- I have no money of my own, no access to money, and/or no place to get money.
- I believe he won't pay child support or help me financially with the children.
- I owe money to the utilities, telephone, etc., so I couldn't get my own place.
- I need his medical plan to cover health expenses for me and/or my child.
- I would have to quit my job if I leave him.
- Other:

A lack of support from others

- If I don't live with him, I have nowhere else to go.
- I don't know anyone who would take me and the kids in, even temporarily.
- There is no women's shelter in the area I live.
- All my family is back home in my country, and I don't really know anyone here.
- My family has made it clear that they won't take me in if I leave him.
- I live in a remote or rural area and have no transportation.
- Other:

Fear for personal safety or that of others

- I'm terrified of what he'll do to me if I tell him I'm leaving.
- If I left, he'd seriously hurt me or maybe kill me.
- He'll hurt our pets or animals if I'm not there to

take care of them.

- Where I live, a woman needs a man in the house or she's a target and vulnerable.
- Staying with family is not a good solution because he knows where they live.
- I'd be looking over my shoulder and living in fear every day.
- If I got involved with a new man, he'd kill that guy or seriously hurt him.
- My partner believes that the 'disobedience' of a woman gives her family the right to kill her.
- Other:

Child-related fears

- I can't take my children with me if I leave.
- He'll harm the kids on weekend visits (I won't be there to protect them).
- He'll take our children back to our home country and I won't see them again.
- I might lose custody because he can afford a good lawyer and I can't.
- He'll use a personal problem of mine (e.g., drug use) against me in a custody fight.
- I believe he'll call child protective services and they would take my children.
- In my culture, men get custody of the children after divorce.
- Other:

Standing up for my (property) rights

- It's my house, so he should leave, not me.
- It's our house, and I have as much right to it as he does.
- I've begged him to leave, but he won't get out.
- If I'm the one to leave, the kids will lose their home and have to change schools.
- I worry that I'll lose my legal right to a fair share of our joint property if I leave.
- Other:

Other legal factors

- My immigration status would be in jeopardy if we were no longer together.
- If I leave, he might report my illegal status to immigration authorities.
- If I leave, he might report my illegal job to authorities.
- I can't afford a lawyer to help me

.....

BARRIERS TO LEAVING

Deciding to end a relationship, or not going back, can feel like tension between reasons holding you there (or pulling you back) and reasons pushing you away. Review the barriers that you checked off for emotional and physical leaving. Some of those things might go

on the left side of the scale. They can be thoughts or feelings, or practical matters, like money. If you are already 'gone,' both physically and emotionally, list the factors that were important in your final decision.

Factors pulling me to stay (or go back)	Reasons I left or reasons I want to leave



COMMON CONTROL TACTICS



Coercive control is the defining feature of 'abuse,' as we define the term. But physically assaultive men and emotionally abusive men have much in common, as 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 describes several control tactics, including intimidation, coercion and threats, isolation, using male privilege, and minimizing or denying harm. Here are some different (but similar) control tactics used by abusive men that will help women label their experiences and feelings. It's not likely that any one man uses all of these tactics, but every abused woman will identify with many of them.

Orchestrating the 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. However, as discussed in the section on paradoxes, seemingly 'nice guys' can be abusive at home. Abusive men can also have good qualities (in some contexts). He may publicly

criticize men who are abusive to their families. This manipulation of his image starts with the woman herself, as he denigrates his ex-partners as having been vindictive or mentally unstable. *He* is the victim. Women often report that he is a great guy to have at a party, is generous with friends, and is charming and charismatic. Indeed, this charisma is probably what attracted her to him 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 that he believes he deserves, such as a fancy car or a speed boat. The toys make him look successful.

But 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 would 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 doesn't seem like '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. In other words, he is a victim to be pitied.

Orchestrating the public image of his partner

By 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 backhanded compliments, like describing her as “sweet, but not so bright,” or “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, he says, that he must make up for her deficits so that the kids don’t suffer. His calls to child protective services create an image of himself as the concerned parent, and create a file record of her as the suspect parent. He may encourage her reliance on drugs so that he has a ‘buddy’ to party with, or he may not take drugs himself but control her by controlling her access to drugs. He might criticize her for being an addict while holding 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, claiming that their partner is “suicidal.” Shelter workers could tell you about men calling to report the “real story” about 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,” he might say. 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 the fact that she might initially believe his portrayals of her or be confused by his mixed messages. This could lead to difficulty in getting support from friends and family after leaving, and it could compromise her attempts to get custody of the children.

The ever-present potential for ‘a scene’

Only the most toxic man is abusive all the time. Periods of ‘normal’ life, in other words, inevitably elapse between incidents. However, at the back of her mind, she knows full well that the peace could end in an instant. As a result, she may ‘stage manage’ her

life to avoid situations which, as past experience suggests, will trigger an abusive episode – especially when other people might witness it and cause her embarrassment. Don’t disagree with him about even a trivial issue, she thinks to herself, 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. This means walking on eggshells, trying desperately to do everything correctly. Inevitably, though, he’ll erupt at something and leave her guessing about what to do differently next time. Men whose abuse is always unpredictable with no apparent pattern are even more destabilizing for victims of abuse. The ever-present potential to erupt, especially when other people are present, can be an extremely successful strategy for him to get his own way and keep all the attention focused on his own needs.

The ever-present potential for escalation of the control tactics

Some of the most dangerous men are actually the least likely to use physical abuse. They don’t have to. A menacing look can be an effective control tactic if a woman knows that he’s capable of hurting her. Or maybe it’s a drive through the countryside, pointing out places he could bury her body where she’d never be found. Or completing passport applications for the children, including forging her signature, and leaving the papers out in plain view. Or maybe threatening to post private or disparaging information on social media. In LGBTQ2+ partnerships, the threat of forced ‘outing’ in social or professional settings where the abused partner is not yet ‘out’ can result in intense continued anxiety. These are all examples of highly controlling tactics because they threaten a horrible consequence for non-compliance with the abuser’s wishes.

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 who is critical of him. The flip side of isolation is when

a woman comes to believe that she cannot survive without him. He creates an emotional dependency if she believes that she's lucky to have him, or that no other man would want her, or that she needs him to guide and manage her life. Creating financial dependency is another control tactic that might keep her from leaving. He can prevent her from working, prevent her from learning English or developing other job skills, tell her that she's not good enough to get a job, sabotage her efforts to keep a job, or 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 (property or money gifted to him by her family) if she wants a divorce. Fearing abandonment and destitution, she may be desperate to keep him happy. Even if she does leave, financial pressures could force her to return, especially if she has children.

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 the anti-violence field has seen men justify their abuse with religion. Most religions have peace and reciprocity at their roots (e.g., "treat others as you would like to be treated"), but religion is also intertwined with patriarchal cultures which condone (if not encourage) male domination of women. Like others who distort religion for twisted ends, men who cite scripture 'cherry-pick' the bits that justify their actions and ignore the bits that condemn them. His image as 'devout' can cause a woman to worry that no one will believe that he mistreats her. Meanwhile, a woman might use her own faith as a coping strategy to deal with the stress and confusion of religious rationalizations. In seeking the counsel of faith leaders, she may be treated with great understanding, or she may instead be admonished to suffer in silence. A man who acknowledges his wrongful behaviour can still use religion to escape blame. For instance, a Christian might ask his partner, "Christ has forgiven me, why can't you?"

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 who she speaks with or who she spends time with. Like the other tactics described here, this is a common occurrence but not a universal one, and it can range in intensity. Attempts at monitoring can include frequent, random calls throughout the day to ensure that she's where she's 'supposed to' be, dropping by her workplace unexpectedly, checking the details of her internet usage or e-mail, or checking the car's mileage to see how far she's travelled. He might even forbid her from leaving the home unless accompanied by him or an approved chaperone.

Relatively old-fashioned electronic monitoring (e.g., listening devices, or hidden cameras) is now accompanied by new computer-based devices. Key logging software, for instance, is virtually undetectable by the user and can periodically e-mail a log of everything typed, including chat and web surfing. Webcams can be activated surreptitiously by a remote user, who can then hear all conversations 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 every movement. 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 then amplifies his need to control.

In the internet age, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain one's privacy. Some people are resistant to posting information online, as is their right. But a woman can't control the postings of friends or acquaintances on the myriad of social media platforms that exist today. Keeping up with friends by viewing and monitoring social media posts is an everyday activity and a way of life for young people. But they may not fully grasp the severity and potentially negative consequences of cyber surveillance.

Emotional blackmail to inspire guilt

By inducing guilt, an abuser keeps the victim focused on his own needs, and he hopes to prevent her from leaving or entice her to reconcile if she does. Emotional blackmail can take many forms, ranging from the silent treatment or pouting (when he doesn't get his way) all the way to threatening suicide. If sensing that 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 drinking and driving. He may enter therapy and say, "See, I'm trying."

Obsessive jealousy and possessiveness

As part of objectification, dehumanization and a 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 (e.g., dressing modestly, walking with eyes aimed at the ground), nothing can convince him that she is not flirting or seeking sexual liaisons with other men. His thinking could be so distorted that he may accuse his partner of having sex with the investigating officers who took her police statement. Or, similarly, he could see the police officers as having a sexual motivation for believing and aiding her.

Denying her right to have thoughts and feelings different from his

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

Using the children

Children can be used in control tactics – both when they live together as a family and/or after a separation – to gain her compliance with his demands, prevent her from leaving, or continue the 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, gain information about her through the children's social networking accounts, harass her during child transfer for visitation, or threaten child abduction (e.g., move to a new municipality or take them to his country of origin).

STALKING

After separation, surveillance is called ‘stalking,’ and it is a red flag to trigger serious concern for a woman’s 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 that she is ‘cheating’ with other men. Jealousy is a feeling, but stalking is a behaviour – and it is a criminal offense. Men who act on their feelings and flout the law are especially worrisome.

Harassment in the form of stalking can involve repeated, persistent, and unwelcome attempts to communicate over several weeks, such as with telephone calls, letters, texts, notes left on the victim’s property, and e-mail. Stalkers may maintain contact by approaching victims in public, through surveillance, persistent following, leaving unsolicited gifts, ordering goods and services in the victim’s name (e.g., pizza), and damaging property (e.g., cars). In one study, about half of the stalkers assaulted their victims at least once. The variables most highly correlated with assault were a prior criminal record and substance abuse. Overall, 30 percent of the stalkers in the study were ex-partners.

Being stalked by a stranger, especially someone with a mental illness, is fear-inducing. Researchers in this area have identified five categories of stalkers. The highest rates of violence were observed not in strangers but rather 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, included:

Rejected

This was the most common type of stalker in the sample. They were typically (but not always) former romantic partners, and most (85 percent) were male. They felt a loss of the relationship, and they could cycle between a desire for reconciliation and for revenge, between sadness and anger, and between jealousy and vindictiveness. About half (54 percent) assaulted the victims, and the assaults were always preceded by threats of harm. About 20 percent made threats but were not assaultive. Most were employed (71 percent), but half had criminal records and almost a third had histories of substance abuse. They were the most persistent of the stalkers, with the average duration being 41 months in length. And they used a wide variety of methods to communicate and follow their victims. They were also the most likely to use frequent telephone calls for harassment. Included in this group were men termed as ‘morbidly jealous,’ as well as 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 that they saw as their one true love. Into this group fell those diagnosed with erotomania, who believed, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that their love was reciprocated. They could become angry when spurned by the objects of their affection, 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 but who, nevertheless, hoped that the attention would be endearing and ultimately a successful strategy at winning the victim's love. People in this group could be intellectually delayed, or not sophisticated in courtship etiquette. Or they were people who felt entitled to a relationship without having the skills or the patience for conventional dating. About a quarter of the stalkers in this group assaulted their victims. They tended to have a history of stalking, as they would use the same strategy on multiple victims. The average duration of stalking was 16 months.

Resentful

The goal of this group (81 percent men) was to be frightening and upsetting, often as a result of a perceived grievance that may or may not have been based in reality. They could show considerable self-righteousness or a sense of persecution. Sometimes, the victim was known to them, but in other instances the victim was chosen at random. Threats of harm were common (87 percent), and one quarter of these stalkers assaulted their victims. Engaging the legal system to protect victims deepened their sense of grievance.

CYBER SAFETY



If a woman thinks that her online activities are being monitored, they probably are. She should trust her instincts!

It is important to know that it is not possible to delete or clear all of your computer or online activities. If a woman is being monitored, it may be dangerous for her to change her computer behaviours completely, such as suddenly deleting her entire internet history, or stopping her computer usage entirely. She may want to continue to use the internet to look up innocuous information like the weather.

Use a safer computer if researching an escape plan, looking for new jobs or apartments, or bus schedules. It might be safer to use a computer in a public library, at a trusted friend's house, or at an Internet Café. If you use email or Instant/Text Messaging (IM), use a safer computer and an account that your abuser does not know about.

Use a safer phone or messaging system. Email and IM are not safe or confidential, and neither are internet phones (e.g., voice-over-IP) or cordless phones. If possible, call a hotline instead from a phone in the community or at the home of a trusted friend. Set up a new e-mail/instant messaging account, and change the password frequently.

With the woman's permission, consider reporting cyberstalking to police. Some jurisdictions have laws against cyber harassment.

If separated from her partner, it is important for a woman to 'clean up' all the technology that she has used, as well as her internet activities (to the extent possible). The safest option is to assume that all technological devices have been compromised, and that everything said or done online, including passwords, calendar, e-mail and contacts, is being monitored. It may be necessary to have a knowledgeable friend or computer technician help with the 'clean up' process and install up-to-date security software, as well as provide some education on the complexity of privacy and safety on the internet.

Our resource on cyber safety provides more information.

PROFILES OF ABUSIVE MEN

Psychologist Lundy Bancroft has treated thousands of abusive men and has documented his observations in several excellent books. Bancroft outlines several myths about abusive men and answers questions commonly posed by women. Abusive men share many commonalities, Bancroft has found, especially in how they think and rationalize their actions. However, there exists wide variation in styles and intensity. He has devised the following 10 descriptive profiles (some men fall neatly into one profile, but most straddle two or more).



The Demand Man

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



Mr. Right

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



The Water Torturer

Has a calm, low-key presentation. He is sarcastic and derisive, and he uses constant low-level insults.



The Victim

He feels persecuted, unrespected, or taken advantage of. He feels abused and wants sympathy.



The Drill Sergeant

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



Mr. Sensitive

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



The Player

He's often good-looking, and he can be intensely romantic at the onset of the relationship. But the passion cools. He initially builds up his partner's self-esteem and then withdraws his interest. He may pit women in his life against each other. He's chronically unfaithful, he uses women as playthings, and he may claim sex addiction.



Rambo

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



The Terrorist

Terrorizes his partner with threats of what he might (or could) do. He is sadistic, highly dangerous and highly controlling, and he likes to see her afraid. He 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. This can exacerbate the problem, but it 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.

Reference:

Bancroft, L. (2002). *Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. New York, NY: The Berkley Publishing Group.

CATEGORIES OF PERPETRATORS



The Martyr

- He sees himself as the rescuer of a 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 Rescuer

- Like the ‘martyr,’ he believes that he rescued the woman from a bad situation.
- Sees the woman as needing guidance and/or as being unable to make decisions on her own. Sees her as a possession or trophy, as something that he has shaped, and as someone who should be grateful to him.
- He uses anger, violence, or threats in the same way as the ‘patriarch.’



The Victim

- He sees himself as being taken advantage of by her, or perhaps even abused by her.
- Sees her as abusive to him, unstable, moody, an alcoholic, a drug addict, 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 her.



The Patriarch

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

Reference:

James, K., Seddon, B., & Brown, J. (2002). *'Using it' or 'Losing it': Men's constructions of their violence towards female partners*. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/12980954/Using_it_or_losing_it_Mens_constructions_of_their_violence_towards_female_partners

RATIONALIZATIONS FOR ABUSE

A rationalization is an excuse for doing something that 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 (e.g., “She hit me first”) or misunderstood, or the victim lied or exaggerated. If he does actually recognize that his actions are wrong, rationalizations help him believe that it was not his fault and that it’s not a bad reflection on him (e.g., he claims that stress or alcohol was the cause).

Abusers use rationalizations to explain their actions to others

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

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 as a man with a problem (e.g., “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, and so a man may not want to acknowledge that he is an abuser of women. In batterers’ treatment programs, the first task is to encourage men to understand the following: 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 can be a tall order for someone who has spent years believing that his behaviour was 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 self’

(e.g., “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”). He is incensed when he is arrested and/or made to attend a treatment program, and he feels misunderstood and persecuted.

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 the 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 ...

A woman might see his rationalizations as valid criticisms of her

Being blamed for his actions, she might feel responsible for ‘causing’ his abusive behaviours (e.g., “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 she takes in 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.

MEN'S EXCUSES

How do men explain away 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 (e.g., job stress). Another goal of an abuser's account is for the man to distance himself from the role of 'batterer,' and instead see his actions as externally or situationally driven rather than as a representation of his true self. In his mind, he may even be a victim (of the situation, or of his partner). His account may not be true or valid, but it represents how he perceives his behaviour and how he will explain it to others, like the police.

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 then move to another (e.g., apologizing but then offering an excuse). Over the course of a relationship, an abuser's accounts for successive incidents can change (e.g., the likelihood of an apology declining over time). Sometimes men might report having no memory of the incident or might provide a different account of the incident. The following four categories of accounts were derived from studies where men were interviewed during intake into domestic violence treatment programs.

Excuse

He admits that his actions were wrong, but he claims that it wasn't his fault. He denies responsibility, and says that any harm he caused was unintended. Examples might include that he was drunk, or that he was under a lot of stress at work. Without those external factors, he says, he would not have done it. So, he can continue to think of himself as a 'good guy.'

Justification

He accepts responsibility for his actions, but he denies that 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 that his actions were wrong. This may preserve his sense of being a 'good guy' because he is owning up to a mistake. He may implicitly or explicitly promise to change.

Dismissal / Minimization / Repudiation

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

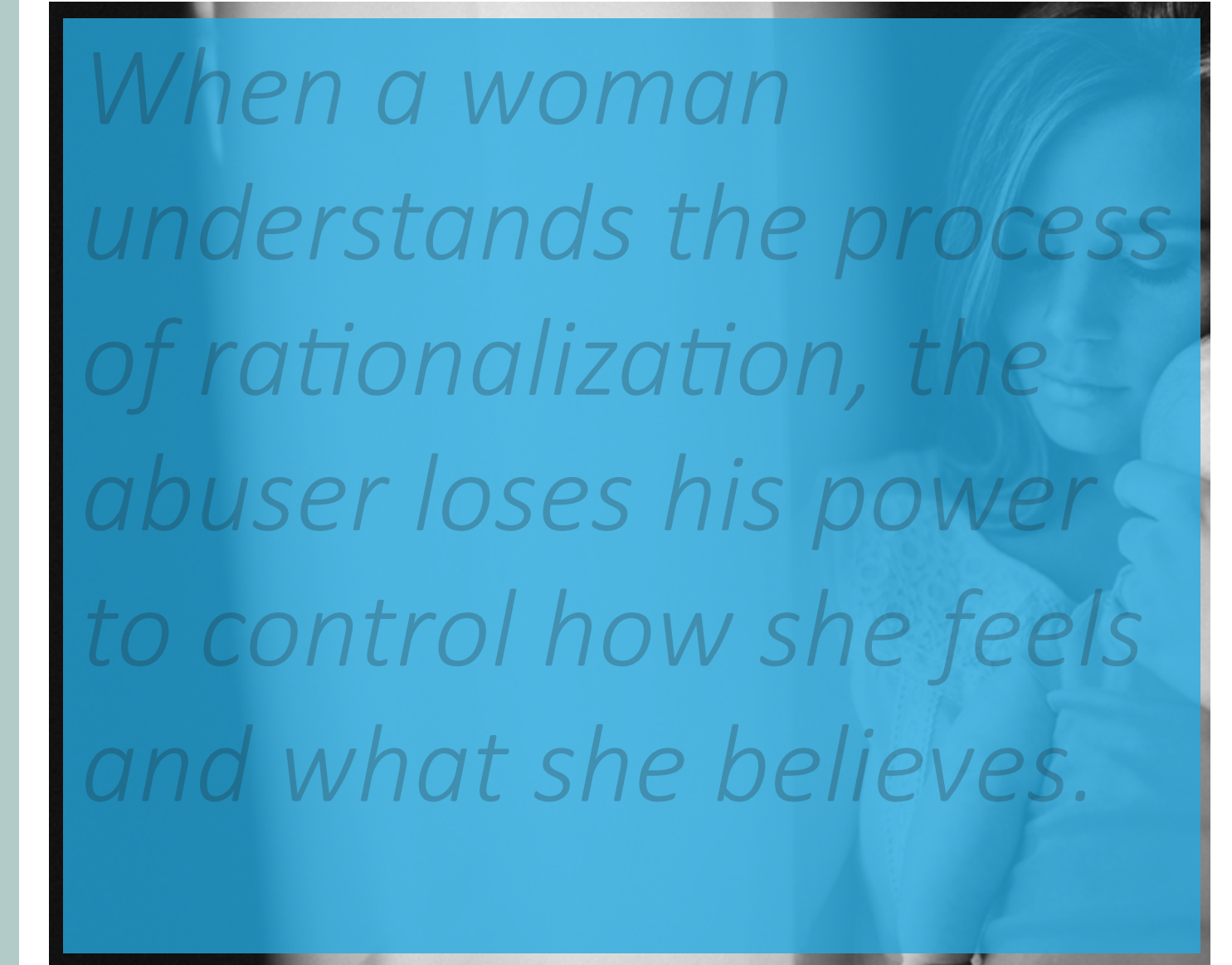
Other rationalizations focus on circumstances or his problems

Such rationalizations might include: "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 ultimate message of these rationalizations is that he is not responsible for his actions, and that things might get better when the situation changes (e.g., he gets a better job). He generally sees these external factors as being beyond his control to change.

RATIONALIZATIONS SEND MESSAGES

The messages of rationalizations can include that the man is blameless or misunderstood, that the woman is at fault or chose to trigger his abuse, and that preventing future incidents is within the woman's power (and is out of his control). Some rationalizations might look and feel like love, as when he is obsessively jealous. A man can block a woman from working, but at the same time deny her money from his income to meet the children's needs. This is called 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." The message hidden in these rationalizations is that the man is superior, and that 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 that 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.



When a woman understands the process of rationalization, the abuser loses his power to control how she feels and what she believes.

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 his behaviour as somehow being outside himself. It is someone else who needs to change (either themselves or their expectations).

His abusive behaviour won't stop until he takes responsibility for his actions

Knowing that smoking is unhealthy doesn't make it easy to quit. But we aren't likely to quit until we appreciate the fact that smoking is unhealthy. The same idea goes for changing the attitudes and values that drive abuse.

Rationalizations can lose their power if a woman sees them for what they are

If a woman accepts male rationalizations as valid, she will feel guilty, or unworthy, or any number of emotions that can sap her spirit. But eventually, perhaps helped by a supportive friend or counsellor, she can see the messages that underlie the rationalizations, and she can stop believing them and stop internalizing them as core beliefs about herself. She can understand how rationalizations work to undermine her sense of self-worth, and how they reveal more about her abuser than about herself. When a woman understands the process of rationalization, the abuser loses his power to control how she feels and what she believes. She can then see that her behaviour should never result in abuse.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTROLLING MEN

The behaviour of abusive and controlling men is not the result of 'anger management problems.'


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

The behaviour of abusive and controlling men is not the result of 'anger management problems.' Nor is it 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, which is driven by a deep sense of entitlement ("I want to be the centre of attention, and I deserve to be the centre of attention in this family"). Maybe that's the arrangement that his father demanded and received. Male privilege and entitlement are reinforced by society and popular culture, with boys growing up hearing messages that males are better than females and that men must be in charge. However, all boys don't grow up to be abusers. Even most boys with abusive fathers don't grow up to be abusive themselves. And some men grow up and romantically partner with other men and have same-

sex relationships where abuse occurs. So, male privilege cannot fully explain why some men are abusive while others are not. The recipe for making an abusive man includes a complex stew of factors that we don't completely understand. It takes many years to create the thinking patterns that result in abuse, and it is difficult to undo the damage. The features of an abuser's character that permit the mental gymnastics required for rationalization are both deep and strong. The following five features are traits common in men ordered into treatment for abuse. Not all men have all five characteristics, but they are all fairly common.

Self-centredness

Abusive men are usually self-centred, and this characteristic goes by several labels: egotistical, selfish, narcissistic, immature, or arrogant. Regardless of which label is used, it means that he sees himself as unquestionably the most important person in the family, and he believes that 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 is common for problems to first emerge when a baby enters the equation.



Blaming other people for their own actions and problems is the second common feature of abusive men.

otherwise. It is common for problems to first emerge when a baby enters the equation. Having to now 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 as 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. This trait can result in a woman being treated like a servant as he focuses 100 percent on his wants (and none on hers). And she might feel pressure to anticipate his wishes. She may describe being with him as "like having another child," one with constant demands for attention and temper tantrums when he doesn't get his way. Research shows that most types of psychotherapy are not effective with abusive men, unfortunately, because talking about themselves, their problems, and the injustices that they have endured, such as childhood abuse and vindictive ex-partners, serves to feed their intense ego needs and preference to blame others for their problems.

Externalization of blame

Blaming other people for their own actions and problems is the second common feature of abusive men. This can also be called 'blame shifting.' Everything bad is somebody else's fault. It is why (in his mind) the woman is to blame for her own

victimization. Or, perhaps it's stress or booze that is to blame. Or it's 'God's will,' or an unreasonable boss at work, or his mother who abused him, or his father who abandoned him. As previously mentioned, when he clings to rationalizations that excuse or justify his choices, he is unable to believe that he can control and change his own behaviour.

Low capacity for empathy

Consistent with being absorbed entirely with one's own needs is the inability to discern the needs of others. Empathy is the capacity to understand a situation, and/or the feelings or motives of another person. Empathy is often described as the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. A lack of empathy, then, 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, in part it is 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 themselves. It is also why he assumes that 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. Abusive fathers may have a poor understanding of the developmental needs of their children, and they may put their own needs above those of their children.

Threat sensitivity

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

Resists authority

One final trait common to abusive men is that they can have difficulty living within externally-imposed constraints. Speeding laws don’t apply to him, for instance, because they are ‘stupid,’ or they only apply to unsafe drivers. He’ll drive as fast as he likes and will feel persecuted if given a ticket. He may even accumulate dozens of unpaid tickets. Some abusive men irrationally fail to inhibit behaviour that repeatedly leads to consequence or punishment. Rules don’t apply to them. By applying their well-honed skills of rationalization, they explain away the decisions of police who arrest them, or of judges who incarcerate them.

Reference:

Bancroft, L. (2002). *Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. New York, NY: The Berkley Publishing Group.

Note: The inclination to resist authority is a factor that needs to be taken into account when he is considered for bail, non-custodial 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.

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 that men are better than women, or that 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 your partner treats you (or how he 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 own benefit			
Daily life revolves around what he needs and what he wants.			
He believes he is the head of the house, the king of his castle.			
He believes that he deserves to have an attractive girlfriend or wife.			
He makes all the big decisions for us as a family.			
He believes that he deserves to have anything he wants.			
He buys nice things for himself while the kids and I go without.			
He believes he deserves success at work or business, even without much effort.			
We are in debt because he buys nice things (for himself or to impress others).			
He treats me more like a servant than his partner.			
If he ever helps around the house, he thinks that I should thank him (or he never helps around the house).			
If he takes care of the kids, he calls it "babysitting" instead of being a parent.			
He has to win at everything he does/avoids doing anything he can't win.			
He believes that men should not do housework or help with the kids.			
He believes that it's a woman's job to take care of men and do what men want.			
He doesn't follow the rules of society, like the speed limit or paying taxes.			



	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 own benefit - Continued			
When he wants something, he wants it NOW (including sex).			
He believes that men are generally better than women.			
He can easily break the law because he thinks laws are stupid.			
If I didn't do things fast enough or to his satisfaction, I'd be in trouble.			
He can take my paycheque and not feel bad that I have no money.			
If he is dishonest to someone, he doesn't feel guilty.			
Needing to be the centre of attention			
He likes to show off.			
He dominates most of the conversation in a group.			
He doesn't like listening to other people talk/he interrupts others frequently.			
He must have the biggest TV or the most expensive car (or he wants to).			
He talks about himself all the time.			
He rarely (or never) asks about me or how I'm feeling.			
I can't remember the last time he gave me a compliment.			
If he gives someone a compliment, it's because he wants something.			
If someone doesn't compliment him, he takes it as an insult.			
If the conversation moves to another topic, he brings it back to being about him.			
Things were okay until the baby came and I had to spend less time with him.			
He is easily bored, especially with things that interest me.			
When we were dating, we spent hours talking about him and his problems.			



	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
Needing to be the centre of attention - Continued			
If he has a problem, everyone has to drop everything to help him.			
He justified sexual relationships with other women by saying I was ignoring him.			
Sense of superiority or arrogance			
He believes that he is smarter than most other people.			
He doesn't like to be around people who are smarter than he is.			
He is extremely critical of people, even his children.			
He makes it clear (or implies) that he is better than I am.			
He feels hurt and rejected by a small criticism that most people would take in stride (or even appreciate).			
He gets angry if anyone teases him about even a small mistake.			
Putting other people down makes him feel better about himself.			
He always has an easy solution for other people's problems, but he never sees any problems that he might have.			
He ignores suggestions from others about how to improve himself.			
He does not react well to suggestions about how to be a better father.			
He says his life is so interesting that someone should write a book about him.			
He only plays a game if he knows he can win.			
Even when he plays with kids, he has to win.			
He is super critical of other people, even children.			
He is easily offended or feels "dissed" at minor things.			
A small setback or problem will cause him to abandon a project.			



	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
Sense of superiority or arrogance - Continued			
If he is playing a game and starts to lose, he will quit.			
When something goes wrong, it's never his fault.			
If I did something well, he had to show me that he is better at it than I am.			
It's important that his child be the best, because it looks well on him.			
He feels misunderstood by people who don't understand how "special" he is.			
He makes fun of me and calls me demeaning names.			
He makes fun of the kids when they make a mistake.			
He can never apologize or say that he was wrong about anything.			
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...			
He assumes that I know what he wants and what he is thinking.			
He thinks anyone who disagrees with him is wrong.			
He adores the kids, but he treats them like possessions instead of people.			
He spends a lot of time worrying about his appearance.			
If the baby cries or the kids are noisy, he thinks they do it on purpose to get on his nerves.			
He takes everything personally (e.g., if someone is late, he thinks they are trying to make him angry).			
If he buys me a present, he gets something that he likes (and cannot see what I might like).			



	This does not describe him	He is a bit like this	He is a lot like this
Self-absorption / selfishness / self-centredness / seeing others as an extension of him - Continued			
He cannot see anyone else's viewpoint if it is different than his.			
OR, he buys something expensive so he can show it off to others.			
He can do nice things for other people – if he gets lots of compliments.			
If he does something nice and doesn't get compliments, he feels used.			
He doesn't understand the needs of the children, or he assumes they need the same things that he does.			
He treats the children like adults and assumes that they think like adults.			
If I'm not around, he expects one of the kids to take my place in taking care of him.			
I kill myself working so hard, and he doesn't notice or care that I'm tired.			
He takes credit for things that I did, like when the house looks nice.			
Even when I'm really upset (e.g., somebody close to me died), he expects his daily routine to continue.			
If something nice happens for me (e.g., I got accepted into college), he can't be happy for me.			
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).			

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



UNDERSTANDING ABUSE DYNAMICS

WHY ALL PROFESSIONALS NEED TO KNOW

Because any woman you meet might be impacted by abuse

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

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

A common example of this is how women are prescribed antidepressants or other medications to

treat 'symptoms' of mental health problems that are really being caused by abuse, or are the result of coping with an untenable situation at home. Prescribing a pill for depression won't work if the 'depression' is actually a logical reaction to life circumstances. Other presenting issues that could be indicators of abuse include anxiety, chronic pain, fatigue, or child behaviour problems.

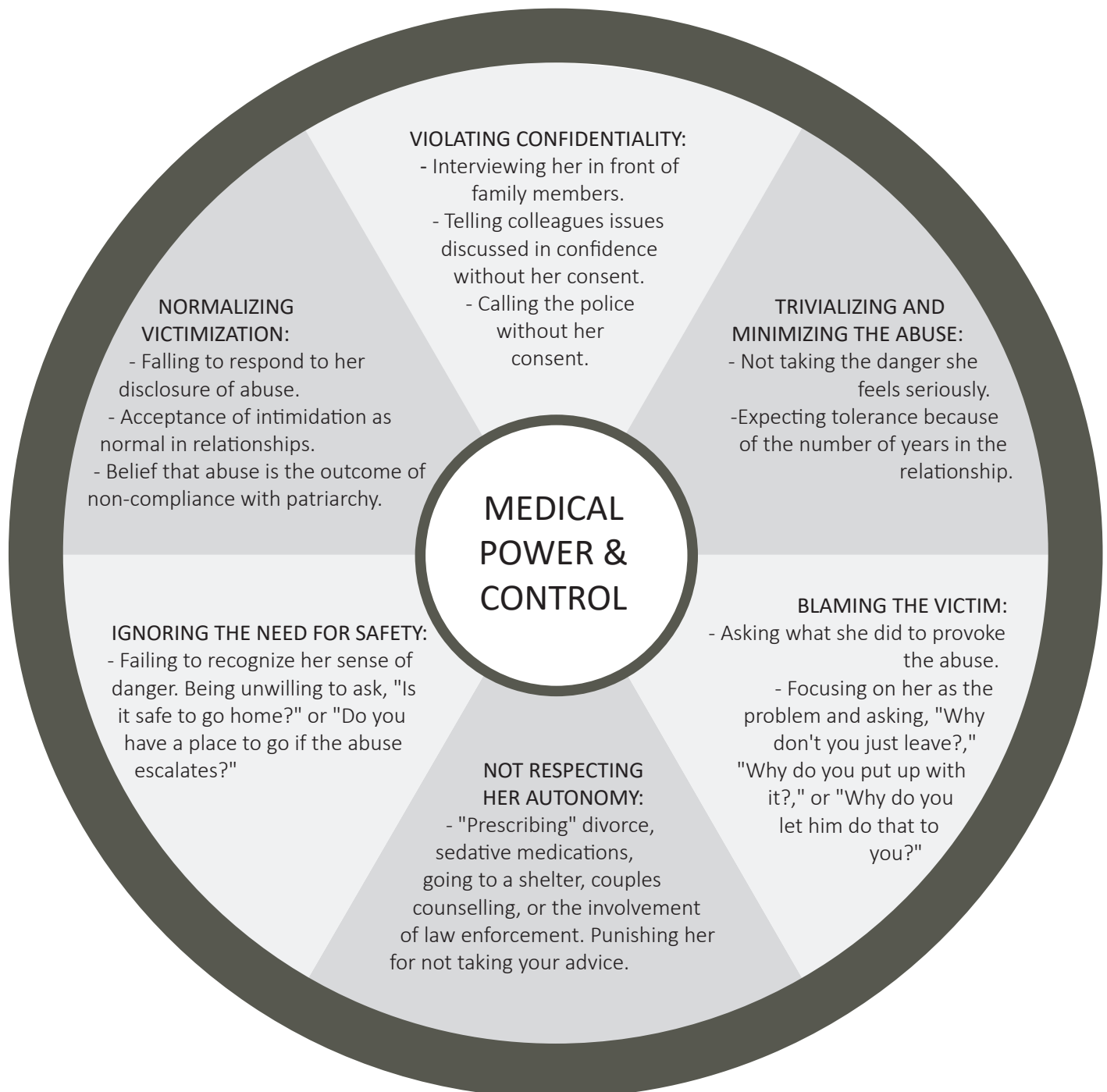
Because your intervention may not be effective if she can't feel safe

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

*Addressing her
need for safety
is the priority for
now.*

BECAUSE EVEN A WELL-MEANING RESPONSE COULD MAKE HER SITUATION WORSE

The Medical Power & Control Wheel was developed by the Domestic Violence Project in Kenosha, Wisconsin, for use in health care settings. However, the principles apply anywhere. The Wheel shows how some reactions by professionals could make a woman feel blamed or 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. And if her partner learns that she tried to disclose his abuse, his need to control may trigger an escalation in his threats or violence. He has a lot at stake, and he needs to keep her quiet.



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, who have jurisdiction over criminal offences. But all of the helping professions play a role when women need and reach out for help. Healthcare 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 the result of coercive control. Other groups that play a role include her children’s teachers or school counsellors, staff at childcare centres, lawyers, judges, faith leaders, psychologists, and child protection workers. Know the signs that a woman is in crisis, be prepared to respond

in a sensitive way, and refer her to the services in your area that best match her needs.

A ‘no wrong door’ approach

People in all helping professions will meet women who are being abused, or who have recently been abused. It is important that we all feel knowledgeable and comfortable with the issue, we deliver our service with a full understanding of how abuse affects women, and we refer women as appropriate to abuse-specific or other services. The ‘no wrong door’ label describes a service-delivery system that is accessible and integrated, and that 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 that they enter.



PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ABUSED WOMEN



Whether you use the term ‘feminist,’ or are more comfortable with another label, a woman-centred practice places the woman at the centre of all efforts.

Each woman is the expert on her life (therefore, 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 that she takes must be defined by her. She might make decisions that worry you, like staying with or returning to an abusive partner. But while you may not agree with everything she says or does, this is her life, not yours.

Safety is the priority

A crucial first step in any intervention with an abused woman is to think about the likelihood of ongoing or escalating harm. Inquests held to examine intimate partner homicides often conclude that the victim suspected that her partner or ex-partner had the potential to kill her. However, other work suggests that an abused woman’s sense of risk can be distorted by chronic victimization or the socialization of women to be polite and non-assertive, or to simply 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

percent. A truly dangerous man will easily ignore these restrictions.

Note: If a woman has recently ended an abusive relationship (or is about to end one), this is the time (as statistically correlated) when there is an elevated risk of her being hurt or killed. If she plans on leaving, help her develop an exit plan. If she has already left, help her identify ways that she can protect herself and summon help in an emergency. The London Abused Women’s Centre has developed a customizable safety plan. An internet search with the terms ‘safety plan’ and ‘abuse’ or ‘violence’ will locate guidance on the specifics.

Children’s exposure to violence in the home is harmful to their wellbeing and development. In many jurisdictions, knowledge that an abused woman has children who have been exposed to violence in the home, or who are at risk of exposure to violence, will trigger mandatory reporting obligations. It is critical to be clear and up front with the woman about the limits of confidentiality when it comes to the safety of the children. Include the mother at each step of the reporting process, including the actual phone call to child protective services if she wishes, and ensure ongoing safety planning.

** For more information about children’s exposure to violence, see the resource ‘**Helping Children Exposed to Violence at Home: An Essentials Guide,**’ which is also part of the DELTA series.

Seek to understand each woman, in all of her complexity

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

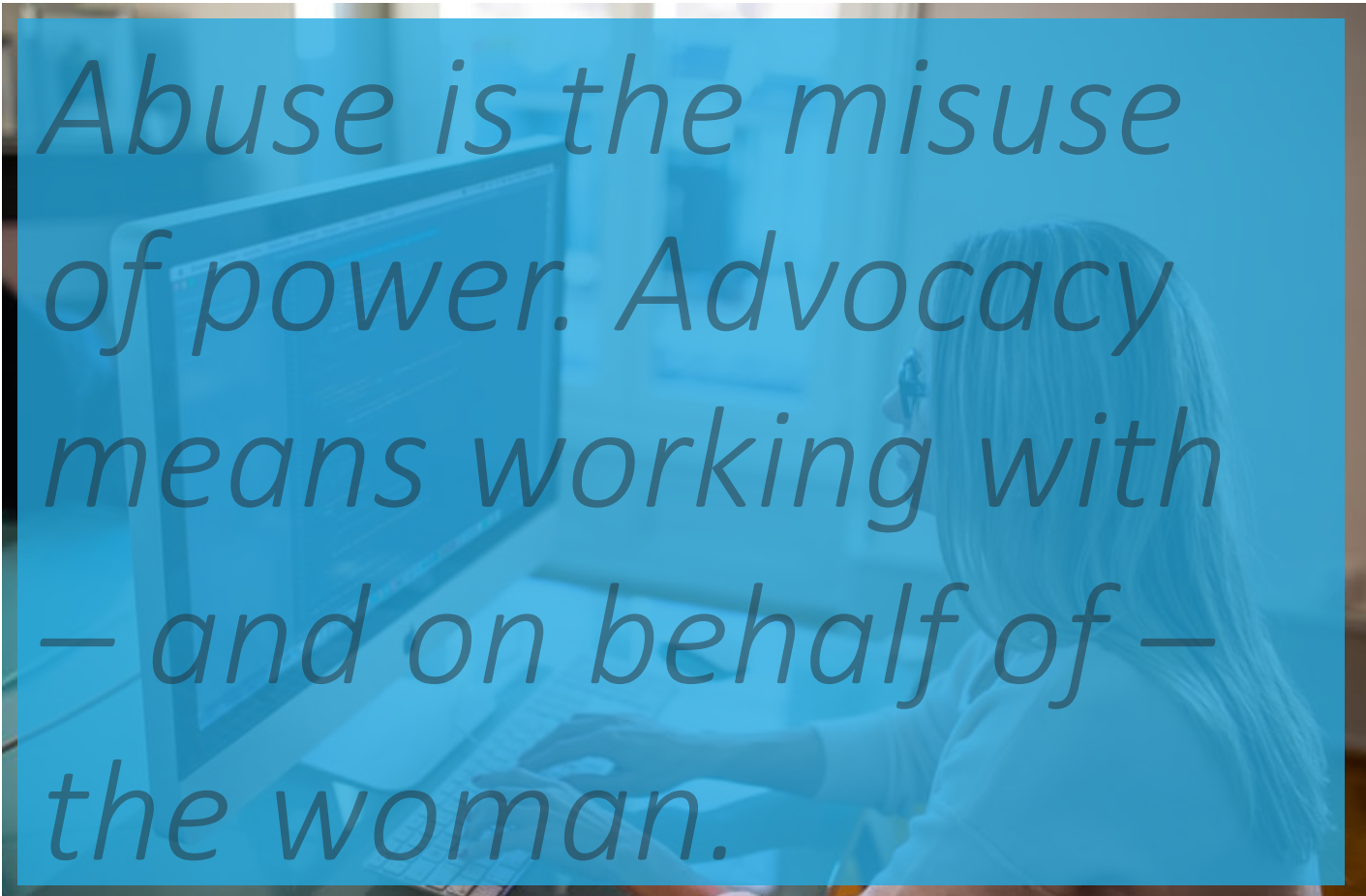
Be aware of the power imbalance between the helper and the person being helped

Abuse is the misuse of power. Advocacy means working with – and on behalf of – the woman. That said, 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 that you will do, including any drawbacks of your service. Clarify limits on your

promise of confidentiality, emphasize that your assistance is optional and that she can opt out at any time, 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.

Don't give advice: Help her identify and assess her choices

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



*Abuse is the misuse
of power. Advocacy
means working with
– and on behalf of –
the woman.*

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE WORKPLACE

Workplaces are central to changing social norms and supporting women and families

Domestic violence has a profound impact on all aspects of a woman's life. Social norms that view domestic violence as a private matter only serve to further isolate women and fail to identify larger systemic issues that drive violence against women. Traditionally, woman abuse has been viewed as a private issue that occurs in private homes, with individual interventions being focused on supporting women when they seek external support. But violence against women is a broad social issue, and it needs to be addressed at all levels: education, health, government, community and workplaces. (**For more on social norms and how they impact violence against women, see the resource, 'Rethinking Resiliency: How understanding our world can help us bounce back,' which is also part of the DELTA series).

According to the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, the signs and symptoms of domestic violence are often noticed by co-workers or employers before a woman is murdered by her intimate partner. Often, friends, family members and co-workers witnessed abuse beforehand and were aware of the ongoing risk to the victim's safety.

Recent research has reshaped the way that we view issues of domestic violence and our solutions for increasing safety for women and children. Current prevention and intervention strategies now view woman abuse as a workplace and community issue. In other words, it is no longer seen as a private issue only.

Men's use of violence against women is a significant public health issue that impacts all spheres of a woman's daily life. It impacts her parenting, her participation in the community, and her working life. Further, domestic violence can have profound psychological, economic, and health consequences for women and children. In this Guide, we discuss woman abuse specifically. But more broadly defined, domestic violence is any form of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse against a person by their intimate partner, and thus can also include same-sex intimate partnerships. It can include financial control, stalking, and ongoing harassment. And these behaviours often occur at or near a woman's workplace. Domestic violence can occur between intimate partners who may or may not be married, common law, or living together. It can also occur after a relationship has ended, and it often extends into all aspects of a victim's life.

What women report when abuse impacts the workplace

Research Highlights:

- 38% of women stated that intimate partner violence impacted their ability to get their work done.
- 53.5% experienced intimate partner violence at or near the workplace.
- 37.1% reported that co-workers were affected by their experiences of woman abuse.
- 43.3% of those experiencing woman abuse discussed it with someone at work.

Women with a history of domestic violence are more likely to have:

- A more disrupted work history.
- Lower incomes.
Frequent job changes/job loss.
More frequent levels of casual, contract and part-time work.

Why employment is a key pathway for women to leave a violent/abusive relationship:

- Provides the financial security needed to leave an abusive relationship.
- Helps to prevent a woman from becoming trapped and isolated in violent and abusive relationships.
- Helps a woman maintain her home and standard of living, both for herself and for her children.

Creating a safety plan should be a shared process with the victim, as only she knows her abuser's habits and patterns. She also knows what she needs in order to feel safe.

Canadian employers lose \$77.9 million annually due to the direct and indirect impacts of domestic violence. There are also costs to women, their children, and society at large. Because domestic violence costs Canadian workplaces millions of dollars each year, it presents an opportunity for collaboration, resource development, and training across sectors. Prevention of violence is an emerging area of practice, and it is possible to prevent violence against women. But efforts must be collaborative, and they must address the abuse of women by changing social norms and addressing domestic violence in all spheres: the home, community, institutions, and the workplace.

Historically, service providers, researchers and advocates have focused on the occurrence of domestic violence in the home, but Canadian research has recently identified the workplace as another important environment in which women experience violence and its consequences, and where women make attempts to reach out for support and safety. Abused women may be particularly vulnerable at work due to the predictability of their location and hours. Abuse can impact an employee's productivity, performance, and wellbeing. A common manifestation of

domestic violence in the workplace involves the woman receiving threatening phone calls and emails. For some women, the perpetrator may physically come to their workplace. The World Health Organization suggests that violence against women and children is a multifaceted social issue that must be addressed through an ecological approach that spans individual, workplace, organizational, community, economic, government, and societal levels.

Why would an abusive partner target a workplace environment?

A man who extends his abuse to a workplace setting increases his control over his partner/ex-partner's life. By harassing, stalking, and threatening a woman at work, perpetrators may succeed in getting the victim fired, which would consequently increase the victim's financial dependence. This further increases his control over her.

What can an employer or co-worker do to support a woman experiencing domestic violence?

First, employers and coworkers can learn to recognize

the signs of domestic violence in the workplace. Second, employers can offer support and build safety plans with a woman and her children.

Recognizing signs of domestic violence in the workplace:

- Injuries (e.g., bruises, broken bones, hearing or vision loss). These are sometimes attributed to “falls,” or “accidents”
- Clothing that is inappropriate for the season, such as long sleeves, turtlenecks, or sunglasses, worn to cover injuries
- Absenteeism or lateness to work
- Spending long hours at work with an unwillingness to go home
- Work performance (e.g., poor concentration, making frequent errors, inconsistent performance).
- Expressions of general anxiety and fear
- Requests to leave early, blocks phone numbers, or is reluctant to give out her work email
- Isolating self at work, is less social, and does not make reference to her spouse or family
- Emotionally dysregulated, tearful, depressed, or reports feeling numb
- Minimizing or denying level of abuse, frequency of harassment, threats or injuries
- Receiving an unusual number of phone calls at work and perhaps becoming emotional after or during the phone calls
- Reluctance to answer calls or respond to messages
- Co-workers may receive insensitive or insulting voicemail, email or text messages that were intended for the victim. These should be documented and addressed
- Perhaps not using the words ‘abuse’ or ‘violence,’ but rather speaking about bad/low moods, stress, conflict, anger, temper, and alcohol or drug abuse by a current or former partner
- An abusive partner or ex-partner may disrupt the workplace with personal visits, even when directed not to do so

A woman may be very much aware that the abuse is impacting her work performance, and she may be anxious about job performance and job loss. Abuse is a leading cause of mental health issues for women. Women often report feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress during and after the end of an abusive relationship. Pay particular attention to risk. Ask if the

abuser is depressed (as observed by the victim and others), engages in obsessive behaviour (e.g., stalking, following her to and from work, or appointments, etc.), is unemployed and/or if he threatens suicide. These behaviours can be indications that she is at a higher risk for violence.

Creating a safety plan to address domestic violence at work

Creating a safety plan should be a shared process with the victim, as only she knows her abuser’s habits and patterns. She also knows what she needs in order to feel safe. Although well-intentioned, if an employer/co-worker were to create a plan without her, she may experience it as another form of control. It is important for victims of domestic violence to have agency in decision-making and safety plans.

A safety plan needs to be flexible, reviewed frequently, and changed as new safety needs arise. The plan should be accessible and/or easy to find in a workplace environment. At the same time, accessibility should be balanced between confidentiality and safety. A victim may not want personal details shared across various departments. However, victims and workers should be cautioned that although personal information will be kept confidential, there may be exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to seek outside consultation due to safety concerns.



A workplace safety plan could include the following:

- A supervisor or co-worker could ask the abused woman if she has had any protection orders or restraining orders (a workplace may be included in the order). A workplace can request a copy of the order, and can ensure that all conditions of the order are being followed.
- Reception and security should have a recent photo of the abuser in order to identify an abusive partner or ex-partner should he arrive at work.
- Ensure that all workplace directories which can be accessed by the public do not include her workplace contact information.
- If possible, give her a new phone number and/or extension.
- Install a panic button in her work desk or her work area.
- Ask if her cell phone has a pre-programmed 911 emergency feature. If not, provide her with one.
- Provide her with information about the services and resources that she can access in the workplace and/or the community (e.g., EAP counselling, paid leave, community counselling resources, women's shelter information, websites, and literature on domestic violence).
- Ask her to document all incidents of abuse in the workplace, and to document how the abusive behaviour affects her wellbeing and her work performance. Support her in addressing her performance issues. Put supports in place that she identifies as helpful.
- Talk to her about scheduling policies/practices or other human resource policies that could help. Work with her to arrange a schedule that is less predictable in order to protect her from harassment and contact with the abuser. Offer a flexible schedule or other work arrangements.
- She may need flexibility with work hours in order to attend appointments so that she can access the help that she needs (e.g., court, medical appointments, etc.).
- Check in with her. Ask about her wellbeing and inquire about the effectiveness of the safety plan that you have both created together.
- Assist the victim in screening calls/blocking calls/blocking emails from her abusive partner/ex-partner.
- Have panic buttons located throughout the workplace, specifically placed in more isolated areas.
- Create internal code words that signal interpersonal danger, and ensure that all employees are aware of them.
- Walk the victim to/from her car before/after work. Ensure that she has priority for the most secure parking spots, and ensure that parking and entrances/exits are well-lit and monitored.
- Encourage all employees to have cell phones that have 911 on direct dial. Provide education about when to call 911 and when to report safety concerns to supervisors and/or Human Resource departments.
- If the abuser and the victim work together, employers should make adjustments so that the perpetrator cannot access the victim at work (e.g., different teams, different schedules, separate locations).
- If possible, have security staff at your workplace.
- Monitor doors and ensure that appropriate doors are locked.
- Have an emergency contact person that is aware of the safety issues for the victim if she is absent and cannot be reached directly.
- Ensure that all employees understand the safety planning process, as well as the safety policies and practices of the organization.
- Ensure that employees have an understanding of warning signs of domestic violence.
- It may be more appropriate to reassign the victim to a less visible location in the workplace, or it may be appropriate to locate her in a less isolated location. It may increase safety by removing her name from an office door, not making company emails and phone extensions public, and taking her name off the workplace website and other public documents.
- Record victim/abuser correspondence or contact.
- Always call 911 if there is any sign of danger.



ADVOCACY WHEEL

The Advocacy Wheel was developed by the Domestic Violence Project in Kenosha, Wisconsin. They also developed the Medical Power & Control Wheel. It demonstrates the principles of advocacy in health care responses to abused women.



BE AWARE OF MESSAGES HIDDEN IN WELL-MEANING WORDS

Having good intentions doesn't guarantee that our words and actions are helpful (e.g., asking, "Why didn't you leave?"). A person using those words intends to say that a woman's situation was intolerable or unacceptable (and so she should have left). But, the woman hears it differently as she decodes the messages packed up in that question. She could feel *judged*, hearing the message as "other (normal) people wouldn't have put up with that treatment," or "you are crazy to love a guy like

that." She could feel *blamed* for being a victim, taking the message to mean that the victim (her) must leave home, not the person who makes the relationship intolerable. She could feel alone and *misunderstood*, thinking, '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 helper and the abused woman.

	Intention	What she might hear	Other options
"Do you think that's a good idea?"	To help her appreciate the downsides to a decision that may not be in her best interests.	You (a professional) think 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 to not feel 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, a crazy person, etc.).	"I'm scared for you."
"Children living with violence against a mother will have emotional and behavioural problems."	To leverage her love for her 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 ..." ... "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 you want proof; you think it’s 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; to help her see positives.	You are minimizing the seriousness of her situation.	“Will anything good come from all of this?”

Listen more than talk

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

Interviewing and listening are not the same

Sometimes you interview, and sometimes you listen – depending on your role and your goal. Being mindful of the difference keeps you task-focused, and helps you define boundaries. You may speak with a woman in any of a variety of roles, including: therapist, assessor, intake worker, investigator, judge, researcher, or advocate. Your role in this interaction will define your approach to the conversation.

Therapist: Stimulate a process of insight and growth.

Assessor: Gather information to inform decisions about her or someone else (e.g., her children).

Intake worker: Gather information to inform an intervention plan.

Investigator: Gather evidence (maybe for use in court).

Judge: Determine if something is true, or what weight to give someone’s input.

Researcher: Use her to learn something to help other people (not necessarily her).

Advocate: Learn 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 to 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 will use that information.

USING ACTIVE LISTENING

The best listening is done actively rather than passively. 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. Further, active listening prevents a listener from misinterpreting, missing, or dismissing what the speaker has to say. There are several steps in the 'active listening' process:

Suspend judgment

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

Focus: Be in the present with her

Distraction can block listening. This is true both for activities that are happening nearby, as well as thoughts that might pull our attention away. If you can't focus on listening, arrange another time to talk. Alternatively, quickly address the distraction before you begin, or at least name the distraction so that she knows what to expect (e.g., "The telephone is going to 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. Don't rush her. Watch her body language for clues of distress. Nod and acknowledge that you are listening, but don't interrupt.

Restatement / paraphrase

In the form of a statement rather than a question, summarize your understanding (e.g., "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 will likely have three components: facts, her thoughts, and 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 (e.g., "I hear how upset you are"). If appropriate, add your thoughts or observations, 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.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing is a technique used with people who are facing a difficult change in their lives. For instance, maybe they need to quit smoking or stop drinking. Motivational Interviewing is more of a counselling approach than a strict question-and-answer session. It is designed to strengthen a motivation to change. It is a non-confrontational, non-directive, and non-judgmental way to move people closer to a decision about change.

The role of a helper is absolutely not to convince a woman to end her relationship. That is entirely her own decision. However, reaching out usually means that she sees a problem and maybe contemplates a change. She has options, and reconciliation is one. If she expresses ambivalence, help her talk about the factors that are pulling her towards reconciliation and the factors that are pushing her out of the relationship. Gently re-frame any distortions that she voices about self-blame, or if she minimizes the inappropriateness of abuse. When Motivational Interviewing is appropriate, it consists of four components:

Express empathy

If you focus solely on the negative aspects of her partner, or speak only about control tactics, she could feel that you don't understand the pros and cons that she is weighing. Demonstrate that you recognize that the situation is difficult, and give her space to express any positive features of her relationship:

- “You were together for a long time, and you probably had good times and happy memories.”
- “Closing that door would be a big change in your life.”
- “What parts of the relationship are you missing the most right now?”

If a woman decisively wants to end the relationship, be careful about focusing on the positive features of her relationship. You could appear to be minimizing the abuse, not listening to her concerns, or suggesting that she forgive him.

Develop discrepancy

Once she has voiced her ambivalence, ask how she wants her life to be. Does she want to feel valued and respected? Does she want to be happier? Don't list the reasons she wants to change. Encourage her to tell you. Also, if you focus excessively on his faults, she may end up defending him or feeling criticized. If she is not ready to label his behaviour as 'abusive,' be careful in doing so. She may be reluctant to see herself as having been 'abused.' However, you can label his actions as being unacceptable and not deserved.

Roll with resistance

Resistance in the Motivational Interview framework is called 'counter-motivation,' meaning thoughts that block people from believing that change is possible. This is normal. Change is scary. Don't push or be critical.

Support self-efficacy

Women with abusive partners yearn for their partners to recognize that they need help and get counselling. Maybe the woman thinks that sobriety or grief counselling is the answer, or maybe she sees a need for a batterers intervention program. Regardless, the point is that a woman cannot force her partner to change or to become a different person. It took years to develop his personality, and changing it won't be easy for him, especially if he doesn't see it as being a problem. But a woman is responsible for her actions and choices only. Blame is not the issue, so it doesn't matter who is at fault. Help her identify her own choices. She can accept him as he is. She can hope that he will change, perhaps with a time limit (e.g., “I'll give it six more months”). Or she can end the relationship.

Further reading:

William Miller & Stephen Rollnick (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, 2nd. Edition. Guilford Press.

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 in order to justify a protective measure. If you must have a disclosure of abuse, these questions can 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 that it doesn't feel like an inquisition.

- Minimize the use of closed-ended questions that demand 'yes' or 'no' answers.
- Ask the question and then stop talking. Give her time to formulate an answer.

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 medical treatment. Some women experience true and serious mental disturbances that require medication. And to ignore full-blown psychosis or life-threatening clinical depression would, of course, be a disservice to women. So, we must be open to seeing major mental illness where it manifests. However, more typically we meet women whose coping and survival skills look (from the outside) like 'problems,' or have started to get in the way of their lives and made their lives more difficult. Instead of seeing coping as something to be 'fixed,' we can help her identify her own effective coping strategies, have her focus on using the healthiest ones, and find a new repertoire of effective coping strategies that don't come with costs to her health and wellbeing.

Adopt a strength-based approach

It is easy to slip into ‘pathologization’ because the helping professions are typically problem-focused. The police focus on criminal acts, child protection workers look for parenting deficits and evidence of abuse, and 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 that drive them. When working with abused women, less-desired behaviours and attitudes could be poor self-image, a lack of confidence, or a pessimistic view of the future. Women can move away from a reliance on costly coping strategies by adopting coping that is effective but that doesn’t have a downside. The essence of strength-based practice is to find the strengths inherent in the person and build on them.

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. However, at the same time you can instill in her a message of hope for a better tomorrow. Healing is a journey, and speaking with you is a positive 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 that she knows what to expect from a healthy, equal relationship, and so that she can chart her partner’s progress while he is in a treatment program for abusive men.

USING A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

The strength-based approach is integral to trauma-informed 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 to ultimately reduce the effects of problems. It also reminds us of the potentially negative power of some diagnostic categories and labels, such as ‘victim.’

Practice 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 strength-based approach also serves to banish stigmatizing labels from our vocabulary (e.g., ‘non-compliant,’ ‘dysfunctional,’ ‘resistant,’ ‘lack of insight,’ etc.).

Learn to see strengths in adversities

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

Help her to 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 her 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 that she is currently struggling with. For example, her diligence in pursuing a school course indicates that she can apply that trait in her search for housing. Her patience with a friend’s child learning to tie a shoe indicates that she can be supportive when dealing with her own child (or herself).

SCREENING FOR ABUSE

Universal screening

One approach recommended for health care settings involves routine, universal screening of all women for abuse. This means asking every woman about abuse, not only those who fall into so-called 'high risk' groups, or those with obvious physical signs of abuse (e.g., bruises). However, it is important to recognize that although this may be helpful, it may also be difficult to apply in some situations (e.g., when an immigrant woman presents with an interpreter or family member, thus limiting her ability to respond candidly). Universal screening of women also does not adequately address the needs of men in the LGBTQ2+ community.

Several validated questionnaires exist for asking about domestic violence, but perhaps the more important factors influencing whether women will ultimately opt to disclose abuse are the patient-clinician relationship, and the manner in which the questions are asked. The London Middlesex Health Unit developed the Routine Universal Comprehensive Screening Protocol, which is available here and outlines practice guidelines for screening.

Abused women have given their opinions on the ideal response from a doctor who learns or suspects that a woman is being abused. They include: Treat me with respect, concern and without judgment; protect me (e.g., see me 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 (e.g., follow-up in a few days).

Screening is not an intervention

The essential elements of a response include documentation, risk assessment, addressing the safety of the children present in the home, the facilitation of a safety plan, effective referrals, and follow-up.

Screening is not a Risk Assessment

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 (e.g., predicting harm when there is none) and, even more concerning, false negatives (e.g., not predicting harm when harm is present). Moreover, they cannot take into account the unmeasured contextual variables and random factors that often precipitate tragic incidents. Finally, it is often true that insufficient information is available to accurately complete these risk instruments. Risk assessment is a complex process that requires significant training and an understanding of the dynamic nature of many risk factors. For most professionals helping abused women, monitoring for signs of danger and working collaboratively with those skilled in risk assessment is likely to be more helpful.

Be cautious of power and control tactics

The rate of partner interference is higher among women accompanied to the medical setting by a man. The authors suggest that health care providers be alert to signs that patient non-compliance or missed appointments could be caused by partner control tactics.

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LISTENING TO ABUSE DISCLOSURES

Here are some guidelines for professionals when dealing with a woman who relates details of abuse. A 'disclosure,' as we use the term here, means that it is the first time she is telling someone about the abuse, or it is the first time she is telling you.

Take a breath

Think for a few seconds about your responsibility in this situation. This woman has chosen you as the person to tell some very personal and potentially embarrassing information. Your reactions over the next few minutes may 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.

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 that you can't keep it in confidence, this means that she expects (or wants) you to take action or to tell someone else.

Ensure privacy

Scan the immediate area to ensure that 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.

Stay quiet and listen

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

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 she senses that any of these things are true.

Monitor her body language and facial expressions

Talking about or even just thinking about, past traumas may trigger the same feelings of fear and helplessness that she experienced when first living through those events. In the extreme, a woman could experience a flashback or a dissociative episode, removing her from the 'here-and-now,' and transporting her mentally to someplace else. Fortunately, this is rare. Watch her rate of breathing and for other visible signs of distress, or for evidence that 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.

Use touch only with her permission

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

Normalize her experiences

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

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 has said, such as colleagues at your agency, let her know.



NOTE: 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 that you can't keep it in confidence, this means that she expects (or wants) you to take action or to tell someone else.

Debrief with a colleague if necessary

Be prepared for the emotional reaction that you may feel when hearing the disclosures of women who have been abused. 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 own response to abuse disclosures, find a supportive colleague or seek out the guidance of your supervisor.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Be kind

We have tried in this Guide 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 they are free from abuse and fear. And the compassionate support of the helpers and the healers that they meet along the way hastens their journey toward peace. One idea underpins all the principles and assumptions here, and 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 – this is the essence of service and the essence of kindness.

Closing the door

Before moving on with life, women often need to understand (or at least try to understand) their ex-partner's behaviour. Why did he do what he did? That is a difficult question to answer. But we can help her describe and put labels on what he did. Meanwhile, as she nears the end of her process of closure, she may be thinking about what to let go from the past and what lessons to bring with her into the future...

MOVING FORWARD

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. Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying called the Serenity Prayer: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Check off any thoughts, feelings, decisions, or actions that 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 that 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..." And there is a very good reason. You cannot control the actions of another person. So, you cannot regret the choices that he made.



Here is some space for any other “regrets.”

Review the items that 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 that 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. Below 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 that 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 that I can change today (or work on changing in the future):

- Instead of believing that 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 that I am worthy of respect and love.
- Instead of feeling like a victim, I can be a survivor.

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