

ANGER AND VIOLENCE

Whenever you or a loved one has a problem with anger, the potential for violence always needs to be addressed! Violence is not an expression of anger, but a strategy to maintain power in a relationship. Some people feel entitled to power and maintain this belief through self-pity, denial, rationalization, manipulation, and disregard for their partner’s feelings. Underneath this drive for power can be deep feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and fears of abandonment. The potential for violence can be seen in people who:

- Define manhood through competition, maintaining power, and devaluing women.
- Do not take responsibility and constantly blame others for their feelings and behavior.
- Defend against emotional pain with substance abuse, excitement, and anger.
- Are hypersensitive, rigid, and moody and expect partners to meet all their needs.
- Rationalize their need for control as necessary for others’ well-being and safety.
- Have a history of past violence.

RECOGNIZING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Violent tactics are rarely seen early in a relationship. Initially, a person may be intensely romantic and pressure his or her partner to make a commitment. Gradually, a cycle develops of tension building toward abusive action followed by an expression of remorse or romance. Emotional and verbal abuse may appear before actual violence. One out of 6 women reports that her partner hit her at some point in her marriage. Because 70% to 80% of murdered women are killed by their husband, a family member, or close male friend, it is very important to become aware of how violence can progress over the years:

Nonphysical Indicators	Violence—No Contact	Violent Contact
Extreme standards, blaming	Punching walls or doors	Pushing, shoving, grabbing, or twisting arms
Intimidating looks, gestures	Throwing objects	Holding down, pinning against a wall, or carrying against one’s will
Insults, name-calling	Destroying objects	Slapping, spanking, or punching
Mind games	Breaking windows	Kicking, kneeing, or biting
Making all the decisions	Tearing clothes	Choking, banging head on floor, or hair pulling
Controlling the money	Driving recklessly to scare	Forced sex
Isolating from work, family, friends, or school	Blocking exits or the car	Inflicting pain or burning
Accusations of infidelity	Taking keys	Use of weapons
Questioning about activities, stalking, or checking up	Taking money or credit cards	
Threatening divorce, taking the children, suicide, and violence—“I’ll beat you.”	Unplugging the phone	
	Cruelty to animals or children	

THERAPY FOR BATTERERS

Hidden feelings of powerlessness are often expressed in the need to control others. In group therapy, people can recognize vulnerable feelings in others that they have hidden from themselves. It can take 18–24 months to eradicate the misuse of power that feeds abuse. Management of violence can actually be accomplished early in treatment, but control issues require lengthy intervention. Offenders need to:

- Admit that they alone are responsible for violence.
- Experience vulnerable feelings that underlie the need for power.
- Find acceptable channels for relieving pressure: sports or expressing insecurity.
- Recognize the cycle of violence and its triggers—“I can’t stand it when . . .”
- Learn to use steps to reduce anger danger: time-out, positive self-talk, and more.
- Learn to mutually share power in a relationship and resolve conflict equitably.
- Rediscover initial interests and pleasure that attracted partners.

THERAPY FOR VICTIMS

To recognize and treat victims of battering, common misconceptions about domestic violence must be challenged:

Domestic Violence	
Fiction	Fact
1. Uneducated, poor, or minority people with few job skills are more likely to be battered.	1. Violence occurs in all strata of society. The poor are prosecuted more often.
2. Dependent, masochistic women may seek out violent partners.	2. Mental health problems are the result of, not the cause of, battering.
3. Many people do things (unintentionally) that cause their partner to hit them.	3. Violence is an individual character trait, not a relationship dysfunction.
4. Women return to abusive partners because they are unable to separate.	4. Family, friends, and clergy often urge women to make the relationship work.
5. People who have been battered will tend to get into another violent relationship.	5. Most people who have been battered go on to establish good relationships.
6. People who have been violent can change with a different person or reduced stress.	6. People who batter will continue to have violent relationships until they get help.
7. Violent people are uneducated, unsuccessful, or lacking in conscience.	7. People with a variety of backgrounds, accomplishments, and values can be violent.
8. Once a person leaves a relationship, he or she is safe from violence.	8. People are in greatest danger right after they leave a violent relationship.

Statistics and other ideas come from *Spouse Abuse* by Michele Harway and Marsali Hansen (Professional Resource Exchange, 1994). See also *Getting Free* by Ginny Nicarity (Seal Press Feminist Publications, 1997), *Abused Men* by Philip Cook (Prager, 1997), 800-799-SAFE, www.domestic-violence.org.

Therapy does not start by pushing people to end abusive relationships. Battered women make an average of seven attempts to leave before doing so permanently. They return due to a lack of financial and emotional support. Individual counseling is needed to create the safety for victims to:

- Recognize and admit that abuse is happening.
- Place blame entirely on the violent partner (unless both are abusive).
- Learn that symptoms of depression, disinterest, low self-esteem, indecisiveness, and anxiety are reactions to battering rather than character flaws.
- Realize that they cannot “save” their partner. Recovery must happen in groups with other batterers who can help offenders recognize abuse and take full responsibility.
- Develop a safety plan with an exit route, a strategically placed safety kit (clothing, medication, money, keys), prearranged shelter, and knowledge of when to leave.
- Build a sense of personal power, support, and the ability to make decisions.