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## **Cycle of Violence**

Research in the area of domestic violence has shown there is a recurring cycle with abuse. Through researcher Lenore Walker and the Domestic Abuse Project of Minneapolis, Minnesota, the cycle has been broken down into three phases, each having some unique characteristics.

### **Phase I: Tension Building**

- In the beginning of most relationships, violence is rarely shown. The relationship is often one of infatuation. During this time, there is a lack of stress between partners and positive behavior is shown. This is a time when each partner is on their best behavior. If violence occurs, the chance of the relationship ending is high.
- As the relationship continues, the demands increase, as does the stress.
- Aggressive behavior increases, usually directed towards objects rather than the partner. For example: punching doors, throwing objects, etc.
- The violence moves from objects to partner. Verbal abuse as well as physical abuse may increase.
- The victimized partner may alter his/her behavior to try to stop the violence, doing such things as keeping the house cleaner, the children quieter, or being home more often.
- The verbal and physical abuse will continue.
- The victimized partner may withdraw and feel responsible for the abuse.
- The abuser may become obsessively jealous and try to control most of the partner's behavior and time, such as telling her/him where she/he can go, with whom, and how to dress. This is often pushed off as a sign of love.
- The abuser may try to isolate his/her partner from family and friends. They may tell their partner that if she/he loved him/her, she/he wouldn't need others or that she/he is married now and her/his place is with the abuser.
- The release of tension which follows violence for the aggressive partner reinforces the abusive behavior.

During this stage, the abuser may rationalize his/her behavior and place the blame on the victim. The victim may purposely avoid arguments so the abuser does not get upset.

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/Cycle of Violence

The tension-building phase differs with each case. Some people or even different cycles with the same person, will be more severe than others. Also, the length of this phase may be days or months.

## **Phase II: The Acute Battering Incident or Explosion**

- In this phase following violence, the abuser feels actual release from the built-up stress and tension.
- The violence usually occurs when the batterer perceives a loss of power or status and the violence is **deliberately** used to re-establish control in the relationship.
- The abuser's violence is planned. He/she **makes choices** about the violence. For example, deciding the place and time for the episode, making a conscious choice about which part of the body to hit and if it is done with a fist or open hand, etc.
- This is usually the phase where law enforcement becomes involved. When this happens:
  - As a result of the abuse, the pent-up stress and tension have been eliminated. Thus, the abuser often appears calm and relaxed when law enforcement arrives.
  - The abused partner, on the other hand, may appear confused or hysterical from the episode.

During this stage, the abuser feels their actions were not a problem and they were to teach the victim a lesson. The victim may feel scared, humiliated and confused.

## **Phase III: Calm Phase or Honeymoon**

- This phase is characterized by a calm, non-violent or loving period of time after an abusive episode.
- In this phase, the abuser may take some responsibility for his/her behavior, thus giving the partner hope for change. Examples: begging for forgiveness, making promises not to do it again, or to get help, acting as if nothing happened, giving gifts etc.
- If there is no intervention and the relationship continues, there is a high possibility the violence will escalate and increase in severity (back to Phases I and II).
- Unless the abuser receives help, this phase will only last a period of time, then the stress and tension will again begin to increase and the cycle will repeat itself. The longer the abuse continues, the shorter Phase III becomes, until it is almost nonexistent.

During this stage, the abuser believes the abuse worked; the victim learned their lesson and they can begin to control the victim again. The victim is thankful the abuse is over, is afraid, and yet hopeful the abuser's actions will change.

Once power and control are established by creating fear and self-doubt, the threat of violence is always present and can include coercion, violence and other tactics intended to remind the victim of the abuser's power.