

# Recognizing and Intervening in Domestic Violence and Abuse

Safer Society Foundation  
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## Introductions/Logistics

- A little about me . . .
- A little about Allies in Change . . .

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## Allies in Change

- Non-profit adult out-patient counseling center
- Individual and couples counseling
- Specialized groups to address abuse and anger issues in men and women
- 30ish groups for abusive partners, for men only, women only, and one multi-gender LGBTQ+ group
- Open-ended, goal-based groups, typical length of stay is 1+ year
- Approximately 20% (80ish) of our group members are voluntary, more than any other program in the country
- Recovery group for female-identified victims/survivors of DV (in or out of the relationship)
- Professional trainings/workshops

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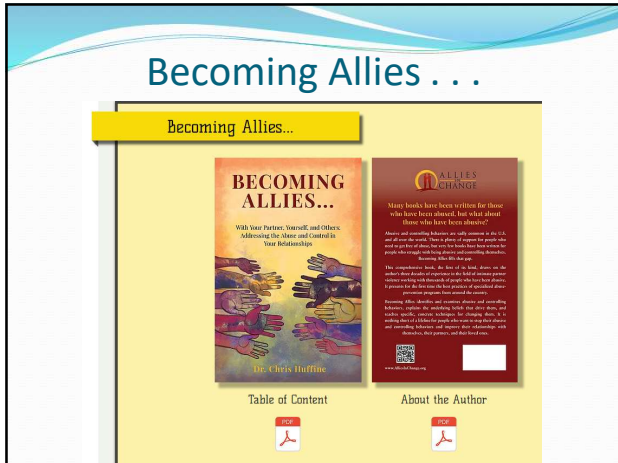
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## Warning . . .

- As you hear this material it may lead you to realize that some of your clients have been abused or been abusive
- It may also lead you to realize that people in your personal circle have experienced domestic violence
- This is a common experience when mental health professionals become better educated about domestic violence

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That it only includes physical abuse
  - Every abusive relationship includes many different types of abusive behavior
  - Some abusive relationships have little to no physical abuse
  - The vast majority of domestic violence involves non-physical abuse

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That the most problematic and damaging behavior is the physical abuse
  - Even “mild” or “minor” abuse can cause serious psychological damage, even if there is no physical injury or pain
  - Psychological abuse is a better predictor of fear of future violence than the severity of earlier violence (Marshall, 1999)
  - Nearly two-thirds of women who had only experienced verbal abuse met the criteria for PTSD (Kemp et al., 1995)

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That it is primarily a working-class issue and/or an issue in communities of color
  - Working class people and people of color who are abusive are more likely to get caught up in the criminal justice and child welfare nets, but are no more likely to be abusive
  - Domestic violence is found in every social class, occupation, religious community, age group . . .

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That people who are abused/abusive grew up in abusive homes
  - While there is a greater risk for children who grow up in abusive homes to experience domestic violence as an adult (for females, as an abused partner; for males, as an abusive partner), many abused and abusive partners grew up in relatively functional homes

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That most abused partners (and, sometimes, even abusive partners!) will self-identify as such
  - Most people in abusive relationships do not realize it is an abusive relationship until they have had their consciousness raised
  - This is especially true for people who are abusive, but also quite common among people who are abused

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That domestic violence is caused by a variety of other issues (e.g., trauma, substance abuse, mood disorders)
  - While many issues can “trigger” an abusive episode, the one and only cause is a pro-abuse belief system
  - In a person without the pro-abuse belief system the exact same issues can be present, but there are no patterns of abuse

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That no specialized treatment or training is necessary to work with it, simply treat the “underlying” issue
  - Domestic violence is an issue distinct from any other and every mental health professional needs at least some basic training
  - For abusive partners in particular, abuse intervention groups (not individual therapy or general therapy group work) are the key way of stopping abusive behavior and changing underlying pro-abuse belief systems

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That you can “tell” just by looking at them when someone is in an abusive relationship
  - Most abused and abusive partners are normal, everyday people, with normal, everyday issues
  - Most abusive partners are only abusive with family members and well-behaved outside of the home

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That there are classic psychological profiles for people who are abused or abusive
  - While abused partners will typically have elevated levels of distress, they can manifest that distress in a variety of ways
  - There is no common psychological profile of abusive partners and many can present as quite normal

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## Common misconceptions about DV

- That it is uncommon and does not need to be routinely screened for
  - At least a third of the adult population will be directly affected by domestic violence at some time in their lives
  - Abused and abusive partners are more likely to seek out mental health services than the general population

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## Why Should You Care About Domestic Violence As a Mental Health Professional?

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## DV is a significant issue

- 1 in 3 women will be physically assaulted by a romantic partner at some point in their lifetime, in the U.S. and internationally (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010)
- 1 in 3 female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2014)
- The significant majority of women murdered or nearly murdered by romantic partners were stalked (MacFarlane et al., 1999)

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## Prevalence of domestic violence among therapy clients

- More than a third of all individual female clients with a severe mental illness have experienced at least one act of physical abuse from an intimate partner in the past year (Goodman et al., 1997)
- Victims of domestic violence are more likely than non-victims to utilize mental health services
- Physically abused women report twice as many days of feeling sad and depressed as non-abused women (Oregon Governor's Council on Domestic Violence, 1998)

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## Prevalence of domestic violence among therapy clients

- Abused women are likely to have nearly twice as many contacts with health care providers (Oregon Governor's Council on Domestic Violence, 1998)
- Abused women often turn to mental health professionals for support (Oregon Governor's Council on Domestic Violence, 1998)
- 91% of depressed abused women displayed a significant decline in depressive symptoms following the end of the abusive relationship (Campbell et al., 1994)

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## Gender

- The most significant demographic definer of who is most likely to be abusive or abused is gender
- Most experts indicate that somewhere between 85-90% of all perpetrators of DV are men and 85-90% of all adult victims of DV are women

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## Children and domestic violence

- It has been estimated that 40-80% of children in domestically violent homes have witnessed at least one episode of abuse
- It is estimated that about 25% of all children will be exposed to family violence at some point in their life

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## Children and domestic violence

- Children exposed to domestic violence demonstrate a pattern of brain activity similar to soldiers who have been in combat (McCorry et al., 2011)
- There is clear evidence that exposure to domestic violence is at least as damaging as being physically or sexually abused (Marmion & Lundberg-Love, 2008, pp. 263-278)

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## Children and domestic violence

- A great resource for hand-outs/more information on children who witness DV:  
<http://www.nctsn.org/content/resources>
- Another great resource is “Little Eyes, Little Ears” released by the Canadian government, email me for a digital copy

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## Guess how many DV offenders go to jail . . .

- What percentage of DV offenders do you think ultimately end up getting convicted of a DV crime?

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## Guess how many DV offenders go to jail . . .

- Research by Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck & Hamby, 2015 identified 517 cases of DV in a national sample and interviewed family members about what happened
- More than a third of these cases involved some kind of physical injury
- About ten percent required medical attention

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## Guess how many DV offenders go to jail . . .

- Only about 1 in 4 cases (25%) of DV was reported to the police
- Of those, about 1 in 5 (20%) were never even investigated—the police never showed up
- Police only investigated about 20% of all DV incidents

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## Guess how many DV offenders go to jail . . .

- Of those that were investigated, only 3 in 5 (60%) led to an arrest
- Of those arrested, almost a third were not prosecuted
- Of those prosecuted, less than half pled or were found guilty
- **Only about 3% of DV incidents ultimately lead to a conviction**
- In other words, based on this research, for every DV conviction, there are about 33 other DV incidents

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## Alternatives to arrest . . .

- Criminalizing and arresting abusive partners is just one aspect of what needs to be done to help stop domestic violence
- All of us, as community members have a responsibility to become more aware of and address domestic violence as we encounter it

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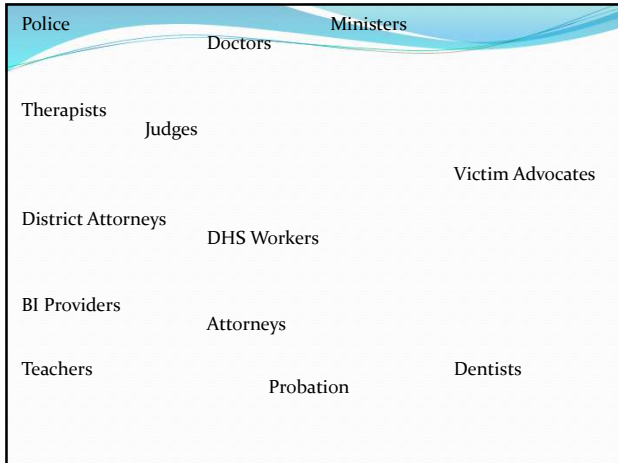
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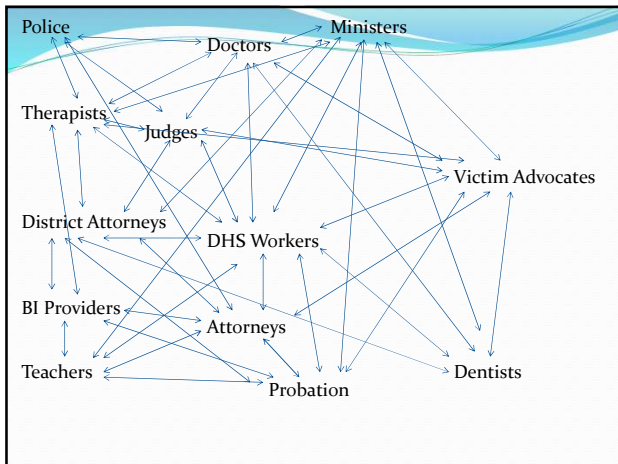
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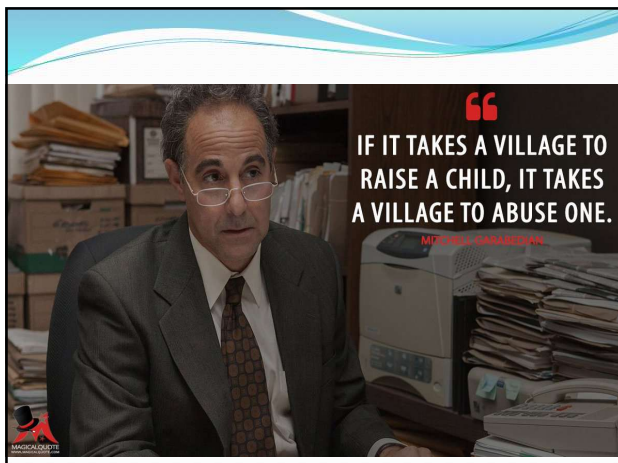
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## Domestic Violence Defined (DV 101/201)

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### Definition of Domestic Violence

- A pattern of **coercive behavior** used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship
- Coercive behavior

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## What is abusive behavior?

- Most obviously it is physical abuse
- Physical abuse includes:
  - Hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing, shoving, pinching, poking, choking, pulling hair, etc.
- It also includes being physically controlling:
  - Grabbing, holding, restraining, blocking your way, moving you against your will
- ANY UNWANTED physical contact is considered physical abuse EVEN if it doesn't cause an injury or pain

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## What is abusive behavior?

- There are many other kinds of abusive behavior:
- **Verbal**
  - Name calling, put downs, tearing apart with words, swearing, yelling
- **Psychological**
  - Non-verbal behavior that creates fear/intimidation including looks, stares, facial expressions, gestures, the silent treatment, etc.
- There are also more subtle forms of psychological abuse such as *radiating intensity*

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## Radiating Intensity

- “Radiating intensity” describes a state of emotional distress in which the abusive partner is not acting overtly abusive, however they are significantly distressed/unhappy
- There is often subtle blaming of the family for their distress
- Alternatively, it may be conveyed that the family needs to be wary and to not “set them off”
- That distress is conveyed by subtle behavioral cues that result in the family being anxious and on edge around them
- As a result, the family is often on eggshells

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## Radiating Intensity

- This is different than simply being grumpy or being in a bad mood
- In its benign form, others typically don't feel particularly anxious and aren't concerned about the person "losing it"
- It's like a bad mood on steroids
- Radiating intensity is quite toxic and wearing on other family members. It's akin to an odorless, colorless toxic gas that gradually poisons those exposed to it.

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## What is abusive behavior?

- **Property**
  - This is often psychologically abusive to others who witness acts of aggression against objects, even if the object isn't damaged
- **Financial**
  - Please refer to the hand-out for an extensive list of examples

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## What is abusive behavior?

- **Sexual**
  - Most typically we think of rape or child sexual abuse when we hear this phrase
  - Most broadly, it includes any kind of unwanted sexual contact or sexual harassment

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## Examples of Sexual Abuse

- Most common among abusive partners:
  - Verbal sexual abuse
  - Unwanted sexual comments
  - Sexual pressuring
  - Badgering the other for sex
  - Disrespecting sexual boundaries
  - Retribution for setting a sexual boundary
  - Infidelity
  - Violating sexual agreements

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## Examples of Sexual Abuse

- Physically forcing sexual contact
- Sexual contact with an intoxicated person
- Sexual contact with an unconscious person
- Taking advantage of their power
- Using sex to manipulate their partner
- Key quality of non-sexually abusive behavior: **Non-coerced informed consent**

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## Ongoing uncoerced informed consent

- Consent: They need to clearly give permission
- Informed: They need to fully understand what they are giving permission for
- Uncoerced: It needs to be okay to say “no” without repercussions
- Ongoing: They can withdraw their consent at any moment

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## Relational neglect

- Neglect is a more subtle form of mistreatment
- It isn't about doing things to a partner, it's about NOT doing things with a partner, specifically the things that help keep a relationship healthy and loving
- Just as there is child abuse and child neglect, both of which can be quite damaging, there is also relational neglect. And, just as child abuse and neglect can go together, so can relational abuse and neglect can go hand in hand.

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## Relational neglect

- One common form of neglect, rampant in abusive relationships, is the non-acknowledgement of the abusive and controlling behavior
- Accountable acknowledgement can significantly mitigate the damage of the abuse
- Typically, abusive individuals don't do this, instead they deny, rationalize, minimize, justify, or ignore the abuse
- This non-acknowledgement significantly aggravates the impact of the abuse, akin to scraping a knee but not attending to it—it's much more likely to become infected and cause problems

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## Relational neglect

- Relational neglect includes things like:
  - not acknowledging a partner
  - not thinking about them, particularly how they are different from the other
  - not considering their input or preferences
- The partner presumes everyone sees the world through their eyes, that their perspective is the only one, that their concerns and needs are the only ones that are important

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## Relational neglect

- The opposite of love isn't hate, it is indifference, which is a significant aspect of relational neglect
- Other words for this include narcissism, grandiosity, and egotism

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## It's NOT about the physical abuse

- Even in the worst abusive relationships there is going to be far more non-physical than physical abuse
- Many abusive relationships have little to no physical abuse
- Because most of our laws are against physical abuse this means that *most domestic violence is not illegal*
- This means that *most domestically violent families can't be intervened with via the police and courts*

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## It's NOT about the physical abuse

- For most victims, even of severe physical abuse, the emotional abuse was still worse
- "Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but words will break my heart"
- "The physical abuse made me hate him, the emotional abuse made me hate myself"
- The "active ingredient" of physical abuse is not the abuse, but the meaning of the abuse

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### Definition of Domestic Violence

- A pattern of coercive behavior **used by one person to control and subordinate another** in an intimate relationship
- **used by one person to control and subordinate another**

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### To be *controlling* of another is:

- To make them act or think in a certain way, without them freely choosing to do so
- To interfere with their freedom and liberty to make their own choices
- To coercively or manipulatively reduce another person's options

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## Controlling behaviors

- All of us are occasionally controlling (raindrop)
- What is particularly damaging are *on-going patterns* of controlling behavior (rainstorm)
- While most abusive behaviors are intrinsically abusive, most controlling behaviors are not

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## Controlling behaviors

- Anything can be twisted into a controlling behavior
- Anger is not a cause of abuse, but more typically a symptom, resulting from the frustration when controlling behaviors aren't working
- See the hand-out for many more examples

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## Definition of Domestic Violence

- **A pattern** of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship
- **A pattern**

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## No one's perfect

- The problem is not about any single abusive act. Most of us can probably give an example or two of when we have acted poorly in the moment.
- In those cases, we apologize and/or recommit not to doing those kinds of things and we generally don't
- This can be considered to be hurtful behavior rather than abusive

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## Hurtful behavior

- Hurtful behavior refers to unintentionally causing harm to another
- Hurtful behavior is a result of accidents, mistaken assumptions, misunderstandings, being imperfect, and inadvertent neglect, among other things
- Hurtful behavior is common and inevitable, especially in close relationships
- Hurtful behavior is never done on purpose or intentionally to harm
- When pointed out, the other is typically quick to acknowledge it and, if it is something they can change, seek to do so

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## Examples of hurtful behavior

- Stepping on someone's toe
- Giving them a gift they don't care for
- Forgetting to do something for them
- Showing up late
- Touching them in a way they don't want to be touched
- Snoring
- Misplacing a shared item
- Accidentally damaging or breaking someone else's belonging

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## Hurtful vs. abusive behavior

- Hurtful behavior is inadvertent and is not intended to cause harm, even though it does
- *Abusive behavior is done willfully to cause harm and control*
- Hurtful behavior is often quickly acknowledged and owned when the person who has done it becomes aware of the harm
- *Abusive behavior is often denied, minimized, etc.*
- Hurtful behavior is consciously managed as much as possible by the other person to reduce harm
- *Abusive behavior continues unabated*
- Everyone is occasionally hurtful
- *Only some people are abusive*

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## Abusive behavior is always a choice

- While many things can *trigger* abusive behavior (e.g., stress, unemployment, intoxication, trauma), none of these things *cause* the abuse.
- Abusive people simply give themselves permission to be abusive whereas non-abusive people do not
- Think of being willing to be abusive as being like a firearm. If you have a firearm, then many different things could lead you to shooting it (feeling suicidal, a home invader, hunting an animal). If you don't have a firearm, then you can't shoot it even if those things are present.

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## Abusive behavior is always a choice

- Non-abusive people are faced with the same kinds of stresses, challenges, injustices, etcetera, but still do not allow themselves to become abusive in those same circumstances
- Because being abusive is always a choice, then the person being abusive is 100% responsible for the abuse. Regardless of how the abused person was behaving, nothing they did "made" the person become abusive

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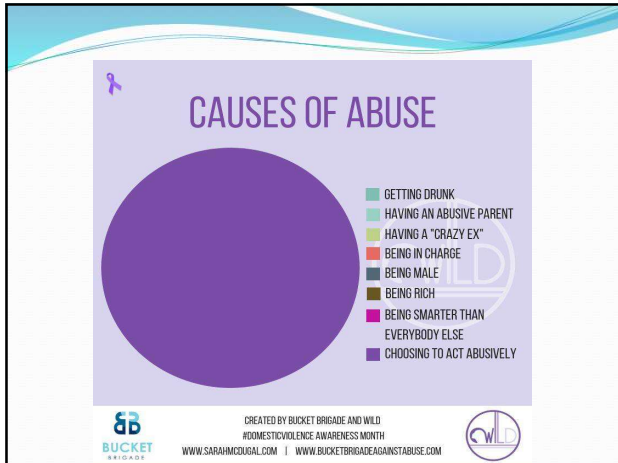
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### A pattern of abuse is the main problem/issue

- Once a pattern is formed an *environment* is created
- The "bully effect"—even technically non-abusive behavior is experienced by the family as being abusive
- It isn't just the abuse itself, it's the anticipation of it, the aftermath of it
- As a result, the family becomes vigilant/hypervigilant in the home, anticipating/fearing the next abusive outburst

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- Each act of abuse and control is like a single wire in a cage. Looked at individually they don't seem particularly intimidating. But put all the wires together and you are confined. When you look closely you see only the 1 wire; pull back, and you will see the cage.



- After Marilyn Frye

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## A pro-abuse belief system

- The reason why there are *patterns* of abuse is due to the presence of a pro-abuse belief system
- Stopping abusive behavior has to focus *not* just on stopping behaviors, but on changing underlying belief systems
- If the beliefs aren't changed, new abusive behaviors will appear even if old ones are stopped

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## DV House



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We see the world, not as it is, but as we are - or, as we are conditioned to see it. When we open our mouths to describe what we see, we in effect describe ourselves, our perceptions, our paradigms.

Stephen R. Covey

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### A pro-abuse belief system

- While there are a wide range of beliefs that justify abuse, a highly common one, among abusive partners and others, is a “Power Over” orientation
- This conceptualization was developed by Patricia Evans and first outlined in her self-help book “The Verbally Abusive Relationship”
- Similar concepts have also been touched on by others over the years

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### Reality I: Power over

- Win-lose/One winner
- One right answer/one truth
- Either my needs or your needs me or you
- External focus
- Blame
- Assumption of scarcity
- Abuse and control are used
- Competitive: Others are viewed as opponents, competitors
- Homogeneity and conformity
- Focus on outcome (winning)
- End justifies means

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## Reality II: Personal Power

- Mutual respect is practiced
- Win-win/Many winners
- Many right answers/many truths
- We can all get our needs met/*me and you*
- Assumption of abundance
- Internal focus
- Cooperative
- Others are viewed as allies
- Diversity is respected
- Accountability on both sides

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## Definition of Domestic Violence

- A pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another **in an intimate relationship**
- **in an intimate relationship**

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## Why target their partner?

- “Because they can”—fewer immediate sanctions
- They have the most leverage (physical, financial, emotional)
- Feelings of entitlement, their partner “belongs” to them

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## Why target their partner?

- Greatest emotional investment
- Source of the greatest hurt
- External focus and the person they have the most contact with
- Easiest to project their suffering and struggles onto

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## “Why don’t you leave?”

- Perhaps the most common response to hearing that a person is being abused is to encourage them to leave the abusive relationship
- While leaving can be raised as a possibility it is vital that it not be the primary focus unless that is the abused partner’s primary focus
- Keep in mind that, from the abused partner’s perspective, the primary problem often isn’t the “relationship”, it’s the abusive and controlling behavior

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## “Why don’t you leave?”

- Most abused partners don’t want to end the relationship, they just want the abuse to stop. Their preference often is to remain in the relationship if the abuse can stop
- A common retort is why aren’t we asking why don’t they (the abusive partner) stop?

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## Why do abused partners stay?

- There are many reasons why abused partners remain in abusive relationships. These include . . .
- Fear of retaliation if they leave
- Logistical barriers to leaving
- Questioning their own ability
- Consequences if they leave
- Concerns for their children
- Fears of social isolation

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## Why do abused partners stay?

- Social pressures to stay
- Hope
- The abused person feels responsible
- Positive connections with the abuser
- Denial
- See the handout for 50 reasons why abused people stay

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## Being hostage to the abuse

- The most common reason why the abused partner is unable to set limits with the abuse is because they are a hostage to the abuse
- There is often a power differential that makes it more difficult for the abused partner to set effective limits with the abusive partner
- Power differences can include physical, economic, intellectual, as well as other forms of leverage

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## Being hostage to the abuse

- For example, this is why we rarely hear about children sexually abusing adults, students sexually abusing teachers, employees sexually harassing supervisors, etc.
- If one has true power over the abusive partner, then one is more likely to effectively set limits related to the abuse
- If one does not have power over the abusive partner, then there is much less that can be done by that individual to get the abuse to stop

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## Being hostage to the abuse

- Just the awareness alone of the power difference is enough to not be abusive when one is less powerful and more abusive when one is more powerful (e.g., "Power corrupts")
- Part of stopping abuse is empowering abused partners

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## The only one who knows both sides of the abusive partner . . .

- Because most/all of the abuse happens in the privacy of the home, many loved ones (and the therapist of the abusive partner) don't see their abuse or consider that person to be an "abusive partner", simply a partner
- If your only knowledge of the partner of your client (or friend) is as an abuser, then it can be difficult to also see that person as having non-abusive qualities (i.e., "a batterer")
- Only the victim and the children see the abusive partner as both a partner/parent *and* as an abusive person, rather than as either/or (i.e., "a person who is abusive")

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## Recommended Readings

- \*Carol Jordan et al (2004) Intimate Partner Violence: A Clinical Training Guide for Mental Health Professionals
- Patricia Evans (2010) The Verbally Abusive Relationship
- Lundy Bancroft (2002) Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men

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## Recommended Readings

- Terrence Real (1997) I Don't Want To Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression
- Chris Huffine (2021) Becoming Allies . . . With Your Partner, Yourself, and Others: Addressing the Abuse and Control in Your Relationships

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