

# The Dynamics Of Domestic Violence

Including:

The Facts.....	1
Characteristics of Battering.....	2
Myths and Realities.....	3
The Cycle of Violence.....	4
The Progression of Abuse.....	5
Why do Men Stay?.....	6
Barriers to Leaving.....	7
Understanding the Victim.....	8
The Healing Process.....	9
The Equality Wheel.....	10
Power and Control Wheel.....	11

## **Characteristics of Battering**

Some battered women may embody the following characteristics:

- ◆ Is not aware that a crime has been committed against her person.
- ◆ Is not firmly convinced of her right to be free from violence.
- ◆ Is economically dependent.
- ◆ Fears danger to self and children if she leaves.
- ◆ Fears losing custody of her children. Fears that if she leaves that she will be accused of abandoning them and/or the father may hurt them in her absence.
- ◆ Fears that if she leaves with the children that she will be accused of kidnapping.
- ◆ Fears that the abuser will kidnap the children and she may never see them again.
- ◆ Fears retaliation.
- ◆ Fears court involvement.
- ◆ Fears that partner is not able to survive due to his emotional dependence on her.
- ◆ Fears loneliness.
- ◆ Is insecure about the potential of independence and lack of support.
- ◆ Feels guilt about the failure of the marriage.
- ◆ Feels cultural and religious constraints.
- ◆ Lacks alternative housing or job skills.
- ◆ May experience a sense of shame, degradation, or lack of self esteem.

## **Some Myths and Realities About Domestic Violence**

**MYTH:** Domestic Violence affects only a small percentage of the population.

**REALITY:** Abuse occurs in one of every six households in any single year.

**MYTH:** Middle-class women do not get battered as frequently or as violently as do low income women.

**REALITY:** The frequency and severity of violence among the middle-class is just as great among lower income people.

**MYTH:** Battered women seek maltreatment

**REALITY:** Rather than seeking maltreatment and desiring physical abuse, battered women may feel guilty and responsible for her partner's actions. Battered women do seek help and they do leave. We must acknowledge their barriers to leaving.

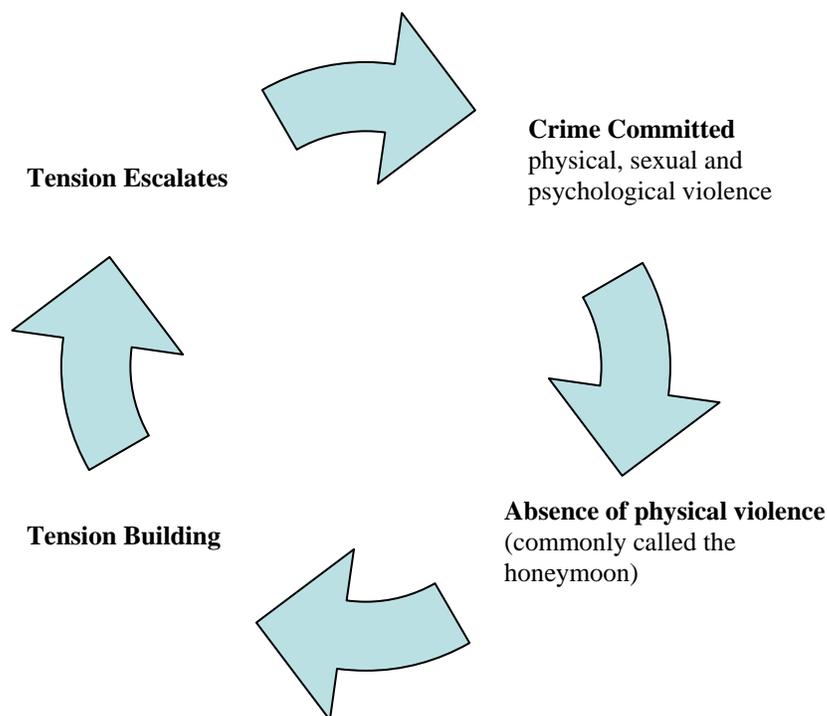
**MYTH:** Women of color are battered more frequently than Caucasian women.

**REALITY:** All ethnic groups report similar patterns of violence.

**MYTH:** Battered women are uneducated and have few job skills.

**REALITY:** The education level of battered women ranges from grade school through the completion of doctoral degrees.

## The Cycle of Violence



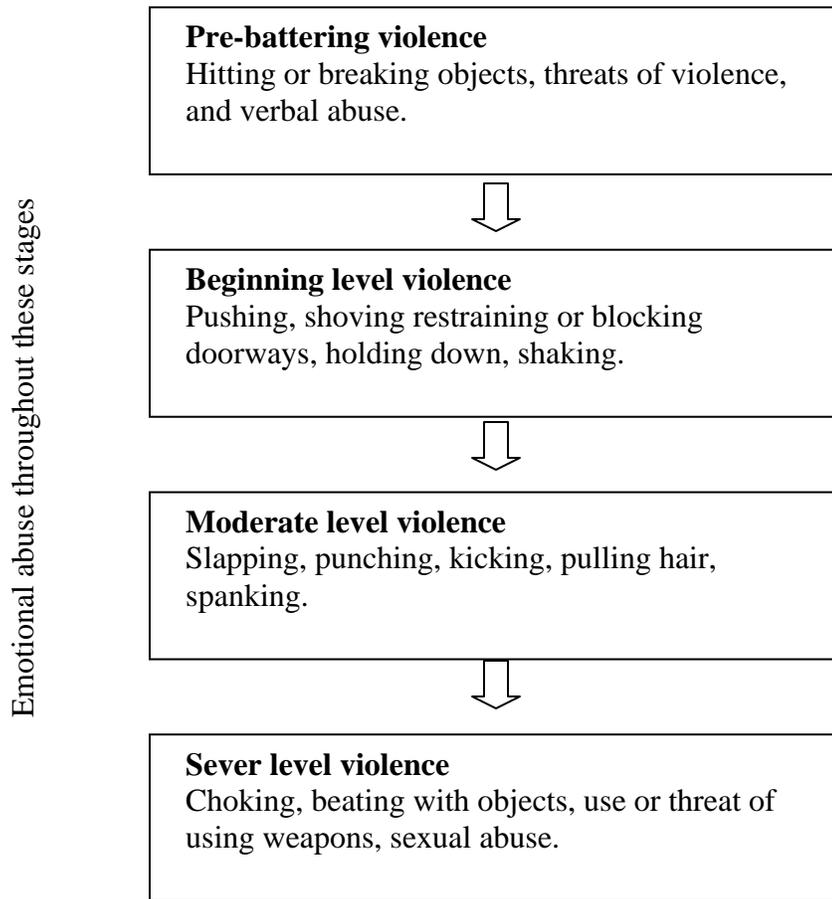
**The cycle of violence-** a recurring behavioral pattern where the offender swings between affectionate, remorseful calm and periods of tense demands culminating violence.

- The more times the cycle is completed, the **less** time it takes to complete.
- As the cycles are repeated, the violence usually increases in frequency and severity.
- After a violent episode, the offender may be genuinely sorry for what he has done. Often his worst fear is that his partner will leave him, so he may try as hard as he can to make up for his behavior. During these calm periods, the offender may seem fully in control and determined never to raise a hand again.
- The victim may even do something that she knows may instigate the violence because the tension building may be so unbearable. Nevertheless, if nothing else has changed, the odds of the violence reoccurring are high.

It is important to note that not every battered woman's experience will reflect this model. It is good at illustrating isolated incidents of violence but does not address the **constant fear** of violence. In fact, the honeymoon stage seems to contradict our belief that the fear of violence is just as coercive as the incident(s) of violence.

The power and control wheel puts violence in a social and political context as well as addressing more adequately the reality of domestic violence.

## The Progression of Abuse



- The first stages of abuse. Psychological abuse must be taken seriously and can be just as harmful as physical abuse.
- Violence usually (not always) progresses. It may begin with seemingly small, socially acceptable attempts to establish power and control, and it tends to become progressively more destructive.

### **Examples of psychological abuse are:**

**• rigid sex requirements • insulting • humiliating •yelling •ignoring •jealousy  
•violence to property •threats • isolation • blaming the victim • labels such as bitch  
or slut • forced dependency •invasion of privacy •hurting or psychologically  
abusing the children**

## **Why Do Men Stay?**

We are often asked why women stay in these relationships. This offensive kind of question places blame onto the victims without acknowledging the responsibility of the perpetrator. Following is an excerpt **adapted** from Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships, by Ginni NiCarthy.

### **If a man feels so hostile to his chosen mate that he regularly hits, why doesn't he leave?**

If pressed for an explanation, he might say that its love that has him locked hopelessly in its grip, though he's more likely to confess that he feels the need of a woman, and that life without an intimate partner would be intolerable. He may not even be willing to admit to himself the importance of the relationship, because emotional dependency runs counter to the accepted image of masculinity.

Often the man is as emotionally dependent on his victim as he forces her to be on him, though he may rarely admit to this. They tend to shut out the rest of the world- she because she's ashamed of the abuse and because he demands that she cut off other relationships, he because he doesn't know how to form relationships and is jealous and fearful of her involvement with others. The more isolated they become, the more dependent he grows and therefore forces her to be. Since no one person can fulfill all of another's needs, the continued disappointment leads to increased stress, depression and hostility.

Many men who batter are immature and emotionally dependent, though some successfully hide it in their work and social lives outside of the home. They are often addicted to the women they abused, and they batter in hopes of frightening the women so much that they dare not leave.

The batterer believes he can force change by frightening the woman into submission and fidelity, and he often like the woman he victimizes, perpetually renews his hope for change.

## Barriers to Leaving

### **Attitudinal Factors**

- Belief that violence is temporary, or caused by unusual circumstances. Hope that he will change.
- Belief in batterer's treatment.
- Belief that she is the cause of the violence.
- Belief that she could understand her abuser and help him stop his violence.
- Belief that all men are violent.
- Feelings of personal incompetence.
- Belief that divorce is wrong and/or that single parenthood is detrimental to children.
- Belief that the abuse stems from alcoholism or stress at work.
- Religious beliefs which dictate a two parent household and the submission of the wife.
- Love. The battered woman may still love her abuser.
- Fear of the unknown.

### **Situational Factors**

- Fear of more severe physical attack from her abuser if she tries to leave.
- Financial dependence on her abuser so that she will have difficulty finding a place to go.
- Lack of social support so that she has no friends or family who can or will help her.
- Lack of support from societal institutions.
- Fear that the abuser will gain custody of the children.
- Not wanting to leave her belongings/way of life.
- In some battering relationships the violence escalates **slowly**. "Just noticeable difference" is a term meaning that as the violence escalates, the victim may not acknowledge the progression. By the time the abuse is reaching a severe level, she is more isolated and has less resources or options.

## Understanding the Victim

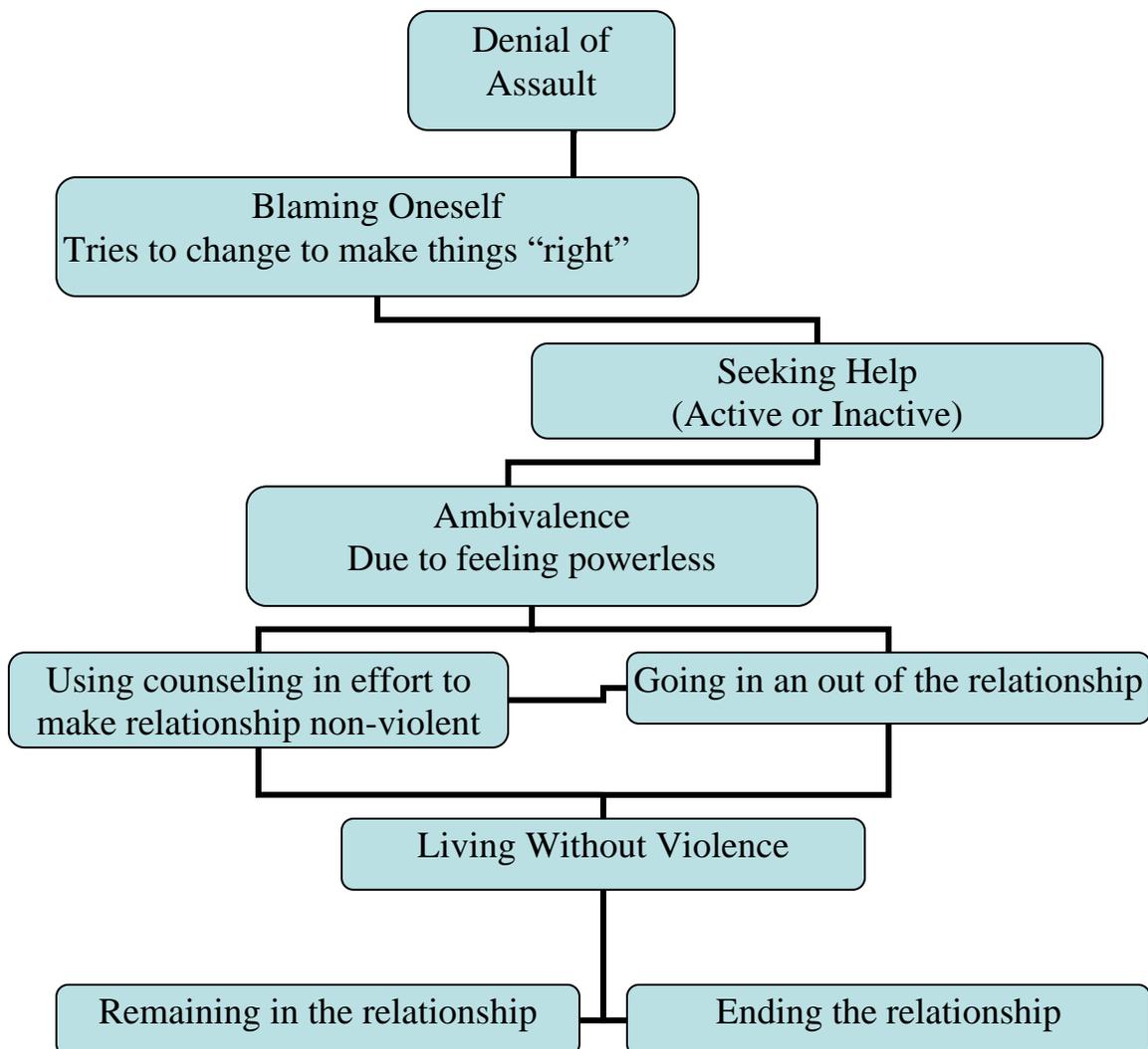
(Leaving is a Process)



Women leave or attempt to leave between 6-8 times before the final termination of the relationship.

### Stages in a Battered Woman's Experience

---



## The Healing Process

**Grieving-** Despite the fact that her relationship was abusive, a formerly battered woman may go through a period of grieving the death of a relationship. Although it is the task of an advocate to try to name the reality of her abuse, you must allow this grieving process to take place. During this time, women may be offended if you refer to the perpetrator as her “abuser” or the “batterer”. We will see anger, grieving, and isolation during this time.

A second grieving that takes place months after the woman has left the relationship. She may go back to the abuser for a period of time during this. The stages of grief are denial and isolations, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (these stages are not always experienced and/or may not be experienced in this order).

During this time she will often have to work through her feelings of guilt and lack of trust in herself and her judgment. She may have a very hard time trusting shelter workers. You may not always hear the facts of her situation the first time or first couple of times that you talk with her. **Building trust and accepting her own judgments will take time.**

**Healing-** The healing which follows the grieving process is characterized by the woman’s growing conviction that she is a worthwhile person. She understands that she can begin to take these enormous steps in her life and that she can make a change.

**Empowerment-** Often facilitated by support groups and/or counseling, empowerment is the process by which the woman feels able to access her resources and feels confident in her abilities.

**Activism-** Finally, formerly battered women may take on a supportive role at the shelter as a volunteer or as a paid staff member. Many of our shelters were founded by formerly battered women.