

Healthy Families Healthy Nations
Domestic Violence Training

for Professionals and Service Providers

Theme - Improving Our Communities - Understanding Violence

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Profiles Of

*Abusers, Victims,
Children who witness violence*



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2009

Behaviours Of An Abuser

It is important to know that abusers do not grow up and want to become an abuser. Something happened in their lives that affects how they behave as adults. It is highly likely that an abuser has witnessed or experienced family violence during childhood. Children who grow up in violent homes are in danger of becoming the next generation of victims or abusers. There are reasons as to why people do the things that they do.

It is also important to know that although there are many factors that encourage people to use violence, it is ultimately their **choice** to react with violence.

Before Abuse Begins:

- the person develops a desire to abuse (will feel the need to abuse)
- the person overcomes internal constraints to abuse (internally know that abuse is wrong but does it anyway)
- the person develops opportunities to abuse (will literally try to cause friction in home or relationship)
- the person overcomes the partner's resistance to being abused (despite pleas from victim to stop, the abuser does not)

School-Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bullying, fighting, biting, harm self • depression, withdrawal • difficulty expressing feelings • learns to rationalize violence • easily distracted (decreased ability to learn) • seeking attention (regression-return to bedwetting/ thumbsucking/baby talk) • destruction of property • disrespect for self and others (opposite sex) • displays violence towards others
Adolescent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unhealthy relationships • dating violence • bullying • poor self esteem • suicidal ideations, self harm • threatening others • truancy, skipping school or not going to school • disrespect for self and others (opposite sex) • displays violence towards others • abuse substances (alcohol, drugs, solvents, medications)

There is hope and help for children.

Positive influences can help a child overcome the negative experiences.

Children are resilient, their personality traits and coping skills will help them thrive and live a healthy lifestyle.

Possible Behaviours At Different Stages of Life:

Developmental Stage	Potential Behaviours
Infants and Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• high startle response• failure to thrive• listlessness• disruption in eating and sleeping routines• delays in development• fear may slow child's exploration and play• imitation of violence (begin to learn aggression)
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• aggressive behaviours• clinging (difficulty separating from trusted caregiver)• anxiety• cruelty to animals• destruction of property (unhealthy ways to display anger)

Once these choices have been made, the cycle of violence begins. An abuser will attempt to rationalize his/her behaviour.

After The First Episode, An Abuser May:

- play down the incident (it was not that bad)
- blame others (if it wasn't for...)
- make excuses for behaviour ('I lost control')
- be extremely remorseful (apologizes to victim)
- likely be full of promises that it will not happen again (most cases it does happen repeatedly)

This process gives the abuser a growing sense of power, domination, and control. We can begin to see the cycle of violence.

If there is no help or intervention, the abuse is likely to continue or may even become worse over time.

An abuser not only struggles with their behaviour, but also struggles with their own personal histories, most of which have not been ideal. Abusers have low self esteem and have a poor image of themselves. They may see violence as a way to gain control over people. A negative learned behaviour that we learned is that if you have control over a person, you deserve more respect, have more power and authority. Again, historically, Aboriginal people came from a place where everybody had a role. The whole concept of power and control has always existed in Aboriginal communities. It is time to 'break the cycle.'

An Abuser May:

- feel very jealous of others and not want their partner to speak, talk, or look at members of the opposite sex
- be overly possessive of partner
- speak with disrespect about opposite sex
- become very angry at little things, has a quick temper
- try to isolate their partner from family, friends, and community events
- try to control by using violence or the threat of violence
- deny responsibility for their behaviour and blame others
- always tries to find 'faults' in partner
- apologize and 'makes up' after violence
- promise to stop abuse and change behaviours
- stereotype 'male' and 'female' roles (a man has the right to control their partner by any means, women has to do all the cooking and cleaning)
- control or not approve of how their partner spends money
- purposely destroy property
- demand sex (especially after violent episode)
- have an addiction, abuse substances (drugs, alcohol, solvents, medications)
- enjoy belittling or putting partner down in front of others (call names, laugh at partner)
- be insecure in self, low self esteem
- always have to get their own way, makes all the decisions (does not compromise)
- engage in risky behaviour
- try to cause friction in relationship (make accusations)
- not take 'no' as an answer
- have a history of violence against partners, failed relationships

acting out violent events (repeating event in play)	bullying (picking on younger siblings and children who are smaller)	avoid people and places that remind them of violence, don't want to go home
develop fears of being abandoned or of being hurt	may become distrustful, insecure	older children may run away, abuse substances, turn to sex early, have suicidal thoughts, get involved in criminal activity

- Not all children who have experienced violence appear to have serious problems.
- Not all children who display such problems have been exposed to family violence.
- Feelings experienced may include: fear, sadness, guilt, anger, shame, and confusion.
- The risk of child maltreatment increases in a violent home.
- Households where violence exists are more likely to have young children.
- Children living in a violent home may be slow to develop.
- Children are affected differently at different stages of their lives.

Behaviours Of Children Who Witness Violence

Children are sometimes direct targets of violence.

- ▶ physical abuse
- ▶ sexual abuse
- ▶ emotional abuse
- ▶ mental abuse
- ▶ neglect

Children who see or hear violence are hurt in many ways. They do not have to be hit to feel the pain of violence. Children are at high risk of accidental injury in a violent home. They are very aware and know when violence is happening in the home. Witnessing violence in the home indirectly harms children.

Possible Behaviours Of Children Who Witness Violence:

trouble sleeping (nightmares, restless, lethargic)	headaches, stomach aches, unexplained injuries	separation anxiety
increased aggressive behaviour (bullying, fighting, swearing)	constantly worrying about danger and/or the safety of self and loved ones	withdrawal from others (parents, family, friends, trusted adults)
emotional numbing (not showing any feelings)	difficulty focusing on tasks (schoolwork, chores)	loss of skills learned earlier (toilet training, naming colors, writing)

Many times, abusers do not realize what harm they are doing to the family unit, some may not realize they are indirectly abusing family members. It may just seem like 'normal' behaviour in the home or even in the community. It is not.

Other Warning Signs:

- checks up on partner at work or when they are away from home
- acts like they own their partner (like property)
- lies to make themselves look good in front of others
- tries to make it seem like they are the victim
- acts like the 'king/queen of the castle' (everybody has to listen to them)
- threatens to harm self/partner/children/pets/property
- poor coping skills
- has no respect for self and others
- has unrealistic expectations of partner
- very sensitive (cannot laugh at themselves, easily insulted)
- cruel or mistreats animals
- cruel or mistreats children
- does all the talking for partner
- stalks partner
- denies that there is a problem

Indicators A Person May Be An Abuser:

<p>Family History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abusive background • rigid, religious background • stereotype sex roles • many experiences of failure 	<p>Behavioural Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor sleeping habits • unhealthy relationships with victims • rigid, parenting style • abusive attitude • abuse of substances
<p>Mental Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low self esteem • guilt, shame • isolates from others • preoccupied with sex • wild mood swings • low tolerance, low patience • extremely jealous 	<p>Sexually Abusive Behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive fondling of self and others • use of pornography • exhibitionism ('flashing') • sexually demanding • unhealthy role playing • harassment

A Victim May Also:

be over aggressive	have eating disorders	multiple abusive relationships	does not trust anyone
defensive body language	be defiant	fear certain people, places	difficulty getting along with others
block 'memories'	sexual problems, promiscuity	be very passive	punish self
have anxiety attacks	have sleeping disorders	have recurring medical problems	disconnect self from situation
have boundary issues	nightmares	bedwetting	'mask' feelings with happiness

It is important to know that nobody can stop a person's violence. An abuser is responsible for their own behaviour.

Abuse is never the victim's fault.

Victims can be male or female.

Nobody deserves to be abused.

- relatives, in-laws, community members want the family to stay together
- lack of protection
- feelings of guilt or shame
- does not believe in his/her ability to make it on their own, afraid to be alone
- believes in promises to make changes or make things better
- feels isolated (nowhere to go)
- genuine love for partner (wishes and hopes things will get better)
- may not know what support is available
- may not know what abuse is (may seem 'normal')

"A lot of domestic violence in the community. The man being sent to jail, the mother and children are left in the home to deal with what happened. No help for families. Couples need to learn that they can't hurt each other because they pull the children into it, whatever they are doing. Some couples do not realize what damage they are doing to the children."

NAN Member 2006

Common Beliefs Of A Victim

There are many 'survival' skills that victims of violence learn when living in an abusive relationship.

A Person May Develop:

- a lack of trust for others (may not trust themselves, or trust people who do not deserve their trust)
- a fear of making changes (situation may feel familiar and 'safe' when it is not)
- caring too much (trying to help others before helping themselves)
- trouble recognizing or showing emotions (may be hard to share feelings, or ask for help)
- negative coping skills (may turn to food, alcohol, drugs, violence)
- aggressive behaviour
- low self esteem (some adults think they are 'bad' and deserve to be abused)

Possible Personal Indicators Of Abuse:

- unkept appearance (usually clean and kept)
- poor body posture
- difficulty speaking up
- low self-image
- sense of shame

Possible Personal Indicators Of Abuse: continued

- lack of self-confidence
- self abuse (drugs/alcohol, self harm ie. cutting, burning)
- suicide attempts
- clothes that conceal/hide body
- depression
- poor self esteem
- extremely anxious

Victims of abuse do not always fit the 'profile' of a victim, however, there are some common traits that are a result of abuse.

These common traits are what an abused person becomes after living with abuse for a period of time. It does not dictate who they are or what they can accomplish.

Common Profile Of A Victim:

- fearful
- minimizes the abuse ("It is not that bad")
- isolated (may feel he/she is the only one)
- sense of helplessness ("I don't know what to do")
- sense of hopelessness ("I can't change anything")
- blames self, may feel guilty or shamed
- feels they deserves the abuse ("I shouldn't have done that")
- does/does not believe in the traditional female role

- low self esteem
- hopes for change
- lacks knowledge (may not know what abuse is)
- has children
- is dependent of spouse (emotionally, financially)
- genuine love for spouse regardless of behaviour
- avoids, withdraws from friends, family, community
- makes excuses or apologizes for abuse ("It only happened once")
- nervous, on edge
- feelings of sadness or depression
- may or may not attempt to cover bruising/marks
- may abuse substances to cope (drugs, alcohol, solvents, medications)
- gets angry (tries to fight back)
- gets defensive about situation
- denies abuse ("Everything is okay")
- feelings of obligation to family ("I don't want to break up my family")
- feels like a bad parent

Why Do Victims Stay?

- fears for their life
- cannot afford to leave and support the family
- feels responsible to keep the family together
- wants the children to grow up with both mother and father