

Cycle of Violence

Stage 1: Tension Building

During this stage the demands on and the stresses in the relationship increase. Risk factors that increase the possibility of domestic violence occurring include substance abuse, employment concerns, mental health issues, financial worries (poverty), pregnancy, etc.

There is an increase in aggressive behavior, usually toward objects rather than a partner. For example punching doors, throwing objects, etc.

The violence moves from objects to partner, and there may be an increase in verbal abuse. The abuser appears moody and unpredictable

The abuser finds fault with seemingly minor events.

The partner begins to alter his/her behavior to stop the verbal abuse and/or the violence. For example they may try keeping the house cleaner, the children quieter, staying home more often, etc.

The verbal, emotional and/or physical abuse continues to escalate. The abuser may maintain tight sole control over finances and money.

The 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 over where the partner will go, with whom, how she dresses, and forbid the partner to see certain people.

The abuser may try to isolate the partner from family and friends. The abuser may tell the partner that if they loved him/her, they wouldn't need others.

During the tension building stage, the victim....

- * feels that nothing he/she does is good enough for the abuser**
- * feels like he/she is walking on eggshells**
- * feels powerless to stop the next beating and/or explosion**
- * feels angry because the abuser doesn't trust him/her**
- * is angry because the abuser isn't keeping his past promises to get counseling, etc**
- * feels helpless**
- * becomes compliant and accepts blame**

During the tension building stage, the abuser....

- * feels like a non-person**
- * denies that he/she is hurt, frustrated, disappointed, insecure**
- * feels caught between a rock and a hard place**
- * feels powerless in his/her own home**
- * believes the victim should make him/her feel better**
- * blames others for feeling miserable**
- * may drink or use drugs to reduce tension**

The tension building stage differs with each case. The length of this phase may be days or weeks or months. The dynamics of increasing tension vary, as does the severity of behavior.

Stage 2: Abuse Takes Place

The violent episode includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse: threats, intimidation, yelling, name calling, blaming, hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, pulling hair, throwing objects, hitting objects, rape, stabbing, etc. A crime under the Criminal Code of Canada has been committed.

In this stage a feeling of release from the build-up of stress and tension in Stage 1 may be felt by both the abuser and/or the victim.

The abuser makes choices about his/her violence. For example, decides the time and place for an episode, decides what to say and how to say it, decides what part of the body to hit and in what way to hit (fist, open hand, shove, kick, etc).

The abuser may destroy property, for example putting holes in the walls or tearing the phone out. The abuser may hurt pets, for example kicking or throwing them.

During this stage the RCMP may become involved. As a result of the explosion, the abuser's pent-up stress and tension has been eliminated so they may appear calm and relaxed when the police arrive. The partner will feel confused and very upset from the incident.

During the abuse stage, the victim....

- * is terrified**
- * blames himself/herself for the violence believing they said or did the wrong thing**
- * is ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed, degraded**
- * is shocked and angry**
- * may be so overwhelmed and frightened by the ongoing threat of violence that he/she is relieved the confrontation is occurring to get it over with**
- * wonders if she/he is exaggerating the severity of the situation**
- * fears for her children; either what they have experienced or what they have witnessed**
- * may try to defend herself or try to flee**
- * feels trapped in the situation**
- * feels alone and may look for help**
- * may do whatever she feels she has to to survive, or to protect herself and the children**
- * may call in sick to work so people don't see her injuries and she doesn't have to talk about it; finds ways to keep the abuse 'private'**

During the abuse stage, the abuser....

- * feels out of control**
- * blames the victim for the violence**
- * wants to control the victim**
- * wants to punish the victim or teach her a lesson**
- * wants to prove their control**
- * may use alcohol or drugs, then use it as an excuse for the violence**
- * feels he/she has solved the problem**
- * is unpredictable**
- * is irrational and cannot be reasoned with**
- * may threaten the victim with hurting the children**

The abusive behavior is reinforced by the abuser's release of tension following aggression.

Stage 3: Apologies, Excuses and Making Amends

This stage is characterized by a calm, non-violent, or loving period of time after an abusive episode.

During this time the abuser may take some responsibility for his behavior, thus giving the partner hope for change. Examples: the abuser begs for forgiveness, promises not to do it again, promises to get help (eg counseling).

The abuser may act as if nothing has happened, which can contribute to the victim thinking they are over-reacting to the abuse.

The abuser may give gifts, or be very attentive and caring.

During the making amends stage, the victim....

- * wants to escape the abuse and never experience it again**
- * may consider or make plans to leave the relationship, but feels guilt about this, and may be persuaded to 'try again'**
- * wants to believe his promises to change**
- * is depressed, feels helpless and trapped**
- * is overwhelmed at the complexities of trying to start a new life without him**
- * may keep the abuse a secret or minimize what happened if people question bruises and injuries, out of shame and the hope that it will not happen again.**
- * may believe his promises to change, and his statements of love**
- * may have a renewed sense of hope**
- * is reminded of the good qualities of her partner**
- * may arrange 'help' for the abuser, such as counseling**

During the making amends stage, the abuser....

- * feels temporarily in control of self**
- * may feel shame and guilt**
- * may fear his own behavior**
- * is afraid the victim will leave him**
- * may display loving caring behavior**
- * may act genuinely sorry**
- * minimizes the abuse**
- * promises never to do it again**
- * is afraid the victim will involve the police or tell people what has happened**
- * may drink or use drugs to escape his feelings**

During the making amends stage, the abuser seeks to draw the victim back into the relationship. Domestic violence is about power and control, and the abuser will continually use tactics designed to have power over, and control, their partner.

The Cycle of Violence is a three stage repetitive pattern. As it repeats it typically speeds up through the stages, and becomes more violent. It is a difficult cycle to break because of the constant return to the making amends stage, which brings a renewed sense of hope.
