
Family Shelter Service

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⊕ PARTNERS WHO CHOOSE VIOLENCE ⊕

It is important to understand that violence is a choice made by the batterer. It is not an innate characteristic of some people, such as shyness or athletic ability. If the violence is directed only towards an intimate partner or family member, the problem is family violence.

- ◆ **The batterer will either deny or minimize the abuse.** In an effort to escape the shame and guilt, the abuser will try to convince the person injured that it was an accident, an occurrence that will never repeat itself or that it was in fact not their fault. To accept responsibility for their actions, a batterer will have to come face to face with their shame, guilt and fear... emotions that are too intense or uncomfortable to acknowledge. If the abuse were to be acknowledged as abuse, the batterer would need to change their behavior -- something they may not want or know how to do.
- ◆ **The batterer usually has low self-esteem.** When they feel inadequate, wrong or out of control, they seek to regain a sense of control. The use of violence or abuse gives the batterer a feeling of control.
- ◆ **The batterer often expects their partner to be a mind reader.** When their partner or family member does not respond to these needs, the hurt, fear and insecurity are labeled as anger. In an attempt to relieve the anger, the batterer explodes into violence or turns to other coping mechanisms such as drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, etc.
- ◆ **Most batterers are extremely dependent on their partners.** The thought of losing this relationship is often extremely terrifying. Extreme jealousy and possessiveness are common. As a result the batterer increases the isolation of the couple which raises the stress level in the relationship.
- ◆ **Many batterers have been described by their partners as having a Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde personality.** They can be extremely charming, loving and attentive one minute and the next explode into rage. The batterer often keeps the abusive side hidden from those outside of the home. It is through these extremes in behavior that the batterer is able to manipulate people around them.
- ◆ **After an abusive incident, the batterer usually feels calm and free of tension.** They may make promises to go to counseling or give up behaviors that upset their partner. Because the batterer feels better, they want everything to be back to normal. The batterer's requests for sex and intimacy are used to convince the batterer that in fact, all is well.
- ◆ **The influence of drugs and/or alcohol are often used as an excuse for the violence.** A substance use/abuse problem is not the root of violence. The abuse is one problem, the dependence or use of substances is another. Abusers who enter treatment programs and are successful in recovery are often still abusive.

The task of unlearning abusive behavior rests solely with the batterer. There are programs for batterers designed to teach anger management, conflict management, stress reduction, empathy, etc. Like any treatment, it is only as good as the sincerity with which it is approached and worked at over time. The batterer's use of power and control has most likely been developed over years. To expect it to stop with a few counseling sessions is unrealistic. Couples counseling should **never** be attempted until the violence has ended. When one partner is violent, the victim's disclosures of abuse will likely result in retaliation.