

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors where one partner attempts to establish power and control over another person. Typically, *the pattern of control starts out slowly, and it increases in frequency and intensity over time*. Domestic violence includes not only **physical abuse**, but **social, emotional, economic, and spiritual abuse**. It includes intimidating, manipulating, blaming, isolating, frightening, terrorizing, threatening, blaming, and injuring a loved one or partner.

The Power and Control Wheels

In the center of the wheel is the power and control, and on the outside spokes, you can see the physical and sexual abuse. As a society, we know that that is abuse. We call it that, we prosecute for that. But on the inside of the wheel, there are so many other components that sometimes we know it feels terrible, but we don't know that it is abuse or power and control.

Some of the spokes inside that wheel include minimizing, denying, and blaming, coercion and threats, intimidation, isolation.

The Cycle of Violence

The *cycle of violence* tells us the *why* and *how* this is happening in a relationship. **All relationships start off in some sort of honeymoon phase**. Typically, those pursuing are charismatic and charming and attentive. At some point in the relationship, though, **you enter the tension-building phase**. In this phase you enter the **Garden of Resentments**, this is where your partner begins tilling away at negative grievances, stockpiling them away to be used as weapons against you later. It's as though there's this list of things that you're doing wrong or can't get right. You may or may not be aware of the list, but you can sense that your partner is agitated and frustrated and unhappy with you. This feeling can be described as walking on eggshells.

Then we enter the explosion phase, and that can be a physical or verbal assault. It might also be lengthy periods of neglect or ignoring. Essentially this is a confrontation where promises are broken and threats are carried out. If there was ever a sense of being on the same page with this person, there's now a power differential.

If domestic violence was linear, we would be out of there in a heartbeat, but right after an explosion, we circle back up to the honeymoon phase, and this is where your partner engages in, hooks you back in and makes them feel better about themselves. Sometimes this is, "I'm sorry, it'll never happen again," or "Let's go talk to somebody about this." Sometimes it's gifts. Sometimes it's just helping more around the house or with the kids. This is seduction back into the cycle where you think that it may be different this time, that there could be hope. **Each time we move through the cycle, we typically see it increase in frequency and intensity.**

Stepping outside of the cycle means letting go of everything inside of it. It means grieving the loss of the hope, the dreams, and the possibility and coming to an understanding that this issue isn't about you getting it right or doing it better. This is about your partner's need to have control and dominance over you.

Co-parenting after Domestic Violence

When two individuals are trying to co-parent, there may be, at times, a sense that one partner is unsafe. There may be a fear of sending your children to be with that person. Some of the danger or warning signs to look out for in an abusive individual would be things like an explosive temper, manipulation, jealousy and possessiveness, rigid sex roles, a past history of abuse, isolation. Minimizing contact is probably my first and highest recommendation. **This is somebody who's had a big voice in your life, big voice in your head.** And **they know just what to say** to put you in that place of fear or shame or regret. *Minimizing contact looks like communicating through a third party, if possible.*

Co-parenting and Addiction

One definition of addiction is the *inability to stop a behavior despite repeated attempts to stop it and a number of consequences that you face by continuing that behavior.* We recognize the classic alcoholism, sexual addiction, drug addiction, but really, when you think about an addiction, it becomes that thing that we do to feel better. It has provided us with a temporary relief, some of our painful symptoms, some of our hurts.

When a parent has an addiction in the home, it's very hard for a child to understand that. You really want to be aware of that sort of internal processing that the kids have when an addiction is in the home. Focus on helping kids to see that it's not because of them.

When there's addiction in the midst and parents are faced with co-parenting situations, the level of addiction needs to be assessed. If this is someone who has a severe drug addiction, **co-parenting is gonna be very difficult.** When the addiction is not at that level, co-parenting isn't impossible, and it's important to remember that the addiction and their recovery is their process and their journey.

Wrap-up

When you're put in these situations where you're having to be in a continued relationship with somebody with a history of abuse, or where there's an ongoing addiction, one of the best things you can do is **put some boundaries in place to protect you on an emotional level.** That will allow you to still enjoy that relationship for what it is, and be able to show up in the ways that you need to show up.