

The following document was provided by Abbey Newman to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in support of her Witness Statement.

Hand out

A healthy relationship is based on respect.

It's when:

- You can have different opinions and interests
- You can listen to each other
- You can trust each other
- You can both compromise, and talk arguments out
- You can spend time on your own, or with your own friends and family
- You feel safe around your partner.

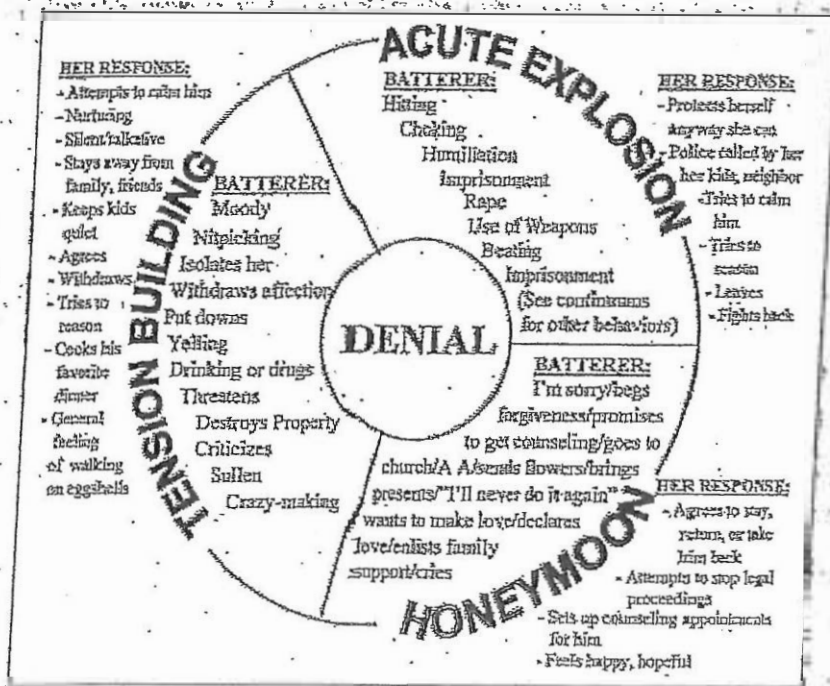
Abusive/ Unhealthy Relationships

- Abuse in relationships is any behaviour that causes physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional damage, or causes you to live in fear.
- The pattern of continuous abuse is called family of domestic violence in Australia and here it is punishable by law.

What is family violence?

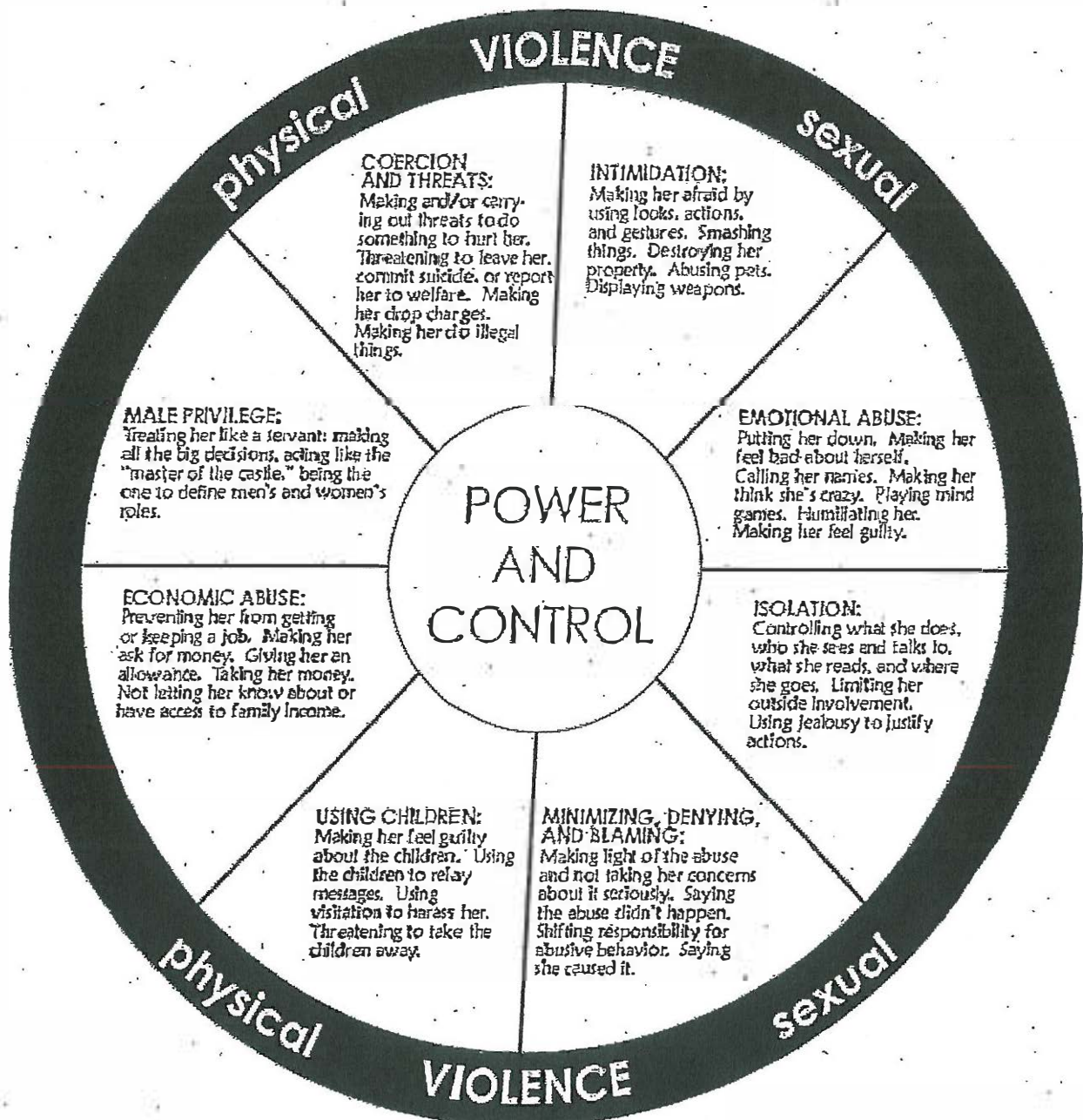
Family violence is harmful behaviour that occurs when someone threatens or controls a family member through fear. It can include physical harm, sexual assault, emotional and economic abuse or abuse of a pet.

Cycle of Violence



Hand out

Power and Control Wheel



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Pursuit Techniques

People who use family violence typically follow behaviours described on the power and control wheel. Their behaviour also follows the cycle described in the cycle of abuse. They also follow three documented pursuit techniques in the effort to convince their partners to return to them.

THE BUY BACK

- Buying presents and gifts for her, the children or her family and friends
- Promising counselling
- Paying for school activities or expenses
- Completing tasks that may have been requested for a long time.

This phase aims to stir feelings of gratitude, and make her feel obligated to return to him.

THE HELPLESSNESS PHASE

- “I can’t live without you”
- “You’re the only one who can make me smile.”
- “My whole world is you and the children.”
- “I can’t even feed myself.”
- “I’ll kill myself if you don’t come back to me

This phase can be coupled with pressure from family and friends urging her to take him back due to his poor state of mind or deteriorating physical condition. This phase aims to stir guilt in the women, because she is able to help but is choosing to put herself/safety first.

THE THREATENING PHASE

- “I will take the children off you.”
- “I will report you to DHS”
- “I will find you where ever you go.”
- “An intervention order is just a piece of paper if I want to hurt you I will”
- “I will kill you”
- “I will make your life hell”

This phase is designed to create fear and doubt. She may believe that the threats were not as bad at home, or she should have listened when he made promises to change and try to work things out rather than endure the threats/fear/uncertainty.

These phases maybe used in order, sporadically or all at once.

Is My Relationship Abusive?

Sometimes when we are in a relationship, we may not realize that the relationship is abusive. Sometimes we may think it's not that bad or we are blowing things out of proportion.

Here is a list of behaviours that may have been going on in your relationship. Please tick behaviours that apply to your situation.

- You felt nervous or tense around your partner.
- You changed your behaviour i.e. not arguing back, to control their anger.
- Your partner always checked up on where you were
- Your partner unfairly blames you
- Your partner doesn't offer any emotional support
- Your partner says that if you changed the abuse would stop
- Your partner criticises you in front of others
- Your partner threatens to hurt/kill himself or herself if you ever leave
- You don't have equal access to finances or have no access to finances
- Your partner put you down
- Your partner yelled to get what they wanted
- Your partner yelled to scare you
- Your partner acted jealously toward your friends and family
- Your partner accused you of cheating
- Your partner "Towered" over you
- Your partner physically assaulted you including
 - Slapped you
 - Grabbed you
 - Restrained you
 - Pushed you
 - Kicked you
 - Choked you
 - Spat on you
 - Forced sex
- Your partner made you feel like you were crazy, wrong or stupid
- You feel like nothing you ever do is good enough
- You feel pressured when it comes to having sex
- Your partner has forced sex
- Your partner makes excuses for their behaviour, e.g. It was because I was drunk, tired, on drugs, stressed, or upset.

You may have found that you ticked some of these boxes or a lot, ticking these boxes can indicate that you are in an abusive relationship. Abuse is NOT ok for any reason it is crime. It is not your fault that these things maybe happening to you. The abusive partner is making a choice to use abusive behaviours; they are accountable for their actions. If abuse is happening to you there are people who care and want to help:
FREE CALL 24hrs: 1800-015-188

A relationship should be a place where you feel safe, loved and equal.

Warning Signs

- 1. Jealousy: At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say that their jealousy is a sign of love. It is in reality a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. They may do strange things such as check the mileage on your car, call you often at work, accuse you of flirting and so on.
- 2. Controlling Behavior: At first the abuser may say this is because they are concerned for your safety, you need to use your time well or you need to make good decisions. They may be angry if you are late coming home from work, the store or an appointment. As this gets worse he may want to make personal decisions for you about the home, your clothes or even your being involved in social activities.
- 3. Quick Involvement: Many Partners dated or knew their abusers only a short while before making the decision to live together. Abusers will come on like a whirlwind claiming love at first sight and telling the partner they have never been loved like this before.
- 4. Isolation: Abusers will try to cut their partners off from everything. If you have friends of the opposite sex you may be accused of sleeping with them, caring about them and not caring about your partner. If you have same-sex friends you will be accused of having an affair. If you are close to your family you may be accused of being "tied to the apron strings". Abusers will accuse people who support you of causing problems. They may also choose to live in rural or remote areas or try to keep you from working or going to school.
- 5. Blame: Abusers will often blame others for their problems. They may make mistakes and blame you for upsetting them and keeping them from concentrating. Abusers also blame others for their feelings.
- 6. Jeckyll an Hyde: Many partners are confused by their abusers' sudden changes in mood—partners will describe that one minute they are nice and in the next minute they just explode with anger. Explosiveness and mood swings are typical of abusers.
- 7. Cruelty to Children or Animals: An abuser may try to punish you by hurting your children or your pets. They may expect children to be capable of doing things far beyond their ability and punish them when they do not "behave". This characteristic is also shown in abusers who punish animals brutally and who are insensitive to their pain and suffering.

Stepping into a new beginning

Strategies for dealing with your ex-partner

- Prepare yourself emotionally and mentally before contact with your ex-partner. Remember you are in charge of your own life and he has no right to control you
- When you see your ex-partner, consider having someone with you for moral support
- Set limits about your ex-partner's behaviour. Refuse to let him put you down. Write a list of what you will not tolerate. Terminate the encounter if he will not respect your rights.
- Remain clear about the purpose of your contact. If he wishes to raise other issues, make another appointment so you can prepare yourself
- If you find yourself drawn back by his charm and promises, re-read your "bad memories" list
- Make a note of all arrangements and agreements, so your partner can't play "twist the truth" and denial games.

Strategies to increase your safety after the break-up

- Take any threats seriously and report them to the police
- Take out an Intervention Order
- After you have obtained the Intervention Order, notify the police every time your partner attempts to make contact with you. If you are consistent about this, your partner will soon realise you mean business
- If you are frightened of your partner and do not have an Intervention order, at the very least refuse to be alone with him.
- If you need to return home at a later date to collect your belongings, ask the police to accompany you.
- If you stay in the house, change all locks.
- Consider getting an unlisted phone number
- Reclaiming your creativity
- Do you have any interests or talents that you have put on hold, even since childhood?
- Before the relationship began, what gave you pleasure?
- How can you make these things part of your life now?
- What interests and pleasures did you want to pursue while you were in the relationship, but were unable to?
- How can you bring these into being now?

Strategies for resisting going back

- Arrange ahead of time to phone a friend when the urge to go back strikes. Phone her before taking any action. Have her remind you of all the reasons that you left.
- Talk through the feelings that are making you want to go back. When these feelings are acknowledged openly, they lose much of their power. If you have no one to share your feelings with, try expressing them in a journal.

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- Remind yourself about how your partner's abuse affected you. Get back into your anger about his mistreatment.
 - Focus on the here and now, not the future. Recognise that this is a bad moment that will pass. Do something right now that will make you feel better.
 - Transfer your distress into positive action. One woman gradually redecorated her house this way.

Considerations about trying again

- Be very clear about why you are making that decision.
- How long will you give your partner to make positive changes?
- How will you know if the time comes to leave again?
- What will your limit be?

Douglas, K., *Invisible wounds: a self-help guide for women in destructive relationships*, Women's Press, London, 1996.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

- *Write a list of the ways you think your partner has been abuse toward you.*

- *What does your partner gain from their behaviour? E.g. He yells and I don't argue back or he hits me and I stay in the house with him.*

- *How has the behaviour/abuse made you feel?*

- *How has the abuse/behaviour affected you? Are you less confident, do you see your friends and family less?*

- *What negative messages have you heard about yourself from your partner? How have they made you feel? Do you believe them?*

- *How have you coped? What things have you done so the abusive behaviour has not overwhelmed you?*

- *IF YOU LEAVE. How will things be different? What will it look like? How will it feel?*

What will I gain?

What would I lose?

<i>What will I gain?</i>	<i>What would I lose?</i>

- *IF YOU STAY. Will things change? What will things look like? How will things feel?*

What will I gain?

What would I lose?

<i>What will I gain?</i>	<i>What would I lose?</i>

- *What's your worst fear if you leave?*

- *What's your worst fear if you stay?*

- *What strengths do you have that have kept you going?*

- *What can help you feel stronger? Who can you talk to? What do you do to make your-self feel better?*

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS SHEET NOW?

Read this information reflect on how it makes you feel. Keep it for at least a week and read it again, you may want to add to this.

Completing this sheet may not have helped you make a definite decision but it is a good start. This is a great tool to take with you to see a counsellor or family violence support service. Below is a list of support services, these are free services that can help you. They will not tell you to leave or stay but they are able to support your choices.

- *Women's Health West
317-319 Barkly Street
Footscray
PH: 96899588*
- *Western Women's Support
Caroline Springs
Werribee
PH: 93619300*
- *Western Region Health Centre
Paisley Street Footscray
PH: 83984100*
- *Immigrant Women's Support Service
Outreach Service
PH: 98983145*

Im Out Of My Relationship Why Do I Feel So Bad?

You have left an abusive relationship so why don't you feel better? When all relationships end a sense of loss and hurt is felt, even when it was your idea to end it. It's ok to grieve the end of the relationship and what you have lost.

REMEMBER THAT:

You have lost a part of your self:

The abuse in your relationship may have changed the person you were before the relationship. You may have been assertive, outgoing, social, but the abuse has made you more withdrawn and distrustful. Trauma does change people, respect that you have been through a lot of trauma over an extended period. It is ok to feel different, give yourself time to recover.

You lost a companion and confidant

Often regardless of the abuse, you may have told your partner things you would have told anyone else. Your partner gave you the ability to talk over day-to-day things. Even though you know your decision to leave was the right one, you may feel lonely. Feeling loss and sorrow does not mean the relationship was healthy but that you feel the loss of some parts of your relationship.

You lost your sexuality

You may feel the loss of being sexually intimate with another person. Or just being able to be close with someone.

If your relationship was sexually abusive you may have lost your sexual innocence which is: your ability to feel safe and comfortable with a sexual partner or your ability to control your own body. It may take some time to regain your confidence with sex and feeling sexual again. Remind yourself that it is not your fault that this happened and in time, you can heal.

You lost your ability to trust

Your partner's abusive behaviour may have been triggered by discussions over money or children etc. You may now avoid having these discussions with others or new partner. It may feel like you have lost the ability to speak your mind and assert yourself.

You may find it hard to trust new partners and feel like you are constantly waiting for a blow up. Remind yourself that you have experienced trauma and that you are moving forward but still need time to recover.

You lost your life dream

You may have felt he was the one and had dreams for the future. You may have had to leave your town, job and family home. This coupled with dreams of children; marriage and growing old together can create a profound sense of loss.

You lost dreams for your children

Guilt over your children witnessing violence and their loss of innocence can feel like an enormous sense of loss. You may feel like you have failed to provide them with a happy family. You may also feel guilt over exposing the children to the violence. It is easy to see what could have been done in hindsight, but you did what you had to do to safely leave the relationship and keep your children safe. You can offer your children counselling and make sure you show them regularly that you love them and it's not their fault.

You lost family and friends

You may have had people you thought were friends react badly or not believe you about the abuse. They may have chosen to side with your partner. This can feel like a big loss and betrayal. You may have lost contact with past friends or family. You may feel awkward about re-kindling these relationships because you feel different or are worried about how they will react. Give your self time and have faith in your good friends.

You lost you valued possessions

Your partner may have destroyed or sold your possessions that had sentimental value. People often feel guilty about mourning these possessions, give your self permission to miss these items and remember what they represented to you. You may have shared financial obligations such as mortgage, bills and car payments etc. You may be feeling as though you have lost you financial security. Or you may find you partner has left you in debt. With out the stress of an abusive relationship having difficulties with finances causes high stress.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOSS OF YOUR ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

DENIAL: It may not seem real that your relationship is over. You may feel as if the violent times never happened. Even if you were planning to leave your relationship for a long time, it may still take some time to accept that the relationship is over.

It is a normal reaction even to behave as if you are still in a relationship and go about the same behaviours. This stage will pass and you will eventually move through other stages of grief.

ANGER: Anger is a valid emotion after suffering trauma. It may be hard initially to express your anger and you may get tired of people telling you to "let it out." This can be a result of learning to keep your anger in while you were in a violent relationship, to keep your self safe. It may feel scary to imagine expressing your anger, it may feel overwhelming, but it will pass and you will get through it.

You may feel anger toward your partner. You may have had thoughts about hurting your partner in the same way that he hurt you. These thoughts are not abnormal or bad, they are just thoughts. If these thoughts become actioned or you start making plans to hurt your partner this is when you need to seek help.

Life line 13 11 14

DEPRESSION: This is a normal stage of grief. It is important to be able to recognise the signs of depression, because depression may be temporary and situational as you work through the abuse you have suffered, but it can become serious and you may need counselling or medical help.

You may feel sad, teary; you may have an increased or decreased appetite, you maybe sleeping a lot more or not at all, you may feel a sense of hopelessness (that life may never improve etc) or you may have had thoughts of hurting or killing your self

Remember that it is ok to feel bad you are working through trauma and allowing yourself to feel the emotions that surface. Crying is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign that you are allowing your self to feel and work through your trauma.

If you are having, suicidal thoughts you need to get help
Life Line 131114 or Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

ACCEPTANCE: Eventually the pain of your relationship will not affect you on a daily basis. This stage is called acceptance. It means that you have worked through your feelings and you maybe ready to move on. Although you have reached this stage, don't be surprised if during your life you experience things that trigger off memories that make you angry or depressed, you have moved through them once and you can move through them again.