

Relationship Violence

When you think about the ideal romantic relationship, chances are the words that come to mind are love, happiness, and fulfillment with a special person. Most likely you have chosen to be with your partner based on specific characteristics you value: honesty, mutuality, respect, similar interests and ideas, and feeling supported. Being together makes you feel good inside and brings out the best in you. You are accepted for who you are while being encouraged to reach your goals and grow as an individual.

Relationships can be complicated and where there is intimacy there may also be friction. For most of us it is not a dance on rose petals. Each of us brings past experiences and current expectations. An occasional disagreement/fight is normal, what isn't normal is when the fight becomes emotionally, physically, or sexually violent. Violence is based on power and control; however, violence may not be instantly recognized as such when it is carried out in the form of putting the other person down, playing mind games, controlling what the other person does, who he/she sees, what he/she wears, using a loud voice or destroying things to intimidate him/her. Making all major decisions in a relationship and keeping the other person financially dependent are other forms of abusive control. Abuse is more commonly identified in cases where the person uses blatant physical force such as hitting, slapping, or pushing. Partner rape means being forced to be sexual in ways that are not comfortable and that are unsafe.

Relationship violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, culture, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status; it happens to both men and women. According to a 1997 report from the U.S. Department of Justice, one in three women sought treatment in the emergency room as a result of injuries caused by domestic violence. If you are in an abusive relationship, know that you are not alone and that you are not responsible for the other person's behavior even if he or she suggests that you provoked his or her abusive behavior.

Violence in relationships often follows a cycle that continuously repeats itself. The three stages in this cycle show how violence can become a pattern and why it is so difficult to end a violent relationship:

Stage 1: Tension- Building. This is the stage when tension builds up in the relationship over things that are not directly addressed or resolved. A violent individual most often relies on the use of force or coercion to get what he or she wants rather than using an open dialogue and compromise to solve problems. Criticism, blaming, and arguing also tend to increase during this stage.

Stage 2: Violence. During this stage any of the forms of violence may be used. The violent individual loses control and uses the violent behavior as a way to relieve stress. At the end of this stage the batterer may feel guilty and ashamed and the person who has been at the receiving end of the violence will most likely feel hurt and scared. In addition, the victim may fear retaliation from his or her partner if he or she were to leave the relationship.

Stage 3: Seduction/Honeymoon.

Honeymoon refers to the positive feelings that result from the release of tension and the hope that things will get better. You love your partner and hope that he or she will change or that things will go back to how it used to be when things were good. The batterer often apologizes or uses excuses for his or her behavior, attempting to convince his or her partner that this behavior will never occur again. Eventually, however, stage 1 returns.

The only way to change the cycle is to break it. If you are experiencing relationship violence, talk to someone, seek support, and plan for your safety. The Counseling Center staff is available for individual and group counseling as well as more information regarding this issue. Come to our Chicago Campus Center located on the 5th floor of the HCC ~ room 502 or in Schaumburg room 114, or call 312.341.3548 for more information. You can also call the **National Domestic Violence**

Hotline:

CALL: 1-800-799-7233
TDD: 1-800-787-3224
E-MAIL: ndvh@ndvh.org
WEBSITE: <http://www.ndvh.org>

Prioritize your physical and emotional well-being and know your rights as a human being to avoid becoming involved in a potentially violent relationship. Look over the list on the following page and decide whether you claim these rights and whether you allow your partner to do the same.

Relationship Rights

- 1. You have the right to be treated with respect.**
- 2. You have the right to have and express your own feelings, ideas, and opinions, including unpopular ones.**
- 3. You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.**
- 4. You have the right to set your own priorities, even when they conflict with those of others.**
- 5. You have the right to say "NO" without feeling guilty.**
- 6. You have the right to ask for what you want.**
- 7. You have the right to make mistakes.**
- 8. You have the right to have some time for yourself.**
- 9. You have the right to decide whether or not to have sex.**
- 10. You have the right to choose whether or not to assert yourself in any given situation.**

Adapted from Vivian A. Tamburello, Ph.D. Finding Your Voice: Speaking Up and Facing Conflict. Anger Management/Assertion Group: Johns Hopkins University. 1995.

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