



Emerge: Counseling & Education to Stop Domestic Violence December Newsletter

Accountability in Action

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Emerge provides trainings to educate people who want to work in a Certified Batterer Intervention Program

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Our next Introductory training will be held on January 26-28, 2011 in Arlington, MA

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December, 2010



Featured

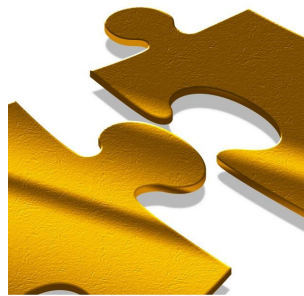
Accountability on Line One

Katherine, our Office Manager, is on the line with a woman from Virginia who wants her husband to attend an abuser education program. I hear Katherine asking her if she has support for herself. Bruce, one of our interns, is explaining to a social worker why his client needs to be in a certified batterer intervention program rather than in an anger management program. Another intern, Stephanie, is talking to a mother about her abusive son. Erika, one of our Group Leaders, is talking to a Probation Officer about the poor attitude of one of her group members. I just finished up a call with a Department of Children and Families Caseworker about a group member who dropped out of our program. She agreed that this is grounds to suspend his child visitations. Before that, I was talking with a man whose partner wanted him to attend EmERGE. I'd spoken with his partner about 10 minutes earlier when she called for ideas about how she could get him to call. I said, "Give him my name; I'll talk to him". When he did call, he was mostly concerned about being labeled a 'batterer'. I didn't try to convince him that he was a batterer; I told him we help to identify any kind of abusive or controlling behavior, and how it hurts partners and relationships. I told him we could help him to have better relationships. He said he'd come, but we'll see.....



Support Emerge
by attending the
Community
Works Benefit
Fundraiser at the
Somerville
Theater on
Thursday
April 21,
2011
at 7:30pm.
Featuring award-
winning comic Wendy
Liebman.
Tickets are only \$25
and 80% of the
proceeds directly
benefit Emerge

Most work days, the Emerge phone lines are buzzing with this kind of communication. Though these calls cover many topics, the broad category under which many fit is abuser accountability. We field about 10 calls a week from women who want to talk about their abusive boyfriend or husband. Others are calling about their ex-partners, with concerns about his treatment of the children. About 10 calls a day go to, or come in from Probation Officers, concerning offenders who are attending Emerge. The topic during these exchanges is often about some problem we've flagged about the offender. Sometimes, it's the beginning signs of poor attendance; the group member has missed a group session without calling in advance. Sometimes, it's about his under-participation. Right now, I can hear Bill talking to a Probation Officer about how this particular group member continues to blame his partner for his own abusive behavior. Bill is giving early notice to the PO that this man is likely to be terminated if this behavior persists. Sometimes, we talk to Probation Officers about signs of dangerousness, which we see as red flags for serious re-assaults.



We also talk with first responders about these dangers, even for group members who are not on probation. Last week, I spoke with a police officer about one of our group members. My co-leader and I are concerned about his escalating jealous behaviors: spying on her, and confronting her with 'evidence' of her infidelity that he has reported during group sessions. He appears to be saying that her apparent infidelity lets him off the hook from having to refrain from continued control tactics. Our Supervisor, Susan, agrees that the situation looks very volatile, and we all worry that he will commit a new act of violence. We've talked with him directly about this, and he says he 'won't do anything stupid', but still we worry, especially after he admitted he had recently monitored her emails. The police officer agrees with our concerns and said they would increase patrols around the area. We have spoken with the man's partner and referred her to a local victim advocacy program. We'll check in with her again next week to see if she has called the program.

Accountability is sometimes confused with punishment, but it's broader than that. Accountability is best understood as a process in which abusers are asked to account for, and take responsibility for, their abusive behavior, and in fact, we do a lot of this in our groups. This is important because minimizing one's abuse, and blaming one's partner for it, often signify that a man will continue to be abusive. Some seek to find commiseration from other group members in their complaints about their partners. To counteract this, we ask group members to confront victim-blaming and to hold each other to a higher standard; one where each person takes responsibility for his own behavior, and treats his partner and/or ex-partner, with respect.

But accountability is not just something that gets worked out during group sessions. Much of it occurs between sessions, during our calls and emails with victims, and during our many exchanges with referral sources. If a woman calls and her abusive partner hasn't even attended a program, we explain the purposes, and the limitations, of those programs, being careful to explain that just because he may agree to attend doesn't mean he'll change. Sometimes, it's necessary to dispel misconceptions about abuser education programs. Some abusers

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deliberately misinform their partners about the goals or messages of their abuser program. One woman said that her abuser told her that the program considered her to be 'an enabler'. Another said he told her that he "wasn't as bad as the other men" in his group. Another told her that it was her obligation to pay for his program since she is the one who created the problem by "having me arrested".

Informing partners and ex-partners about the true goals and requirements of our program helps to level the playing field for victims. Most partners have not had any prior experience with a domestic violence program, and many tell us that we are the first program that has told them that they are not responsible for the abuser's behavior. We are also instrumental in guiding women to victim advocacy programs that will provide emotional support, legal advocacy, safety planning, and help for their children. Surveys of victims whose partners are attending abuser education programs have found that many make important decisions while he is attending; such as whether to file for divorce, whether to restrict his access to the children, and whether to file additional charges for past or future acts of abuse.



Our survey of victims whose partners attended Emerge found that women found the information that we provided to be useful in making those decisions. A number of women said that they felt less conflicted about walking away from the relationship when hearing that he was still minimizing or blaming her for his past abusive behavior, for instance. None of the women we surveyed said that they felt pressured or in any way obligated to remain in the relationship as the result of their partner attending Emerge. In fact, some women whose partners were doing well in our program (actively participating, not minimizing or blaming) said that they were encouraged by hearing from us that positive group participation is meaningless unless it is accompanied by changes in his treatment of her.

Many also said that the "What You Should Know About Your Abusive Partner" pamphlet was very helpful, particularly the section called, How do I know if he's changing. In this section, we advise victims to trust their gut feelings and to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude about early signs of change, rather than assuming that these will necessarily continue. Still, we provide some things to look for in terms of positive change. These include:

- Has he completely stopped saying and doing things to frighten you?
- Can you express your anger toward him without being punished for it?
- Does it feel safe to bring up topics that you know might be upsetting to him?
- Can he listen to your opinion and respect it even if he disagrees?
- Does he respect your wishes about sex and physical contact?
- Can you spend time with your friends comfortably? Can you do other things that are important to you, such as taking classes or take a job?
- Are you comfortable with how he interacts with the children? Do you feel safe leaving them alone with him?

We also provide a list of signs that he is not changing. These include:

- Does he say that you are abusive?
- Does he interfere with or pry into your efforts to find support for yourself?
- Does he minimize his abuse?
- Does he try to get you or the children to feel sorry for him?
- Does he expect something in return from you for attending Emerge?
- Is he pressuring you to make decisions about the relationship?
- Is he pressuring you to go to therapy for yourself or to couples counseling?

Abuser education programs provide an opportunity for abusers to change. We believe that change is possible and that many abusers do make meaningful changes. We take pride in our continuing efforts to learn how to best motivate abusers to make these changes. However, the responsibility for change always remains with the abusive person. Besides providing an opportunity for abusers to change, we are also responsible to provide meaningful reports to referring agencies (and to make these available to partners who request them) so that they have better information about whether the abuser is using this opportunity. Abuse education programs should offer victims information and education about how abusers can make use of these programs, and also help victims find support and referrals to deal with the abuse they have experienced.

David Adams Ed. D., and Susan Cayouette Ed. D.
Co-Directors

Upcoming Events

Support Emerge by attending the Community Works Benefit Fundraiser on **Thursday, April 21st at 7:30pm**, featuring award-winning comic Wendy Liebman. Tickets are \$25 and 80% of the proceeds will directly benefit Emerge. Click [here](#) for more info!

Emerge provides a three-day training three times per year for people who would like to work in a Certified Batterer Intervention Program. Our next three-day training will be held in Arlington, Massachusetts, from January 26-28, 2011. For more information or to register, click [here](#).

Domestic Violence Risk Assessment and Management: A Two-Day Training Conference

Emerge, in conjunction with The Battered Women's Justice Project, will be hosting a two-day conference designed to give participants up-to-date information about risk markers for domestic homicides and serious assaults, and to help identify more comprehensive and safe practices for assessing danger, protecting victims, and monitoring batterers.*

The next Danger Assessment Conference will be held on Feb. 17-18, 2011 at the Omni Parker House Hotel in Boston, MA. For more information, click [here](#).

*This conference is intended for members of domestic violence teams who are recipients of Community Defined Solutions to Violence Against Women (CDS, formerly Grants to Encourage Arrest), including police officers, dispatchers, victim advocates, probation officers, prosecutors, batterer intervention program staff, and child welfare workers.

Emerge: Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence

Founded in 1977, EmERGE was the first abuser education program in the United States. Since its creation, EmERGE has been a national leader in working to end violence in intimate relationships.

EmERGE's mission is to eliminate violence in intimate relationships. In working toward this goal, EmERGE seeks to educate individual abusers, prevent young people from learning to accept violence in their relationships, improve institutional responses to domestic violence, and increase public awareness about the causes and solutions to partner violence. With the development of parenting education groups for fathers, EmERGE has expanded its mission to include a goal of helping men to become more responsible parents.

EmERGE teaches that domestic violence is a learned behavior, not a disease or a sickness. EmERGE supports grassroots, institutional and cultural efforts to stop partner violence, sexual assault and child abuse. EmERGE recognizes that other oppressive life circumstances such as racism, poverty and homophobia create a climate that contributes to partner violence.

Questions? Comments? Visit our website at www.emergedv.com or email us at emergedv.com!