



Emerge

Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence

E-Mail Newsletter

Volume Two: Issue One ~ January 2007



Winter is upon us!

With the seasonal changes and beginning of a new year, there's an opportunity to begin looking at why abuser education programs should address the issue of what kinds of friendships abusers develop. Ted German, Director of Training, discusses this topic.

We also have details on an upcoming Boston area training as well as trainings EmERGE will be conducting in Oregon and South Carolina.



Friendships: Sources of Support or Accountability for Abusers?

By Ted German, Director of Training

Those of us who work with abusers know that many abusers often receive direct and indirect support for their harmful behavior from their social network (friends and family). Here, I will briefly discuss how abuser education programs can productively address issues related to abusers and their friends. Issues related to family support will be addressed at another time.



Research has shown that there is a correlation between abusive behavior and having friends who are abusive and/or endorse attitudes which encourage abusive behavior (DeKeseredy and Kelly [1], Williamson and Silverman [2]).

Both research and anecdotal information from counseling experience suggest that victims often believe the abuser's friends directly and indirectly support and encourage his abusive behavior. As part of the counseling process we suggest that group leaders ask clients about their friendship networks. We ask clients whether

they have disclosed their abusive behavior to friends. If so, we ask how their friends have responded to them.

There is another reason for counselors to investigate sources of outside support for their clients. Abusers need other positive sources of social support outside of their intimate relationship. Many are overly reliant, if not emotionally dependent, upon their partners in ways that are integral to their pattern of abuse.

Currently, at the end of our Second Stage groups, group members are encouraged to tell a (hopefully) positive friend the details of their abusive behavior, and the ways in which they have explicitly or indirectly undermined their partners to others in their social network. The clients are also expected to ask these people to check in about future behavior in the abuser's relationship. We hope that this interaction between abusers and their friends will be part of the abusers' accountability process. Abusers who are significantly invested in maintaining a positive public image may be motivated by this involvement of a friend from their larger social network.

While we hope that the exposure of past abusive acts to friends serves as a deterrent for future abuse, we also hope that this friend can be a positive source of support in other ways. Optimally, these friends would understand, accept and support the goals of the abuser education program and have the knowledge of how to best support the abuser in the future. But we don't think this is likely to happen without program outreach to the abuser's friends.

We are developing a new program component in which clients will be asked to choose a friend or other important member of their social network to be part of their group experience. This will give us the opportunity to educate this friend on how to constructively support the abuser during and after the program. [Men Stopping Violence \(in Atlanta, GA\)](#) has been asking group members to bring a friend into their groups as a regular part of their evaluation process.

However, we know that a significant percentage of men who come to Emerge do not have a positive male support in their life. These men will need program encouragement to find new, positive sources of support.

When working on self-care issues in the group, we ask men to examine their current friendship networks and look beyond friends who support abuse or other harmful behaviors. Some possible sources of healthier friendships might include volunteering, attending religious services, 12-step groups, meeting people through their partner's network of friends. However, Emerge does not encourage group members to associate with each other outside of the program. This is because partners of abusers are justifiably wary of having their partner associate with other abusers.

[1] DeKeseredy W.S. & Kelly, K. (1993) Woman abuse in university and college dating relationships: The contribution of the ideology of familial patriarchy. *Journal of Human Justice*, 4, 25-52.

[2] Williamson, G.M. & Silverman, J.G. (2001). Violence against female partners: Direct and interactive effects of family history, communal orientation, and peer-related variables. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(4), 535-549.

That's it for this month! We hope you are having a great new year, and we'll see you again in February when we'll have an article by Lieutenant Jon Tiplady, a police officer who has specialized in domestic violence cases.

Best Regards,

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mail: emergedv@gmail.com

voice: 617-547-9879

web: <http://www.emergedv.com>