



Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence

E-Mail Newsletter

MARCH 2007: Volume 2, Issue 3

In This Issue

["It's Her Fault..."](#)

[Making Amends to a Partner](#)



Emerge is a member
of the following
[organizations:](#)



Welcome Back!

For those of you who have worked with abusers, you know that one of the barriers to change is the blaming and minimizing behavior most abusers engage in. In this newsletter, Erika Robinson, a group leader at Emerge, addresses blaming behavior and discusses ways to engage abusers over the topic.

As a complementary article, we have also included an excerpt from new material developed at Emerge highlighting an exercise, "Making Amends to a Partner".

["It's Her Fault..."](#)

by Erika Robinson, Emerge Group Leader



One of the biggest challenges we face with men in abuser education groups is getting them to stop blaming their partner's for the abuse they commit.

Some men may be able to convince their partner that not only is she at fault for **his** maltreatment of **her**, but he may redefine her objections about the abusive behavior as **her** abuse of **him**. Many abused women are put in "lose-lose" situations.

A group member will often see *himself* as the victim. When he denies or downplays **his** abuse, then he may view her negative reactions as unfair, out of place, or exaggerated. Then, to add insult to injury, he may ignore or disregard her complaints or become furious about them. It is also common



for abusers to believe that their own anger is justified but hers rarely is.

It can be especially infuriating and confusing for her when his abuse has not been physical but is hurtful to her in other ways. For example, he may be verbally abusive, laughing at or mocking her, dismissing or ignoring her, or using moodiness to distance himself from her.

An abuser education group may be the first place where his non-physically abusive behavior is labeled as abuse -- and this may be hard for him to hear.

Taking responsibility for all of this can be a daunting task for a man in an abuser education group. While here at Emerge a group member is asked to identify all forms of his abuse and recognize the short and long term effects that it has on his partner, ex-partners, and children. He may assume that if she has responded angrily to his behavior, that she is not afraid, and is not experiencing duress or distress. This often reflects a self-centered way of thinking and a lack of empathy for his partner.

One way to address this is to teach empathy. When discussing a group member's act of abuse, we often try to "bring the victim into the room", by asking group members to identify what her perspective might have been. In this way, group members progressively learn how their behavior comes across to, and affects, their partner. Besides asking group members to recognize their impact on their partners, we also provide brief didactic lessons to help men identify the specific elements of empathy and respect so that they may practice these behaviors on a day-to-day basis.

It becomes easier for men to stop blaming or justifying their actions when they accept the reality that each act of abuse they commit is ultimately their *choice* and therefore their responsibility. This can only happen when an atmosphere of accountability exists within the group, and hopefully in other parts of their lives.

[Ed. Note: The following article is an example of how Emerge may educate abusers about making amends to their partner and children]



Making Amends to a Partner

The following activity was developed by Christopher Hall and Susan Cayouette for discussion and use at Emerge. This activity and others are discussed during Emerge's Advanced Group Skills training.

Here are links related to this month's articles:

Articles by Barbara J. Hart

@ <http://www.mincava.umn.edu>

The articles contained on the **MINCAVA** website include a number of topics including "Battered Women and the Criminal Justice System," "Children of Domestic Violence: Risks and Remedies," and many other detailed and useful pieces related to working with abusers and their victims.

Invitations to Responsibility: The Therapeutic Engagement of Men who are Violent and Abusive

@ www.narrativetherapylibrary.com

This link provides an outline to a book by Alan Jenkins that describes methods to intervene with men who blame and abuse their partners.

Blaming the Victim: Domestic Violence and the Co-dependency Model

@ <http://www.aic.gov.au>
Publications >> AIC Conference Proceedings >> #27 >> Section 4

This PDF article by Greg Dear addresses the hazards of applying a label of co-dependent upon a battered woman, and discusses the differences between being a victim of abuse and being co-dependent.

Instructions to Group Members:

If you are working to make changes in your life, and those changes are a stark contrast to the way you've done things before, others may not be very trusting. And why should they? If you've been cutting people down, attacking their weak spots, or using anger to justify your actions, others are probably waiting for the other shoe to drop. Their walking on eggshells does not end the moment you make a few changes. You need to work toward being consistent about these changes. You need to realize that it takes time to rebuild any trust you've destroyed. But how do you do that?

CHANGES THE ABUSER MAKES:

Taking Responsibility:

If you believe others are testing you, or that their behavior is unacceptable to you, that doesn't give you an excuse to lash out and fall back into old behavior. If someone that's been familiar with your old behaviors starts questioning you, or 'brings up the past' it can be really important to not get defensive. To be consistent and keep up with the changes you're working towards, you need to take responsibility for *your* past behavior and stop focusing on your partner's behavior altogether.

Explaining Your Negative Self-Talk:

Hopefully you have worked to identify some of your negative self-talk you've had when choosing behaviors based in your negative self-talk. If you went to explain your negative self-talk to others, your explanation may sound an awful lot like blaming. When working on being consistent and making amends to others, it's really important to be able to explain to others why your actions and beliefs are not their fault.

Understanding Partners' Perceptions:

Some of these exercises have given you the chance to put yourself into other's shoes. That's exactly what you need to do over time, especially when others don't trust the changes you're working to make in your life. You may have to explain how you understand their distrust and other effects of your abusive behavior. You may need to ask for their opinions and thoughts, and be open to respectfully compromising or be open to taking their suggestions on how to change your behavior.

Remembering and Maintaining Your Goals:

As in prior exercises, you had the chance to make small goals for the future. To rebuild trust, you're going to have to keep

Blaming victims: Abused women should not suffer again by having their children taken away

<http://www.thegreenbook.info>
Tools & Resources >> Section IV

Kenneth J. Theisen wrote a guest editorial for the San Francisco Daily Journal which calls for training for helping professionals and understanding for victims of domestic violence. He looks at how taking away custody may not be in the best interests of either mother or child.

Why Does He Do That: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men

@ <http://www.lundybanroft.com>

Lundy Bancroft, a former group leader and co-director at Emerge, authored this book about why batterers choose to abuse their partners and family.

those goals over time. Be consistent in your changes. Keep up with them. Really concentrate on the goals that you have the most trouble with. Don't forget the goals you've followed through on. Tell people other than your partner your goals so they can support you in achieving them.

NON-ABUSIVE RESPONSES TO A PARTNER:

Taking Responsibility:

When your partner says, "You always used to yell and scream when you didn't get your way," instead of responding with, "Hey, that was in the past, get over it," respond by saying, "I know. I used to do that a lot, and I'm working to not do that anymore."

Explaining Your Negative Self-Talk:

When he/she says, "Why is it always my fault that you're angry," instead of responding with, "If you would only remember what I ask you, I wouldn't get angry," respond by saying, "I always thought you were making me angry and I thought you couldn't do anything right. I really didn't want to take responsibility for myself. It's not your fault I thought those things because I was always finding ways to make excuses, and blaming you was the most convenient."

Understanding Partners' Perceptions:

When your partner says, "You've never listened to me," instead of responding with, "That's stupid. Of course I listen to you!" respond by saying, "I understand why you might think that. I've always shrugged you off, and when people do that to me I tend to think they're not listening to me either."

Remembering and Maintaining Your Goals:

When he/she says, "This is just a temporary thing. I know you'll go back to the same habits, you're not fooling me," instead of responding with, "No it's not! I'm trying hard, and you're always making it so difficult on me," respond by saying, "I've made a goal to be aware and notice what I say to myself. I've been trying to notice my thoughts and keep myself from being abusive before it even starts."

Thank you again for your interest and support. If you have any questions about these articles or the Emerge Program Model, please contact us via phone at 617-547-9879 or e-mail at emergedv@gmail.com

Sincerely,

**Emerge:
Counseling & Education to
Stop Domestic Violence**

All articles copyright Emerge 2007. No duplication without permission