

E-Mail Newsletter

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Emerge is a member of:



Autumn Greetings!

Or Spring, for those of you in the Southern Hemisphere! This month Laurie VanLoon begins part one of a two part feature on overlaps between therapy and abuser education. Next month she will detail some specific case studies.

Overlaps Between Abuser Education and Therapy ~ Part One

By Laurie VanLoon, LICSW

In this article I speak from my experiences as a therapist in private practice who tries to incorporate what I learned as an abuse educator to help make my counseling work relevant and effective. I was trained by Emmerge, and co-led groups in the 90's, as well as supervising Emmerge's Latino program groups. I have been a clinical social worker for almost 20 years; previously I saw families and children as well as adults; now my practice is just with adults.

Those of us therapists who were trained decades ago rarely discussed domestic abuse in our training. If trained more recently, we probably were exposed to new ideas to support survivors, as well as relevant ideas about trauma. But very few of us have had help in learning how to recognize and work with perpetrators, and many therapists still struggle with the complexities of working with survivors. As a result, certain errors are common when we start out:

- Physical abuse is often seen as more serious or more real than other forms of abuse, which may be assumed to be just ordinary unpleasant behavior.
- Not seeing forms of control or abuse because it's not on our radar screens. Often we are more attentive to establishing or maintaining trust in the therapeutic alliance and less focused on identifying abuse.
- Confrontational tactics with abusers rarely produce positive results.
- Disempowering survivors by defining their experiences and urging action is dangerous and counterproductive.

It is helpful to good counseling practice to have the kind of comprehensive understanding of abuse that Emmerge provides, alongside therapeutic skills that focus attention on the specifics of a relationship. I believe that much of what therapists have learned about human functioning can be adapted to integrate well with abuse education philosophy once we know to include it in our work. That integration begins with how we assess, and assessment by counselors is what I will focus on in this article.

Assessment is sometimes thought of as what we do at the beginning of a therapeutic relationship. But there are no guarantees that we are given complete information. Many people are not yet comfortable enough to be open, or do not wish to reveal certain behavior or thoughts, or their thinking or perceptions are distorted. So assessment is,



properly, a continuous process.

Many years ago therapists were often uncomfortable asking about substance use. Now this is fairly routine, and most of us are relaxed and comfortable with it. Most of us have also become comfortable asking about sex. Additionally, we're recognizing how the other (often socially taboo) topics of money and religion can be useful areas of inquiry. We are beginning to develop a similar "it's routine to discuss this" attitude about gender and sexual orientation. But while we may ask basic questions about physical safety or threat of it in relationships, we often stop there. Assessment of individuals should include questions about other forms of abuse, more subtle behavior, and contexts, as well as beliefs about relationships.

The assessment tools we use, whether formal or informal, can be similar for considering the possibility of either survivor or perpetrator roles. We look not only at behavior, but attitudes, history, and context. Emerge uses some of the following assessment tools, of which I was able to play a part in helping to design:

1. A brainstorming exercise in the form of an extensive checklist of behavior and attitudes ranging from the unpleasant to the potentially lethal; this can be used for survivors individually or in groups; it can also be used for perpetrators assessing themselves or imagining what their partners might say.
2. A set of **evaluation questions** (at Emerge, we use the Violent and Controlling Behavior Checklist - ed.) to help therapists tune in to perpetrator behavior and beliefs in specific, relevant ways; these can also be helpful in abuser education groups. The questions can be used with survivors to help clarify patterns in their relationships.
3. A comprehensive set of question and guidelines for determining whether specific actions that clients identify constitute abusive behavior. Called Defining Domestic Violence: Three Considerations, a Tool for Counselors and Therapists [Contact the Emerge office for more information on these tools].

Emerge has developed a day-long training for therapists on the complexities of assessing for domestic abuse called "[Is It Abuse?](#)". Although we have no upcoming dates at this point, please let Emerge know if you might be interested in this training.

When we assess in therapy we are of course trying to get a complete picture, including many areas in addition to the question of possible domestic abuse. Deciding where to focus our goal-setting work can be confusing if there are other pressing concerns too.

In a future article I will address assessment and treatment dilemmas I have encountered when working with couples. Next month, I will share with you some of my own experiences and dilemmas assessing individual adults, both survivors and perpetrators. I will use fabricated case examples constructed from combinations of characteristics of my (and other therapists') clients, and add a few thoughts about treatment.

Be sure to read next month's E-Mail Newsletter for Laurie's Case Study Examples!

Emerge 2008 Training Schedule

Emerge has completed its run of Boston area trainings for 2007. Those of you who are interested in joining us for an introductory or advanced training in 2008, please call our office for more information or register today!

INTRODUCTORY COUNSELING ABUSERS TRAINING:

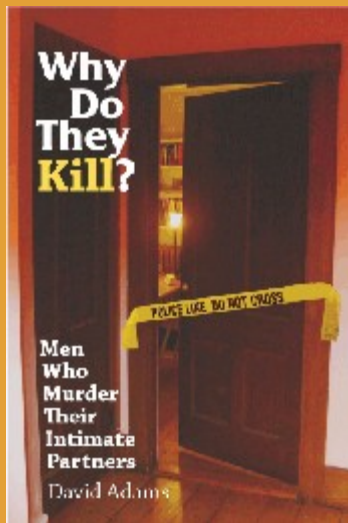
This three-day training instructs participants on how to use the Emerge model of abuser education, in addition to discussing philosophies and goals behind working in the domestic violence field. Panel presentations, lectures, role plays and demonstrations are used throughout the training. All participants receive a copy of the Emerge Program Manual in addition to a collection of selected readings. The cost is \$250 per participant, \$175 for each additional person per agency attending.

Introductory Training 2008 Dates:

February 27-29, 2008

June 11-13, 2008

September 10-12, 2008



ADVANCED GROUP SKILLS TRAINING:

Emerge's two-day training uses DVD presentations of group sessions to give more direct information on ways to improve your use of the EmERGE second stage group exercises. We also provide information on new materials and alternate activities for challenging clients. This training includes an opportunity for participants to receive feedback on their own cases and agency related issues. \$200 per participant.

Advanced Training 2008 Dates:

May 8-9, 2008

October 16-17 2008

Emerge presents both introductory and advanced trainings away from our Boston area location. If you wish to keep updated on upcoming out of state trainings, please visit our homepage or watch this newsletter for updates. If you would like to set up a training in your area, please contact Ted German, Director of Training at 617-547-9879.

Emerge will be providing training in Hong Kong in November/December, and conducted a training in Taiwan in September.

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