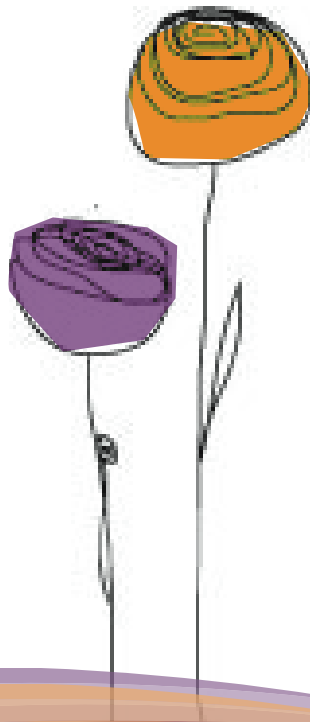


HONOURING RESISTANCE



How Women Resist Abuse in Intimate Relationships

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This handbook was originally written in 2005, entitled *Resistance to Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationships - a response-based perspective*, by the following people, who were staff of the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter at that time:

.....

*We believe
perpetrators
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and to behave
respectfully
towards others*

.....

- Jill Weaver, M.S.W., R.S.W.
- Nick Todd, M.Ed., C. Psych.
- Cindy Ogden, M.S.W., R.S.W.
- Laura Craik, B.S.W., R.S.W.

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United Way
of Calgary and Area

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Introduction

The concepts presented in this handbook were developed by a group of professionals who have worked in the field of domestic violence for many years.

This handbook was written for:

- women who have experienced domestic violence;
- the friends and family who love them;
- professionals who work in the field of domestic violence; and
- perpetrators of domestic violence

By reading this handbook, our hope is that:

- women will recognize the strength they have shown in resisting abuse;
- friends and family of abused women will have a better understanding of the many subtle ways women resist abuse;
- professionals counselling victims and/or perpetrators of domestic violence will use the response-based approach;
- perpetrators will choose to consistently treat their partners with respect and dignity.

Many people believe victims of domestic violence share some common “effects” of abuse by their intimate partners. They make an assumption that victims passively accept violence, and lack self-esteem, assertiveness, or boundaries. Much attention is paid to these “effects” of violence. Unfortunately, this leads people to have a stereotyped, negative view of victims.

This handbook looks at what victims do when they are being abused. By looking at what victims do to oppose abuse and to keep their dignity, we hope people will form a more accurate view of victims. We also hope victims will reconsider any feelings they are “damaged”, and, instead, to look at the strengths they have shown in resisting abuse.

This handbook also looks at what perpetrators do when they are abusive. Much attention is focused on trying to understand the reasons people are abusive. For example, it has been suggested that perhaps people are abusive because they themselves were abused as children, or they have mental health disorders. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to excusing



perpetrators from responsibility for their behaviour. In fact, it is our experience in working with perpetrators that they are in control of their actions, and that they make deliberate choices about their abusive behaviour. We believe perpetrators can, at any point in time, choose to change and to behave respectfully towards others.

In working in the field of domestic violence, we have found that:

1) Whenever people are badly treated, they always resist.

In our experience, people always resist violence and abuse in some way. They will stand up against, not comply with, and try to stop or prevent violence, disrespect, or oppression.

2) People tend not to notice that victims resist abuse.



Abuse can be very dangerous, so usually victims resist it in ways that are not obvious. Others probably will not even notice the resistance so they assume that victims are “passive” and “they do not do enough to stand up for themselves.” In fact, victims actively resist violence, and in real life, the so-called “passive” victim does not exist.

3) Perpetrators of violence know that victims will resist, so they make plans to stop the victims from resisting.

For instance, some women will resist their husband’s abuse by leaving the house. Knowing this, some men will try to stop this resistance by taking shoes, money, bank cards and car keys. Others might pull the phone out of the wall to prevent their wives from calling for help.

4) Violent and abusive behavior is always done deliberately.

As shown in point 3 above, the fact that perpetrators make plans to stop victims from resisting indicates that their abuse is deliberate. Perpetrators also make decisions about how they will be abusive. For example, some men think it is “wrong to hit a woman”, but they will push, grab and verbally abuse their partners.



5) When it comes to domestic violence, appearances are deceiving.

Onlookers cannot easily see what occurs in domestic violence situations. Typically, perpetrators and victims do not tell others what is happening. Perpetrators cover up their abusive behaviour. They may blame the victim and be friendly and charming to the outside world, so that they do not have to face the consequences of their actions. Victims do not often like to tell the full story of the abuse to others, because

- 1) it may not be safe to do so and
- 2) they do not want people to think negatively of them.

We will explain more about these ideas in the rest of this handbook. First, we will define some of the words we use in this handbook. We also describe different types of abuse. We will then share one woman's story of her husband's abuse. This story helps to show how she resisted abuse, and how these ideas apply to a real-life situation.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: deliberate behavior in which one person chooses to dominate, control, or harm another. Perpetrators abuse against the will of victims, who never ask or choose to be abused.

Perpetrator: the person in a close relationship who chooses to behave in ways that harm, control, or dominate another.

Victim: the person who has been purposely harmed by the unwanted actions of another. The victim is in no way responsible for the abusive actions of another. Victims always oppose abuse and often show great strength in doing so.

Resistance to Abuse: Whenever people are abused, they do many things to oppose the abuse and to keep their dignity and their self-respect. This is called resistance. The resistance might include not doing what the perpetrator wants them to do, standing up against, and trying to stop or prevent violence, disrespect, or oppression. Imagining a better life may also be a way that victims resist abuse.

** Note: in this handbook, we are using 'she' to describe the victim, and 'he' to describe the perpetrator, because in our women's shelter, most of



our clients have been in heterosexual relationships in which they have been abused by men. However, sometimes women within heterosexual relationships can be abusive towards men. Within lesbian relationships they can sometimes be abusive towards other women. Homosexual men can also be abusive towards their partners.

TYPES OF ABUSE BY PERPETRATORS

Here are just a few examples of behaviours that are abusive:

Emotional or psychological abuse:

- insults; name calling; belittling; constant criticisms;
- attacking a person's belief system or culture;
- abusing or neglecting children and attempting to stop the mother from intervening;
- mocking the victim; humiliating her;
- using the victim's lack of legal rights to get more power and control over her. (i.e. People in common-law relationships or in homosexual relationships, as well as immigrants without citizenship status, are examples of people who have not been granted full legal rights.)

Isolation:

- trying to stop the victim from having access to family and/or friends;
- trying to stop her from having social contacts, outside interests, and/or work;
- jealousy; taking away her access to a vehicle or transportation.

Intimidation:

- destruction of property;
- attempting to control what a person says or does not say;
- attempting to make the victim account for every minute of her day;
- threatening to hurt anyone who helps the victim;
- threatening to hurt or kill children, pets, friends, or family;
- threatening to commit suicide;
- attempting to control with fear;
- telling her she is a bad mom;
- threatening to be abusive if she does not do what he wants;



- threatening to disclose the victim's sexual orientation if she does not do what the perpetrator wants.

Economic abuse:

- keeping his money from the family; trying to stop the victim from earning money;
- attempting to force her to hand over money;
- attempting to force her to account for how she spends money;
- forcing the family to live in poverty when money is available.

Physical abuse:

- grabbing; pushing; shoving; slapping; punching; kicking;
- attempting to strangle; breaking bones; knifing;
- shooting or using other weapons;
- locking her out of her home; abandoning her in an unsafe place;
- murder.

Sexual abuse:

- forced unwanted sex;
- demanding that the victim wears more (or less) provocative clothing;
- forcing sex with objects, friends, animals;
- insisting that the victim act out pornographic fantasies;
- denying her sexuality;
- making degrading sexual comments; leering;
- making threats if she does not comply with sex;
- pressuring to have sex.

Spiritual abuse:

- ridiculing a victim's religious/ spiritual beliefs;
- attempting to stop her from practicing or participating in spiritual practices;
- using spirituality/religion as a way to attempt to control and manipulate the victim;
- destroying spiritual scriptures or objects;
- attempting to force or pressure her to accept spiritual beliefs or engage in spiritual practices.



Susan's Story

I met Roy, a good-looking educated man, after the end of a 15-year marriage. I was attracted to his great sense of humour, his kindness towards others and his sensitive and caring manner. He had custody of a child from his first marriage and he spoke of how much he loved being a dad. I had two children from my first marriage and our blended family started off well.

One day after I already felt committed to the relationship I experienced a dark side of Roy. I was shocked the first time he emotionally abused me. I had told him I wanted to spend the weekend visiting my sister in

another city with my two children. Roy attacked me verbally for several hours, talking down to me as if I was a child, insulting me, making hurtful accusations against me, and criticizing me. He paced back and forth across the floor in a rage.

He called me names and said I was “immature, self-centered, uncaring, and insensitive.” He twisted things that had happened in the past, and said they “proved I was selfish and immature.” For example, I had kept my children in the school they had been attending before we moved in together. Roy said I should have put my children in the same school as his child when I moved in with him. He said, because I did not do this, I was obviously “selfish.” Roy acted like a lawyer in a courtroom, accusing me of a terrible crime.

The more I stood my ground the angrier Roy became.

He threatened to ignore my children and to stop doing anything together as a family. Trying to stop the verbal abuse I agreed to have him come to my sister's place. Roy calmed down and said he had gotten angry because I had provoked him.

He claimed he would not have become angry if I had been more loving and understanding. I was confused because although I didn't think I had done anything wrong – the way Roy behaved towards me made me wonder if I had actually done something wrong. I knew, though, I did not deserve to be sworn at and put down.



Soon after this incident, I became pregnant. Roy was often still the fun, charming man I first married. There were many happy times in our marriage and family. We usually listened to music after the children were in bed, and talked about how our day had been. I also loved that he could be incredibly funny. Roy had the talent of a stand-up comedian.

I soon learned, though, Roy’s first verbal attack on me was one of many abusive episodes. He began to verbally assault me every few weeks. These abusive incidents often escalated over a few days. Roy’s behaviour always got worse until I eventually gave into him.

An example of this was when I told Roy that one of my own children needed new winter boots. Roy insisted my child wear used shoddy boots that didn’t fit her, even though we could well afford new ones. Roy called me names, swore at me and made offensive comments about my child. He again twisted past events, and said everything proved I was “favouring my own child” and I was “too assertive and uncaring.”



“There were many happy times in our marriage.”



The more I stood up for my child, the more Roy abused me. He threatened to ignore my children, and to end the relationship. He even threw a heavy iron towards me. After a couple of days of these verbal attacks, I asked my mom to buy a new pair of boots for both Roy’s child and my own. I did this even though Roy’s child had new boots and did not need them.

Roy did his best to try to keep me isolated from friends and family. For example, when my brother came to visit us, Roy insulted him at the door, and would not let him into our house. Roy also tried to stop me from continuing a relationship with a long time friend by being verbally abusive to me when I spoke with her. He accused me of not caring about the marriage, and of caring more for my friends than for him. He also grabbed the phone from me when I was talking with this friend, then yelled and cursed at this friend for four hours. After this, I talked with her only when Roy was not present.

I also felt ridiculed by Roy – he would often mock me including the time when I asked for gas to ease the pain of childbirth. Several



times I asked him to stop laughing at me but he kept up the ridicule. When I asked him really assertively to stop, he turned on me. He accused me of being an “insensitive and uncaring” person and said I was now “attacking and hurting” him. After this, I began resisting his mocking by trying to ignore him, and by carrying on as if nothing had happened. Sometimes I joked along with him, pretending I also thought it was funny. I did not give him the satisfaction of knowing his insults were hurting me.

Roy always blamed me for his own behaviour. I knew this was ridiculous. I sometimes became really angry that he twisted things around to try to make it seem it was my fault he was abusive. It was not safe for me to tell him I was angry, so I would sometimes vent my anger by going for a walk in the forest and swearing out loud about things he had done. I even used branches to hit trees.

.....
“He could suddenly ‘turn off’ his rage towards me and be very nice to someone else moments later.”
.....

Early in our marriage, Roy once looked surprised and said how strong I was when I was assertive. I thought this was strange. Later, Roy often attacked me for being “too assertive.” He claimed I was selfish and uncaring whenever I was assertive. A part of me knew Roy was trying to gain control over me by stopping me from saying what I felt, but it took some time to realize he purposely attacked my strengths.

I noticed some ways Roy showed he could control his abusive behaviour. For example, he could suddenly “turn off” his rage towards me, and be very nice to someone else moments later. I remember one time when he was yelling at me. It happened that the front door was open because it was so warm. Just at that moment, a friend knocked at the door, and then called out. I heard Roy swear quietly to himself. Then he said “I hope she didn’t hear me.”

He immediately stopped his verbal rampage, and was very nice to our friend during her visit. By his actions, Roy obviously knew the way he was yelling at me was wrong in the eyes of others. It felt good, in a weird way, to see that Roy was fully aware his behaviour was unacceptable.



Roy also showed control over his rage by threatening me with abuse if I did not do what he wanted me to do. He knew I hated his verbal attacks, so he would often threaten to become “upset” (his code word for abuse) if I did not do what he wanted. I remember thinking “if Roy can plan in advance to be abusive, he must be able to turn on his rage when he wants to try to get control over me.” It was quite a shock to realize his anger was not impulsive.

Yet another way Roy showed control over his behaviour is that he did not physically abuse me, so although he scared me by throwing heavy objects in my direction, he never did touch me. His verbal abuse was so horrible though, I remember thinking “I almost wish he would hit me, and then there would be something visible that would show how much he is hurting me.”

I also noticed Roy was a lot meaner to me than he was with other people. When Roy was abusive to me, he often found excuses for his behaviour by saying he was “over-tired,” or was “stressed” by something else in his life. I noticed, though, Roy still was able to be kind and respectful to our friends and neighbours when he was tired or stressed.

After many months of being frequently verbally assaulted by Roy, I reached the point where I was “walking on eggshells” all the time. I did not feel at all safe, so I decided that instead of being assertive, I would keep things to myself. I was afraid of his verbal and emotional abuse, and also when Roy swung heavy objects in his hand and threw them in my direction. I tried to do everything he wanted, to try to stop him from getting angry.

Even though I tried to “keep under the radar,” sometimes Roy’s abuse was completely unpredictable. I remember feeling very hurt when Roy would start vicious verbal attacks over stupid little things. One time, I forgot to buy peanut butter from the store, and Roy became enraged, accusing me of being “disorganized” and “incompetent.” He insulted me by talking down to me as if I was a child, and instructed me on “how to better organize my life.”

During these depressing times, I remember that in the midst of Roy’s



“...he often found excuses for his behaviour by saying he was over-tired.”



degrading verbal assaults, I would hold my head up high and say to myself, “stand tall,” to maintain my dignity. After I started to keep my thoughts and feelings to myself, Roy started accusing me of being “cold” and “distant.” I then remember numbing my feelings to lessen the pain.

Our children were also afraid of Roy. I could see they also “walked on eggshells” around him. He was controlling with them, would often yell and belittle them, and would give them harsh punishments for their mistakes. For example, he locked them in the bathroom, or sent them to the cold, unfinished basement. He knew the children were afraid of the dark so he would also turn out the lights. The children seemed to be “shut down” when they were with him, but when they were with me they behaved just like normal children.

.....
“It was not safe for me to directly oppose Roy, so I found other ways to try to support the children.”
.....

It was not safe for me to directly oppose Roy, so I found other ways to try to support the children. For instance, Roy’s own 9-year-old child forgot to bring home a notice from school, and Roy yelled at him that he was “useless.” He said, “there was something wrong with his brain because he was so forgetful.”

Roy made him wash down the kitchen cupboards and the floor, and then sent him to bed from 3:00 in the afternoon until the next morning. I helped my stepson with the washing when Roy went upstairs. I also played games with him when he was sent to bed and told him all of the things I liked about him.

I also noticed how Roy would talk about his abuse in a way that made it sound as though we were both involved in this behaviour. He would say “he was sorry for his part in our argument” even though I had hardly said a word. He would also talk about his abuse as “emotional intimacy.” I knew it was not safe for me to tell him this was a load of crap so I just thought it to myself.

I was at times totally amazed at the gap between the way Roy described himself, and the way he was with me. Roy would describe himself as an “emotional, feeling person” who was “unassertive and sensitive.” He would sometimes compare his personality to being like a “bunny rabbit.” I would laugh to myself, and think, “he is more like an ornery grizzly bear.”



I remember deciding that when Roy was abusive towards me, I would try not to “stoop to his level” and so would do nice things for him such as writing down his good qualities on a card for him. It did not change his behaviour in any way, but I know I made myself feel better by responding with kindness.

I began to build a network of friends and support in the neighbourhood. By doing this, I had a life outside the marriage and I did not feel so vulnerable. However, Roy also attempted to suppress this resistance with verbal attacks.

One day, I came home to another “freak-out” from Roy. He attacked me for being away from home too much and not spending enough time with him. He swore at me, and said I was “not able to make a marriage work, and “it was no wonder I had been divorced before.” Roy then went upstairs. I heard him pacing the floors of the bedroom.

I felt at my wits’ end this time, and was so tired of “walking on eggshells.” I felt whatever I tried, I was “damned if I did, and damned if I did not.” It was horrible living in such an emotionally shutdown state, and I felt I was “living a lie” by not being able to speak safely and freely to my husband. I reached a point where I thought about leaving the relationship, although it was the very last thing I wanted.

I had always told myself that, no matter what happened, I was not going to go through another divorce, as I wanted an intact family for my kids. I decided I should pack a bag as a back-up plan, in case I decided to flee the house. I packed a bag with clothes, financial and legal documents, and hid it in the front of the house. I thought about where I would go if I needed to leave our home.

In fact, this time, Roy escalated his abuse and told me to get out of the house and to leave the children behind. I felt really afraid, and wondered if he would be physically abusive this time. I made a final decision to flee with the kids if I had the opportunity. When Roy went



“I was at times totally amazed at the gap between the way Roy described himself and the way he was with me.”



to the washroom, I grabbed the children and my packed bag, and drove to a friend's house.

I quickly organized a new life for myself by getting a job, seeing a lawyer, and renting an apartment. While I took care of all the practical things, I found I felt incredibly sad and I really grieved over the loss of the intact family, my stepchild, and the hopes and dreams of the marriage. I hated having to work full-time and leaving the children in day care.

During all this time, Roy kept phoning me, saying he really wanted to get back together. He said he “would do anything to save the marriage.” For the first time ever, he was very apologetic. He admitted he had not treated me well in the marriage and promised he would change. He even told me he was seeing a counsellor for help.

.....
“After I returned it was only a matter of days before Roy began to be controlling and verbally abusive again.”
.....

I felt so confused about whether or not I should return to him that I went for counselling to help me to make my decision. I thought if Roy was really sincere about changing his behaviour, going back to him would be the best solution for all of the family.

When I told the counsellor my story his response was to say, “I had been part of the problem,” and had “let the abuse happen to me.” The counsellor suggested to me that I was too “indecisive,” and “unassertive.” He also told me if I had been more assertive, Roy would “love me for it” and I could stop the abuse.

In my vulnerable state, when I so desperately wanted the marriage and family to be saved, I wanted to believe the counsellor was right. Maybe the power to change the marriage was in my hands, and even though I felt doubtful, it was a very appealing idea. I decided to return to Roy, and that I would try being “very assertive” with him.

After I returned, it was only a matter of days before Roy began to be controlling and verbally abusive again. I asserted myself very strongly to try to get Roy to stop, but of course, Roy's assaults escalated. It was then I remembered how assertive I had been at the beginning of our marriage, and how unsafe it had always been to directly resist his abuse.



I found out Roy was not sincere about changing his behaviour.

In fact after I returned, he angrily stated he was “tired of hearing I did not feel safe with him.” He took back his admission that he had mistreated me. Instead, Roy said we were both “equally responsible for the problems in the marriage.” I found out Roy had, in fact, hired a lawyer and planned to seek custody of the kids if I left again. I also found out he had seen a counsellor only once. This time, I did not stay long in the relationship. About two weeks later, at the next chance, I left again and never returned.

After I left, Roy tried to hide the truth about his violent behaviour. He described himself to family, friends, and neighbours as an “innocent victim” of my “sudden departure from the home.” He told people I had left the home “because parenting was too overwhelming and I wished to pursue my career.” To expose the truth, I decided to tell friends and family, including some of Roy’s own family, about his abuse.

Some were supportive; however, I was discouraged by the victim-blaming reactions of others. Some people asked me why I had become involved in a relationship like this in the first place. Their questions suggested they thought there was something “wrong” with me. They would say things like “I had always thought you were a very strong person.” Didn’t they realize he was not ‘like that’ until the relationship was well established?

I noticed it was hard for others to understand how great my relationship with Roy was at the beginning. Unless people knew Roy really well over a long period of time, he seemed to be a very nice and caring person. Some friends and acquaintances who knew Roy said they would never have guessed he could be abusive.

A lawyer who later represented me said things I found offensive because he suggested I was equally responsible for Roy’s abuse. He talked about Roy’s abuse as “couple bickering” in the marriage, refused to use the word “abuse,” and always referred to the violence in the relationship as a “high conflict” situation.

People questioned why I did not leave the marriage sooner. One

.....
“...didn’t they realize he was not ‘like that’ until the relationship was well established?”
.....



comment was, “I do not know how you could have put up with that.” Another comment was, “I would never have been able to stay with a man who treated me like that.” Simply the fact I had been a victim seemed to make others judge me negatively. I was frustrated people assumed I had been weak or passive in the marriage.

They did not realize I had done many things to oppose the violence and to keep my dignity. I was also frustrated that others did not understand how hard it was to leave the relationship, and that I suffered many losses in having left. I lost being a full-time parent, and the separation and divorce were really hard on the kids. I lost the relationship with my stepchild, my financial security, as well as most of my possessions, which I left behind when I fled the home. I also lost the hopes and dreams I had at the time of a happy marriage and intact family.

Well-meaning family and friends said they are afraid I will become involved in another abusive relationship. In fact, I truly feel I am a better, stronger person from having experienced this difficult situation, and from having resisted the abuse in so many ways.

Susan’s story helps us to see **how perpetrators have control over their abusive behaviours** and how **victims always resist abuse**.

Using examples from Susan’s story, we will now review the five points about domestic violence that we made at the beginning of this handbook. This will enable us to take a closer look at what victims and perpetrators do in these situations. We will also use examples from other stories of domestic violence.



1. WHENEVER PEOPLE ARE BADLY TREATED, THEY ALWAYS RESIST.

Whenever people are badly treated they always resist. In our experience working with victims of violence, none of them complied with violence, disrespect, or oppression. They always tried to reduce, prevent or stop the abuse in some way.

Because they are in such danger, victims usually do not resist the perpetrator’s abuse openly (although some victims do resist openly anyway). Often the only way

victims can resist the abuse is in their thoughts, or through small acts that are sometimes not even noticed by others. A victim’s resistance may not stop the abuse, because the perpetrator is making his own decisions about how he wants to behave. A perpetrator’s abusive behaviour is totally his responsibility, and he is the only one who can stop the abuse.



However, the victim’s thoughts or actions indicate that in no way does she “go along with” the abuse, or “let it happen.” The victim’s resistance shows her desire to escape the abuse, to keep her dignity, and to make a better life for herself.

The following examples show some of the many ways victims resist abuse. We will take a look at what the perpetrator tries to do, and how the victim opposes him.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to isolate the victim	trying to retain some relationships with others, imagining or remembering good times with her loved ones.



Examples:

- Roy tried to stop Susan from having a relationship with a lifelong friend. However, Susan still kept her relationship with the friend by talking to her when Roy was not present.
- Susan started to socialize more as a way to oppose Roy’s attempts to isolate her.
- When a perpetrator refuses to allow his wife to speak to her friends, she talks on the phone with her friends after he is asleep.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to humiliate the victim,	thinking or acting in ways that sustain her self-respect and dignity.

Examples:

- Susan remembered that she would deliberately “hold her head high” and say to herself, “stand tall”, when Roy said insulting things to her.
- In response to her husband’s constant criticisms of her physical appearance, a woman is very careful to always wear nice clothes and to have her hair styled.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to control the victim	thinking or acting in ways that show she refuses to be controlled. Doing what the perpetrator wants her to do in a very dramatic way is another kind of resistance.

Examples:

- Susan resisted Roy’s control over her and the children in ways that were not obvious, such as quietly disregarding Roy’s “instructions” on what she should do about the annoying behaviour of an acquaintance.



- When Roy insisted that her daughter wear worn-out boots that did not fit her properly, Susan asked her mother to buy boots for her daughter and Roy’s child.
- A victim whose husband is very controlling pretends to play along with him. A husband insists that his wife put away everything in the fridge in exactly the right spot, and gets angry if anything is “out of order.” Unable to challenge him openly, the victim decides to do what he wants, but in a dramatic fashion. She puts everything away especially neatly in the “right” place. She then labels in great detail each section of the fridge where the foods “belong.”
- A stay-at-home mum finds different reasons to be out of the house with the children so that they can escape the perpetrator’s criticism and control as much as possible.
- A wife, whose husband insists that the house remain very clean all the time, refuses to do any housework at all.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to say that both of them are responsible for his abuse...	thinking or acting in ways that show for herself that he is the only one responsible for his behaviour.

Examples:

- Susan’s anger at Roy for using the word “arguments” or “emotional intimacy” to describe his abusive behaviour; her refusal to accept or respond to these statements; and Susan thinking to herself, “what a load of crap” - these were all ways that Susan made it clear for herself she was not responsible for what Roy did to her.
- A perpetrator, who punches his wife in the face, says that it was just a “fight that got out of hand.” The wife calls the police, expecting that he will be charged with assault. By calling the police, the wife protects herself and demonstrates that he is responsible for the violence.
- A perpetrator of a sexual assault claims that it was a mutual act and that the victim enjoyed it. However the woman feels “dirty” afterward and showers often. This action demonstrates that the act was violent and offensive.



What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to make excuses for his violence	thinking or acting in ways that show for herself that there is no excuse for his violence, or that the abuse is wrong.

Examples:

- Roy often blamed Susan for his actions, saying that Susan caused him to be abusive by “not meeting his needs.” However, Susan always knew that she did not deserve Roy’s mistreatment of her. She was angry when he blamed her for his own behaviour. Susan knew she was innocent. This knowledge, as well as the anger she vented in the safety of the forest behind her house, showed her resistance to this aspect of Roy’s abuse.
- An abused child whose parents believed that he “was a bad child and needed to be disciplined,” would remember and write down all the abusive things his parents did to him in a journal.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to hide his violence	thinking or acting in ways that expose the violence

Examples:

- Roy tried to hide his violence by describing himself as a “gentle bunny rabbit”, or as an “emotional, feeling person.” Susan realized that her astonishment at hearing these statements from Roy showed her immediate understanding of how far Roy’s descriptions of himself were from his actual behaviour. She came to think of these feelings of astonishment as a form of resistance. They showed that she refused to accept Roy’s description of himself as “harmless.”
- After Susan left, Roy tried to hide his abusive behaviour by portraying himself as a “victim” to others. He refused to take any responsibility for his behaviour. Susan resisted this misrepresentation by telling others—including members of his own family—about Roy’s abuse.



- A woman, whose boyfriend punches her in the eye, refuses to stay at home or to wear dark glasses to cover up the black eye. She intentionally goes to his place of work to show his co-workers what he did.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to make the victim “stoop to his level”	refusing to behave in the same way as the perpetrator

Examples:

- Susan refused to engage in Roy’s abuse of her. She would purposely do something nice for him in the middle of his verbal assaults, such as writing him a card and listing all of his good qualities. She did this even though it made no difference to the severity of his attack on her.

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator tries to hurt the victim	doing things to reduce, endure, or escape the pain. Any means by which the victim challenges the perpetrator to deliver more pain is also an act of resistance, because sometimes a victim decides that instead of being safe, she will protect her dignity instead.

Examples:

- Susan resisted Roy’s attempts to hurt her by refusing to show her emotional vulnerability to Roy. Instead, she kept her feelings to herself. When he mocked her, she joked along with him.
- Susan also opposed Roy’s abuse by numbing her feelings when he verbally assaulted her.



- Susan would comply with Roy’s demands in order to stop his abuse of her. She would then find more subtle ways to resist him.
- During a physical assault, a victim takes her mind to a pleasant, peaceful place.
- A perpetrator punches a victim who refuses to do what he wants her to do. In response, she says “go ahead, jerk, punch me again, but it will not change my mind.”

What the perpetrator does	The victim shows resistance by
if the perpetrator acts unpredictably, trying to make the victim afraid so he can gain control of her	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating predictability and routine in her life • the victim may become unpredictable herself

Examples:

- When a husband becomes tense, the victim knows from her experience that he will become abusive. She then purposely says things that she knows will make him angry so that she has some control over when she gets hit.
- The victim pays close attention to the small details of everyday life to lessen the risk to herself and her children. She takes as much responsibility as possible for her own safety.

2. PEOPLE TEND NOT TO NOTICE THAT VICTIMS RESIST ABUSE

As we see in Susan’s story, resistance by victims is often not noticed by other people. Susan resisted Roy’s abuse in many unobvious ways. She numbed her emotions, she ignored Roy’s “instructions”, she stopped sharing her thoughts and feelings with him, and she chose not to “stoop to his level.”

In our experience, all victims resist abuse in some way, although their acts of resistance may be different from Susan’s. Victims decide how to resist abuse based on what they know of the perpetrator, what they need to do to be safe, and what they need to do to keep their dignity. Susan’s counsellor seems to have had a stereotyped view of victims as



“passive”. The counsellor wrongly assumed Susan did not resist Roy’s abuse.

Unfortunately, in many cases, the ways that victims have resisted abuse have been labelled as “sick” or “dysfunctional” by others. Some examples of negative labels that could be applied to Susan are:

What Susan did to resist abuse	How this may be labeled negatively by others
Susan resisted Roy’s abuse by not sharing her emotions in relationship.	This could be labelled as “emotional detachment,” as an the “inability to express emotions,” or as “avoidance.”
Susan resisted abuse by not doing what Roy wanted her to do.	This could be labelled as “passive-aggressive behaviour,” or “difficult/uncooperative behaviour.”
Susan resisted Roy’s abuse by refusing to stoop to his level of behaviour and by doing nice things for him.	This could be labelled as “co-dependency.”
Susan’s resisted Roy’s abuse by numbing her feelings	This could be labelled as “dissociation.”

One problem with the use of these ‘labels’ is that they may be hurtful and offensive to victims. Another problem is that they tend to suggest that both parties are responsible for ending the abuse. For example, Susan’s counsellor told her that if she had been more “assertive” she could have stopped the abuse, and her husband would “love her for it.”

This suggestion implied that Susan was at least equally responsible for ending the violence. Thus, although people may agree with the common belief that “perpetrators are responsible for their violence”, to be consistent with this belief we suggest avoiding any labels that imply that both parties are responsible for the violence.



We have found it is empowering for victims to think about what they did to oppose mistreatment. When Susan remembered and talked about the ways she resisted Roy's abuse, she felt stronger. Another woman stated that it felt so good to understand the ways she resisted the abuse that she felt "she could lift up her car." Other victims have responded by saying, "I knew I was not weak," and "I feel more capable now to deal with difficult situations I may encounter."

Some women have been discouraged by the victim-blaming messages that they have heard from others. They have found that examining their resistance to violence has helped them to resolve their feelings of being "damaged" and/or somehow responsible for the abuse.

Exercise for victims of abuse

How did you respond?

You may find it helpful to think about ways you responded to various abusive acts you experienced in your intimate relationship. Think about an incident where your partner was abusive towards you. Then, think about all the ways you showed you did not comply with his poor treatment of you.

What did you do? How did you feel? What kind of expression was on your face? What did your body language convey? What went through your mind? Then, think about what the perpetrator did next. Again, how did you respond? Write in detail about the ways you showed resistance to his abuse. What is it like for you to think of your resistance to abuse? Has your resistance been labeled as sick or dysfunctional by anyone? If so, how?



3. PERPETRATORS KNOW THAT VICTIMS WILL RESIST, SO THEY MAKE PLANS TO TRY TO STOP THE VICTIM'S RESISTANCE.

Perpetrators do not believe that victims will be passive. Therefore, perpetrators think about how victims will resist their abuse, and make plans to try to stop this resistance. For example, bullies do not pick on children who are bigger and stronger than they are. Bank robbers assume that tellers will resist, so they make plans to try to overcome that resistance.

Susan's story shows how Roy deliberately attempted to stop Susan's resistance. He attacked her strengths, such as her assertiveness. He attacked her strengths, such as her assertiveness and the more she stood up for her child the more he abused her. He tried to upset her emotional well being by verbally attacking her in unpredictable ways.

Here are other ways that perpetrators try to stop victims from resisting. (This is not a complete list.)

- One man's immigrant wife did not know Canadian law. He tried to convince her that she would be deported if she called the police for help, because they would know she was a "bad" wife. He also told her that "women's shelters were where bad wives went, and that this would also be a reason for her to be deported."
- A perpetrator knew that his partner would find it harder to resist his violence if she had no money, so he made sure she never had any spare cash.
- A husband blamed his wife for his own behaviour. He played "head games" with her and tried to confuse her so that she would be easier to control. For example, Roy attempted to confuse Susan by labelling his abuse as "emotional intimacy."
- A perpetrator knew that his spouse would attempt to call the police for protection against his aggression. He called the police first, twisted events around and made up a story that she was assaulting him.



We also hope that supporters will challenge messages from others that blame the victim or excuse the perpetrator.



- A perpetrator said sorry and gave gifts to a victim following abuse, hoping that the victim would stop feeling angry at him. He believed that this would stop any plans she was making to oppose his mistreatment of her. (Note that it is sometimes difficult for a victim to know what the perpetrator's kind and loving behaviour actually means, because sometimes perpetrators are truly sorry and actually make changes in their behaviour).
- A perpetrator presented a "nicest guy in town" image, believing this would make it more difficult for his wife to convince others that he is abusive.

4. ABUSIVE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR IS ALWAYS DONE DELIBERATELY.

Perpetrators of violence often try to avoid responsibility for their abusive behaviour. They may blame someone or something else. They may find excuses for their violence such as, "they were in a blind rage,"

or, "they were so out of control with their anger that they did not know what they were doing."

As well, they may blame their behaviour on their partners, an abusive childhood, stress, alcohol problems, their cultural background, financial problems, or their personalities (i.e. an "intense" personality; a tendency to "over-react.") Unfortunately, sometimes professionals, such as counsellors and lawyers, also hold beliefs about violent behaviour that excuse perpetrators of responsibility for their own behaviors.



Nobody knows why some people are violent in their intimate relationships. Many studies have been done, but nobody has been able to find a "cause" of violent behaviour. In any case, we believe that there are no acceptable reasons for one partner abusing another in an intimate relationship.



It is not surprising that many victims are also confused about their partner's violent behavior, and do not understand why he does such mean and hurtful things. In our view, this "failure to understand" is another way that victims resist abuse. It shows that victims know that there are no acceptable reasons for abusive behavior.

We have found from our experience in working with perpetrators that their abuse is planned and deliberate. The most obvious ways perpetrators show that their abusive behaviour is deliberate is by trying to stop victims from resisting, discussed in section #3 above.

The following are some additional ways that perpetrators show they actually do have control over their behaviour:

- The perpetrator can suddenly change his behaviour in the middle of an abusive episode. Susan noticed that Roy was able to stop his verbal attack when a friend unexpectedly showed up at their door. He quickly switched from being enraged to pleasant and friendly.
- The perpetrator threatens to be abusive if the victim does not do as he wishes. By threatening to "get upset" (i.e. abusive), Roy showed that he could predict his abusive behaviour. Another man, who had smothered his wife on several occasions with a pillow, threatened further smothering to attempt to control her.
- The perpetrator does not abuse others –only his wife. Roy excused his behaviour towards Susan by saying he was "overtired" or "stressed." However, Susan noticed that he chose to be kind and considerate to others when he was tired and stressed. Apparently, Roy was able to choose the target of his "stressed" behaviour.
- The perpetrator makes decisions about the type and amount of abuse. Even when they become abusive, perpetrators have rules about how far they will go. For instance, Roy never physically hit Susan. His abusive behaviours included throwing objects towards her (**but never actually hitting her with the objects**), and being verbally abusive. Other perpetrators will push, grab, or slap but they will not punch their partner. Others will never use a degrading name but they will constantly criticize.
- Perpetrators are selective about where they will inflict injury on a victim's body. Victims of physical abuse often say that perpetrators bruise them on parts of their bodies where the bruises will not



be seen. Abusing victims in this manner allows perpetrators to better escape the consequences of their actions from others. Other perpetrators have deliberately assaulted their partners on their faces, thinking that they will then stay home and not dare to show their bruises to others. Actions such as these by perpetrators suggest that they are quite purposeful about how and where they are physically abusive towards their victims.

- Perpetrators are selective about when and where they will be abusive. An example of this behaviour is when a wife disagreed with something her husband said while they were together in the mall, but rather than responding abusively in public, her husband waited until they were in the privacy of their car before attacking her verbally. In contrast, other victims report that their partners wait until they are in a public situation to humiliate the victim by insulting her in front of others.

Exercise for victims of abuse

Reflect upon some of your partner's abusive behaviors. Can you see evidence that these behaviors were deliberate, controlled, or planned? Does he act differently towards you when there are other people around? How has he attempted to stop your resistance to his abuse? Does he treat others with respect, and you with disrespect? Write down all of the evidence you have that indicates his abuse was deliberate. What is it like for you to think of the perpetrator's behavior in this way?

5. WHEN IT COMES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, APPEARANCES ARE DECEIVING.

Because victims' resistance to abuse is often not noticed, some people assume that victims have not done enough to protect themselves. People may, therefore, believe that victims create their own misfortunes. As well, victims tend not to talk about their experiences of abuse. They may choose not to talk so that they are safer from the perpetrator, and they also may wish to avoid the negative judgments of others. Often family, friends, and professionals do not hear the full story of how much victims have suffered or have resisted the abuse.



Perpetrators are often good at hiding their violence, blaming the victim, and showing other people a positive image of themselves. Because of this deception, outsiders may view the abusive actions as being “out of character” and impulsive behaviour. People also tend to think that the abusive actions are caused by stress or other matters beyond the perpetrator’s control.

Since people tend not to notice victims’ resistance to abuse, they may tend to judge them harshly. Similarly, since they tend to excuse perpetrators, they may tend to judge them mildly.

Many victims of violence encounter messages that are painful and disheartening. For example, a counsellor labelled Susan as indecisive and unassertive. This counsellor also implied that Susan was responsible for the abuse in her marriage because “she did not assert herself strongly enough.”

Acquaintances often imply that the victim was “damaged” and “responsible for the abuse.” Well-meaning family and friends may feel there was something wrong with the victim for having picked an abuser to marry, and that “she is still so damaged that she is likely going to pick another abuser.”

Other examples of damaging messages encountered by victims are:

- “She has a target on her forehead.”
- “She grew up in an abusive home, so abuse is all she knows.”
- “Her self-esteem is so low that she does not believe that she deserves anything better.”
- “She became involved in an abusive relationship because she is passive-she was looking for someone to make decisions for her.”
- “She is dependent on the abuser to take charge, to be the dominant person in the relationship, and to make her feel feminine.”
- “I would never put up with somebody treating me like that! How could she have put up with it?”
- “How could she have stayed with him that long?!”
- “She is exaggerating what she experienced.”



On the other hand, people often excuse perpetrators of their responsibility for their actions, and they fail to see that perpetrators deliberately try to stop victims' resistance.

Some typical statements made about perpetrators are:

- “He was an outstanding member of our community. I would never have thought he could do something like this. Stress must have caused him to behave out of character.”
- “He seemed like such a caring person. He was devoted to his family. I cannot understand how this could have happened.”
- “He wrestled with his demons for a long time, but they finally overcame him.”
- “He witnessed his father abusing his mother, so this was all he knew.”
- “Anger always got the better of him. He could not seem to control his impulses.”
- “Once he had a few drinks, the alcohol took over and he became a scary guy.”

CONCLUSION

In our experiences, victims always resist abuse and violence. Even when they oppose abuse only in their thoughts, their resistance is still very important because it shows that in no way do victims experience mistreatment passively. We have found that victims feel empowered when they focus on their resistance and on the many ways they keep their own dignity and character in the face of mistreatment and degradation.

From our work with perpetrators, we conclude that they always anticipate that victims will resist their attempts to control, dominate, and inflict pain. Perpetrators take deliberate steps to stop such resistance. Other evidence has demonstrated that perpetrators are able to control their anger. Their actions are planned and deliberate. We feel that recognizing the deliberate nature of abusive behaviour is respectful of perpetrators, in that it expresses confidence in their ability to control



their own actions, rather than being “helpless victims” of forces beyond their control.

Our hope is that those who are providing support to victims and/or perpetrators will focus their attention on victims’ resistance and perpetrators’ responsibility. We also hope that supporters will challenge messages from others that blame the victim or excuse the perpetrator.

Susan says she felt like she had been in the midst of a “sea” of victim-blaming messages. She gained a better understanding of her experiences when she met a counsellor who helped her to see how she had opposed mistreatment. As a result, she experienced “many light bulbs go off.” She said that it was “refreshing and liberating” to be honoured for her resistance rather than blamed for her victimization.

In helping perpetrators to see the deliberate nature of their actions, we have had men remark that they have realized they do have control over their actions. For example, one man, when referring to his abusive behaviour, said: “You make the decision to quit (abusing your partner)...I don’t need to get into history or childhood... whatever happened to me when I was a teenager or whatever, doesn’t apply when I’m (in my 40’s) and you decide that it doesn’t relate anymore. I mean, you just stop getting mad that way. Deal with it another way.”

Another man, after receiving counseling, said, “I do not think (violence) is a learned behavior. You either choose to abuse or choose not to abuse. I chose the wrong way and now I am choosing the right way.”



Mission

Our mission is to respond to the need for comprehensive solutions to end the cycle of family violence for individuals and families in our community.

Vision

Our vision is a society where individuals and families build healthy, violence-free relationships.

Men's Counselling Service

The Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter offers a unique program for men seeking to change their abusive behaviour. The Men's Counselling Service uses the response-based approach described in this handbook and is free and voluntary (not court-mandated).

Phone: 299-9680

www.calgarywomenshelter.com

Crisis Line: (403) 234-SAFE (7233)





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