



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Abusive Relationships**

When people hear the words “abusive relationship,” they typically picture the battered woman who stands staunchly by her wife-beating man. According to the National Institute on Domestic Violence, 85 to 95 percent of domestic violence victims are women, and women are more likely to be killed by an intimate than a stranger. However, physical violence is not the only type of abuse that occurs in a relationship, and thus, experts believe that abuse against men is SIGNIFICANTLY UNDER-REPORTED.

It is estimated that over 12 million cases of abuse occur in the US each year. But Abusive Relationships don’t always pack a punch. In fact, for most victims, the physical abuse is the least painful of all - sexual, emotional/verbal and financial abuse often hurt more. Sexual abuse can include any non-consensual act, painful or degrading acts or language during intercourse, withholding sex or forcing it, and even exploitation through photographs or prostitution. Something as common as criticism about sexual performance can be considered abuse in the right context.

During emotional / verbal abuse, an abuser will often control who the victim sees, where they go, and what they do. Abusers don’t want their victims to have a social support system, but justify their control by saying that they love the victim so much they worry about the victim’s safety when they leave. Other examples of emotional abuse include: • *ensuring lack of transportation or a telephone* • *accusing the victim of unfaithfulness* • *constantly checking on the victim* • *finding fault in every one of the victim’s friends and family* • *discounting a victim’s values* • *giving the “silent” treatment* • *trivializing the victim’s emotions*.

Verbally, the abuser exerts control through humiliation and sometimes subtle erosion of a victim’s self-esteem and will discount his or her opinions and beliefs. Verbal abuse is much more than namecalling and can include withholding important information from the victim, making inappropriate jokes about the victim in public, leaving nasty messages for the victim to receive, and barking orders.

You could be the victim of abuse if your lover...

- Constantly keeps track of your time
- Acts jealous and possessive
- Accuses you of being unfaithful or flirting
- Discourages you to have relationships with friends and family
- Prevents you from working, interacting with friends, or attending school
- Constantly criticizes you or belittles you
- Controls finances and forces you to account for what you spend, BEYOND reasonable cooperative budgeting
- Humiliates you in front of others (including ‘jokes’ at your expense)
- Destroys or takes your personal property or sentimental items
- Has affairs
- Threatens to hurt you, your children, or pets Threatens to use a weapon
- Pushes, hits slaps, punches, kicks or bites you or your children
- Forces you to have sex against your will or demands sexual acts you are uncomfortable with

Financial abuse can occur when the victim isn’t permitted to get or keep a job, has to account for every penny spent or doesn’t have access to household income. Some victims are forced to have all bills put in their name, are forced to turn over their paychecks to the abuser, and some are even forced to beg or commit crimes for money.

Therapists recognize a typical cycle of abuse which can be confusing to a victim and erode any sense of personal power. The cycle is repetitive.

- **EXCUSES** - after an abusive episode, both the abuser and the victim explain away the problem.
- **HONEYMOON PERIOD** - things seem to go very well. When things are “great,” they really are great - gifts, apologies, positive feelings
- **ROUTINE** - a return to routine life around home and work
- **TENSION** - tension begins to build and the abuser shows signs of anger, impatience, and frustration. The victim recognizes these signs and feels the familiar need to “walk on eggshells.”
- **TRIGGER** - something sets off the abuser, often not easily identified or based in reality, and the abuse begins.

Some people are unable to recognize that they are being abused because they are in denial and use rationalization mechanisms to tolerate their abuse. Even if they do realize they are being abused, many won’t leave a relationship because of fear - fear of the abuser, fear of the unknown (life without the abuser) or the fear that they can’t trust anyone to help them.

Therapy works, but without it, a victim could face a LIFETIME of troubled relationships and chronic emptiness. For an abuser, therapy could mean an end to the abuse cycle.

If you would like more information about abusive relationships, how to overcome the cycle of abuse, or getting help (for either the abuser or abused) and what options are available, please call Portage Path at 330-253-3100.



Psychology of Battered Woman (Spouse) Syndrome

- adapted from the Women's Rural Advocacy Program

EVERY NINE SECONDS IN THE UNITED STATES, A WOMEN IS ASSAULTED AND BEATEN. IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP, THE VICTIM OFTEN GOES THROUGH STAGES OF EMOTION, WHICH ALL FORM THE BATTERED WOMAN SYNDROME.

- **Denial:** The woman refuses to admit- even to herself- that she has been beaten or that there is a problem in her marriage. She may call each incident an accident. She offers excuses for her partner's violence and each time firmly believes it will never happen again.
- **Guilt:** She now acknowledges there is a problem, but considers herself responsible. She feels she "deserves" to be beaten because she is somehow flawed and is not living up to her partner's expectations.
- **Enlightenment:** The woman no longer assumes responsibility for her partner's abusive treatment, recognizing that no one "deserves" to be beaten. She is still committed, though, and stays with her partner, hoping they can work things out.
- **Responsibility:** Accepting the fact that her partner will not, or can not, stop his violent behavior, the battered woman decides she will no longer submit to it and starts a new life.

While the syndrome is usually referred to as a women's issue, roughly 2 million men are abused by their spouse or significant others annually, leading some experts to refer to it as Battered SPOUSE Syndrome. Abuse against men is believed to be severely under-reported. Even when men DO report, most people are so astonished that men usually end up feeling like no one believes them. For more information, visit www.dvmen.org.



Possible Indicators of Emotional Abuse

- from thisisawar.com

Most people in physically abusive relationships strongly believe that the emotional abuse is much worse than the physical pain. Emotional abuse is often extremely difficult to detect. However, by being aware of the indicators, you may be able to determine that someone is in trouble and help them.

- depression
- withdrawal
- low self esteem
- severe anxiety
- fearfulness
- failure to thrive in infancy
- aggression
- emotional instability
- sleep disturbances
- inappropriate behavior for age
- overly passive/compliant
- suicide attempts or discussion
- physical complaints with no medical basis
- extreme dependence
- underachievement
- inability to trust
- stealing
- feelings of shame or guilt
- frequent crying
- self blame or depreciation
- substance abuse
- avoidance of eye contact

If you believe someone is being abused, don't confront the abuser. Instead help the victim seek treatment to learn his or her own way out. Call 330-253-3100 and learn about treatment options available.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call **Portage Path** and find out how we can help:

Web Site	www.portagepath.org
Appointments	330-253-3100 800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline	330-434-9144 888-434-8878
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