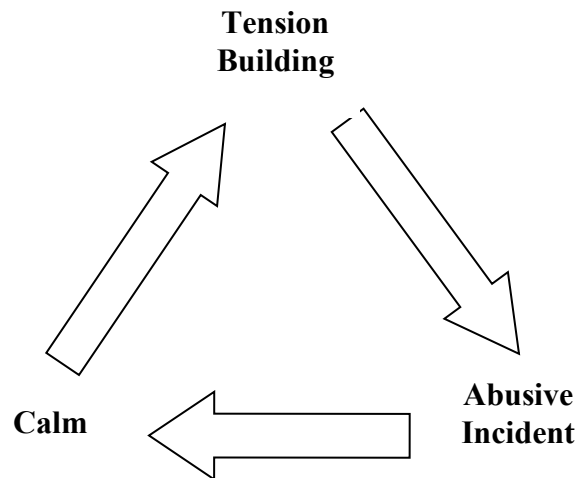


## **CYCLE OF ABUSE**

Although both abusers and victims may be either male or female, in this list abusers are referred to as men and victims as women.



Abuse can be described in terms of phases which go around and around in a never-ending cycle. It is a pattern that victims know very well. Abusers are not impulsive or out of control, but very much in control. They carefully plan and execute their abuse whether it is subtle, threatening or severe acts of violence.

The length of the cycle usually shortens over time, bringing abusive incidents closer and closer together. The “reconciliation” and “calm” stages can disappear completely, leaving only tension that builds quickly into violence. This cycle can happen hundreds of times during a relationship. The abuser might cycle through these stages anywhere from a year or a few hours.

The victims are caught in a carefully designed and planned cycle made to trap them under the power and control of their abusers. They fall into a pattern of their own. They will repeat the lines repeatedly to themselves and others until the same phrases sound like a broken record.

Denial occurs at every stage and keeps the cycle unending. Only by breaking through denial can the cycle of violence end.

### **THE THREE PHASES**

#### **Tension Building Phase**

The victim denies that the tension is mounting, dismissing it as outside stress. She blames herself for his behavior and doesn’t believe the abuse will worsen. In turn, he denies the

reality of the situation by blaming the tension on her, his work, bad traffic, getting drunk, financial difficulties, etc. As stress builds during this stage, communication breaks down. Creates fear in the victim. Victims try to placate the abusers and avoid the next phase of violence by becoming submissive or extra helpful. Other victims might try to provoke the abuser into the violence they both know is coming; this can be a survival strategy to lessen the impact of the abuse, have control of where and when it happens or just to “get it over with.” This does NOT mean that the victim causes the abuse.

### **Acute Explosion Phase**

This is the actual episode of abuse that follows the tension building. This may be a physical attack or an intense emotional exchange including swearing, name calling, or other methods of humiliation. Most victims will identify emotional abuse as more devastating than physical, as the pain from physical abuse fades but emotional pain does not. Emotional/psychological abuse affects the heart and soul of the victim, who they are as a person. This phase is often a particularly frightening and dangerous time for the abuser to dominate the victim.

### **Calm/Honeymoon Phase**

The abuser may express remorse and be apologetic. The victim wants desperately to believe this is true and convinces herself that it could have been worse. The incident is in the past and, for a while, things seem back to normal or even better than before.

| <b>Tension Building Phase</b>  |  | <b>Acute Explosion Phase</b>   |  | <b>Calm/Honeymoon Phase</b>   |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Abuser</b>  | <b>Victim's response</b>   | <b>Abuser</b>  | <b>Victim's response</b>   | <b>Abuser</b>   | <b>Victim's response</b>  |
| Irritable<br>Nitpicking<br>Isolates victim<br>Withdraws affection<br>Put-downs, yelling<br>Drinking or Drugs<br>Threatens<br>Destroys property<br>Criticizes | Tries to calm<br>Nurtures<br>Withdraws<br>Extra helpful<br>Silent<br>Tries to reason<br>Cooks his favorite meal<br>Keeps kids quiet<br>Timid<br>Avoids confrontation<br>Minimizes, justifies & rationalizes his behavior | Verbal Attack<br>Humiliation<br>Imprisonment<br>Hitting<br>Choking<br>Beating<br>Rape<br>Use of weapons<br>Beating | Protects herself any way she can<br>Tries to calm & reason<br>Fights back<br>Calls 9-1-1<br>Leaves | Remorseful<br>Cries<br>Begs for forgiveness<br>Promises to get help<br>Attends church or AA<br>Gets counseling<br>Sends flowers; brings presents<br>“I’ll never do it again.”<br>Wants to make love<br>Enlists family support | Relief<br>Agrees to stay<br>Returns or takes him back<br>Attempts to stop legal proceedings<br>Sets up counseling appointments<br>Feels happy & hopeful<br>Declares love<br>Accepts excuses<br>Grateful |