

# Domestic Violence Basics



FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

# This Course Made Possible by

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The Seattle Human Services Department, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Division.

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*The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this course are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

# Created by the DV/MH Collaboration Project

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The development of this course was a collaborative effort by the following:

- **City of Seattle** Human Service Department, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Division
- **Consejo Counseling and Referral Service** – a social service organization that primarily serves Latino/as and has domestic violence and mental health programs
- **King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence** – a county-wide membership organization
- **New Beginnings** – a domestic violence organization
- **Seattle Counseling Service** – a mental health and addictions organization that primarily serves people who are LGBTQ
- **Sound Mental Health** – a community mental health organization

# Project Focus

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The organizations are partners in the **Domestic Violence and Mental Health Collaboration Project**, a grant-funded effort to improve services for survivors of domestic violence with mental health concerns.

Since Seattle Counseling Service and Consejo specialize in serving LGBTQ and Spanish-speaking immigrant and refugee communities respectively, these communities are also a focus of the project.

# Enhancing Knowledge

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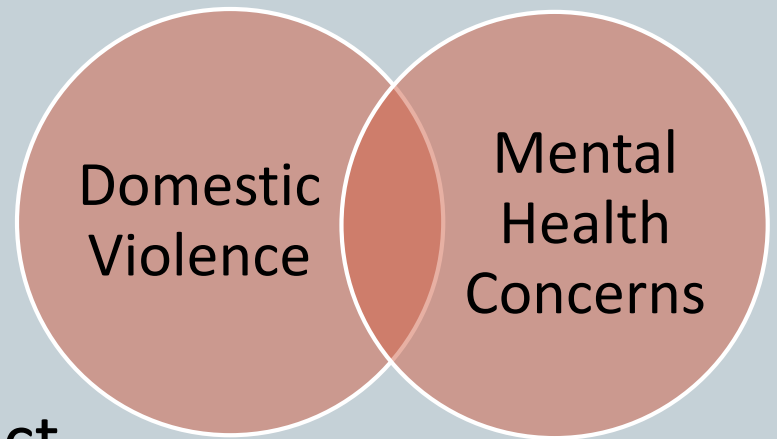
This course is a component of the Enhancing Knowledge Initiative of the project.

While the mental health providers at the partner organizations participate in this course, the domestic violence advocates at the partner organizations will participate in a course on mental health basics.

# How will taking this course lead to change?

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The purpose of the courses is to provide a shared understanding of how domestic violence and mental health concerns intersect.



This is one step in a process of systems change that the partners are undergoing in order to work together more effectively and to improve services.

# Other Project Steps

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The other steps include:

- Creating more welcoming environments
- Improving identification of and response to domestic violence and mental health concerns
- Making more effective referrals
- Utilizing liaisons
- Conducting cross-disciplinary case reviews
- Building stronger relationships between the partner organizations
- Increasing collaboration

# Expectations for this Course

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- This course is intended to cover domestic violence basics only. It is an overview.
- The content has been tailored specifically for mental health providers.
- Information on how to respond to domestic violence is provided in the course entitled “Domestic Violence Response for Mental Health Professionals.”
- If you are interested in learning more, please see the “Learn More” section at the end of the response course.



# Course Contents

This course has 4 lessons:

1. Understanding Domestic Violence
2. Culture
3. Co-Occurring Factors
4. Trauma-Informed Practice

# Learning Objectives

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**AS A RESULT OF THIS COURSE, YOU WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO:**

- 1. Describe common tactics batterers use.**
- 2. Describe the connection between oppression and domestic violence.**
- 3. Identify whether a behavior is indicative of being abusive or experiencing abuse.**
- 4. Recognize barriers to leaving an abusive relationship**
- 5. Summarize how domestic violence affects service recipients**

# Learning Objectives continued

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**AS A RESULT OF THIS COURSE, YOU WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO:**

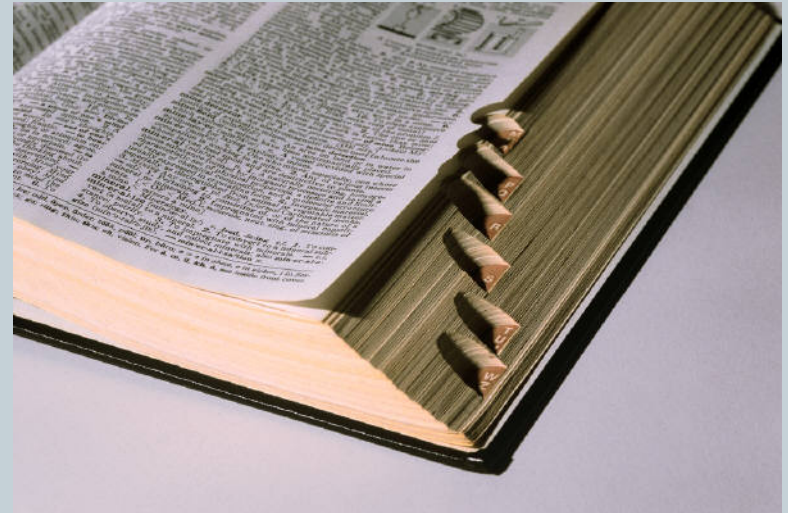
- 6. Recognize the role culture plays in the lives of all domestic violence survivors**
- 7. Recognize the intersection of domestic violence, mental health concerns, and substance use.**
- 8. Apply the philosophical framework of trauma informed practice to your work**

# A Note about Language

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Accompanying this course is a glossary that was created by the DV/MH Collaboration Project.

If you are not familiar with a word or term used in the course, please check the glossary for more information.



# Why Learn about Domestic Violence?

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There are many reasons including:

- Domestic violence is very common and many people do not get the assistance they need.
- Domestic violence can greatly impact mental health.
- Domestic violence can lead to substance abuse.
- You have an opportunity to help survivors of domestic violence obtain the resources and support they need. You can really make a difference.

# Opportunity

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- You may be the first person a survivor of domestic violence trusts enough to disclose that the abuse is happening.
- You are in a position to link survivors to resources, assist them with safety planning, and support their self-determination.
- Many survivors are reaching out to mental health providers for help. DV programs alone are not able to meet the tremendous volume and scope of their needs .<sup>1</sup>



# Defining Success

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How do you define success in your work?

Addressing domestic violence is not about “rescuing” survivors or about convincing someone to leave a relationship. Of course, it can be very challenging to know that someone is in danger and is not ready to make significant changes in their life.

As a mental health service provider, you know that change sometimes happens very slowly and that people are most successful when they are able to make choices for themselves.

# Indicators of Success

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With that in mind, we suggest these indicators of success:

- Creating an environment where people feel comfortable talking about DV
- Educating survivors about dynamics of power and control
- Assisting survivors with safety planning
- Providing survivors with the support needed to regain a sense of their own agency and self-determination
- Informing survivors of DV advocacy services and connecting them when applicable

When survivors have the support and the resources they need, they can make transformational changes in their own lives.



# Lesson 1 – Understanding Domestic Violence

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**AS A RESULT OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO:**

- 1. Describe common tactics batterers use.**
- 2. Describe the connection between oppression and domestic violence.**
- 3. Identify whether a behavior is indicative of being abusive or experiencing abuse.**
- 4. Recognize barriers to leaving an abusive relationship**
- 5. Summarize how domestic violence affects service recipients**

# What is Domestic Violence?

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Domestic Violence is a learned pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that a person uses to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

The behaviors can be physical, sexual, psychological, and/or economic.

Intimate partners include people who are currently or formerly in dating, sexual, marital, or domestic partner relationships or who otherwise define themselves as being in an intimate relationship.

## Key Words

Learned

Pattern

Power

Control

# Behavioral vs. Legal Definitions

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The previous definition is a behavioral definition that is broader than the legal definition of domestic violence in WA State (RCW26.50 and 10.99) that is used to define criminal behavior.

For the purposes of this course, it can be assumed that when we use the term “domestic violence” or DV, we are referring to the behavioral definition.

# Who Experiences DV?

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Domestic violence impacts people from all backgrounds, so it is important not to make assumptions about who has experienced or who has perpetrated DV.

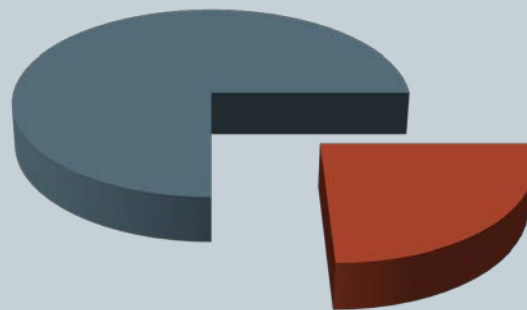
The only characteristic most DV survivors have in common is being female. However, it is important to recognize that men and people who are transgender also experience DV.

Likewise domestic violence has an impact that is widespread. It hurts all of us.

# Domestic Violence is Very Common

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Nearly 1 in 4 women in the U.S. reports experiencing violence by a current or former spouse or boyfriend at some point in her life.<sup>2</sup>



One survey of men in same sex relationships found a lifetime prevalence of 39.2% and 22% of men reported physical abuse in the last 5 years.<sup>3</sup>

The prevalence and severity of lesbian battering are comparable to that of heterosexual relationships.<sup>4</sup>

48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

# Power and Control

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Even though physical violence is what we typically picture when we hear the words “domestic violence,” DV is really about power and control.

Physical violence is just *one* of many types of tactics used by those who are abusive to establish and maintain power and control over their partners.

Some people control and abuse their partners without ever using physical violence.

Since the media and society tend to not acknowledge or take seriously other tactics of abuse, it can be harder to recognize them.

# Taking All Forms of Abuse Seriously

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Those who are abusive will often deny the seriousness of their abusive behavior and accuse their partner of overreacting or imagining the abuse.

As a result, many survivors may need support and assistance in identifying emotional, financial, and sexual abuse.

You can help survivors by taking these forms of abuse seriously and by helping them recognize how these tactics have been harmful to their physical and mental health and their overall functioning.

# Common Power and Control Tactics

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- Emotional, Physical, Sexual Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Coercion ,Threats, Intimidation
- Minimizing, Denying, Blaming
- Isolation

## Using/Misusing

- Children
- Male Privilege (in heterosexual relationships)
- Other Forms of Oppression
- Vulnerabilities (survivor's or abuser's)

*Can  
you think  
of  
other  
tactics?*



# Emotional, Physical and Sexual Abuse Examples

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## **Emotional Abuse**

can include:

- Put downs
- Name calling
- Mind games
- Humiliation
- Manipulation

## **Physical Abuse**

can include:

- Hitting, Pushing
- Punching, Kicking
- Strangling
- Restraining
- Sleep deprivation
- Withholding medication

## **Sexual Abuse**

can include:

- Rape
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Sex trafficking
- Forced prostitution
- Making partner watch pornography

All of the above power and control tactics can potentially harm survivors emotionally, physically, and sexually, and should not be considered completely distinct categories of abuse

# \$ Abuse, Coercion, Threats and Intimidation

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## **Financial Abuse**

can include:

Controlling survivor's money

Causing survivor to lose jobs

Deciding how survivor can spend money

Putting survivor in debt

## **Coercion / Threats**

can include:

Pressuring survivor to act against own interests or to put self at risk

Threatening to harm or kill the survivor or those close to the survivor (children, parents, pets, etc.)

## **Intimidation**

can include:

Destroying property

Displaying weapons

Punching walls

Using looks, gestures, or symbols to indicate threat of abuse

# Minimizing, Denying, Blaming

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## **Minimizing**

can include:

*“It wasn’t that bad.  
It was just  
a little pushing.”*

*“You are making  
a mountain  
out of a molehill.”*

## **Denying**

can include:

The abuser asking his partner why she has a black eye in the morning after punching her the night before.

Saying the abuse never happened.

## **Blaming**

can include:

The abuser, the community, or the survivor saying the survivor is responsible for the abuse. Saying the abuse was caused by stress, money problems, alcohol, etc.

For different reasons abusers, survivors, and the community all might engage in minimizing, denying and blaming.

# Isolation and Using Children

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## **Isolation** can include:

- Moving the survivor away from friends and family, possibly even to an area where the survivor does not speak the language or know the laws or customs
- Preventing the survivor from spending time with others
- Isolating the survivor makes it much harder for the survivor to reach out for support or to leave the abusive partner

## **Using Children** can include:

- Attacking or undermining the survivor's ability to parent
- Encouraging the children to abuse the survivor
- Threatening to harm or take away the children

# Using Privilege and Oppression

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Batterers exploit the power imbalances and prejudices of society to control their partners. Some examples of this are...

They may use the threat of outing their partner (telling others about their sexual orientation or gender expression) as a means of control.

Some batterers target people of color or immigrants, believing they have a right to control them because they feel superior to them or believe them to be submissive.

# Privilege and Oppression continued

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Men in heterosexual relationships may misuse their male privilege to justify their behavior or to access resources not available to their partners.

People who are mentally ill or who are chemically dependant are often stigmatized. Batterers can exploit this by telling their partner that they will not be believed if they seek help and unfortunately, this may be the case.

# Manipulation through Vulnerability

31

While some batterers will target their partners' lack of privilege or their insecurities to keep them in the relationship, others will use their own vulnerabilities to manipulate and control their partners.

Some survivors stay with their partners because they have been convinced that their partner cannot live independently and they feel responsible for taking care of the person who is abusing them.

# Manipulation continued

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Some batterers use suicidal threats to keep their partners in the relationship.

In these cases survivors may remain in an abusive relationship due to compassion, feeling obligated, social pressures, or a sense of self sacrifice.



# Barriers to Leaving

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Barriers to leaving an abusive partner include:

- Fear - of being hurt or killed, of being “*outed*”, of being deported, of being homeless, etc. (These may very well be valid concerns.)
- Having nowhere to go
- Concerns about sharing or losing custody or otherwise putting their children at risk



# Barriers continued

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- Lack of financial resources
- Religious, family or cultural pressures to stay
- Believing no one else will ever want them
- Reliance on abuser as a caregiver
- Love and Hope – some survivors may want to stay in their relationships and may believe that their partners will change



# It's Not Mutual

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We have explored how abuse in relationships consists of a pattern of power, control and exploitation. However, sometimes we hear that both people in the relationship have used violence or that both have been abusive. This can be confusing unless we dig a little deeper.



DV is about one person having power and control over the other. Even if both people use violence in the relationship, only one person is able to truly dominate the other.

# Studies say...

36

To better understand why DV is not mutual, it can be helpful to look at research about gender and the use of violence.

However, keep in mind that the research is typically...

- Heterocentric  
Centered on heterosexual relationships
- Based in a binary gender system  
Gender is viewed in terms of males and females only, rather than gender variation
- Restricted to cisgendered males and females  
Individuals who identify with the gender given at birth, people who are not transgendered

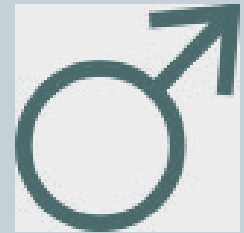
# Research on Gender and the Use of Violence

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While both men and women may use violence in relationships, their *reasons* for being violent and the *impact* of their violence can be quite different.

Men:

- are more likely to use severely violent tactics,
- less likely to be injured, and
- less likely to be intimidated by their partner's violence



Men tend to use violence for:

- purposes of dominance and coercion,
- control of partner's behavior,
- protecting self-image, and punishment

# Research continued

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Women tend to use violence for:

- self-defense
- escape, and
- retaliation

Men and women both use violence to:

- express anger
- release tension, and
- force communication<sup>6</sup>



# ICE\*

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To understand who is the survivor and who is the abuser in a relationship, we need to look further than who has done what to whom.

We need to ask, “*Why?*”

Virtually any behavior can be used either

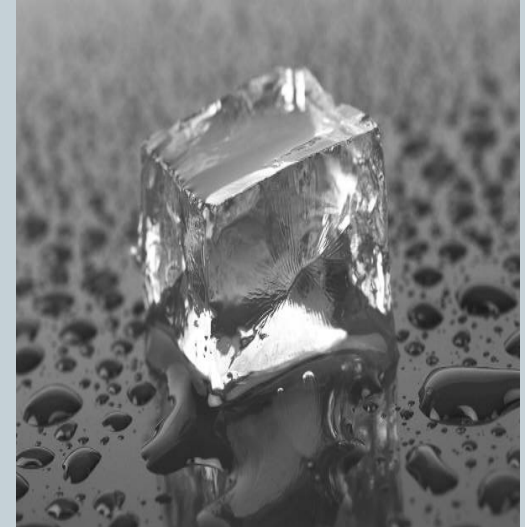
- to survive abuse *OR*
- to establish power over another person.

# Intent, Context, Effect

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When assessing who is establishing systematic power and control in a relationship, we must look at the:

- **I**ntent
- **C**ontext, and
- **E**ffect of a pattern of behaviors.



We can remember to do this by thinking of the acronym **ICE** – after all, abusive behavior is Cold!



# I = Intent

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What is the intent of the behavior?

What are the real, imagined, perceived, expressed, or intuited reasons for the behavior?

What is the goal of the behavior?

Was the behavior used to establish control over someone else, or was it used to regain control over oneself?

*For example...*

Did the service recipient hit their partner to scare them or to try to stop a sexual assault?

# C = Context

42

- What was the context in which the behavior occurred?
- What has been happening in the relationship over time?
- What happened immediately before and after a specific behavior occurred?
- What meaning or history does a certain behavior have, given the context?

# Context Example

43

What would you think if a client told you that their ex mailed them a box of things that they left behind after the relationship ended?

What if they mentioned that their stuff was wrapped in newspaper?

This does not sound abusive, does it?



# C = Context continued

44

How would your understanding of the situation change, if you also knew that the ex had threatened to kill your client, if your client left?

What if the client told you that the newspaper was the obituary section?



Knowing the context can make a big difference.

# E = Effect

45

What is the effect of the behavior?

Whose life is smaller as a result of the behavior?

Who is being controlled, manipulated, coerced, exploited or hurt as a consequence of the behavior?

Who is afraid?

*For example...*

If your client says their partner threatened to commit suicide if the client left the relationship, whose life is being impacted by that threat?

# Applying ICE

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Keeping “ICE” in mind will help you better understand why a person experiencing abuse might do things that seem unhealthy or even abusive.



It also can explain why a person who is abusing their intimate partner might be able to make it sound as if it is their partner who is unstable or abusive.

# Applying ICE continued

47

When it comes to domestic violence, it is important to be aware of details, but it is also important not to lose sight of the big picture of what is going on overall in the relationship.

The point is not the behavior itself, but rather, whether the behavior is part of a pattern of exerting power and control.

**\*Information about ICE is adapted from an assessment tool created by The Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse.**

# Scenario

48

The following slides contain a scenario about a couple and their relationship.

Imagine that you are the “you” described in this scenario.

After each piece of the scenario, you will be asked to answer some questions about what you read.



# Introduction

49

You and your partner have been together for 11 years.

You met while you were in the final year of your Masters program.

You had so many things in common that it just seemed obvious that you should be together.

You both have full time, high intensity jobs downtown, but you each still try to make family a priority.

You have two children: Samuel, age 6 and Alicia, age 8.

# Family Trip

50

Every year since you were young, you have celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with your family at your family's lakeside cabin.

You always have a great time water skiing on the lake and the kids love to build sand castles.



# Family Trip continued

51

The cabin is large enough to comfortably accommodate everyone, but your partner refuses to stay there insisting instead that you stay at a nearby motel.



Your partner says your mom always bosses the family around, that she is brainwashing the children, and that you all need some personal space.

# Family Trip Questions

52

*How do you feel about your partner's insistence on staying at a motel?*

*Is your partner being abusive?*

**Yes**

**No**

# Family Trip Answer

53

This situation is ambiguous.

Your partner's insistence on staying at the motel could indicate controlling behavior, an attempt to isolate you from your family, and a disregard for your feelings.

It could also be an attempt to protect you and your children from an abusive mother/mother-in-law.

Without knowing more about your relationship and the circumstances, it is not possible to definitively say that your partner is or is not abusive.

# Morning Meetings

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You are rushing to get ready this morning because you have an 8am briefing with your company's VP, an important meeting that you have been prepping for all week.



As you are pouring Samuel's cereal, your partner says, *"I have an important meeting this morning, so I'm leaving early for work."*

# Morning Meetings continued

55

It's your partner's turn to drop the kids off at school.

Without any further discussion, your partner walks out the door leaving you with both children and only 20 minutes to get to your meeting.

# Morning Meetings Questions

56

*How do you feel?*

*Is your partner being abusive?*

**Yes**

**No**



# Morning Meetings Answer

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There appears to be a pattern of your partner disregarding your needs and making decisions without your input.

When this also undermines your career, it could be an indication that your partner is abusive.

We are starting to see some definite red flags in your relationship.



# Paying the Mortgage

58

You are excited to have lunch with your friend Daniel. You really need to talk about the challenges in your relationship.

You are leaving the office to head to lunch when your partner calls and says that you forgot to mail in the mortgage payment.

Your partner insists that you drive home on your lunch break, write the check, and send in the payment today or else you will get a late penalty.



# Paying the Mortgage continued

59

Your partner has always paid the bills and you are confused as to why it is suddenly your responsibility.

When you argue that it was not your responsibility, your partner loses it and says, *“You are lazy, disorganized, have no f...ing memory and you don’t care if your family ends up on the streets!”*

# Paying the Mortgage Question

60

*Is your partner being abusive?*

Yes

No

*If your partner is being abusive,  
what control tactics is your partner using?*

# Paying the Mortgage Answer

61

There are now multiple signs that your partner is abusive:

- The name calling
- The put downs
- The possible control of the finances
- The control – telling you what to do and when to do it
- The isolating behavior – preventing you from having lunch with a friend, refusing to stay at the family cabin

# Childhood Photos

62

You come home late from work and find your partner sitting in the bathroom.

In your partner's hands is your childhood photo album.



Your partner is taking out pictures and dropping them into the bathtub full of steaming hot water.

# Childhood Photos continued

63

You quickly reach for your photo album to save what is left, shoving your partner in the process.

Your partner slips off the tub and hits the back of the sink.

With a bleeding head wound, your partner runs to call 911.

# Childhood Photos Questions

64

*What was your partner's **intent** here?*

*What was your **intent**?*

*What was the **context** in which this incident occurred?*

*What is the **effect** of your actions?*

*What is the **effect** of your partner's actions?*



# Childhood Photos Answers

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## **Intent**

Your intent appears to be to save photos of your childhood.

Your partner's intent appears to be to inflict harm on you.

## **Context**

This incident happened in a relationship where you are experiencing an ongoing pattern of abuse from your partner.

# Childhood Photos Answers continued

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## **Effect**

The effect of your actions is that your partner is injured and you could potentially be arrested (depending on what you each tell the police and whom they believe about what happened)

The effect of your partner's actions is that you are probably scared, hurt, and upset. You might be extra careful to do what your partner asks of you or to anticipate your partner's needs in order to avoid a similar incident happening again.

# What about the Kids?

67

In the scenario we mentioned the children, but we did not talk about the impact of the abuse on them.

Unfortunately, children are greatly impacted by domestic violence. Whether or not they appear to have witnessed the abuse, they are likely to feel its effects. Of course, this hurts not just the children, but also those who care about them.



# Did You Know?

68

Battered women are no better or worse parents than non-battered women in the general population.<sup>7</sup>

DV may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country. In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50% of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children.<sup>8</sup>

Battered mothers' interactions with their children improved dramatically 6 months after leaving their batterer and the shelter.<sup>9</sup>

# Impact on Children

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Children who are exposed to DV are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems, including depression, anxiety, and violence toward peers.

They are also more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes.<sup>10</sup>

# Undermining Parenting

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Abusers often undermine the relationship between children and their abused parent. Children may:

- See the survivor as weak, unable to protect them
- Not respect the survivor's authority
- Feel the need to take care of the survivor
- Be forced to batter their parent
- Be used to control the survivor
  - Child may be expected to spy on the survivor
  - Threats may be made against the children
  - Children may be kidnapped

# Parenting Impact

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Survivors' confidence in their parenting ability may be affected due to the abuse.

Batterers may:

- Belittle survivors' parenting skills
- Punish survivors for their children's behaviors
- Threaten to report survivors to Child Protective Services

# Parenting Impact continued

72

DV can interrupt development of parenting skills.

Parents may become:

- Overly permissive, afraid to set limits
- Indulgent, giving children what they want out of guilt
- Distracted, unable to pay attention because of the abuse
- Unstructured, due to the challenge of maintaining routines in a volatile environment