

### **Relationship violence:**

is a pattern of behaviors used to gain and maintain power and control over another person. Relationship violence includes threatened physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse of an individual by someone with whom they have or have had an intimate or significant relationship.

### **Relationship violence generally includes the following elements:**

- Once physical violence is introduced into the relationship it increases in severity and frequency.
- Violence and abusive behaviors are often interchanged with promises to change and apologies on the part of the abuser.
- Increased danger for the survivor when trying to terminate the relationship.
- Relationship violence crosses all class, race, cultural, religious, socio-economic lines and occurs in heterosexual as well as in GLBT relationships.

### **Common Reactions to Relationship Violence:**

Fear and terror--- Anxiety--- Low self-esteem--- Depression---Difficulty with trust and intimacy  
Shame and embarrassment---Sexual difficulties---Nightmares---Problems with memory  
Increased startle response---Cognitive confusion---Numbing and avoidance

### **The Cycle of Violence**

Relationship violence is rarely an isolated incident; it is a pattern of coercive behavior intended to exert control and domination by the abusive partner over the victim. The recurring abusive incidents usually escalate in frequency and severity. The Cycle of Violence is a general pattern that most abusive relationships follow. It passes through three phases: tension building, explosion, and gifts and apologies. It is a dangerous cycle that can end in serious physical injury or death. It is often very difficult to recognize the pattern once it has started.

Every relationship is different, so it's impossible to describe exactly what an abusive relationship looks like. Some relationships never go through the gifts and apologies phase, but rather pass from tension building to explosion and back again. As the cycle progresses, the gifts and apologies phase tends to shorten and the abusive partner tends to express less remorse. As the cycle progresses, it becomes more difficult to break without outside intervention.

#### **Phase One: Tension Building**

This is a time of increasing stress and tension. The victim may feel as if he/she is walking on eggshells or waiting for the abuse to begin. This increased nervousness and vulnerability may anger the abusive partner. The victim may also try to stand up for him/herself or attempt to provoke acute abuse in order to get the violence over with. It is important to emphasize that there is nothing a person can do to prevent the violence from occurring.

#### **Phase Two: Explosion**

In this phase, the violent partner explodes and attacks the victim verbally, psychologically, and/or physically. The explosion phase can last from a few minutes to several days. When the explosion is over the victim may deny the seriousness of his/her injuries. The time immediately following the explosion is a common time for the victim to reach out for help. The police may be called and/or the victim may contact a friend or shelter for advice and assistance.

#### **Phase Three: Gifts and Apologies or "Honeymoon Period"**

The abusive partner is often very apologetic in this phase and seeks forgiveness from the victim. Gifts are given and empty promises are made that the abuse will never happen again. The victim wants to believe that the abusive partner's loving behavior during this phase is proof that the violence will not continue.