

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION: CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The cycle of violence, developed by Lenore Walker in 1979, is a three-stage framework that can be used to understand the cyclical behaviour of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. This model is revised here to include five stages.

The Five Stages in the Cycle of Violence:

STAGE 1: Build-up Phase – Tension builds within the perpetrator for various reasons (such as family pressures, work stresses or his own thought patterns) and his behaviour becomes more aggressive and intense regardless of how hard the victim tries to calm him. Other individuals and couples have a range of reactions to this tension which do not include the use of violence. Because of his physical strength and his realistic and frightening threats to hurt her, the woman feels that she is under her husband's control. His verbal attacks weaken her even further.

STAGE 2: Explosion Phase – A violent outburst occurs. These outbursts are likely to intensify over time. After the assault, the husband enters the...

STAGE 3: Remorse/Forgiveness Phase – He may feel ashamed or guilty and afraid of the consequences. However, he will usually deny or understate the violence and refuse to take responsibility for his actions. He may claim that she is responsible for the violence because she provoked him, because she deserved it or because he was out of control and did not realise what he was doing. Unfortunately, the woman often believes this "reasoning" because to admit otherwise would be to acknowledge the potentially dangerous situation she (and perhaps the children) are living in.

STAGE 4: Pursuit Phase – If she leaves him or withdraws physically or emotionally following the violent incident, he will usually try extremely hard to win her back. This is also known as the "Buy-Back" Phase because he will try to buy back his partner by showering her with extravagant gifts, being loving and attentive, and promising that he will never hurt her again. She may return, wanting to believe that he has changed. If she still refuses to go back, he may resort to threats and more violence. He may threaten to make life as difficult as possible for her regarding their property, finance, children, relatives, etc. This is the time at which most domestic murders occur and she may return out of fear. Alternatively, he may act helpless, saying that he cannot cope without her and threaten suicide if she does not come back to him. Many women return, feeling needed or that they must protect him from harming himself. The couple move into the...

STAGE 5: Honeymoon/Romantic Ideal Phase – If a reconciliation occurs (having come so close to separation and destruction) the couple may experience a very intense, intimate relationship where neither wants to remember the pain of the violence and earlier difficulties are denied. He may be communicative and responsive to her needs and she hopes – or believes – that he has changed. Unfortunately, in violent relationships, the cycle inevitably continues as the underlying issue of control reappears and the relationship weakens again under the growing weight of tensions.

