DEALING WITH ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
One in three women will experience at least one physical assault by a partner.
The most prevalent age range of women that suffer violence from a partner is 19-29.
Mark Evans, Ph. D., reported that in Oregon, 90% of domestic violence victims are white, 47% have at least some college education, and 43% have household incomes of at least $35,000.
Domestic violence is not limited to one particular race, one education level, or one income level. Depending on the section of our country, the racial majority in that section, the level of college attainment of most people in that section, and the income level of most people in that section correlate with the majority of people who suffer domestic violence.
Some relationships are mutually abusive.

Most abusive relationships have an imbalance of power. In other words, one is the aggressor and the other is the submitter.

Abuse can take different forms:

- Physical attacks (hitting, kicking, slapping, choking, biting, throwing things, rape (whether married or not))
- Verbal attacks (yelling, sarcasm)
- Emotional attacks (put downs, coercing)
Signs of Abuse

- Constant put downs or statements that show a lack of appreciation for one’s worth or ability.
- Controlling behavior; for example, telling one’s partner what will be done instead of discussing it and deciding together.
- Intense jealousy of friends, family, or other outside social contact, and trying to isolate one’s partner.
- Yelling, shouting, and intimidation.
Interrogating one’s partner about time spent apart from the relationship; for example, wanting to know exact details of what happened, who the partner was with, and where he/she went.

Feeling threatened and intensifying the abuse when one’s partner begins to move toward autonomy or independence; for example, getting a better job, going back to school, making new friends, or seeking counseling.

Demanding or coercing sex when one’s partner is not interested, AKA rape. This applies even if the partners are married.
SIGN OF ABUSE

- Borrowing money without repaying it or taking things without asking and not returning them.
- Destroying the property of one’s partner; for example, sentimental items, keying his/her car.
- Physical abuse or the threat of physical harm.

Individuals who abuse others are sometimes addicted to substances like alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription medications. They may also have other addictive behaviors.
Interestingly, he/she often depends on his/her partner for his/her own sense of self-esteem.

Sometimes, he/she expects his/her partner to do things that he/she should do for him/herself; for example, putting on his/her shoes, getting him/her a drink.

He/she often feels powerless in the larger world, so the relationship may be the only place where he/she feels a sense of power or control.
In trying to maintain a sense of control, power, and self-esteem, an abusive person will sometimes tear down his/her partner’s sense of self-worth and abilities.

Often, because of his/her own feelings of low self-worth and fears of abandonment, an abuser will do things to try to keep his/her partner in a dependent, fearful, and diminished state so his/her partner will not believe that he/she can leave him/her.
STEPS FOR CHANGE FOR ABUSERS

- Taking a deep breath, focusing on your body, and walking away from your partner can help you to cool down when you are feeling angry.
- Fear and hurt usually lie beneath the anger. Anger is often used to mask these more vulnerable feelings.
Realize that you may drive your partner away through angry outbursts instead of gaining a sense of control.

You might try using intense physical activity, like exercise or sports, to redirect your anger so that you won’t hurt others.

Writing down your thoughts and feelings in a journal when you become angry may help to work out the anger.
When you feel hurt by something your partner says or does, don’t assume that he/she meant to hurt you. Your feelings may be a reflection of your own insecurities.

Seek out help from friends and others to help you change.

Working with a counselor can help you learn to express your feelings so that you don’t hurt or belittle your partner.

Go to an anger management workshop or join an anger management group.
Partners of abusive people often “enable” the behavior. Examples include:

- Taking care of the abusive partner, making excuses for him/her, or just going along with the pattern of abuse.
- Pretending that a problem does not exist or believing that things will just automatically get better without help.
Putting up a front to outsiders that all is well when it clearly is not. Covering up for the abusive partner when he/she makes messes and outbursts; for example, intervening for him/her at work; apologizing for starting the fight; fixing broken doors, windows, or other things; putting on make-up to cover up bruises that he/she inflicted.
“Walking on egg shells” to try to avoid getting hurt and to try to keep the peace.

Doing everyday tasks for the abuser that most adults should do for themselves.

Enabling behavior can be a sign of poor self-esteem. Taking care of one’s partner physically or emotionally can make one feel needed or loved.
Subconsciously, the enabler may feel that unless he/she can serve and provide for others, no one could ever love and accept him/her for who he/she is.

This is how abusers can often convince their partners that “no one else would want them.”

Understanding one’s relationship patterns can help break the cycle of being trapped in an unhealthy, unsupportive and mutually dependent relationship.
Positive Ways to Cope with an Abusive Relationship

- Avoid isolating from other relationships.
- Talk to others if you believe your partner is abusive. Other people can give you their view.
- Check on resources that can help people who are in abusive relationships.
- Find your “safe place” to go to if your partner becomes violent.
POSITIVE WAYS TO COPE WITH AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships through self-help books.
- Talk to a professional counselor or a trusted friend to identify what may be causing you to stay in an abusive relationship.
- Start to identify people in your life that could serve as a support system for you—to prevent you being alone should you choose to leave your abusive partner.
Choose not to dwell on past failures. Instead, focus on the present and on planning a brighter future for yourself.

Source for this workshop:
Article, “Abusive Relationships,” by Mark Evans, Ph.D., University of Oregon Counseling Center.
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We hope that you have gained some valuable information from this workshop.

Please print the evaluation that is located on the TRiO website (you may do this for free in the TRiO Lab), fill it out, and return it to Patricia Nicholas, Rm. 114, Bldg. B; Charlene Minus, Rm. 110, Bldg. B; or to staff in the TRiO Lab. You will be given credit for doing a workshop this semester. Thank you!