

## CHAPTER 1: THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

There are choices we have, and steps we can take, to help change the messages we have learned about masculinity. Yet each step towards change can set off an internal alarm and bring back old messages.

Many times, I have thought I'm ready to risk a change in my behaviour. In the next moment, I have found a reason to stay with what I'm used to. I tell myself I'm really okay as I am. Maybe on occasions I have been. I have even avoided the opportunity to explore that.

*(The Prance Of Men, Allan Marriott, p. 113)*

In this chapter we will explore the process that men go through when they change unhelpful patterns of behaviour. You will be able to read other men's stories, and see how they began to more fully understand what got in the way or restrained them from changing their behaviour, even though they desperately wanted their abusive behaviour to stop. You will then be making an informed decision. Many men find it hard to face up to what they have done to others. They think that by ignoring what is happening the situation will somehow come right. Or they think that they can do it on their own. This is not surprising because men are taught to be self-reliant; to work things out for themselves and to not admit failure. In my work I have assessed many men who don't accept my invitation to explore these issues further but insist they can do it their own way. 'What they end up doing is more of the same old behaviour to fix the problem, and find themselves more stuck in the Old Rule Book than ever. They usually come back at some stage and agree to try it my way after more harm has been done to others.'

### The Process of Change

The process of change is not as complex as some people make it out to be. In this book I present a framework that I believe can be applied across a wide range of unhelpful behaviours.

Often people who go to counselling are not empowered to develop their own resources to resolve problems. So whenever anything goes wrong they need to take themselves back. While at times this is important, I also believe that many people have their own skills, commitment and resources to work through the difficult issues in their lives. But firstly, we need to understand something about change itself.

Our lives are in a constant state of change. One of my favourite sayings is 'Change is the only constant.' Whenever we change, part of us becomes excited and determined, while another

part of us fears what it may mean and wants to remain the same. Even when we are strongly determined to be different, there exists a part of us that wants to keep things the same.

This idea is embodied in a French proverb: 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose', meaning: 'The more things change, the more they remain the same'. Two very important questions I always ask myself when a person, couple or family are telling me about a certain problem are: 'What is getting in the way of stopping this problem?' and 'What is required to change it?'

As you will see, when you try to change any behaviour you may find that your old patterns of interaction and communicating, beliefs, and behaviours get in the way and hinder a different action. Look at the following story and consider what is going on.

*Mary came to see me one day with her two children, John (aged 12) and Beth (aged 10). Mary was separated and having a hard time of it on a very limited income. Beth was becoming very withdrawn and there were concerns about her lack of friends. Other children were picking on her during interval and lunch times, at which point John would rescue her. It had got to the stage where John and Beth would spend all interval and lunchtime together.*

*Because John was about to change schools, Beth's behaviour was becoming worse. In many ways John's caring and taking care of Beth made the problem worse, robbing Beth of her ability to stand up for herself. John had been told by his grandmother that he was the man in the house and he needed to protect Beth and Mary. He had taken this to heart and was carrying out this manly role at Beth's and his own expense.*

*We looked at this pattern of behaviour and whether or not Beth would need to rely on John for protection all her life. Beth thought she could go it alone. With her family she practised ways of defending herself from the attacks of the other pupils.*

*Beth came to a subsequent family session with a big smile on her face. She had gotten angry at one of the girls who had put her down and had stood up to her. Beth had told this girl that it didn't feel very good being got at and asked her how she would feel if she was the target of abuse. As things are apt to happen, Beth is now seen in the company of these other girls. And John is free to spend his time with his male friends.*

You will now see that it is very easy to slip into patterns of behaviour that don't help in the sorting out of problems. Often it requires a fresh look at a problem from a new or different viewpoint in order to make a change. Remember, the willingness to change will always be opposed by the fear of or resistance to change.

As you change you will progress through a series of levels that helps make sense of the situation in which you find yourself (see page 4). At Level 0 there is an unwillingness to acknowledge that change is necessary, with an intense effort to shift responsibility or blame others. You may be unaware that a real problem exists. Others may be aware of the problem and may have been telling you about it for some time, but either you don't want to hear or you don't believe it is such a big issue. You may find yourself stuck with patterns of behaviour that are unhelpful, and you do more of the same old behaviour to resolve the problem. This only makes the problem worse.

At some point you will begin to recognise that something isn't working. You will begin to search for possible explanations. When you reach this stage you have begun the process of change. You may want to know why you act in certain ways in certain situations. In fact,

## The Building Blocks of Change

Level  
0

**Refusing to acknowledge our part in the problem**

Level  
1

**Understanding our patterns of abusive behaviour**

- Impact on others
- Impact on self

Level  
2

**What stops change**

- Shifting responsibility
- Restraints to change
- Facing our part of the problem

Level  
3

**Understanding origin of patterns of abuse**

- Family of origin patterns
- Our own abuse
- The old rule book: male expectations and conditioning

Level  
4

**Deciding on a non-abusive lifestyle**

- Short-term and long-term costs and benefits

Level  
5

**Relating to other men, women and children in non-abusive ways**

- Developing a rule book
- The Respect Test
- Towards intimate and respectful relationships
- Responsibility for our own emotional lives
- Communicating honestly
- Dealing with jealousy
- Solving problems

Level  
6

**Healing the damage done by abusiveness**

- Apologies
- Resigning from the abuse club

Level  
7

**Maintaining our changes**

- Developing support systems
- Building non-abusive lifestyles
- Challenging systems and structures that encourage abusive lifestyles
- Sharing our story with others
- Developing a clear safety plan

exploring your part in the problem invites an exploration of many aspects of yourself, your relationships with others, and past experiences.

At Level 1 you are seeking information. You have not yet committed yourself to making changes and embracing a non-abusive lifestyle. After this search for understanding you will contemplate the options available to help resolve the particular problem.

Having sought reasons for your current behaviour, you will need to understand what gets in the way of change. This is Level 2. Recognising how you have shifted the responsibility for your actions onto others (something we've all done) and the blocks that may get in the way of change is important if you are to make this journey without returning to the old ways.

Level 3 helps you explore where you have learnt these patterns of unhelpful behaviour. Sometimes it is from families; sometimes from the society around us. More often than not it is a combination of both. By being aware of your patterns or traditions you can make different decisions and break with the old rules, which probably haven't worked too well anyway.

After you have the information about the range of possible options available to resolve the issues that face you, it is decision time. The choice is about whether you are happy with how you are or whether you want to change some aspects of your behaviour, thoughts or beliefs.

I always believe it is important for people to feel fully in control of their change process. There are always implications, whether you decide to stay the same (others may decide to leave) or whether you decide to change. Making this decision relates to Level 4 of the change process. Some men decide the costs of change are too high. In order to cope with the new information and to live comfortably with themselves, these men revert back to Level 0, trying to convince both themselves and others that they don't have a problem or that it is everyone else's problem. If men take this option they become even more entrenched in the Old Rule Book. This is a dangerous decision, both for yourself and others.

### *Questions to Ponder*

- If I decide I won't change, what would I need to do to convince myself that abusive behaviour is okay?
- Are others more likely to stick around if I stay the same or if I change?

If you decide to take on the challenge of the next step you enter Level 5, which involves experimenting with very concrete and different ways to be with others, and all the obstacles and risks which that entails. This action stage can be exciting, and you will quickly see how different responses bring about different reactions in others. Many men wonder why they didn't learn this 'stuff years ago; it seems so simple. They discover that others stop being afraid of them in time, with fear being replaced by trust and respect. It takes a strong man to stand up against entrenched patterns of behaviour and make real changes.

You might feel good about yourself when you change, but others may still be hurting. To truly change you will need to heal some of the damage done to others. Level 6 looks at how to go about this process. This is different from saying sorry. Men say that all the time but continue to act in the same old ways. Making genuine apologies and resigning from the 'Abuse Club' are necessary tasks to clearly demonstrate your commitment to being different. Sometimes, however, it is too late to repair damaged relationships.

Maintaining changes can be hard. Old patterns can hold on for some time and threaten to re-emerge. Having friends, partners and support to maintain changes remains one of the most important parts of the whole process. If you are able to maintain a position of change for a reasonable period of time, then the change will remain. This is Level 7 material.

*A participant in one of my groups, Kerry, told me that he found the old patterns of abusive behaviour beginning to re-emerge in his relationship with his wife, Beth, six months after a programme of change. His first response was to find his notes and read through them again. That reminded him of his issues, what decisions he was making to be abusive, and to be aware of his old patterns. He was adamant that he didn't want his old story to re-emerge and destroy the trust that was slowly being rebuilt in his relationship.*

If change isn't maintained, relapse into past behaviours occurs. Relapse is a return to the behaviour of abusing someone.

Before men relapse they have to ignore many of the signs that indicate their old patterns are re-emerging. You will learn to recognise these early warning signs, giving yourself time to work out strategies on how to avoid these behaviours.

This book is based around this journey of change. Each stage has different questions and exercises to work through. Often men are very task oriented; getting to the end seems like the goal. But change is an on-going business, and it is what happens along the way that is the most important part. It is vital that you take your time in working through this material. Don't move on to the next stage until you have worked through all the exercises and issues of the previous stage. Often, others will still feel afraid of you while you come to grips with behaviour that is abusive. Work out clearly how you will ensure others' safety while you work through your issues.

### ***Questions to Ponder***

- Look at the building blocks of change on page 4.

Which level would you place yourself on in the journey of change?

- If you have been abusive towards others for some time, chances are they will feel afraid of you. What will you do to ensure they are safe while you embark on this journey of change? The next time you think you are going to hurt someone physically or emotionally will you remove yourself from the situation or make them take care of their own safety? Will you let others around you know how you feel about a particular situation or will you keep it hidden to yourself?
- Many men tell me they have made lots of promises in the past to change abusive behaviour, only to become abusive at some later point. Saying sorry becomes a hollow gesture. How will others know when you are safe and abuse free?
- How will working hard on this journey demonstrate to others that this time your motivation is genuine and that you want to make real changes?
- Will others respect you more, or less, when they see you taking responsibility for yourself and not shifting the blame on to them?

## The Stories of Four Men

I would like you to meet four men. They are ordinary men, no different from you and I; they have grown up with a clear set of guidelines about how to act or react in certain situations. As you read their stories try, as they have done, to make sense of what's happening in their lives.

*John was stopped one day by a traffic officer for speeding. He works as a sales rep so is out on the road a lot. He covers a lot of kilometres and at times makes a decision to exceed the speed limit. On this occasion, John felt really angry and was confused about how to respond when stopped and given a ticket.*

*Harry had started playing squash with his partner, Jane. They often arranged to meet after work and have a game on their way home. On one occasion Harry was late. He chose to ignore Jane when she tried to express her annoyance at having to wait for him. After getting tired early in the game, Harry got Jane in a headlock and jumped up and down in the middle of the squash court.*

*Steve was at a party with his new girlfriend, Suzanne. He saw Suzanne talking to Alex, one of his friends. Suzanne was chatting away, obviously enjoying her conversation. Steve went quiet. He felt jealous, made a choice to drink more and became drunk, created a scene, and told Alex to step outside. Suzanne was embarrassed and went home alone.*

*Henry went to his local office of the Department of Social Welfare to see what income assistance he could get since he had been made redundant. After waiting for what seemed like an eternity he was seen by a young person who treated him rather rudely. Henry became abusive in the interview and stormed out.*

John, Harry, Steve and Henry were struggling to understand and find acceptable ways to sort out issues that were important to them. Each had made choices that made a difficult situation worse. Each could have made other choices that would have moved them to some level of resolution of the problem.

Each man's story is different, but there are areas of similarity. Behind the obvious story are many less obvious stories. My challenge to you, as it has been with these men, is to look at the other issues and resist the temptation to argue about whether their feeling of anger was valid or not. John, for example, had just left his family yet again to go on the road. He had just argued with Jackie (his wife) about missing their son's birthday party. John's job meant that he missed a lot of family occasions, something he felt guilty about. The argument had made him late for his first appointment in another town. His anxiety about being late, and his unresolved family issues, were preying on his mind when he heard the siren of the traffic officer's car behind him. Being stopped was yet another delay.

John was confused about the source of his anger. From the outside we can take a few guesses. The traffic officer seems in many ways to be the least of John's worries. The traffic officer may, however, be on the receiving end of John's anger and frustration – his failure to be the kind of dad he wants to be, his sense of failure at not being able to keep his appointment, the fears that had arisen from his last argument with his wife. While getting away felt comfortable at one level, John wanted very much to have a good marriage and feared that Jackie would leave.

Harry hated to lose. He had grown up in a family where the men always won or they were wimps. From his father he also learnt that men are clearly in charge and that wives shouldn't complain. Harry hated his father, and whenever he saw him there was a disagreement over

something. Jane could see the similarities between Harry and his dad. Harry did not want to hear Jane when she pointed these out. His anger at being like his father was therefore directed at Jane. Steve's last girlfriend had gone off with his best friend. He wasn't taking any chances this time. He had trouble putting his feelings and thoughts into words. Steve was afraid that Suzanne would not stay around because he didn't see himself as very lovable. Although Suzanne had told him she liked his quiet caring, Steve had trouble believing her comments. Steve's mother had been killed in a car crash when he was eight and he had gone to live with his aunt. Steve had tried hard to protect himself from the possibility of being abandoned again. He therefore tried to minimise the risk of this happening in his relationships. Steve ended up behaving in a way that would result in destroying his relationship with Suzanne, the very thing he was desperately trying to avoid. Henry was made redundant from a job that he had worked in for 25 years. Given his age, he had difficulty finding another job and had set himself up in his own business. This was not going very well, as business in his line of work was very quiet. As a last resort Henry went to the local Department of Social Welfare. He felt like a failure in not being able to provide adequately for his family, something he had done well for the past 25 years of his working life. The combination of having to swallow his pride and ask for assistance was hard enough for Henry. How he was dealt with added to an already difficult situation.

What can we learn from John, Harry, Steve and Henry's stories? Each man identified his anger as part of the problem; in fact, each of these men has come through one of the programmes I run. Clearly, each situation was much more complex than first presented. While saying that anger is the issue (I call this the dominant story) there appears to be no simple explanation for these men acting the way they did. I will argue throughout this book that getting angry is but one tactic men use to gain control of situations where they feel or fear being powerless.

Like these four men, all men are bound to have difficulties in relationships with partners, children, friends and other people from time to time. The challenge of relationships is how to resolve these differences and keeping the relationship safe while dealing with difficult issues. Let's face it, life would be pretty dull if there weren't some degree of difference. When we are close to people we are bound to disagree on some issues, feel passionate about certain beliefs, and want people to take us seriously.

The question is not why John, Harry, Steve and Henry acted in the ways they did, but rather what were the ideas or beliefs and patterns of behaviour that stopped them from acting differently? This does not excuse them from being responsible for their actions and the impact of those actions on others. Each of our men came to learn about being responsible for their issues and decisions. This helped them to make sense of their situations and learn skills to deal with the difficulties of life for which they felt ill-prepared. These four men made a decision to be different.

## **Making Sense of Our Lives**

Over time you will have many experiences that help you make sense of and inform you about your life. These personal experiences add up to your life story, which is constantly evolving and adapting to changes in yourself, people around you and your environment. In your life you will have dominant stories that sometime hide parts of your own story or other people's stories.

‘While at this moment you might not feel it, everyone has considerable control over the choices they make that affect how this life story will be played out. Some things you may have little power to influence. The challenge is to distinguish between what you can change and what you can’t.

Much of day-to-day life is made up of patterns of behaviour. Think for a moment about the many behaviours that you do each day without even thinking. Which way do you drive to work? Go to the dairy? What is your morning routine? What do you do at lunchtime? How do you spend your evenings?

I expect that you, like others, are a social creature in that you relate not just to yourself but to others around you. You will have developed patterns of relating to others. Some of these patterns will be healthy, others unhealthy. How you act, think and feel will have an impact on others, just as how others act, think and feel will have an impact on you. If you are to change your personal patterns of behaviour, you need to change your patterns of relating to others, particularly those who are close to you.

In many ways this book is about those patterns of behaviour that influence your story. If you have learnt a blueprint or map of abusive ways to relate to others (the Old Rule Book), chances are you will respond in abusive ways when under pressure. It is easy to become stuck with these patterns if they are repeated enough, although this may not be what you want. It may feel like these patterns of behaviour have taken over and occupy the driver’s seat in your life. Over time, behaviour patterns can become very resistant to change. This is because patterns of behaviour are often reinforced; you get what you want in the short-term and avoid the underlying issues.

The reasons why patterns of behaviour begin and why they continue can be very different. This is often very confusing. Some people head off to find the cause of how they turned out a certain way, only to be disappointed that, in knowing this, the pattern of behaviour remains. This can make changing patterns of behaviour confusing, challenging and damn hard work. Despite all this, it is possible to change them.

I believe there are three steps to change. Once you understand these you are in a powerful position to change unhelpful behaviours. This is not just related to self-righteous anger and abusiveness, but also to other behaviours that you want to turn your back on.

The first step is to identify your stories or patterns of behaviour. Often, many of these stories are hidden and may be so familiar that they seem normal. Understanding where these patterns come from enhances the ability to build up a picture of your life as it has been in the past and how it is now. Men who come to me talk about all the things they have tried in order to change these stories. The intention is very genuine. It is important to be clear that even if you have been on the receiving end of violence and abuse as a child, that this does not give you permission to be abusive as an adult. Being abused as a child does not cause violence as an adult. However, it may make a person more at risk of carrying on these patterns. A significant number of men do break these patterns and make the decision to not carry on the family tradition of abuse.

Identifying our story involves exploring where our patterns come from, then deciding whether they are relevant for today or whether they have served their usefulness and are now redundant. I have worked with many men who have decided to re-author their lives (change their dominant story) and begin new, exciting and different stories.



The second step is to understand what stops or restrains us from changing these patterns of behaviour. Patterns of behaviour and other options can appear almost impossible to change. The more we do a certain behaviour, the more entrenched it becomes over time.

I have worked with men who have tried everything they can think of to change patterns of behaviour. They have tried to not get angry, to not talk and express concerns, and even to pretend that everything is okay when it isn't. Ultimately, all of these strategies have failed. The importance of identifying the restraints or blocks to change is a vital part of the change process.

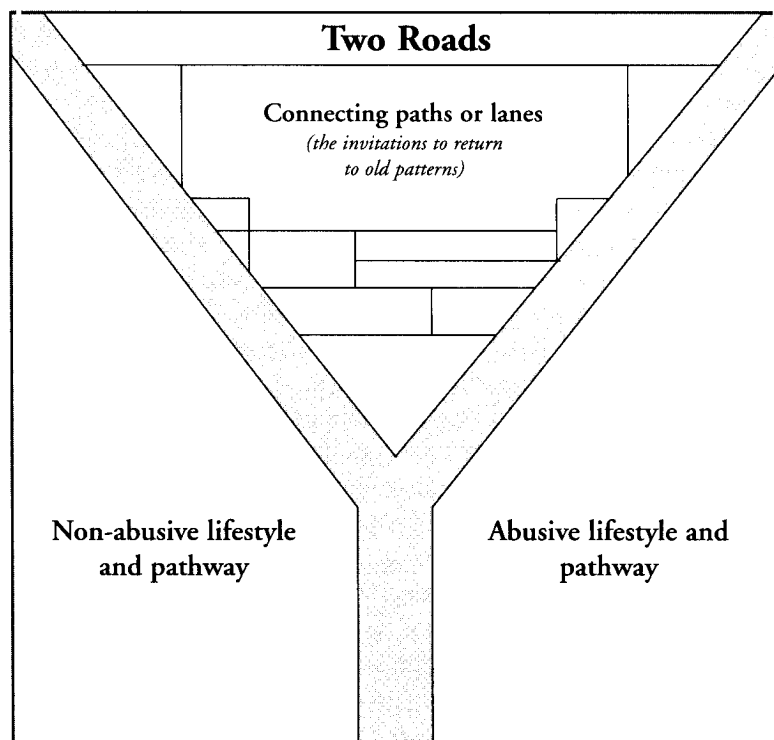
The third step is to develop the skills for dealing with situations in different ways. This requires increasing our repertoire of skills and ideas, as well as remaining open to new ideas as they emerge.

Once these three steps are in place it allows new doors to be opened. It is then possible to experiment with different behaviours that promote safety, trust and respect, instead of continuing with behaviours that breed fear. So, let's explore your readiness to embark on this journey.

## A Question of Readiness

Very soon you will begin your journey of change in earnest. Before you do, however, it is important that you are adequately prepared. You may be at a crossroad in your life, an important time to decide about the type of lifestyle you want to have.

The following diagram outlines the two pathways as I see them. It is common for men to travel down the abusive pathway believing that it is natural and okay. Very few men escape from the strong messages about being 'a man's man' in our society. And this man may believe that it is okay to be abusive to others, and that violence will solve problems in some circumstances.



One road is like a fairly well-worn main road in that it carries a great deal of traffic. Many men go down this road not often knowing the reasons why – this is the Old Rule Book based on disrespect and fear. The other is not as frequently travelled. This is the New Rule Book which demonstrates respect and equality. This book is about making the decision to travel down the less well-worn of the two roads. It may not be as widely travelled, but is much more interesting.

When you are preparing for a trip to a place you haven't been before you usually sort out what you will need in order to have an enjoyable time and return safely. You may have a checklist in your head of what you need to take. You might come up with the following:

work out where I'm going to stay;	first aid kit
food	check the weather forecast
maps	money
warm clothes	tell someone where I'm going
raincoat	check the car is okay – petrol, tyres (including the spare), oil, warrant of fitness

This becomes your survival kit for the time you are away.

### *Exercise*



In the same way as you would prepare to go on a trip, make a list of the resources (physical and personal) you will need to make your journey down the road of a non-abusive lifestyle a successful and safe one. Add your ideas to the list I have started.

- Courage – to face the parts of my story that are painful and difficult.
- Commitment – to myself, my family, and to others who support me.
- Support – from others for the changes I will make.
- Determination – to keep going even when I want to stop.
- Listener or friends – to share my achievements with.
- Diary or record book – to plot my progress.

As men begin to make changes in their lives it is often difficult to recognise what is different. Often it is easy to be blinded to the changes in the same way that it is possible to not appreciate the full impact of your behaviour and how it affects others. Some men expect miraculous change overnight. I think you will appreciate that this rarely happens, and that making changes requires persistence, patience and hard work.

It is easy to become stuck with one particular view of a situation, making it hard to see when a person acts or thinks in a different way. In order to appreciate the different 'news' or information about a situation, some form of progress map is helpful, in the same way that a road map helps you to know where you have come from and where you are going. One thing many men find helpful is to keep a simple diary with them and note down what they

understand about their reactions in certain situations. Comparing how they used to act with how they now act is a sure measure of change.

Take a moment to think about some other behaviour that you have managed to put behind you. For example: have you quit smoking; given up or slowed down your drinking; gone to a gym to keep yourself fit and healthy; taken a night class to learn more about something that interests you? What helped you sustain this change until it became a permanent part of your life?

### *Questions to Ponder*

- How will I and others know when I am ready to leave the old road and embark on this journey?
- What will they notice that will convince them of my determination?
- What will be different in that I may have promised these changes in the past?
- What will I do to make sure the changes made by myself and others are noticed?

It is important to tell others what you are doing. Expecting them to guess or notice will only bring disappointment and breed fear and confusion. Informing others begins the process of developing your respectful relationship with them as it gives them the chance to understand what is going on. It can also be an important safety strategy when you live with other people.

I have found that when men fully face up to their responsibility for their behaviour, they can then, and only then, begin to reclaim their sense of pride and self-respect. Instead of carrying a sense of failure and hiding behind dishonesty, these men can stand tall, knowing they are being honest both with themselves and others.

Think of several people who might be prepared to act as your support team for this journey. They need to be people who will be able to encourage you, challenge you and spend time with you, discussing what you are now understanding about yourself. Don't choose someone to whom you have been abusive. They may feel afraid because of your past behaviour and may need to see some results before trusting once more. Many men believe that once they have embarked on a journey, then those around them should forget the past and also move on. This is far too early in the process. Non-abusive behaviour, and a willingness to listen, are the only things that will help heal the past hurt caused by abuse in a relationship.

*Julie (48) had for many years tried to persuade John (47) to do something about his abusive behaviour. John was not physically violent but verbally and emotionally abusive to her and their three children. This meant that he used put-downs, called Julie names, controlled who she had friendships with and was constantly criticising her. John's attitude when he entered the programme was that all of 'that' was behind them now and that they could move on. Julie was left wondering when he would become abusive again. Part of her wanted to trust that John would change, but she had heard it all before.*

*Julie needed John to maintain a concrete demonstration of changed behaviour before she could begin to rebuild trust with him. This was hard for John to hear, and it wasn't until he could fully appreciate the impact of his past broken promises that he could begin to understand Julie's position.*

Make contact with at least two people and ask them if they will act as your support team. They will want to know about what you are trying to do. Show them this book. If you can't find someone to make contact with, contact one of the many support programmes that may exist in your own community. A good starting point is to contact a Citizens Advice Bureau or a local health centre.

## My View of the World

Before moving on it is important for you to understand how I see the issues you are going to be dealing with. In the early days of work with men on issues of abuse towards others, we talked a great deal about anger, explaining it as the emotion that leads to violence. Think for a moment about the things men say – 'I lost control and hit her', 'If I get angry, I'll blow my stack', 'I've got a short fuse', 'I get mean when I'm angry', and so on.

If we accept this view we would expect violence to erupt all over the place – in the streets, at the office, on the bus, in restaurants; in fact any place where people are. But this public violence doesn't happen anywhere as often as private violence. Most abusive and violent behaviour occurs in our homes behind closed doors.

Those earlier explanations are not sufficient enough to explain the complex issues involved in understanding the range of behaviours used to maintain a sense of power, many of which are associated with anger. Over the years I have come to another understanding which I would like to share with you. This is the idea that men use anger as a way of maintaining or gaining power over others.

This use of anger gets men places, especially when people are afraid. Some men tell me an angry look is enough to instil fear into their children or partner. Others tell me they get their own way if they get angry enough. This, incidentally, will have nothing to do with the right or wrong of the situation; only that anger is an emotion most of us are afraid of; people will cower before someone who is angry, especially if past experience has taught them to be afraid of what might be said or what might happen to them.

Under the Old Rule Book many men have learnt while growing up to hide behind anger to gain control over people or a situation. This is tied very closely to ideas of winning and being on top. Self-esteem for many men is very closely tied to gaining respect of others, which they mistakenly believe will be demonstrated by obedience and an absence of criticism. Let's face it, getting angry in a situation works in the short term, particularly with people less powerful than ourselves. When men realise there are other choices on how to act they are in a strong position to act differently.

Another theory some men adhere to is known as the 'volcano theory of anger' – that is, anger builds to a point and ultimately explodes. On the outside this may appear to be how the situation works, but understanding anger and abuse is much more complex.

The volcano theory is not very useful for change in that it has a sense of a situation being predetermined and does not acknowledge all of the choices that men make when they become abusive to others. If you have been using one pattern of behaviour for a long time, you may become unaware of many of the choices you are making.

My view is clearly based on the idea that men frequently employ abusive behaviour as a tool to retain or regain control in a situation where they are afraid of losing. Equally, men can use other behaviours and emotions - sulking, helplessness, jealousy and annoyance - to control

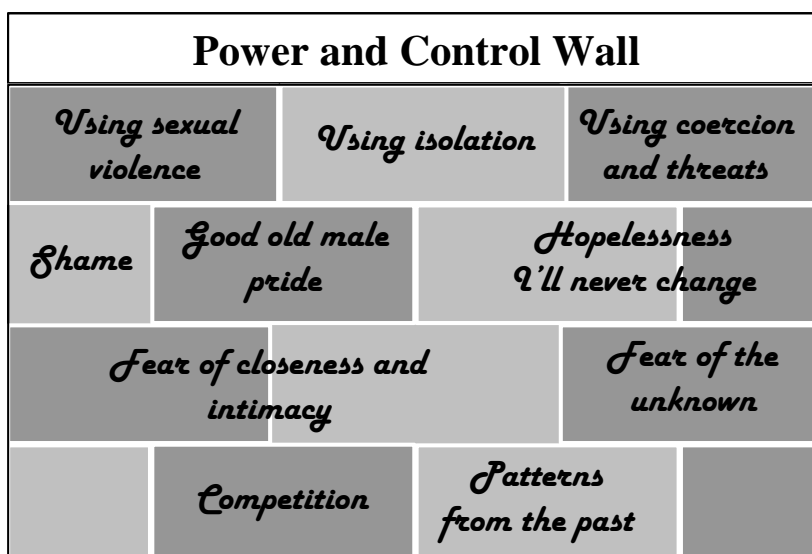
others. There are more. The challenge is to see anger or other controlling emotions for what they are. In time another story will replace the dominant story of anger

## Tactics Used to Control

Men can use a range of behaviours to control others. These, plus other controlling behaviours, are shown on the Power and Control Wall. They link together, supporting each other in much the same way that blocks in a wall do.

### Abuse Checklist

‘Work through the following list of behaviours from the abuse checklist, putting a tick next to the behaviours which you have carried out. Try it daily for a while.



### Emotional Abuse

- Calling a person names.
- Criticising appearance.
- Suggesting the other person is useless, incompetent.
- Calling others crazy, stupid.
- Using guilt, being sarcastic.
- Playing mind games.
- Keeping important information secret.
- Humiliating someone in front of others.
- Refusing to discuss issues.
- Ignoring, sulking, walking out, storming out.

**Using Bullying and Threats**

- Making threats and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt someone.
- Threatening to leave.
- Threatening to kill others.
- Threatening to kill yourself.
- Coercing others to drop charges.
- Threatening punishments.

**Being Intimidating**

- Using gestures, looks, actions that intimidate others.
- Smashing things.
- Destroying property.
- Abusing pets.
- Displaying weapons.
- Using stand over tactics.

**Being Economically Abusive**

- Keeping control of the money.
- Deciding on how money is used without consulting others.
- Preventing a partner getting a job.
- Forcing a partner to get a job.
- Making a partner ask for money.
- Being secretive or dishonest about expenses and income.

**Isolation**

- Controlling what the other person does.
- Controlling where they go.
- Controlling who they see.
- Controlling how long they spend anywhere.
- Sabotaging the plans of others.
- Being rude to the other person's friends.
- Being rude about the other person's friends.

**Avoiding Responsibility for What you Have Done**

- Making light of abuse.
- Not hearing/ignoring the concerns of others.
- Denying abuse ever happened.
- Shifting responsibility onto others.
- Blaming other factors - alcohol, stress, etc.

**Using Children**

- Using children to hurt, hassle.
- Harassing over access and custody.
- Using the children to relay messages.
- Threatening to take the children away.
- Making the other person feel guilty about the children.

**Physical Abuse**

- Hitting, slapping, punching.
- Pushing, shoving, tripping.
- Shaking, choking, throttling.
- Kicking, biting, burning, beating up.
- Pulling hair, spanking.
- Squeezing overly tightly, hurting deliberately.
- Hitting with an object, using a weapon.
- Throwing things at the person.

**Sexual Abuse**

- Having sex when the other person doesn't want to.
- Forcing sexual behaviour others don't like.
- Harassing sexually: unwanted touching, making sexual jokes, forcing someone to watch or view pornography.
- Withdrawing sexually.
- Threatening to go elsewhere for sex.

## Male Privilege

- Treating women like servants.
- Acting like ‘master of the castle’.
- Insisting on respect or treatment entitled to as a man.
- Sticking to strict traditional male/female roles.
- Forcing decisions and/or opinions onto others.
- Making big decisions without consulting others.
- Believing men are better decision-makers.

Now look at the behaviours you have marked. They describe the abusive things you have done. Many men find it hard to own up to the types and range of abusive behaviour they carry out. How will it be for you to own up to the behaviours that you do? Are you ready to own up to all of your behaviours or will you censor out certain bits? What will your new story look like?

You may be aware that you don’t have to be angry to carry out any of the behaviours you ticked above. Men tell me that, although they can say they are angry, in reality they carry out many of these behaviours without even getting aroused. It is when people refuse the invitation to play along with the Old Rule Book that men will start to engage in a process of change.

When a man’s abusive or violent behaviour and attitudes become part of any relationship, the situation can never be the same. There is always the question in others’ minds: ‘When will it happen again?’ They often become overly watchful and cautious, and this wariness can create an even greater sense of discomfort. The decision at this stage in the process is to understand that much of the tension that exists in a relationship is related to the abusive behaviour that has occurred. The impact accumulates over time. Informing others of your decision and determination to change is important at this stage.

## Summary

In this chapter I have covered information about the process of change. There are many levels to progress through before it is possible once and for all to put self-righteous anger and abusive patterns of behaviour behind. Each level is different. Each level has its own distinct challenges. The rest of this book works through this process of change in a step-by-step manner. The process is the road map we will be using over the next part of this particular journey.

You have now looked at the framework that I find useful when embarking on the process of change. You will be aware of how I see the issues, and will have begun to understand something of your own behaviours that fit into the abusive category. This is sometimes hard to accept. Are you ready to move on?