

CHAPTER TWO: BOGGED DOWN WITH OLD PATTERNS

If she doesn't like who I am, it's kind of her to say so.
What a pity ... if only she were different, we could have stayed friends. But I can't abide jealousy! Does she think I'm her personal property; does she decide who I spend time with, and when?
I told her clearly who I am and what I think and how she can trust me to love, even if that is not the I-love-you fakery she wants from me. No I-love-you's from me, Ms. Parrish. I will be true to myself, even though it costs me the joy-overflowing of every happy time we had together.

(Bridge Across Forever, Richard Bach, pp. 163—164)

It is sometimes easier to continue with old and familiar patterns of behaviour than to stand up and be different. In order to feel okay about how they act, men often cloak themselves in beliefs, stories and justifications that excuse abusive behaviour. In the quote above, Richard Bach is so protective of himself that he fears the very essence of what he strives for in relationships, and that is intimacy. When challenged about this, he comes up with all his reasons and excuses, and eventually blames the person who challenged him for what are essentially his issues.

Richard Bach finds himself at Level 0 in the levels of progress in change. This is the level where a person refuses to acknowledge that they need to change or that a problem exists. If you are reading this book then I am assuming that you have already passed Level 0 and want to work on Level 1.

This chapter relates to Level 1 of the process of change. By the end of this chapter you will be clear about your own patterns of abusive behaviour as well as the impact of your behaviour on yourself and others. Appreciating this impact can be a strong motivator for change because, as we will explore later, in order to continue with behaviours that hurt others, it is necessary to censor out (ignore or argue against) the short-term and long-term effects.

'Why do people act the way they do?' is a commonly asked question when trying to understand behaviour. A much more useful and helpful question to ask yourself is 'What stops me acting differently?' I will call the things that stop people acting differently 'restraints' because they interfere with or block our ability to change. The restraints operating for Richard Bach were his fear of closeness; his belief system that said he was okay and that the problem belonged to his partner, Leslie; and a pattern of behaviour in which he initiated

relationships, then distanced himself and looked for the nearest exit when the other person got too close.

Before you can even consider the idea of change you will need to recognise that something is a problem. If you are a typical changer, then it is likely that for some time you may have been unaware that a problem existed, or you just didn't want to acknowledge it. You may have then tried to minimise the effect that this problem has on yourself and others around you. In fact you may have actively blamed others for your difficulties and sought assistance for them to sort themselves out. Or you may have felt that the problem wasn't important enough to warrant your time or energy to change it. You may have looked around at other people who have a similar problem and felt that yours isn't too bad, yet.

If you reacted in the above ways, relax. This is a common reaction for men. In fact you may feel resistance and struggle against admitting that your behaviour is the problem. No one likes to admit that they are in the wrong or their behaviour is affecting others in a negative way. If you admit to having a problem, you are putting yourself in the position of having to make a decision about either changing it or living with it as it is. Either decision will cause discomfort.

It can be very difficult giving up a behaviour that you may have been doing for a long time. It raises questions about the values or beliefs that underpin and maintain your behaviour. Besides, there may be definite short-term payoffs for continuing some behaviours. These of course need to be balanced with the costs, something I will explore with you a little later.

The pattern of abusive behaviour that Frank is expressing in the following story had others feeling afraid of him. His relationship was about to end and he was doubting his ability to change.

Frank's Story

Frank (aged 35) came one day, distraught that his wife Jenny (aged 34) had walked out on him and gone to her mother. He was tearful, upset and desperate to be back with her. He asked me to contact her and talk to her; a request I refused. I asked Frank to tell me his story. This is what he told me:

'It all began when we were driving home from a family barbecue. Jenny was sitting in the back seat of the car with my sister, Mary. Jenny began to gossip to Mary about what had happened to one of our neighbours. I said "Here we go again", or something like that. It was meant to be a joke.

Things went quiet in the car. When we got home a couple of hours later Jenny told me she was upset by my comments. I told her it was only a joke but she didn't believe me. Things were pretty strained for the rest of the night. The next morning I had to go away for work for three days. I hate going away because I don't get on with the rest of the crew.

I was looking forward to coming home. On arriving home Jenny told me her cousin was in town [this couple lived in the country] and that she would really like to see her. I had just gotten home and here she was deciding her cousin was more important to be with than me.

I told her she'd have to hitchhike because there was not enough petrol in the car. Jenny became upset. At that moment I knew I had blown it. I said it was only a joke. Jenny brought up the situation of my previous joke in the car.

I felt cornered. The more I tried to convince Jenny that it was only a joke, the more heated the argument became. She just wouldn't accept my point of view. I got really furious and ended up hitting her, pushing her on to the floor, telling her she was stupid. I kicked her when she was on the floor. I told her to stop hassling me and to forget what I had said.

I walked down to the shop. When I got back she and the kids had gone.

[At this point in the interview Frank became tearful.]

Two days later I met with Jenny and Frank to hear more of the story. Perhaps there was a lot more to the story than I had heard from Frank. Jenny told me that she felt Frank didn't listen to her and ignored her opinions, that he became angry whenever she or the children disagreed with him. She said that although she loved Frank and didn't want the relationship to end, she was frightened for her own and the children's safety. Jenny had also begun, like many women in her situation, to question her own sanity and wonder if it was something about her that brought on this behaviour.

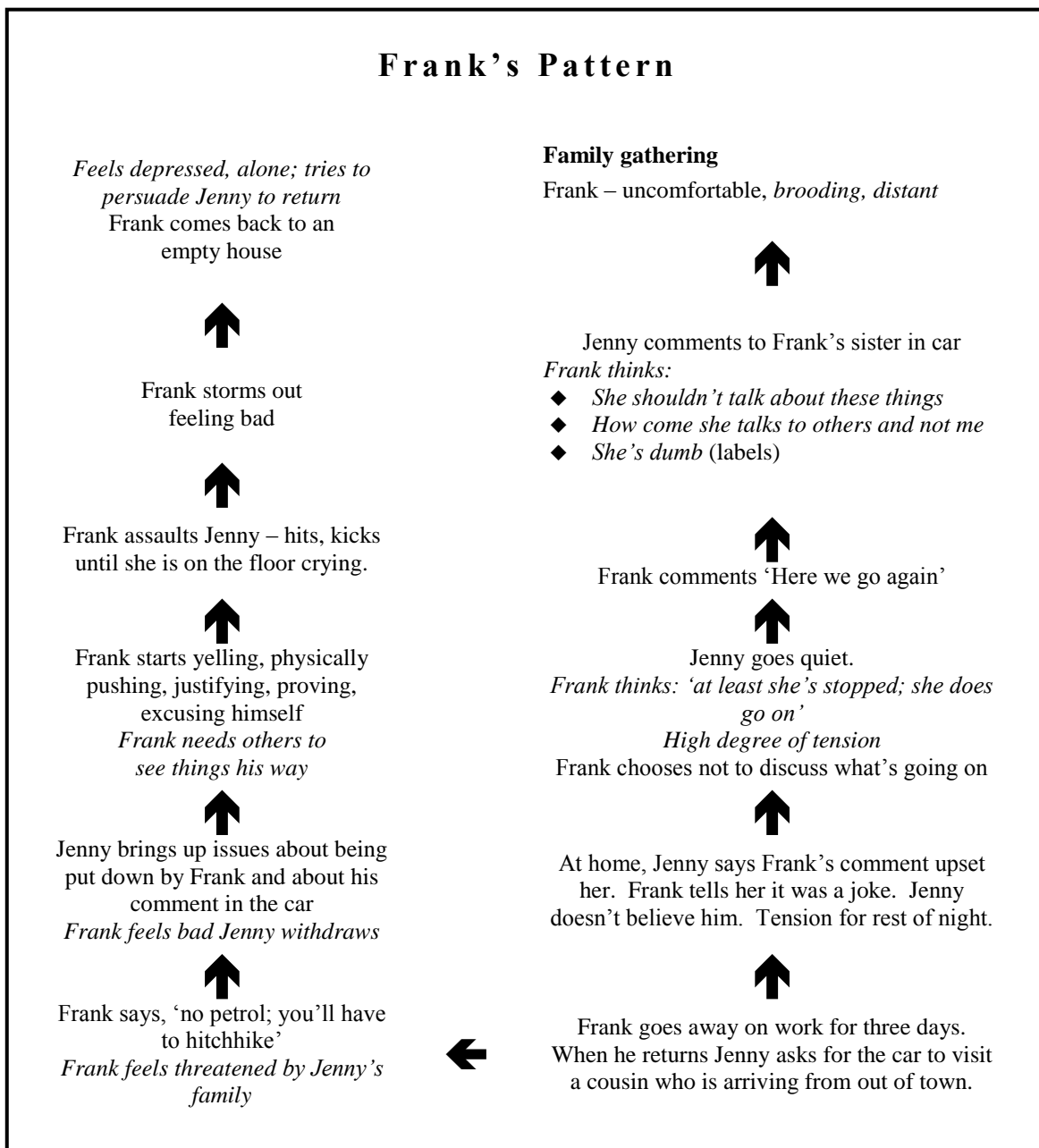
I asked Jenny in what way abuse had changed her and Frank's relationship. She said that she kept things from Frank so as to not upset him, that she tried to be pleasant to him when he was 'in a mood', and that she spent as much time doing things with the children as she could. She described becoming increasingly anxious when Frank was due to return home. For Jenny, relief came when Frank went away with his work. Jenny described her life with Frank as 'like walking on eggshells'. Much of this was new information to Frank; he had little understanding of what was happening to others within his family.

Abuse had not been part of the family she grew up in and Jenny was at a loss to understand why this was happening to her. Frank, however, grew up in a family where abuse was common. He related a situation in which he saw his enraged stepfather break down the toilet door to get at Frank's mother, who was hiding within. As a young boy this had a profound impact on Frank. He tried to protect his mother, the result being that he often became the target of his stepfather's violence.

Frank vowed and declared he would never be like his stepfather, but twenty years later he was aware that he was heading down a similar pathway. Frank feared that his own children were learning from him, and would carry on what seemed like becoming a family tradition of abuse.

Frank and Jenny's story is typical of the many stories I have heard. I have heard the desperation of men struggling with the impact of their behaviour on those around them; the pain and sadness of women wanting better relationships with men; and the difficulty men have in being responsible for the social and emotional climate in relationships.

On working with Frank it became apparent that he carried around with him very firm ideas on how he should behave in relationships, and how men and women should be in relationships. In other words he had a blueprint in place about how relationships and the people in them should act. Unfortunately for Frank, Jenny had a different blueprint. Frank's blueprint was based on issues of entitlement, expectation and the control over others. Frank had a habit of getting angry when things didn't go his way; a habit that didn't make him feel very good and



certainly didn't help his relationship with Jenny and their children. Separation was fast becoming the only viable option.

Frank's story was not an isolated incident in his relationship. Jenny had experienced Frank's abuse and violence many times before. Frank was not a bad man and like most men he was confused about hurting the people he cared about most in the world.

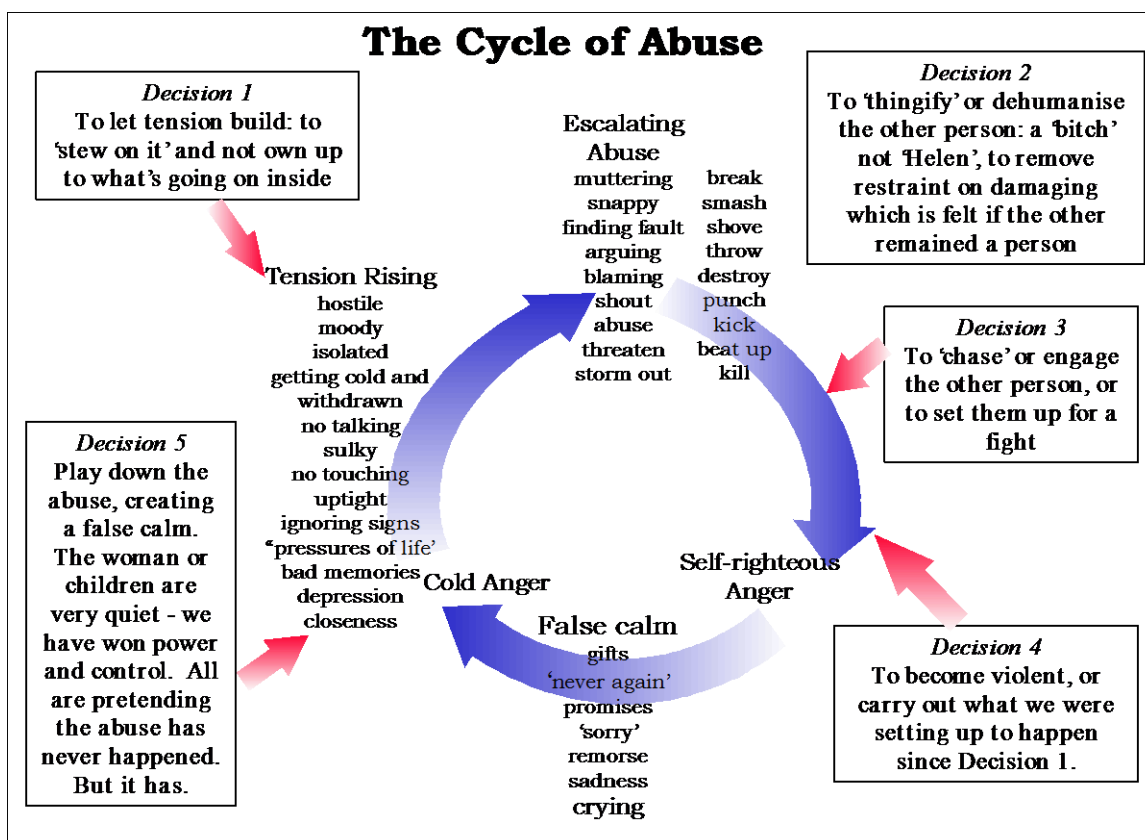
I have talked with men about the tendency to minimise, deny and tell only part of the story. I have included Frank's story for several reasons. Firstly, it gives us a clear pattern of behaviour that has been occurring over time. Secondly, it gives us a few indicators of the wider influences and it highlights the differences between his story and Jenny's story. If we break down Frank's story into a step-by-step sequence (see page 4) we begin to see the points where Frank could have made different choices.

The Cycle of Abuse

Frank’s pattern follows a very clear order He is blinded to much of this pattern of behaviour and the significance of the many and different decisions that he makes.

Over the years men have reported a consistent pattern of behaviour when they become abusive. The diagram opposite outlines five basic decisions in this pattern and is based on work done by Lenore Walker, a researcher who asked women on the receiving end of men’s abusiveness what steps they saw men go through. My colleagues and I have added to the model from our own experience.


The pattern or cycle begins with some degree of tension-building. Often there is little real talking or expression of what is really going on. Real communication stops. You can cut the air with a knife. People are on edge. Men often make up their minds about one view of the situation or issue, distorting the reality of what is going on. If they don’t check their perception of what’s going on with others, how can they know they are understanding the situation correctly? This is a time you might describe as being in a bad mood, or feeling hostile and isolated. Somewhere in this stage a decision is made to let the tension build, to stew on it and not own up to what is going on inside.



Shortly after, there is the next decision — to create distance from the other person. In order to feel okay about hurting people and justifying behaviour men often create a one-up! one-down situation. The easiest way to do this is to label the person — that is to call them names either privately or out loud. This reduces the person to an object and prevents the

abusing person from acknowledging the other valuable characteristics of that person. These labels are often based on characteristics of gender, race or class.

Exercise

 Underline from the following list all of the names you have used to put people down. Add any others you use to the list.

| | | |
|---------|-------------------|---------------|
| poof | dumb broad | nosey |
| slag | interfering bitch | loose |
| bitch | mole | cunt |
| black | prick | bastard |
| hori | chick | uppity |
| dame | dog | mongrel |
| whore | slut | virgin |
| frigid | tramp | iron maiden |
| target | fair game | piece of arse |
| trollop | girl | dumb blonde |
| hen | juicy | fuckwit |
| queer | homo | bossy |
| slob | bag | the cook |
| thick | bugger | nag |
| witch | lazy | slacker |
| nigger | brainless | useless |

Men report that the verbal name-calling gets worse as their self-intoxicating anger rises. For example, bitch becomes fucking bitch or something more derogatory. Name-calling and put-downs act to escalate a situation — that is, to make it worse, and it invites the other person to participate in the abuse.

One very simple and easy way to interrupt name-calling is to use the person's first name at all times. For example, instead of calling a partner a bitch, use her real name: Mary, Jane, Kath, and so on. Try it some time and be aware of the difference it makes to the discussion. James realised that:

'I can't do it the way I was doing it, I can't go around saying you silly bitch all the time ... to me that's an attitude change and a behavioural change ... I can't expect to get away with it. I need to respect my wife for who she is ... there's heaps of things I don't like about her but I have to respect her for what she is and who she is ... and try to understand she is a human being the same as me and she has got the right to her half of the bargain.'

The Old Rule Book teaches men to win at all costs. Men therefore find themselves making a decision to chase others either physically, emotionally or verbally. Have you ever been in the situation where the other person is not going to back down, no matter what? It becomes a win or lose battle with greater threats, intimidation, put-downs or abuse, escalating until someone or perhaps no one emerges a clear winner. Physical chasing refers to following a person and not giving them the opportunity to escape from your abusive confrontation. Have you ever

been in a situation where a disagreement goes from room to room or office to office? Verbal chasing, on the other hand, involves laying traps for people to fall into. It is finding the contradiction in what people say and putting them down for it.

Mark was an expert at this. He would put his partner Mary through the third degree when she was late home. He would find reasons to feed his anger by persistently asking Mary where she had been, whom she had talked to and what she had talked about. Mark would often put Mary down in public situations, particularly when they were out with friends. The more he harassed her, the more Mary withdrew. Mark interpreted this as Mary having something to hide. This is how Mark described what he did:

'I would use a lot of labelling ... it's all verbal ... a lot of chasing... you're useless, you stupid bitch ... a lot of putdowns, and it would go on for a long time ... an hour or a couple of hours ... my wife would go down to the bedroom and I would follow and stand in the doorway and go on and on ... this sort of thing. That would happen perhaps twice, three times a week.'

What Mark was describing was the link between emotional chasing and verbal chasing, which often go together. It is about attacking a person's self-esteem and not the issue at hand. When a person's belief in themselves is undermined they start to doubt themselves and their own abilities. So the person on the receiving end will come to feel responsible for the situation they are in and end up feeling like a victim. Most of us will have had experiences where we know our character has been attacked instead of the issue at hand. It doesn't usually feel very good, does it?

Lillian Rubin, in her book *Intimate Strangers*, offers another view of this situation. She describes it as the approach/avoidance dance. When people are afraid or unsure about what is happening they will often distance themselves from that situation. This distancing can be interpreted as avoidance, rejection or not caring. As one person distances in the relationship an invitation exists for the other person to approach more forcefully. This in turn increases that person's distancing. What occurs is a pattern of behaviour in which one person chases while the other person attempts to escape. As Rubin states:

'It's the rational-man/hysterical-woman script, played out again and again by two people whose emotional repertoire is so limited that they have few real options ... she becomes progressively more emotional and expressive. He falls back on his best weapons: he becomes more rational, more determinedly reasonable. She cries for him to attend to her feelings, whatever they may be. He tells her coolly, with a kind of clenched-teeth reasonableness, that it's silly for her to feel that way, that she's just being emotional.' (p. 73)

This dance of intimacy is often played out in couple relationships. Where there is abusiveness the stakes are higher, often leading to an escalation of the situation.

In all forms of chasing — physical, verbal and emotional — the original issue becomes lost and the key issue becomes one of who will gain the upper-hand position in the situation and feel the most self-righteous, justified and satisfied as a result.

If the struggle for superiority is not resolved by this stage there is a very real danger that a person will resort to physical means to resolve it. This involves a decision to physically assault by slapping, pushing, hitting, or behaviours such as throwing things.

When the fury has died down there is a period of guilt and remorse. No one likes hurting people they care about. When men hurt others they often feel pretty terrible. It's as if the

victory is a hollow one and the powerful feelings that were briefly present soon vanish. There may also be a verbalisation of excuses at this stage as it is very challenging to face the fact of having been abusive to someone else.











Often there is a period that follows which we call the ‘hearts and flowers’ stage. This is a time when men try to make up, they promise to not become abusive again, and they attempt to be very caring.

Women and others are left with the fear of wondering if, and usually when, abuse will happen again. Once abusiveness and violence has occurred in a relationship the relationship can never be the same. It is altered for ever. A healthy relationship cannot exist where fear is present.

Hope is not enough in itself to change a pattern of behaviour. Firstly, if this pattern is unaltered, then the more times it is repeated the worse the abusiveness becomes. Secondly, the more times it is repeated the quicker it takes to complete its cycle. Thirdly, at the end stages of the relationship the guilt and remorse and hearts and flowers are absent. At this point separation becomes the only safe option for the people concerned.

Exercise

Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted and get yourself relaxed. Now remember back to the last time you were quite abusive to someone. It is often easier to think about where you were and who was there. Use the questions that follow to help you get your ideas clear. Remember this is your story. Others may have a different story as to what went on. When you have thought about these questions plot your pattern on a piece of paper in the same way that I have with Frank’s story on page 4.

-  What was going on?
-  What actions did you use to be abusive? (Tone of voice, physical contact, facial expression, statements)
-  Which segments of the Power and Control Wall (Chapter 1, page 14) did you use?
-  What did you want to happen in the situation in the short-term and long-term?
-  What attitudes and beliefs about the situation or other person did you use to support your actions and behaviour?
-  How were you feeling?
-  What changes did you notice in your body?
-  What were the effects on you, on the person receiving your abuse and others who witnessed what went on?
-  How did your past abuse influence this situation?
-  What could you have done differently? What could you have done to build respect and trust?

Some men want to quickly forget occurrences of abuse. Forgetting or ignoring past abuse doesn’t help understanding; it only increases the chance of abusiveness happening again. Remembering can be painful, but I urge you to use your strength to face up to your part in the story. Now ask yourself what sense you make of this situation. Were you happy with how you responded or are you left feeling guilty or ashamed about the outcome or disappointed in your response?

Like other men, you will now have a glimmer of what is going on. You may come to recognise that you often become overwhelmed with anger when situations don't go your way, when someone close to you disagrees, or when you feel cornered. A preoccupation with self-righteous thinking and injustices by others blinds us to an awareness of the choices we make to either resolve or change a situation.

Questions to Ponder

- What would stop me seeing the similarities between Frank's story and my own?
- What parts of Frank's story are similar to my story?
- What parts of my story are different from Frank's story?

The reason for taking so much time over your behaviour patterns is that this forms one of the keys to change. Once you understand in a step-by-step manner what you think and how you feel and behave, you are in a good position to make other choices. You will be very surprised at how clear this becomes.

Questions to Ponder

- What sense do I make of my pattern of behaviour?
- Was anyone afraid? How did I know?
- How have I censored out of my story the parts that are difficult to face up to? (A clue to this will be the parts that are vague or difficult to remember)
- What would help me to remember the full story and what would others want me to add?
- Would others agree with my view of the story or would they have a different story to tell?
- Is my abusiveness getting worse and therefore more dangerous or am I gaining control over it?
- Are abusive patterns of behaviour getting the better of me or am I getting the better of them?

Creating a Safe Environment for Change

By now you will have an indication of whether or not you are abusive to others and the nature of that abuse. If abuse has become a part of your life, then those around you will be feeling unsure of you and may be sceptical of the changes you intend to make. One important first step in building trust back into a relationship is to show you are genuine in your efforts. How many times in the past have you said 'I will never abuse you again'? While statements like this may be a genuine reflection of your desire to not be abusive, the process of understanding and learning new patterns takes time.

Many men find the idea of ‘time out’ useful. Time out creates a safe zone for everyone, and gives you time to sort out what is going on for you. As you get better at identifying your feelings and the beliefs or attitudes that drive your behaviour, you will find you don’t need to rely on this strategy as much. In the meantime, however, time out is very important.

Time out is not about copping out. Many men walk out during an argument or fight, leaving the other person unsure about when and if they will come back, along with concerns about what sort of mood they will be in when they return. This is unfair and disrespectful to the people involved.

Time out has very clear guidelines which I describe below. Just like in a game of basketball, it is a time to rest, strategise and work out a solution to a situation that is not going right. Time out is not an excuse to go and see some mates, go back to work, or go for a quick drink. It is the serious task of relaxing and dealing with the uncomfortable feelings or thoughts that fuel abusive behaviour

Time Out Guidelines

Do

- Talk about time out with people around you *before you need to take it*. Negotiate a contract and what your time out signal will be.
- *Leave when you feel unsafe* and are about to become abusive. State clearly: ‘I am beginning to feel unsafe to be around and need to take time out. I will be back in minutes once I have calmed down, worked out what is going on and can be safe with you.’
- *Something physical*. Go for a walk, run or bike ride. This will give you some distance from the situation and time to think through what was going on.
- *Phone a friend or one of the telephone counselling services* available in your community and talk over what is happening.
- *Phone the person who you were unsafe with* and find out whether the other person feels safe having you back.
- *Return at the time agreed to*. This helps to build trust in the relationship and shows that you are genuine in trying to act respectfully.
- Negotiate a time within the next 24 hours *to talk about what happened*. Talk about what it was you were reacting to in a non-abusive way, using ‘I’ statements but avoid statements such as ‘I think that you ...’ or ‘I feel you ...’ which are really blaming statements. Also avoid unhelpful strategies such as dragging up the past, blaming, not listening, and so on.

‘I’ statements are vital if we are to learn to take responsibility for what we feel. Consider this statement: ‘You know how it is. You just lose your cool and lash out.’ Using ‘you’ when we really mean ‘I’ allows us to distance ourselves from the emotion. It’s as though we are talking about someone else — some unknown ‘you’ far off in the distance.

Now compare this to the statement: ‘I just lost my cool and lashed out? Here we are clearly owning our feelings and taking responsibility for ourselves. Only when we acknowledge our

feelings can we learn to accept them, no matter how much we may dislike them. Only when we accept our feelings and our actions do we have the chance to change them. It is best to get into the habit of 'I' statements at an early stage.

Remember, time out is about safety. It doesn't resolve the issue. This is something that the whole of Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to. For the moment, ensure you are safe. Some men find it useful to photocopy these guidelines and put them on their fridge with a couple of magnets so that they can grab them on the way out the door. Others write them on a card that they keep in their wallets. Think for a moment about what would work for you.

Don't

- *Drink or take drugs.* Alcohol and drug-taking has a high degree of association with abusive behaviour. While alcohol does not cause abuse, it can be used as an excuse. Being affected by alcohol, even slightly, makes it harder to make safe and non-abusive decisions as alcohol and drugs interfere with our ability to think clearly. Time out is for serious thinking and trying to understand what is going on. If you make responsible choices around this issue this will communicate to others you are serious about your decision to deal with your abusive and violent behaviour.
- *Drive.* When people are highly aroused emotionally their ability to think and co-ordinate actions is affected. There are enough dangerous drivers on the road without you becoming another one.
- *Do anything to harm yourself or others.*

Some men find time out a difficult strategy to put in place for a number of reasons. Firstly, men have been taught not to walk away from a fight. This is closely tied to the need to win. Some men think that they will somehow be less of a man if they walk away. If we look at this idea in more depth we find that what is really being said is that 'real men' are abusive and that the need to win outweighs the need to act safely, responsibly and respectfully towards others.

You and I both know that there are no winners when it comes to abusive behaviour. I invite you to think about how you can be a winner with the other person, not a winner at the other person's expense. That only ends up with both parties losing. All the men I have worked with will attest to that.

Secondly, developing a new pattern of behaviour can be hard. Time out needs to be planned ahead of time so that everyone knows what is going on. I suggest you practise time outs before you need to use them. If you are going for a walk, try out your route, check how long it takes, and where the phone boxes are.

Another benefit of time out is that it helps us begin the process of negotiating with others, a very useful survival skill. It also signals to others that we are prepared to be responsible for our feelings and actions. And don't forget that time out can be a test of your commitment to embrace a non-abusive and non-violent lifestyle. If you handle it well, then others will see the benefits.

Exercise

Filling in the following chart may highlight your difficulties in taking time out.



What could I say to convince myself to stay?:



What others might say to stop me from going:

Compare your list with the following list that men from one of my groups came up with:

WHAT I WILL SAY TO CONVINCCE MYSELF TO STAY?

I might lose if I leave.

The issue is too important to drop it now.

I've got to get my point of view across.

Why should I go? I'm the boss around here.

It's raining; it's cold.

We're expecting guests; I'll have to stay.

She'll win. She thinks she's won. She'll think I am a wimp.

Where's my pride?

If I leave they might harm themselves.

What will they think of me, an idiot perhaps?

I've got nowhere to go.

It's too late to go out now.

No friends.

I'll try and stay cool.

This list came from a group of men who had been abusive in all ways imaginable — from physical assault to emotional putdowns. Notice that many of the ideas are about winning and losing, and the need to be in control of the situation.

WHAT OTHERS MIGHT SAY TO STOP ME FROM GOING

Stay here and finish it.

You are always walking out.

Can't you handle it?

If you walk out now take your things and don't come back.

How am I going to manage when I'm relying on you?

When relationships are damaged, others may well be sceptical of you leaving yet again. But I see the bottom line as: if you can't stay in the situation and guarantee safety, then you have to leave. Some men I work with make the choice to leave home and go into a flat until they feel they are safe to be around.

Bernie found taking time out really useful. It made a profound difference to his relationship. He would ignore his partner until she was highly agitated. He would refuse to talk about issues; treating everything with an 'it's not such a big deal' attitude. As Bernie states:

'I could see that over the years it has caused a lot of damage to my relationship and my decision now would be to say stop ... let's sort it out if we can ... if we are in a frame of mind to. If not, let's take a break and come back to it. Time out was the biggest thing for me.'

Questions to Ponder

- What would stop me using time out as a safety strategy?
- Will others respect me more or less if they see me taking steps to be responsible for my feelings and actions?

Assessing the Damage

Living with abuse in its many forms can be painful and frightening. Often it is easy to become blind to the effects of your behaviour or to try to make it somehow seem not as bad. You may have grown up in a house where you experienced abuse like so many of the men I have worked with so you will be familiar with this process. Many men tell me with passion and hurt the injustices that they experienced as children from abusive parents. They have real difficulties seeing that what their own partners and children are experiencing is in many ways very similar. One of the challenges of coming to terms with abusive patterns of behaviour is to appreciate what it is like for those on the receiving end.

We call appreciating what it is like to be in the other person's shoes, empathy. Understanding someone else's reality means that we can at least glimpse what it is like for them. Everyone comes from different cultures (culture is defined as our beliefs, attitudes and values). This culture may be the culture of gender, race, class or age. One of the challenges is to

see ourselves as others see us.

Some men find this a shock. Most men grow up with this crazy idea that everyone, partners and children included, shares the same views of the world as them. It is hard to understand what it means to be a man unless we are willing to risk stepping outside of our masculine culture and see what it is like from the vantage point of another culture—in this case, women's culture.

This can be very powerful. One question I always ask groups I run is: 'Would you put up with your behaviour if you were on the receiving end?' Unanimously, men respond, 'No way.' Yet men have a sense of entitlement, a belief that others can live with and accept the effects of their unacceptable behaviour

Were abuse occurs over a period of time the people on the receiving end, the victim or victims, often have feelings of being trapped. They will often try a range of strategies to cope with the abuse. Lee Bowker has explored this in relation to women who live in relationships where there is abuse. He lists the ways women try to keep themselves safe:

1. *trying to talk their husbands out of further beatings;*
2. *extracting promises to end the abuse;*
3. *threatening some sort of non-violent action, such as contacting the police or filing for divorce;*
4. *hiding or escaping during the beatings;*
5. *using passive defences to protect themselves as much as possible from serious injury;*
6. *avoiding their husbands during periods of high potential for violence; and*
7. *fighting back.*

(Ending the Violence, pp. 19—33)

While Bowker is talking about physical violence, I believe these strategies exist in situations with other forms of abuse with children, partners and in public disputes. Let's face it, it can be very frightening being on the receiving end of abusive behaviour.

When abusive behaviour has become part of any relationship it becomes the central issue, with others fearing what will happen the next time. Danny described this well:

'I suppose we didn't bother in the end ... I was thinking she wasn't interested and she might have been doing the same to me ... still don't know ... it got to the stage where I turned around and hammered her. My biggest mistake was thumping her. I learned through the course once that happened she was afraid of me and things would be worse. Next time she thought I would kill her or something and she shot through ... she saw that in her family when she was younger and that didn't help.'

When abuse patterns such as Danny's develop in a relationship, there is often little opportunity to talk through whatever is going on. Those on the receiving end just don't feel safe enough to put their views out in the open. When they do they are often ridiculed, disbelieved, or just plain ignored. Some men think that it is more preferable to throw things or verbally abuse someone than hit them. This is not true. These actions also induce fear in other people.

Questions to Ponder

- Think of a time in your childhood when you experienced an adult's abusive violence. What was the effect on you at that time?
- How has it affected you in the long term?

Children are also badly affected by seeing abusiveness between significant adults — parents, caregivers — and often develop some kind of health or behaviour problem. Health problems may include bed-wetting, nervousness, stomach aches, headaches, nightmares and soiling. Behaviour problems such as truancy, stealing, disruptiveness and poor achievement may also be evident. This figure goes up when, in addition to seeing abusive behaviour, children are on the receiving end.

James came to me in a last-ditch effort to save his marriage. He had been abusive to his wife, Julie, and his two stepchildren. What James came to recognise was that he wanted to:

'...enjoy my children growing up. I don't want them to know Dad as a big mean grump and a guy who is unapproachable. I want the children to be able to confide in me ... I want to get back the trust and respect I have lost. I know it takes time for respect to grow because if you have hurt someone over many years, trust will take a long time to rebuild.'

In another group, Brent set out all of the people affected by his abusive behaviour and how they had changed as a result. He was surprised by the sheer number of people who were affected. His partner Mary was edgy around him, uncertain of how he would react to issues she would raise. She had become depressed and withdrawn, having gone off to the family doctor who prescribed medication to help her cope. Brent was annoyed at Mary not being her old energetic self and described his relationship as 'being married to nothing'.

The situation was profoundly affecting their three children. Kim (3) was becoming clingy and demanding, Jane (6) was withdrawn and quiet, while John (8) was beginning to treat Mary in a similar way to his father. He would argue, abuse her verbally and threaten by saying things like, 'Dad says you are a no-good mum', and 'I don't have to do what you tell me.' John's school was also concerned about his aggressive behaviour towards his teacher and the other children.

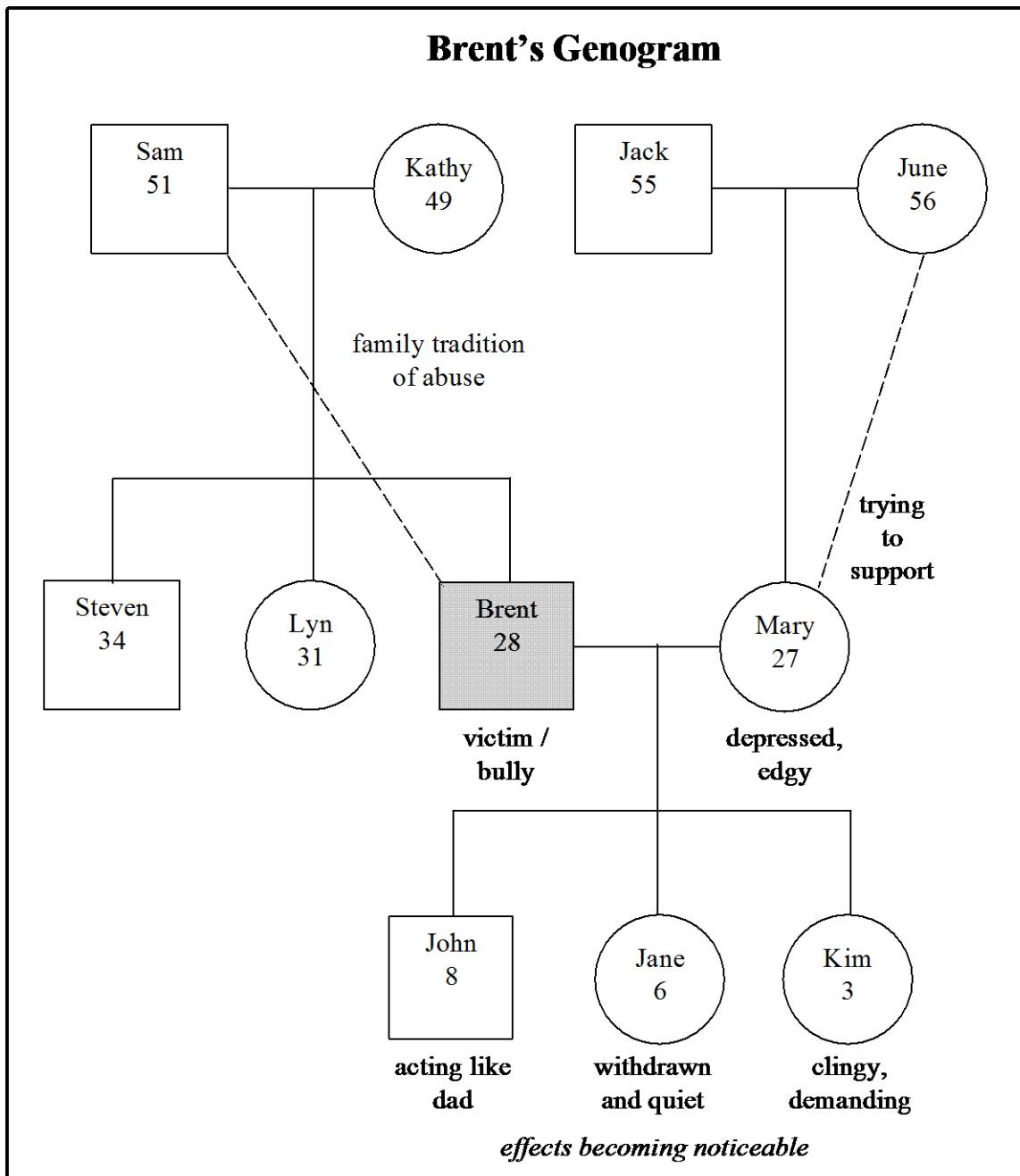
Mary's mother, June, was most concerned about what she saw happening to her daughter, and spent considerable time trying to support the family. Brent hated what he saw as her interference and was rude to her, letting her know she was not welcome. When she wasn't present Brent would berate Mary about how interfering her family was and would attribute most of their problems to them.

June had talked with Kathy, Brent's mother, about her concerns. This resulted in Sam, his father, and Kathy trying to talk with Brent about his behaviour. Brent was angry at his father's 'holier-than-thou' attitude; he remembered what it was like during his own childhood — his father's abusiveness, and the expectation that he would be independent. Brent described his early life as very difficult.

'In the family I grew up in my father exercised his rights. There was this attitude that men and boys would be independent while girls got everything they wanted ... even at high school I had to go out and work for what I got ... they didn't have to go out and work ... if they wanted clothes they just had to ask Mum and Dad and they got them ...'

I resented them for that all the time ... my birthday was on the 29th of December and my birthday and Christmas present were always the same.'

These memories meant Brent was not able to clearly hear his parents' concerns. He was also becoming increasingly isolated from his own brother and sister, with whom he had shared a great deal of time. Brent saw a bleak future with everything he had 'worked for' slipping away.



I have included Brent's story because it shows the wider impact of abuse. Brent's challenge was to see this situation as stemming from abusive patterns that had been passed on to him from his own family. At the end of this exercise he was appropriately subdued. He stated:

'I was surprised at how widespread the effect of my behaviour has been on others. This is an absolutely crazy way to live, going through life not seeing what is going on. How can I call myself a man when what I am is a bully? It's hard to admit it, but I now see Mary was getting help as a result of my problem. I feel sad that I have brought about Mary having to seek some help; she was once a loving and vibrant woman. As for the kids, I remember what it was like for me. I don't want that for them.' [At this point Brent bursts into tears.]

Children learn confusing messages when they live with abuse. As Gelles and Straus point out in their book *Contemporary Theories About the Family*, Vol. 1, p. 552:

The child learns that those who love him or her the most are also those who hit and have the right to hit. The second unintended consequence is the lesson that when something is really important, it justifies the use of physical force. Finally, we suggest that these indirect lessons are not confined to providing a model for later treatment of one's own children. Rather, they become such a fundamental part of the individual's personality and world view that they are generalised to other social relationships, and especially to the relationship which is closest to that of the parent and child: that of husband and wife.

What is being suggested is that when children grow up observing abusive behaviour and/or are on the receiving end of such behaviour, they come to view it as normal. This demonstrates how the legacy of abuse can be carried on from generation to generation. Take time now to explore what the short-term and long-term impact of living with abuse may be.

Short-term and Long-term Impact Checklist

Work through the chart on page 19 and write down what you see as the short-term and long-term effects of abuse in your life. Try to be as specific as possible.

The Stories of Two Women

Linda (26) had left Jeff because she had had enough. She went to her mother's to feel supported and safe. Jeff had rung fifteen times through the day, pleading to talk with Linda.

But Linda was refusing to talk to him, wanting time to think through what she would do. She was nervous, visibly jumping when the phone rang. Linda described herself as one scared woman. She was waiting for Jeff to eventually turn up at her mother's place. She described how she felt:

'It was like being on a knife edge. I wondered as I walked around the house, came out of the toilet, if he would be standing there. Mum said that she had talked to Jeff and she was sure that he really loved me. She gave me this big mother-daughter talk about how relationships had their ups and downs. She described what was happening as normal for relationships. Jeff had somehow convinced her that it was only a "lover's quarrel."

I decided at that moment to tell her the truth. I had hidden what was happening from everyone, feeling like I was the one who had failed. I was the one paying the price. I

was the one who had lost two stone in weight, was on tranquillisers, was smoking like a train.

I told her how Jeff had beaten me regularly over the past year-and-a-half how he had accused me of having affairs, and how he would put me through the third degree every time I went out. Jeff was always pleasant in public, but get him alone and he was a monster.

Mum went quiet, having to weigh up these different pictures of the same man. At first she said that it mustn't be as bad as I was making out. She didn't want to believe my story of what was going on. I felt sorry for her as much as for me. Here we were, two women with our ideas of domestic tranquillity shattered. For the first time I think she began to understand.'

Joan (55), on the other hand, had lived with Harvey (58) for 35 years. Harvey was successful, at the top of his profession and involved in a range of service organisations. They shared a lifestyle that to the outside world seemed perfect.

'He wouldn't let me do anything. He expected me to be around the home, waiting for him to turn up and hear all about what he had done, who he had met, and what others thought of him. It was all me, me, me.

*The children had now left and I was bored, so I thought about going back to university. You would think that I was asking for the world. His first comments were, "What about me?" I told him that **it** would not interfere with his life, that classes would be through the day. He then said, "Why do you want to go back to university? What's the point? It's a waste of time at your age anyway." I felt so awful. Here I had spent 35 years of my life sacrificing my needs in order to look after a husband and children; all I was wanting was a bit of freedom.*

Harvey would never hit me, I'm convinced of that. What he has done over the years is grind me down and expect me to always be there for him. I guess when we got married that that was the deal. I would be the dutiful wife and he would be the provider. It's like a game to him. Every time I make a bid for freedom, he puts some obstacle in the way.

Both these stories can tell us something about the impact of abusive ways of relating to others. 'When their sense of authority is threatened men will often exhibit self-righteous anger or use more subtle tactics as in Joan's story. Jeff, more than Harvey, is into self-righteous anger which is clearly more dangerous and scary for others. Harvey uses a more subtle form of control to keep his wife in check. Both men have a huge impact on the lives of their partners.

Effect of Abuse on Others

When you choose abusive behaviour others are certainly affected. If you are in a position to talk with those affected by your abusive behaviour, they may wish to work through the following checklist. One question you will need to ask yourself is 'How will I handle hearing the other person's comments or concerns without getting abusive?' Once you have been abusive in any relationship, trust will be severely damaged and the other person may be afraid to openly discuss these issues. I ask that you respect their choice in this.

| Effects on: | Short-term | Long-term |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| My partner | | |
| My children | | |
| My wider family | | |
| Myself | | |
| Friends | | |

Effects on Others Checklist

The following checklist is for those on the receiving end of abusive behaviour. Read each statement and mark how frequently you have experienced or felt that way. If you are a man who has been abusive and are no longer in contact with those affected by your abusive behaviour, work through this exercise yourself and see if you can pinpoint what the effects on others were.

| Self-esteem | <i>Always</i> | <i>Usually</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Rarely</i> | <i>Never</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| I sometimes think I'm crazy. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I feel powerless. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I feel ashamed. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I'm often confused. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I've changed into a different person | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I deserve what I get. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I don't deserve to be happy. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I'm not fun to be with | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| My Feelings | <i>Always</i> | <i>Usually</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Rarely</i> | <i>Never</i> |
| I feel depressed. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| I feel jumpy. | | | | | |
| I cry. | | | | | |
| I feel angry most of the time. | | | | | |
| I worry. | | | | | |
| I feel nervous. | | | | | |
| I am afraid for my safety. | | | | | |
| I feel trapped. | | | | | |
| I feel I'm walking on eggshells. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Physical Effects | <i>Always</i> | <i>Usually</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Rarely</i> | <i>Never</i> |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| I've lost weight. | | | | | |
| I've put on weight. | | | | | |
| My sleep pattern is broken. | | | | | |
| I sleep a great deal. | | | | | |
| I lack energy. | | | | | |
| I have nightmares. | | | | | |
| I have stomach aches. | | | | | |
| I have a lot of headaches. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Behaviour | <i>Always</i> | <i>Usually</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Rarely</i> | <i>Never</i> |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| I have emotional outbursts. | | | | | |
| I am a poor achiever. | | | | | |
| I act passively. | | | | | |
| I have angry outbursts. | | | | | |
| I am inconsistent in my behaviour. | | | | | |
| I smoke heavily. | | | | | |
| I have considered suicide. | | | | | |
| I can't seem to get things right. | | | | | |
| I'm always making mistakes. | | | | | |

| Parenting | <u>Always</u> | <u>Usually</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> | <u>Rarely</u> | <u>Never</u> |
|---|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| I have difficulty with my children. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| My children’s behaviour reminds me of their father. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I feel inadequate as a parent. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I’m scared I’ll abuse my children | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I have abused my children. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| My Family of Origin | <u>Always</u> | <u>Usually</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> | <u>Rarely</u> | <u>Never</u> |
| I feel judged by my family. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I can’t be honest about what is going on at home. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I keep the abuse secret. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I am embarrassed to tell others. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I fear no one will believe me. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Relationships | <u>Always</u> | <u>Usually</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> | <u>Rarely</u> | <u>Never</u> |
| I don’t have many friends. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| My partner doesn’t approve of my friends. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I find it hard to trust others. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I feel cheated by marriage. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| I try so hard but nothing seems to change. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Question to Ponder

- What is it like recognising that abusive and violent behaviour can have such an impact on others?

If you have been on the receiving end of abusive behaviour you may well need to seek some help yourself. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau, marriage guidance counsellor or Women’s Refuge will be able to discuss these issues further.

Questions to Ponder

- Do others feel safe around me or are they afraid and how would I know?
- What changes have I noticed about how others relate to me?
- Are others free to express their opinions or are they afraid to because I might lose my cool?
- What do I think it would be like to be in the other person's shoes when I am abusive?
- Would I live with others acting towards me in the way I act towards them or would I think it was unfair and unjust?
- Do I want to pass on to my children a tradition of abusiveness or a tradition of safety and respect?
- What would it feel like to be trapped in a situation as a victim where I wanted the abuse to stop but didn't know what to do?
- When will I be ready to hear from others about how they see me and my behaviour?

Impact on Self

There is always a deterioration in the way people see each other when abuse occurs. The one thing all the men I work with state is that they want close and loving relationships with other people. I doubt whether any man wants to be hated or feared, but that is what happens when abuse enters a relationship.

Questions to Ponder

- Do others respect me more or less, when I am abusive?
- Have I been feeling closer or more distant from my partner/children/friends?
- Do others want to be around me or are they wary in my presence?
- How has a lifestyle of abusiveness affected me? (A clue might be to look back over past relationships with partners, children and friends.)

Summary

What we have done in this chapter is explore the story behind anger and move to look at the patterns of behaviour to help us make sense of what is really going on. 'Why' questions have been left behind in order to stay with the more useful questions about what maintains a behaviour. By now you will be beginning to picture what makes up your pattern of abusive behaviour.

You will now also be much clearer about the impact that your behaviour has on others, both in the short term and the long term. You have heard two women speak about what it is like to be on the receiving end of abusive behaviour. 'While this may be hard to hear, it is important to stick with it as this becomes a major help in resisting a return to your patterns of abuse. It takes a great deal of courage to take in information that you previously kept hidden from

yourself. You will also now be aware that a relationship (whether intimate or non-intimate) can never be the same once fear has become part of it. People cannot be themselves while they are waiting for the next outburst of anger or abusiveness.