

## Family violence based cognitive distortions

Working with families where there is family violence requires the practitioners to utilise a wide range of skills. One of these skills is to identify and work with cognitive distortions around violence.

Typical family violence cognitive distortions generally try to deny, blame, justify, minimise, or invite practitioners to collude with the perpetrator. Often the statements family violence perpetrators make don't allow us or them to move forward in a positive way. As we don't know what approach to take we either don't address the real issue or skirt around the issue in an attempt to try and address it.

Some cognitive distortions can also trigger our own emotional response and as a result we create barriers and decrease the chances of any meaningful work being completed.

By making sense of what is actually being said and understanding the distortions perpetrators make we can attempt to understand and/or rephrase distortions to a) make the offender accountable thus making it their issue, and b) give us a platform from which to begin some meaningful interventions.

Usually these cognitive distortions will fall into one of the following four categories:

- 1. Denial of the existence of a problem and/or the extent of the abuse**
- 2. Denial of the significance of the problem**
- 3. Denial of responsibility for the problem**
- 4. Denial of the likelihood of abuse happening again**

### Cognitive distortions activity task

Some examples of cognitive distortions fitting into each of these four categories are included below: At the end of each category there is a question asking you to give your own examples.

#### **Denial of the existence of a problem and/or the extent of the abuse**

*Typical statements that fall into this category may include:*

- I don't have a problem.
- There are many people much worse off than us.
- She's got it good compared to others; at least I don't hit her.
- I might have hit her but it was only a tap; it couldn't have hurt her.
- She's the one with the problem. If only she didn't bitch on at me so much.
- What, me violent? I'm not the sort of bloke who is violent to women.
- She's the one with the problem; she should be reading this book.
- I can't remember anything of that night.
- There are always two sides to any problem.
- *What are some other examples of distortions that fit into this category?*

### **Denial of the significance of the problem**

*Typical statements that fall into this category may include:*

- I didn't hurt her
- We went to bed and made love just afterwards.
- We argue a lot but that's a normal part of all relationships.
- I just snapped; it was nothing really.
- We've got a communication problem.
- You're blowing this out of all proportion.
- I can control myself.
- *What are some other examples of distortions that fit into this category?*

### **Denial of responsibility for the problem**

*Typical statements that fall into this category may include:*

- We were both out of it on drugs.
- Her family is the problem, always interfering.
- She asked for it.
- You shouldn't have called me that.
- She knows I don't like being talked back to.
- If it wasn't for her friends we would be real happy.
- I've been under a lot of stress lately.
- I inherited my dad's temper.
- I was born like this.
- If she wasn't so verbal I wouldn't need to hit her
- I was drunk/drugged out at the time.
- I don't know what happened.
- *What are some other examples of distortions that fit into this category?*

### **Denial of the likelihood of abuse happening again**

*Typical statements that fall into this category may include:*

- It won't happen again.
- I've learnt my lesson this time.
- I've promised her I'll be different.
- It's all behind me now; I'm looking to the future.
- I've found the Lord.
- *What are some other examples of distortions that fit into this category?*

### **Additional questions**

- *What function do cognitive distortions serve for the perpetrator?*
- *What reactions or thinking do you experience when you hear family violence perpetrators make these kinds of statements?*

*Considering the answer to the above question...*

- *What effects might your reactions or thinking have on your responses? What could you do to minimise these effects?*

Get aware and get real about family violence and what you can do to help! Would you like to become more effective when working with family violence offenders and become an advocate for those who need help the most?

**Click here to discover how we can help you**