

The process of change

Use the following checklist to help family violence offenders...

- *Figure out where they're at in terms of changing their behaviour i.e. how interested, and committed they currently are to making some changes*
- *Consider where they would like to be i.e. what kinds of changes would they like to be making with regards to their use of abusive practices*
- *Consider what they need to do to get there and to make this happen?*

Change is all around us...

Our lives are in a constant state of change. We have all heard the saying... **'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. Two very important questions are...

- *What's getting in the way of stopping this problem? And,*
- *What is required to change it?*

A useful exercise to put how you change into perspective is 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

Then ask yourself...

- ***What helped you sustain this change until it became a permanent part of your life?***

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. As you change you will progress through a series of levels that helps make sense of the situation in which you find yourself. These levels are explained in more detail below in **'the building blocks to change'**.

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

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

At Level 0 the process of change has not been begun, because there is an unwillingness to acknowledge that change is necessary. You may be unaware that a real problem exists, although others may have been telling you about it for some time. Either you don't want to hear or you don't believe it is such a big issue. If there is a problem it is someone else's, and you make an intense effort to shift responsibility or blame onto others.

At Level 1 for the first time you acknowledge something isn't working. Others are suffering consequences of your behaviour, and you yourself are suffering consequences. In opening up to this reality you have begun the process of change. Although not yet committed to embracing a non-abusive lifestyle, you begin to search for possible explanations and seek information.

At Level 2, you acknowledge the blocks that get in the way of change, especially recognising how you have shifted the responsibility for your actions onto others (something we've all done). There are many other blocks that men have, such as fear of losing their power over others through making them afraid, a lack of knowledge about other ways to be effective and have a legitimate influence in relationships, unwillingness to address substance abuse issues, and lack of support amongst family or friends for making such significant changes.

At Level 3 you begin to explore where you learnt your patterns of behaviour. Sometimes it is from families; sometimes from the society around us. More often than not it is a combination of both. For the first time you face honestly the patterns of abusive behaviours you have been using in your dealings with others. In becoming aware of your patterns or traditions you also become aware that you are free to make different decisions and break with the old rules which probably haven't worked too well anyway.

At Level 4 you realise it is decision time. After you have the information about the influences in your life that recruited you into abusive behaviour, and after you have recognised that you have made decisions in the past to use abuse, fear or violence to control others, the choice is now about whether you are happy with how you are or whether you want to change aspects of your behaviour, thoughts or beliefs. Some men decide the costs of change are too high and 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. Whatever you decide there will be consequences that may put you in danger as well as others in danger. If you decide to stay the same you will have to convince yourself that abusive behaviour is okay. Others may see this is your decision and choose to leave.

At Level 5 you take the necessary action to bring about real change. This 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.

At Level 6 you take a further step of acknowledging that although you might feel good about yourself when you change, others may still be hurting. To truly change you will need to heal some of the damage done to others. 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.

At Level 7 you enter upon the continuing challenge of maintaining your changes. This 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.

The ever present risk of relapse...

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. Often men are very task oriented; getting to the end seems like the goal. But change is an on-going business, and it is vital that you work through all the issues of each 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.

- *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? How will others know when you are safe and abuse free?*
- *Will others respect you more, or less, when they see you taking responsibility for yourself and not shifting the blame on to them?*

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?

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