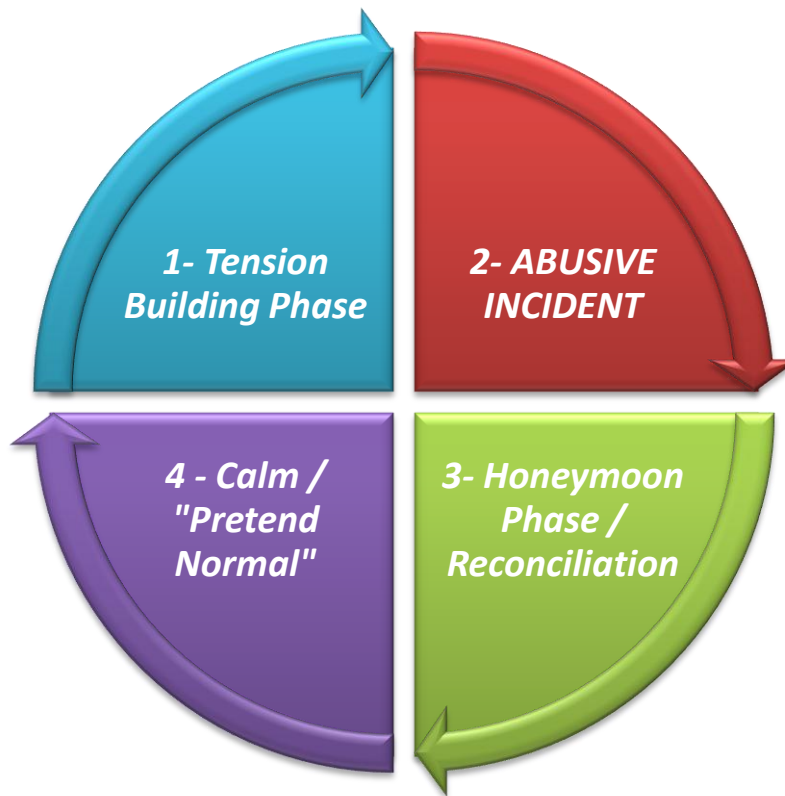


Cycle of Abuse

The Full Cycle (Common at the Beginning of an Abusive Relationship)



Shortened Cycle (More Common Over Time, as Abuse Becomes "Normal")



Phases of the Abuse Cycle

The cycle usually goes in the following order, and will repeat until the conflict is stopped, usually by the victim entirely abandoning the relationship. The cycle can occur hundreds of times in an abusive relationship, the total cycle taking anywhere from a few hours, to a year or more to complete. However, the length of the cycle usually diminishes over time so that the "making-up" and "calm" stages may disappear.

1: Tension building phase

This phase occurs prior to an overtly abusive act, and is characterized by poor communication, passive aggression, interpersonal tension, and fear of causing outbursts in one's partner. During this stage the victims may attempt to modify his or her behavior to avoid triggering their partner's outburst.

2: Acting-out phase

Characterized by outbursts of violent, abusive incidents. During this stage the batterer attempts to dominate his/her partner (victim), with the use of domestic violence.

3: Reconciliation/Honeymoon phase

Characterized by affection, apology, or, alternately, ignoring the incident. This phase marks an apparent end of violence, with assurances that it will never happen again, or that the abuser will do his or her best to change. During this stage the abuser feels overwhelming feelings of remorse and sadness, or at least pretends to. Some abusers walk away from the situation with little comment, but most will eventually shower their victims with love and affection. The abuser may use self-harm or threats of suicide to gain sympathy and/or prevent the victim from leaving the relationship. Abusers are frequently so convincing, and victims so eager for the relationship to improve, that victims who are often worn down and confused by longstanding abuse, stay in the relationship.

Although it is easy to see the outbursts of the Acting-out Phase as abuse, even the more pleasant behaviours of the Honeymoon Phase serve to perpetuate the abuse.

4: Calm phase

During this phase (which is often considered an element of the honeymoon/reconciliation phase), the relationship is relatively calm and peaceable. However, interpersonal difficulties will inevitably arise, leading again to the tension building phase.

-----**Text Source:** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cycle_of_abuse

Graphic and text based on **Lenore Walker, "The Battered Woman"** (1979)

For additional information and support on domestic violence, one particularly helpful resource is:

<http://www.heart-2-heart.ca/women/index.htm> (Support network and self-help database for abused women)

<http://www.heart-2-heart.ca/men/index.htm> (Support network and self-help database for abused men)

-- (Handout created for <http://morninglightcounseling.org/>. See this site for additional resources on a range of topics.) --