

What is Abuse?

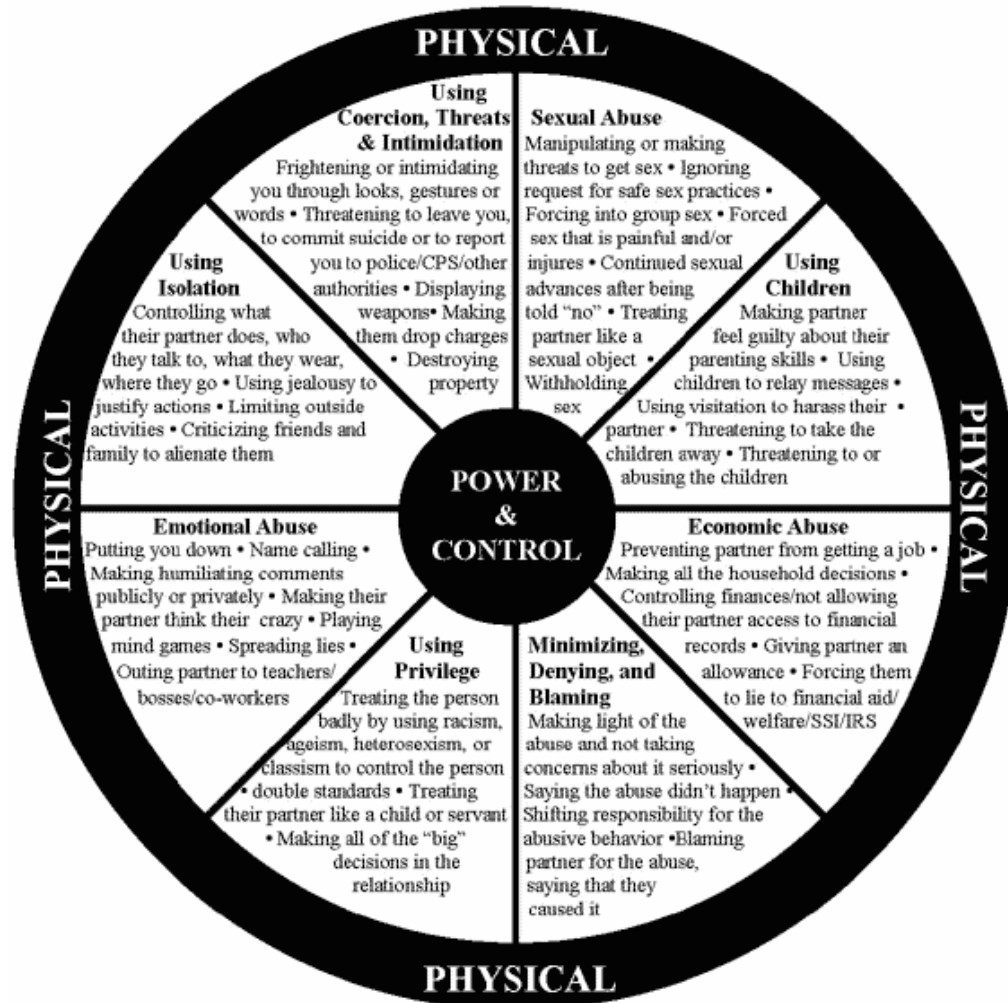
“Relationship abuse is a pattern of abusive and coercive behaviors used to maintain power and control over a former or current intimate partner. Abuse can be emotional, financial, sexual or physical and can include threats, isolation, and intimidation. Abuse tends to escalate over time. When someone uses abuse and violence against a partner, it is always part of a larger pattern of control.”

— Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness
stoprelationshipabuse.org

“Abuse grows from attitudes and values, not feelings. The roots are ownership, the trunk is entitlement, and the branches are control.”

—Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*

Power & Control Wheel



Is It Abuse?

Abuse is a *pattern* of maintaining power and control over a partner. Relationships can contain unhealthy behaviors without being abuse. It is important to look for overall patterns and the context of the relationship:

Is one partner trying to maintain nonconsensual power and control over another partner?

For behaviors:

- Was it consensual?
- Were there safewords?
- Were safewords respected?
- Was there actual harm? (You have to look at different people's definitions of harm)

For relationships:

- Is there a power dynamic that has a non-consensual aspect?
- Are safewords and physical and emotional boundaries respected?
- Are there consequences for setting physical or emotional boundaries or for using safewords?
- Do both partners feel safe and content in the relationship?
- Is the relationship damaging emotionally or spiritually?
- Is a partner being isolated from peers?
- Does the relationship have a negative effect on a partner's self esteem?
- Are there threats of suicide or other types of emotional blackmail?
- Are alcohol and drugs being used irresponsibly in the relationship?
- Is there negotiation for scenes and for the way power works in the relationship?
- Is there trust and safety in the relationship?

“I was victimized by acts of control’ is not the same as ‘I was victimized by the other person’s resistance to my control.’”

—Shea Emma Fett

“The Community Response to Abuse”

<http://bit.ly/CommunityResponse>

Resources

Books

Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men by Lundy Bancroft

Controlling People: How to Recognize, Understand, and Deal with People Who Try to Control You by Patricia Evans.

Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You by Susan Forward.

Articles and websites

Love Is Respect is an educational and resource site about abuse. It includes pages for survivors and perpetrators of abuse, as well as information on helping friends or family members who are experiencing (or committing) abuse.
www.loveisrespect.org

“When does BDSM become abuse?”—Dr. Liz Powell, <http://bit.ly/BDSMabuse>

“Abuse in Polyamorous Relationships,” A powerful essay by a survivor of an abusive polyamorous relationship. <http://bit.ly/AbuseInPoly>

By the same author: “10 Things I Wish I’d Known About Gaslighting.”
<http://bit.ly/10gaslight>

Poly Weekly episode on emotional abuse. <http://bit.ly/PWabuse>

Resource guide for men in abusive relationships.
<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/help-for-abused-men.htm>

Training materials and resources

The Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian & Gay Survivors of Abuse has expertise in dealing with abuse in small, relatively closed communities, and has training materials and occasional webinars. <http://nwnetwork.org/resources>

Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence.
Practical advice for community-based interventions and accountability processes.
<http://www.creative-interventions.org/tools/toolkit/>

Relationship Bill of Rights

You have the right, without shame, blame or guilt:

In all intimate relationships:

- to be free from coercion, violence and intimidation
- to choose the level of involvement and intimacy you want
- to revoke consent to any form of intimacy at any time
- to be told the truth
- to say no to requests
- to hold and express differing points of view
- to feel all your emotions
- to feel and communicate your emotions and needs
- to set boundaries concerning your privacy needs
- to set clear limits on the obligations you will make
- to seek balance between what you give to the relationship and what is given back to you
- to know that your partner will work with you to resolve problems that arise
- to choose whether you want a monogamous or polyamorous relationship
- to grow and change
- to make mistakes
- to end a relationship

In polyamorous relationships:

- to decide how many partners you want
- to choose your own partners
- to have an equal say with each of your partners in deciding the form your relationship with that partner will take
- to choose the level of time and investment you will offer to each partner
- to understand clearly any rules that will apply to your relationship before entering into it
- to discuss with your partners decisions that affect you
- to have time alone with each of your partners
- to enjoy passion and special moments with each of your partners

In a polyamorous network:

- to choose the level of involvement and intimacy you want with your partners' other partners
- to be treated with courtesy
- to seek compromise
- to have relationships with *people*, not with relationships
- to have plans made with your partner be respected; for instance, not changed at the last minute for trivial reasons
- to be treated as a peer of every other person, not as a subordinate