

“Couples in Conflict: Assessment for Domestic Violence & Avoiding Revictimization”

Presented by Annie Viers, MA, LPC-S, LMFT-S &
Celeste Inman, M.Ed., LPC-S, RPT-S, CS

Domestic Violence (DV) & Statistics

- Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior/s in an intimate relationship, to manipulate and gain/maintain control over their partner.
- The abuse is not just physical but can also be; sexual, verbal, emotional, financial and digital.
- DV has no bounds and happens across all socioeconomic, racial and cultural groups.
- Intimate partner violence affects more than 12 million people every year.
- Over 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men experience some form of abuse in their lifetime.
- Almost half of all women and men in the US have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Survivors are 2 times more likely to develop symptoms of depression and 3 times more likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Assessing for DV

- Explain confidentiality
- Be patient, empathic and avoid pressuring
- As the survivor shares, validate their feelings
- Ask direct questions but be sensitive in nature
- When sharing note if the survivor is: fearful, reluctant to share, anxious
- Use a questionnaire or screening tool
- Assess for specific types of abuse
- Identify any risk factors: access to weapons, threats made, escalation of violence

Why should we assess for domestic violence?

- First and foremost, to determine any safety needs
- To determine if the Collaborative process is appropriate to move forward with
- If moving forward with collaborative, the team needs to be more aware of how to engage with the clients
 - Sensitive in nature
 - Making sure the survivor has needed resources: counseling, support groups, financial needs met
 - If your client is the survivor, be sure to advocate for them but also, help encourage the client to advocate for themselves (note they may lack self-confidence and need help with the smallest of things to rebuild self-esteem)
 - Give the client extra one-on-one time to review and understand the decisions at hand and if these decisions are truly in their best interest. Survivors can and will dissociate during heated negotiations and may not fully be present and understanding of what is going on in front of them.
- Understanding the dynamic of power/control
 - Want to make sure the survivor's rights and interests are represented.
 - Survivor may not feel that they have a voice, so it's common to experience a survivor agree to unfair or undesired decisions in the moment to then later protests the decisions that had just been agreed upon.
- Promoting for fair agreements
 - Often the abuser is good at manipulating situations to look different than they really are and the survivor loses out
 - Abusers are bullies that want their way and will manipulate the reality of the situation to gain or remain in control. It is common for survivors to be confused by their own reality because of the chronic nature of this tactic, which creates wavering and lack of confidence in their own decision making.

How to avoid Revictimizing the survivor of the domestic violence relationship

(Revictimization happens when the survivor feels unsupported, disempowered or retraumatized by the process)

- Be sure to assess and recognize if there is domestic violence in the relationship
 - Do not dismiss or minimize what the survivor shares. Be sure to validate their experience. (understand the difference between a deeply hurt and reactive spouse vs an abused spouse) Maybe a handout of the difference?
 - Do not shame or reinforce blame on the survivor, (i.e. don't focus on the survivor's actions rather than the abuser's behaviors)
- The team needs to be empathic and understanding of the survivor
 - The survivor may be more hesitant to trust
 - Feelings of embarrassment and shame, anxiety and/or depression
- Address any unique needs of the case (this is where collaborative can be great & helpful, by providing unique agreements that can't be done in litigation!)
- When asking the hard invasive or overly detailed questions, be sensitive in nature to not retraumatize. Be sure your responses are nonjudgmental.
- Be sure to assess for and truly understand; financial, verbal/emotional abuse, as the power/control dynamics in these DV relationships are often missed or minimized so the survivor is then revictimized.
 - Each relationship is different, so for the case at hand, what are the tactics of control, their cycle of abuse, and the impact of trauma on that survivor.
 - Be aware if the abuser is continuing to try and be controlling such as withholding financials, possibly making false statements
- Help empower the survivor by educating them on the process and being able to make informed decisions. (taking extra time to review next steps and when the plan changes is extremely important! This allows trust to be built with your client)
- Be sure to keep the survivor client up to date on communication. When they are not informed, this exacerbates feelings of helplessness.(ditto above comment)

References

Statistics pulled from "National Domestic Violence Hotline" website:
<https://www.thehotline.org/stakeholders/domestic-violence-statistics>

Deeply Hurt & Reactive VS. Abusive Spouse Behaviors

The deeply hurt and betrayed person and the abused person both experience profound emotional distress, but their experiences and reactions under stress can differ due to the nature of their trauma. Here's a comparison of their characteristics and how each responds to stress:

1. Nature of the Wound:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Betrayal Trauma: The pain comes from a significant breach of trust, often by someone close to them, like a partner, friend, or family member. This could involve infidelity, dishonesty, or a profound violation of what they believed to be a trustworthy relationship.

Shock and Disbelief: They may experience shock or disbelief at the betrayal. Their initial response might be to question their judgment, wondering how they didn't see the signs, or they may feel devastated by the loss of trust in someone they loved or relied on.

Abused Person:

Chronic Trauma: Abuse typically involves repeated mistreatment over time—whether emotional, physical, or psychological—and is often rooted in a power imbalance where one person seeks to control or harm the other.

Constant Devaluation: An abused person's experience is one of ongoing degradation and emotional harm, not just an isolated event. The trauma is often cumulative and manifests in deep-seated feelings of worthlessness or fear.

2. Trust Issues:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Difficulty Trusting Again: They may find it incredibly hard to trust the person who betrayed them or even others in their life, especially when it comes to matters of loyalty and honesty. They may feel hypervigilant and question whether anyone is truly trustworthy.

Rethinking Past Relationships: They might struggle with re-evaluating their entire relationship, wondering if their love and care were ever reciprocated or genuine. They may question their past decisions and second-guess everything that led up to the betrayal.

Abused Person:

Extreme Distrust of Others: The abuse typically leads to a deep-seated fear of others' intentions. It's not just about betrayal—abuse erodes confidence in others' kindness or fairness. Survivors may distrust authority figures, friends, and even family, often seeing everyone as potentially harmful or manipulative.

Difficulty with Boundaries: In addition to trust, setting healthy boundaries can be nearly impossible. An abused person may feel they can't trust themselves or others to respect their boundaries, leading them to allow inappropriate behavior or to feel like they can't protect themselves.

3. Emotional Reactions to Stress:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Heartbreak and Anger: When stressed, they might experience intense sadness, grief, and anger—often at the person who betrayed them. They might feel like they've been violated emotionally and may struggle with feelings of humiliation, inadequacy, and betrayal of their own emotional investment.

Revenge or Withdrawal: Some might fantasize about revenge or feel the urge to “get back” at the betrayer. Others may withdraw emotionally, avoiding intimacy or deep connections with others because they fear being hurt again.

Abused Person:

Chronic Anxiety or Panic: Abuse survivors often experience overwhelming anxiety, especially under stress, because they've been conditioned to fear emotional, physical, or psychological harm. Their stress response can be exaggerated due to the long-term trauma they've endured.

Dissociation or Numbness: Stress can lead an abused person to emotionally or mentally detach from their surroundings. They may become numb or dissociated, as a coping mechanism developed over time to survive the intensity of the trauma. This can look like zoning out, shutting down emotionally, or not being able to process their feelings.

4. Responses to Conflict:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Confrontational or Avoidant: They may either want to confront the person who betrayed them in an attempt to get closure or resolution, or they might avoid the situation entirely, not wanting to revisit the pain of the betrayal.

Increased Sensitivity to Conflict: When stressed, a person who has been betrayed might become more easily triggered by minor conflicts or perceived slights. The underlying fear of being betrayed again can cause an overreaction to even small disagreements.

Abused Person:

Submissive or Defensive: Under stress, an abused person might either freeze or fawn, avoiding conflict to prevent further emotional or physical harm. In some cases, they may become hyper-defensive, over-explaining or trying to appease the person causing harm to avoid further escalation.

Difficulty Expressing Needs: They may struggle to express their needs or assert themselves during conflicts due to the belief that they will be punished, ignored, or invalidated for doing so. This stems from the fear of retribution or being silenced that often accompanies abusive dynamics.

5. Self-Worth and Identity:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Self-Doubt and Shame: The betrayal often leads them to question their judgment, self-worth, or whether they were deserving of love and respect. There might be a feeling of being “fooled” or betrayed by their own instincts.

Guilt for Trusting: A betrayed person might feel guilty for having trusted the person who hurt them, leading to feelings of shame or embarrassment, as though they should have known better or somehow allowed the betrayal to happen.

Abused Person:

Chronic Shame and Worthlessness: Abuse survivors often internalize the trauma, leading to chronic shame. They may feel that they deserve the abuse because of things they were told during the abusive episodes (e.g., "You're worthless" or "Nobody else will want you").

Identity Fragmentation: Over time, repeated abuse can cause a survivor to lose a sense of who they are, resulting in confusion about their own identity and value. They may feel disconnected from themselves, often living in survival mode.

6. Coping Mechanisms:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Rumination or Obsession: Stress can cause them to obsessively replay the events of the betrayal in their minds, trying to make sense of what happened or searching for signs they missed. This can lead to prolonged rumination, making it harder to move past the hurt.

Overcompensating in Other Areas: Some might try to distract themselves or seek validation through other means—work, hobbies, or other relationships—to avoid facing the pain directly.

Abused Person:

Survival Strategies (Fight, Flight, Freeze): Depending on their history, an abused person might engage in extreme avoidance (flight), aggressive defense (fight), or emotional detachment (freeze). These coping mechanisms are often instinctive and learned as ways to survive abuse.

Self-Sabotage or Risk-Taking: Some survivors might engage in risky behaviors or self-destructive habits as a form of coping with stress, particularly if they feel that they are unworthy of better treatment or if they don't believe they deserve peace or happiness.

7. Perception of the Future:

Deeply Hurt and Betrayed Person:

Fear of Future Betrayals: The pain of betrayal can lead to an increased fear of future betrayals. They may approach new relationships with caution or even suspicion, fearing that their past experiences will repeat themselves.

Hope for Resolution: There may still be a hope for closure or reconciliation, depending on the nature of the betrayal. The future could feel uncertain, but there may also be a desire to rebuild or heal, even if it's difficult.

Abused Person:

Pessimism or Helplessness: Survivors of abuse might see the future through a lens of hopelessness or helplessness, believing that their situation will never improve. They may feel stuck or unable to change their circumstances due to the deep trauma they've endured.

Desire for Escape or Freedom: While they may feel trapped, there could also be a longing to escape the abusive environment, but fear and uncertainty make it difficult to take action, even when they know they deserve better.

Conclusion:

Both individuals—those who have been deeply hurt and betrayed, and those who have been abused—experience significant emotional distress under stress, but the core difference lies in the nature of the trauma and how it affects their behavior. The betrayed person grapples with the loss of trust and emotional pain from a specific violation, while the abused person faces ongoing emotional or physical harm that has often resulted in deep trauma, fear, and a loss of self-worth. Understanding these distinctions can help when offering support, as each person may need different kinds of care, validation, and healing approaches.



ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR INVENTORY

<i>Client No. 1</i>		<i>Client No. 2</i>		
Past	Now	Past	Now	
_____	_____	_____	_____	PHYSICAL ABUSE
_____	_____	_____	_____	Block the way, stand in doorway
_____	_____	_____	_____	Hold captive, keep from leaving the house
_____	_____	_____	_____	Lock out of shared home
_____	_____	_____	_____	Refuse to help sick, injured, or pregnant partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Abandon partner in a dangerous place
_____	_____	_____	_____	Push or shove
_____	_____	_____	_____	Grab or hold
_____	_____	_____	_____	Pin to floor, bed, wall
_____	_____	_____	_____	Throw down or knock down
_____	_____	_____	_____	Slap
_____	_____	_____	_____	Hit with fist
_____	_____	_____	_____	Twist arm
_____	_____	_____	_____	Pull hair
_____	_____	_____	_____	Kick
_____	_____	_____	_____	Bite
_____	_____	_____	_____	Pinch
_____	_____	_____	_____	Pull hair
_____	_____	_____	_____	Butt heads
_____	_____	_____	_____	Choke, put hands to throat
_____	_____	_____	_____	Throw objects at partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Hit with an object
_____	_____	_____	_____	Hit, shove, or kick pregnant partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Use a weapon to hurt or threaten
_____	_____	_____	_____	Cause bruises, cuts, black eyes
_____	_____	_____	_____	Cause broken bones
_____	_____	_____	_____	Cause impaired vision or hearing
_____	_____	_____	_____	Burn or scald
_____	_____	_____	_____	Cause hospitalization
_____	_____	_____	_____	Injure or disfigure permanently
_____	_____	_____	_____	Prevent from receiving medical care
_____	_____	_____	_____	Kill or attempt to kill
_____	_____	_____	_____	VERBAL ABUSE
_____	_____	_____	_____	Scream or holler
_____	_____	_____	_____	Use foul language
_____	_____	_____	_____	Call names
_____	_____	_____	_____	Put partner down, say demeaning things
_____	_____	_____	_____	Criticize frequently or continually
_____	_____	_____	_____	Make fun of a disability or shortcoming
_____	_____	_____	_____	Make jokes at partner's expense
_____	_____	_____	_____	Ridicule or insult partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Create fear with your voice
_____	_____	_____	_____	Yell in partner's face ("nose to nose")
_____	_____	_____	_____	Manipulate with lies and contradictions
_____	_____	_____	_____	Insult or drive away partner's family or friends
_____	_____	_____	_____	Ridicule or insult partner's religion, heritage, race, class, beliefs

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Domination

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Act like the boss |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Try to tell partner what he/she can or can't do |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Force partner to do things against his/her will |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Treat partner as less than your equal |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Make important decisions without consulting partner |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to do your share of chores |

Intimidation

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Prevent or impede movement |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Use physical size to frighten |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Create fear with actions, gestures, and facial expressions |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Remind partner of ability to hurt him/her |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Drive recklessly to frighten |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Have weapons your partner is afraid of |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten regularly to leave or to make partner leave the relationship |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to hurt partner's family or friends |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to take away children |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to hit, hurt, or abuse children |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to hit, hurt, or abuse partner |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to kill partner |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Threaten to hurt or kill yourself |

Humiliation

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Ridicule or ignore feelings |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Ridicule or embarrass in public |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Ridicule or embarrass in private |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Force to do demeaning or degrading things |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Talk about an affair (real or invented) to hurt partner |

Harassment

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to leave partner alone |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Follow around the house |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Stalk partner |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Accuse partner of being unfaithful |

Isolation

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Prevent or discourage partner from seeing family or friends |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to let partner leave the house |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to let partner go to work or school |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Take away car keys or money |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to socialize with partner |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Refuse to let partner be alone in public |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Monitor partner, interrogate about where he/she has been |

Withdrawal

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Withhold approval, appreciation, or affection to punish |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Withhold sex to punish |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Sulk angrily to get even <i>Self-</i> |

destruction

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | Hit or injure yourself |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------|

_____	_____	_____	_____	Place yourself in dangerous situations
_____	_____	_____	_____	Attempt suicide
_____	_____	_____	_____	<u>Using the children</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____	Turn children against partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Use visitation to harass partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Punish or deprive children when angry at partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	<u>Destruction of property and pets</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____	Threaten to destroy property
_____	_____	_____	_____	Drop plants or dishes
_____	_____	_____	_____	Break a window
_____	_____	_____	_____	Punch or kick a wall, door, doorjamb, etc.
_____	_____	_____	_____	Slam doors
_____	_____	_____	_____	Smash objects (TV, stereo, phone, remote control)
_____	_____	_____	_____	Destroy something of emotional significance
_____	_____	_____	_____	Threaten to harm a pet
_____	_____	_____	_____	Neglect, harm, or kill a pet
_____	_____	_____	_____	SEXUAL ABUSE
_____	_____	_____	_____	Express intense jealousy
_____	_____	_____	_____	Tell demeaning sexual jokes
_____	_____	_____	_____	Treat others as sex objects
_____	_____	_____	_____	Show sexual interest in others when with partner
_____	_____	_____	_____	Have an affair when you agreed to be monogamous
_____	_____	_____	_____	Minimize importance of partner's feelings about sex
_____	_____	_____	_____	Criticize sexual performance or frequency
_____	_____	_____	_____	Insist that partner dress more seductively or less seductively
_____	_____	_____	_____	Insist on unwanted touching or other sexual activity
_____	_____	_____	_____	Threaten to retaliate if partner isn't interested in sex
_____	_____	_____	_____	Force partner to watch pornography
_____	_____	_____	_____	Force your partner into sexual activity
_____	_____	_____	_____	FINANCIAL ABUSE
_____	_____	_____	_____	Completely control the finances
_____	_____	_____	_____	Refuse to let partner have his/her own checkbook
_____	_____	_____	_____	Make partner ask for money
_____	_____	_____	_____	Threaten to hurt partner financially
_____	_____	_____	_____	Take money or steal property
_____	_____	_____	_____	Threaten to withdraw financial support
_____	_____	_____	_____	Refuse to pay your share of bills as agreed
_____	_____	_____	_____	LEGAL SYSTEM ABUSE
_____	_____	_____	_____	Violate a restraining order
_____	_____	_____	_____	Violate a child custody agreement
_____	_____	_____	_____	Lie about partner to police or in court

FIRST INCIDENT:

LAST INCIDENT:

WORST INCIDENT: