



DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Office of Health Promotion and Wellness

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The Cycle of Violence (Walker, 1979) illustrates the manner in which abuse often becomes a pattern within a relationship. This three stage pattern shows how love for one's partner, hope for an improved relationship without abuse, and fear of retaliation for ending the relationship, keeps the cycle in motion.

STAGE ONE: TENSION BUILDING

This phase is characterized by the escalation of tension and feeling as if the abused partner is "walking on eggshells" in an effort to keep violence from erupting. During this phase it is not unusual for the couple's communication to be decreased and impaired such that mutual communication, negotiation and compromise are minimal. When issues remain unresolved, tension builds. Arguments and criticism increase as do incidents of relatively minor physical abuse (i.e., pushing). This phase may last anywhere from a week to several years and typically becomes more frequent as the cycle repeats itself.

STAGE TWO: VIOLENCE

Following this buildup of tension, physical violence often erupts as the abusive partner loses his desire or ability to manage his anger. Tension is released and the couple feels more "at ease". The relationship appears to improve. The abusive partner may "learn" that his/her abusive behavior helps to reduce stress and change the behavior of his/her partner. The couple is most likely to seek help following an episode of violence.

STAGE THREE: HONEYMOON/SEDUCTION

This phase is characterized by the positive feelings resulting from the release of tension and the hope that the relationship will change for the better after this "last" violent episode. The abusive partner promises that s/he will never do it again, makes promises to change and get help and may pay special attention to his/her partner. At this point, the underlying patterns of control and impaired communication continue until the couple is once again within the tension-building stage.