

# Stages in a Victim's Experience

## *Minimization and Denial*

In this stage the victim denies the seriousness of the situation and excuses the abuser: "He doesn't know his own strength. He was out of control/drunk/high. It didn't hurt that much."

The abuser, who rarely gets beyond this stage, says: "I didn't really hurt her much. She made me angry or pushed my buttons. I didn't know what I was doing. I was out of control/drunk/high."

## *Self-Blame*

This is an inescapable feature of life with a batterer as well as being a recurring component in psychological reactions to trauma.

## *Seeking Help*

Law enforcement and social service agencies most often see victims seeking help at the third or fourth stages of the Progression of Abuse. A 1988 study by Dr. Edward Gondolf indicated that help-seeking behavior increases when the positive aspects of a relationship decrease and the cost, in terms of abusiveness and injury, increases.

## *Ambivalence*

The victim is irresolute at this stage, trying one alternative after another. It is at this point that the victim may respond to the batterer's attempts to reconcile, or initiate their own attempts at reconciliation. It is the victim's behavior during this stage which appears to cause the greatest frustration and anger to individuals in the helping professions, friends or family members. Most often, these attempts at reconciliation do not work, but most, end in further abuse.

This stage can last for years as the victim slowly gets the strength and support from each voyage to the "outer world" to overcome the psychological restraints to move onto the final stage:

## *Living without Violence*

Although a survivor of domestic abuse may live without violence after leaving an abusive relationship, she may well suffer from long-term depression and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome along with a host of other stress reactions to the violence and trauma she suffered.

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