

Lesson 5

WHO'S TO BLAME FOR ABUSE?

1 Samuel 20:1

David now fled from Naioth in Ramah and found Jonathan. "What have I done?" he exclaimed. "What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?"

1 Samuel 26:18

Why are you chasing me? What have I done? What is my crime?

David is bewildered and can't understand what he could have done to cause Saul to want to harm him.

Over time, the victim comes to believe that she did something to cause the abuse. This happens in part because the abuser usually tells the victim it is her fault:

- If she just did something differently, there wouldn't be abuse.
- If she were different personally, the abuse would stop.

In the story of Saul and David, we see that David did not do anything to provoke Saul. In fact, he repeatedly attempted to soothe, appease, use reason, and bargain to stop the violence. Unfortunately, none of his efforts worked. Many victims of domestic violence find themselves in the same situation. They may spend years trying one thing after another to avoid the abuse and please the abuser, with little success. It is easy for such relationships to progress into a situation where one person becomes a tyrant and the other experiences fearfulness, confusion, and low self-worth.

The issue becomes more evident when one realizes that domestic violence is not as much about what the victim does or doesn't do. It is about an abuser's desire to maintain power and control over another person. Domestic violence is a *pattern* of coercive, intimidating, or assaultive behavior aimed at controlling the victim through fear of harm or loss, humiliation, belittling, criticism, threats, abusive control, and isolation, raging, withholding, physical or psychological assault, or other means. While abuse may occur in any relationship, domestic violence is based on a systematic and repeated pattern of such behaviors with the intent of diminishing the victim and maintaining control over her.

Meeting an abuser's demands usually does little to improve the situation because the abuser relies on the abuse to maintain power and control. However, when one demand or condition is met, more may appear. As a result, the victim may come to feel a sense of futility and hopelessness about the situation and feelings of being inadequate, unworthy, or defective.

When the facts about domestic violence are not understood, myths develop. These myths can lead to blaming victims for the abuse. It is essential to understand that domestic violence is...

NOT a communication problem or a conflict of differing temperaments. Couples with these problems don't necessarily resort to abuse. Counselors teaching "couples communication" frequently find that this does not stop the abuse. Domestic violence can occur where good communication techniques are being applied; some abusers will use them as another tool for controlling their victim.

NOT an anger problem--episodes of domestic violence can occur when the abuser is calm. Anger management training frequently fails to end the abuse.

NOT due to stress--many episodes of abuse occur when the abuser is not stressed, and many people do not become violent when stressed.

NOT caused by alcohol or drugs—though these may reduce an abuser's inhibitions or provide him with an excuse for battering. Drugs and alcohol in themselves do not cause domestic violence. Stopping the use of drugs and alcohol may not stop the abuse.

NOT caused by a lack of submission on the part of the victim. Attempts at appeasement, cooperation, obedience, and offering no resistance rarely stop the abuse.

NOT caused by the victim's behavior. Unfortunately, studies

indicate that there is often little the victim can do to stop the abuse. Frequently, the abuser continues to abuse in subsequent relationships.

Domestic violence comes from *within* the batterer. Instead of choosing to respond to situations in other possible ways, the abuser chooses to use abuse. As David discovered, a victim is usually unable to stop the abuse by seeking to please the abuser or trying to meet his demands.

Questions:

1. What are some other reasons you have heard people use to explain the cause of domestic violence?
2. What are some ways in which an abuser may have tried to convince you that you caused the abuse?
3. What are some things you did to comply with an abuser's demands? Did these things succeed in ending the abuse?