

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

*by Christopher Hall, as part of the West Virginia Batterer Intervention Prevention Program Curriculum, 2011(updated 2015)*

Taking time to focus on the impact of domestic violence is only a part of the work that needs to be done in domestic violence intervention (batterer intervention) groups. Exercises that focus on impact are important, but an ongoing question for facilitators to ask themselves is how can abusers be led to reflect on their entitled beliefs that are the foundations of hurtful behavior?

Abusers are commonly very self-oriented, to the point of selfishness. An orientation to oneself is a part of being human, as we all live out our lives through our own perceptions and experiences. Abusers, however, have put their own perceptions and experience as the most important and judge themselves as "better than" their partner and children. This selfishness can be used to lead reflection on personal experiences of harm, and that understanding can lead to an awareness of harm to others.

Something to keep in mind for this exercise is that the discussions and interactions can often be more important than following the exact outline of the exercise. The ultimate goal is to guide understanding that personal experiences do not negate harm to others. Facilitators can begin by asking the class "what are the basic guaranteed rights for human beings, as stated by the United States Declaration of Independence?" Normally at least one participant will be able to identify:

### **Unalienable Human Rights:**

- **LIFE**
- **LIBERTY**
- **PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS**

When referencing these rights, abusers will sometimes complain that their rights have been taken away from them by the court system or by their partners/victims to whom they have been abusive, violent and controlling toward. It can be challenging to confront these beliefs, especially since abusers will talk about how police lied in reports, their partners made things up, and complaints about other's behavior toward them.

Each individual participant will need to make a choice to move beyond such justifications to work toward health and respect. Arguing an individual's experiences and beliefs about being wronged may not achieve this end, and facilitators may want to allow some discussion about these rights (without giving feedback or intervening unless it is to bring the conversation back to topic or interrupt blatant inappropriateness).

Next, ask the class if anyone is familiar with the "Four Freedoms" as brought forward by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They are:

### **Four Freedoms:**

- Freedom of **SPEECH and EXPRESSION**
- Freedom of **WORSHIP**
- Freedom **FROM WANT**
- Freedom **FROM FEAR**

It could be useful to ask the class what these freedoms and rights mean. As a part of this brainstorming, some of the answers might seem obvious, but press for deeper understanding of how each of these items might fit into everyday life.

As a part of the discussion, facilitators can ask participants for examples of ways they tried to take away, limit or stop their partner's freedoms. Specific examples might include attempts to define how a partner should worship or believe, or what faith a partner should have. Inquire if there have been times during their relationship where their partner was denied her needs or kept from doing something, or forced to do something. Finally ask if any of the participant's partners (or children) were put in fear by their controlling, abusive, or violent choices. It is possible that participants may make statements about their partner being able to say whatever she wants, her ability to go to church wherever and whenever she decides to, that they do hard work to provide money to buy things, and that a partner was never afraid.

Often this discussion will lead to a conflict between the participant's claims of being hurt, and their talk about hurting their partners. If the focus remains on claims of personal harm by partners/victims, facilitators may want to note these comments for use as the activity continues.

After this part of the discussion, facilitators can make the statement:

***"People who take away freedoms and rights rarely stop to consider the impact of doing so, and also rarely notice the pain and fear caused by taking them away."***

After making this statement, facilitators can then ask what groups of people have a lot of power in the United States over others. This includes the possible ability to take away rights and freedoms. What groups are controlled by that power? ***Having power does not mean someone will harm those they have control over; it merely means there is potential for abuse and harm.*** The following are some possible answers:

GROUPS WITH POWER	→	GROUPS CONTROLLED
Adults	→	Children
Rich people	→	Poor and middle class, working people
Corporations/management	→	Workers / consumers
Police/court systems	→	Law violators
Highly educated	→	Less educated
Racial/cultural majorities	→	Racial/cultural minorities
Caretakers	→	Elderly/disabled
Facilitators/counselors/educators	→	Participants/clients/students/patients
Able-bodied/healthy/mentally stable	→	Handicapped/unhealthy/mentally ill
Citizens	→	Non-citizens
Straight/heterosexual/cisgender	→	Lesbian / gay / bisexual / transgender / queer / questioning / intersex / asexual
Religious leaders	→	Congregants / non-religious
Politicians/government officials	→	Citizens
"Normal looking"	→	People with tattoos, piercings, haircuts and clothing that are not considered "normal"
Christian	→	Non-Christian
Men	→	Women

The above discussion on who has “power over” may be a challenging one. Facilitators may want to ask how each group who has power can take away rights or freedoms from those whom they have power over. This might best be done by listing the possible rights and freedoms taken away as they are listed. During discussion, it may also be helpful to note that power groups protect those in their group. Here are some possible examples for each category of power (whichever form of oppression facilitators wish to focus on is best saved for the final category - the focus of sexism could be a good choice):

<b>Powerful Group</b>	<b>Group Controlled</b>	<b>Rights/Freedoms Possible to Take Away</b>
<b>Adults</b>	<b>Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killed by adults (LIFE)</li> <li>• Told what to do, how to act, restrained physically (LIBERTY)</li> <li>• Restricted in choices of clothing, activities (EXPRESSION)</li> <li>• Compelled/forced to attend or not attend religious services (WORSHIP)</li> <li>• Neglected by parents/guardians (WANT)</li> <li>• Threatened with or actually harmed (FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Rich people</b>	<b>Poor and middle class, working people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suing / legal attacks for debts; foreclosure (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Manipulation / funding of politics (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WANT)</li> <li>• Redistricting of cities to push poor away from certain areas (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Corporations / management</b>	<b>Workers / consumers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating work policies to put pressure on workers for production (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Firing / controlling or limiting hiring practices (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Unsafe work conditions, pollution or unsafe products (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Police / court systems</b>	<b>Law violators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killing citizens deemed dangerous (LIFE)</li> <li>• Detaining or imprisoning for violations of crimes (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS)</li> <li>• Unsafe jail/prison environments (LIFE, LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Complex systems for defending oneself (LIBERTY; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Highly educated</b>	<b>Less educated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expelled from school for not meeting requirements (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT)</li> <li>• Restricted from certain careers/jobs (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT)</li> </ul>
<b>Racial / cultural majorities</b>	<b>Racial / cultural minorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killed / beaten (LIFE; LIBERTY; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Restricting celebrations / practices to one cultural tradition (HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; FEAR)</li> <li>• Taking over culturally specific events (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WORSHIP)</li> <li>• Treating racial minorities like criminals or less valuable than racial majority (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WANT; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Caretakers</b>	<b>Elderly/disabled</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killing via neglect/abuse (LIFE)</li> <li>• Taking advantage of financially (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> </ul>

<b>Powerful Group</b>	<b>Group Controlled</b>	<b>Rights/Freedoms Possible to Take Away</b>
<b>Facilitators / counselors / educators</b>	<b>Participants / clients / students / patients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treating a person as a trait or a choice instead of a human being (HAPPINESS; SPEECH; FEAR)</li> <li>• Determining someone's future without listening to, consulting or caring about their opinion (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Labeling (HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION)</li> </ul>
<b>Able-bodied / healthy / mentally stable</b>	<b>Handicapped / unhealthy / mentally ill</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refusing to accommodate needs (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT)</li> <li>• Ignoring pain, effects, disability (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Limiting access (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS)</li> <li>• Manipulating or using disability against (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; WANT; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Citizens</b>	<b>Non-citizens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manipulating (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Ignoring, refusing needs (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Straight / heterosexual / cisgender</b>	<b>Lesbian / gay / bisexual / transgender / queer / questioning / intersex / asexual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killing / beating (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Limiting freedoms (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Using religion to attack (WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> <li>• Denying legitimacy and humanity (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS)</li> <li>• Using sexual orientation as an insult to straight people ("you're gay") to control and demean (HAPPINESS; LIBERTY; FEAR)</li> <li>• Assumptions of being straight (HAPPINESS; LIBERTY)</li> </ul>
<b>Religious leaders</b>	<b>Congregants / non-religious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manipulating (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Insulting/attacking other faiths (WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> <li>• Working to cause fear for certain activities (FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Politicians / government officials</b>	<b>Citizens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing laws to favor special interests instead of the larger general public (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WORSHIP; WANT; FEAR)</li> <li>• Using personal position to gain benefits that are not a part of the position (HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>"Normal looking"</b>	<b>People with tattoos, piercings, haircuts and clothing that are not considered "normal"</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignoring (HAPPINESS)</li> <li>• Assumptions of identity/criminality (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION)</li> <li>• Increased pressure from other categories [such as looking more disabled leading to more possible rights/freedoms taken away] (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Christian</b>	<b>Non-Christian</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting policies tied to religious principles (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> </ul>
<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killing / beating (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; FEAR)</li> <li>• Assuming "head of household" (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> <li>• Sexual assault (LIFE; LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; EXPRESSION; FEAR)</li> <li>• Ignored, seen as "less than" (LIBERTY; HAPPINESS; SPEECH; EXPRESSION; WORSHIP; FEAR)</li> </ul>

After completing discussion of the one or more rights or freedoms that can be taken away, facilitators can ask how each group with power can ignore the group it controls. The following are some possible examples:

<b>GROUPS WITH POWER</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>GROUPS CONTROLLED</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>HOW CONTROLLED GROUP IS IGNORED</b>
<b>Adults</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>→</b>	Adult believes that children are not as smart, consider them to be property/possessions prior to achieving independence, their opinions are not as valid therefore justifies not listening to children
<b>Rich people</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Poor and middle class, working people</b>	<b>→</b>	Makes assumptions that people with less money are not as capable, hard working, or important therefore justifies not listening to poor or middle class working people.
<b>Corporations / management</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Workers / consumers</b>	<b>→</b>	Believes workers and consumers are either not as intelligent or are trying to get away with things – or that they do not face as much pressure as management therefore their inflated salaries are justified and workers are not important enough to be recognized or rewarded for their work. Corporations seek to earn as much money as possible and cut safety and health to achieve maximum profits in the belief that consumers will not notice or care about the dangers.
<b>Police / court systems</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Law violators</b>	<b>→</b>	Assumption that law violators are all criminals and therefore do not need to be treated as human beings or care for their opinions. Overlaps with assumptions about racial / cultural minorities.
<b>Highly educated</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Less educated</b>	<b>→</b>	Those with less education have less valid opinions or worth than those with higher education/training, therefore their ideas or careers are less important.
<b>Racial / cultural majorities</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Racial / cultural minorities</b>	<b>→</b>	Majority of power, racially and culturally, leads to belief that majority rules and is more important, therefore opinions and unique needs of fewer people are invalid. Cultural practices of the majority are seen as "normal" and individual practices by other cultures are either ignored or attacked.
<b>Caretakers</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Elderly / disabled</b>	<b>→</b>	Since caretakers often do many things for those who need caring for, these caretakers can think they are entitled to things from those they care for, as well as believe that their method of caring is the best and may ignore complaints or ideas from those they care for

<b>GROUPS WITH POWER</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>GROUPS CONTROLLED</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>HOW CONTROLLED GROUP IS IGNORED</b>
<b>Facilitators / counselors / educators</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Participants / clients / students / patients</b>	<b>→</b>	Seen as "less than," opinions are not as valid, lectured to or given directives without input, assumed to be unintelligent, resistant, and incapable of change, those who do what is wanted are treated better than others. This one needs to be specifically understood by BIP/DVIP facilitators.
<b>Able-bodied / healthy / mentally stable</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Handicapped / unhealthy / mentally ill</b>	<b>→</b>	Opinions that if one is able bodied and doesn't have the ability to do certain tasks, they should just deal with it and do things like everyone who is able bodied – therefore any pain that is visible is uncomfortable and ignored and if nothing is visibly "wrong" then such a person is treated as if they are not handicapped / disabled (often true for mental disabilities).
<b>Citizens</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Non-citizens</b>	<b>→</b>	Not growing up in the United States means that an individual should have no rights or freedoms therefore anyone from another country who is not naturalized is looked at as being less than.
<b>Straight / heterosexual / cisgender</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Lesbian / gay / bisexual / transgender / queer / questioning / intersex / asexual</b>	<b>→</b>	Focus on sexual orientation instead of the individuality and humanity of the person can lead to judging by sexual behavior that is disfavored and justifying actions toward individuals due to this disgust including not listening to opinions or believing that anyone who is gay/lesbian/bisexual wants to convert a straight person to become gay, or in some way has a romantic fixation upon the straight person directly.
<b>Religious leaders</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Congregants / non-religious</b>	<b>→</b>	Thinking that those in a congregation cannot function without guidance, or do not have the capability to understand religious tomes or practices, therefore opinions about faith or the religion are invalid; the non-religious do not have any validity because they lack faith and will be judged as unworthy
<b>Politicians/government officials</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>Citizens</b>	<b>→</b>	Citizens are believed to be uncaring, stupid, "sheep" who can be taken advantage of, policies are drafted without consideration of how the majority of the public will be effected
<b>"Normal looking"</b>	<b>→</b>	<b>People with tattoos, piercings, haircuts and clothing that are not considered "normal"</b>	<b>→</b>	Assumption that people who look different are fitting into a stereotype and will act a certain clothing not or practicing religious ceremonies that are not "normal" and worthy of being judged and ignored or treated differently

GROUPS WITH POWER	→	GROUPS CONTROLLED	→	HOW CONTROLLED GROUP IS IGNORED
<b>Christian</b>	→	<b>Non-Christian</b>	→	Sometimes beliefs that non-Christian is going to be judged by God and go to hell, therefore the person is only worthy of being listened to if wanting to convert to the faith
<b>Men</b>	→	<b>Women</b>	→	Women are sometimes assumed to be nagging toward men, repeating things and trying to manipulate men into doing things, therefore men can ignore women's opinions/complaints unless trying to get something from them. Women's fears about potential physical/sexual assault by men are discounted or minimized.

The above are some possible ideas on how groups are ignored. Facilitators are encouraged to expand on other reasons and ideas of how ignoring happens and then bring the conversation around to looking at the idea that being human leads to several experiences where you may be discounted, ignored or hurt by those in power, but to look at not just how you individually have been harmed, but to spend more time considering how you have power over others and may be harming them. This especially holds true for abusive men toward female partners as several of these positions of power may overlap.