



## Allies in Change Counseling Center Abuse Intervention Group Program Curriculum

### Overview

We believe that decisions to be abusive primarily originate from **how males are socialized** to behave, which is why men do the vast majority of violence. Implicit in the clustering of traditional masculine qualities (e.g., self-reliance, stoicism, independence) is a **presumption that the world is a hostile and dangerous place where others are not to be trusted**. Men who are abusive more strongly embrace this world view than men who are not.

The key theme is **distance and detachment across three domains**: detachment from the relationship, detachment from other people, and even detachment from oneself. This distance and detachment is a significant contributor to men's abusive behavior.

Their distance and detachment from themselves leads to **low emotional self-awareness and limited ability to emotionally deescalate**, which leads to the **externalization of emotions**, through abusive behavior, among other things.

Their distance and detachment from the other person leads to a **narcissism and egotism** in which they fail to consider the other person's (differing) perspective, wants and needs. The abuse within this domain is primarily **emotional neglect and non-acknowledgement of others**.

Their distance and detachment from the relationship as a cooperative endeavor leads them to viewing it as a combative one in which they must **over power their partner** to pursue what they wish. This is where the traditional "power and control" curriculum is most relevant.

To help abusive men more readily choose non-violence, they must work to become closer and more trusting--of themselves, of the other, and of the relationship.

With regards to themselves we seek to help them become more **emotionally self-aware** and to more **effectively and appropriately manage their emotional arousal**.

With regards to the other, we seek to **increase their empathy and awareness of the other's** differing perspective and presence in the relationship.

With regards to the relationship, we seek to help them **work collaboratively** rather than combatively.

### Curriculum

The Allies in Change Abuse Intervention Group curriculum is uniquely integrative. It's primary influences include: the Duluth Curriculum, Patricia Evans' The Verbally Abusive Relationship, Terrence Real's I Don't Want To Talk About It, Paul Kivel's Men's Work, Motivational Interviewing, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

Below are the specific curriculum topics covered within the group. Because groups are open, with new men regularly being added, there is no set order to these topics. In fact, a semi-random order is preferred so that each domain is regularly touched upon.

Included in this summary are some of the research that provides empirical support for what we are doing, consistent with evidence-based practices. The research citations are denoted with an asterisk (\*).

### Foundational Information

- Educating them about traditional **male socialization** and its enormous impact and influence.
- Educating them about **power orientation**: power over vs. personal power.
- Related to this helping them understand the difference between thinking/listening **intentionally** (i.e., closed to the input of the other, with a predetermined agenda) and **informationally** (i.e., open to the input of the other, seeking to understand their perspective as well).
- Educating them about the wide **range of abusive behaviors** including physical, verbal, psychological, economic, property, sexual, and collateral abuse.
- Providing more in-depth education on the wide range of behaviors that constitute **sexual abuse**.
- Helping them to more fully understand the various forms of **economic abuse**.
- Helping them to identify and examine the **pro-abuse beliefs** they hold that allow them to give themselves permission to be abusive.
- In working with individual clients, we identify where they are at in their own personal change process and seek to **match the style of intervention** with the stage they are at.

\*This method of intervention is consistent with the stages of change identified by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) and has been shown to be an effective way to work with domestically violent men (Begun et al., 2001; Eckhardt, Babcock, & Homack, 2004).

### Working Against Oneself

-Helping them see how their **self-talk**, their internal interpretations, significantly color how they see and respond to the world.

\*This is based on Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, which has been widely supported as an effective way of managing intense emotions and behaviors in a variety of situations. Hamberger and Hastings (1988) showed decreases in occurrence of violent behaviors after implementation of a cognitive-behavioral skills training program for male spouse abusers.

-Educating them about the **denial process** as a means of remaining self-deceptive including specific **defense mechanisms**.

\*Recent research suggests that domestically violent men score lower than non-domestically violent men on measures of “emotional intelligence” or the ability to understand, process, and effectively deal with emotion (Winters, Clift, & Dutton, 2004).

-Explaining the concept of **shame**, how it differs from healthy guilt, and how shame increases denial.

-Exploring the role of **mood altering substances** (e.g., alcohol, recreational drugs, food, sex, television) in avoiding self-honesty and how their own patterns of use have contributed to their abusive cycle.

\*Field, Caetano, & Nelson (2004) found that men with strong or very strong expectations of aggressive behavior following alcohol use were 3x more likely to have been domestically violent than those without such expectations.

-Explaining the concept of **externalizing** which occurs largely due to poor self-management and self-awareness.

-Educating about the concept of the victim stance and how that is a personally disempowering lifestyle.

#### Working Against the Other

-Explaining the concepts of **narcissism/grandiosity/egotism**.

-Identifying and examining their **assumptions about and attitudes towards women**.

\*Field, Caetano, and Nelson (2004) found that men with cognitive risk factors such as approving of marital violence were more likely to have perpetrated domestic violence.

#### Working Against the Relationship

-Educating them about the wide range of **controlling behaviors** as well as identifying their own personal patterns.

\*This is supported by the work of Pence and Paymar (1993) who showed the importance of understanding the ways abusive men control their partners and others.

-Helping them to understand the difference between (appropriate) **influence** vs. (inappropriate) **coercion**.

#### Working With Oneself

-Educating them about the physiological component in emotional arousal, including the corresponding **physical and behavioral warning signs** and the negative medical consequences of sustained emotional arousal.

-Teaching them how to **notice, manage and regulate their emotional arousal** through various de-escalation processes.

\*We draw on a number of empirically well-supported anger management and Dialectical Behavior Therapy approaches in this domain.

-Teaching them how to appropriately take **time-outs** as a part of this de-escalation process.

-Teaching them about **primary accountability**--that they alone are responsible for their emotional well-being and that the only true power they have is over themselves.

-Helping them to identify **positive self-talk and non-abusive beliefs**.

-Educating them about **self-care**, leading a well-balanced life and specific, concrete ways of practicing good self-care.

-Educating them about the **relapse** process--the longer term process of falling away from their program into relapse and the personal indications that they are in relapse.

-Helping them to **internalize** the program so that they continue to practice, on a lifelong basis, a non-abusive lifestyle.

#### Working with the Other

-Educating them about **empathy** and specific ways of being more aware of and empathic with the people around them.

-Helping them understand the **impact** of their abusive behavior **on their victim(s), children who are exposed** to it, and others who are affected by it.

-Helping them **understand male privilege and entitlement** and how that may affect their relationship with their partner and others.

-Teaching them how to **think/listen informationally** to better understand/work with their partner and others.

-Teaching them the importance of not only what their intention was in a behavior, but what the **other's perception and experience** was.

-Teaching them the **Platinum Rule**--to love others the way the other wants to be loved.

-Helping them to understand common qualities of the **victim recovery process** from abusive behavior to increase their empathy towards their victim.

-Requiring them to complete and share a **Letter of Accountability** with the group and, when appropriate, with their partner.

-Educating them about the **amends** process and encouraging them to make amends wherever possible.

## Working With the Relationship

-Working from a **presumption of alliance** rather than a presumption of opposition.

-Educating them about the qualities of healthy relationships including addressing:

-compassionate **boundary setting** (and respecting another's boundaries)

-being **assertive** with others rather than passive or aggressive

-the nature of **intimacy** and how to achieve it/manage it

-good **communication skills**

-good **listening skills** including how to listen empathically

-**healthy sexuality** and what that looks like

-Teaching them how to **resolve conflict with a "win-win" mentality**.

\*As outlined in the "Getting to Yes" series of books on effective negotiation

-Helping them to view **healthy conflict as a pathway to greater intimacy**.

-Helping them to understand that **they can be "right" ("win" the argument) or they can be "effective" (maintain a good relationship)**.

-Educate about one key definition of a non-abusive relationship: **non-coerced informed consent** as well as other **non-abusive beliefs**

-Identifying the **qualities of being a good father and a good partner**.

-Effective, empowering, **respectful discipline** as a parent.

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