

What is the cycle of violence?

All relationships are different and can include same-sex couples, heterosexual couples or sibling and family relationships. Healthy relationships have respect, kindness, care, communication, and equality.



WARNING: SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACT SHEET MAY BE DIFFICULT TO READ. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIND ASSISTANCE IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO.

This means that you both want to be fair and work the 'tough' stuff out.

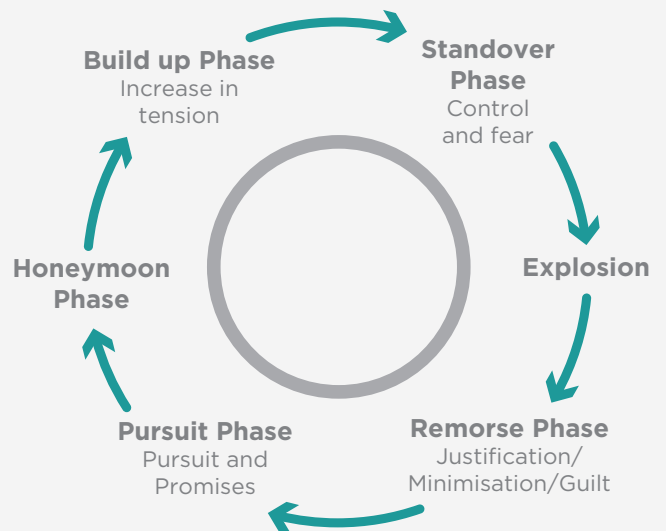
Not all relationships are healthy though, and some relationships are abusive. Most of the time domestic/family violence is gendered which means that it is almost always the man that tries to control and dominate the woman in the relationship.

Within abusive relationships, the abuse follows a pattern – or cycle. This is known as the 'cycle of violence' and it is usually shown in a circle.

This circle is meant to show people what the 'cyclical' nature of domestic violence looks like and to explain how the abuser can change throughout the relationship. There are heaps of different versions of the cycle of violence, but it usually looks like the diagram show on the right.

The cycle of violence is one theory of domestic/family violence, and your experiences and understandings may better align with another theory. Some women may experience every phase in the cycle of violence, while others may only experience a few. There is no one size fits all approach or understanding.

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SOURCE: Lenore Walker (1979) USA

The build-up phase:

The build-up phase refers to the times when tensions escalate. During this phase, the abuser's behaviour is usually unpredictable and volatile, and abuse tends to increase.

The standover phase:

It is in this phase that the abuser's abusive behaviour increases. You might feel afraid, and you might feel like you must 'walk on egg-shells'. You could also be feeling like anything that you do will only make things worse – you are damned if you do and damned if you do not.

The explosion phase:

This is usually when the abuse or domestic violence is at its peak or worst stage.

The remorse phase:

During this phase, your abusive partner may apologise for the abuse they inflicted. The abuser often feels sorry for themselves and they could even express guilt for being abusive. They could justify their abuse by saying things like you made them do it. They could also step back, or retreat, from the relationship for a while.

This phase tends to stop being a part of the cycle of abuse as time goes on. For some women this phase has never been part of the cycle at all.

The pursuit phase:

During this stage, your abusive partner will probably promise not to be abusive again and/or promise to get help for their abusive behaviour. They could become the 'perfect' partner or the partner you fell in love with in the beginning. They could be more attentive towards you; they could give you presents or deliver on promises they have made in the past.

They might also explain their abusive behaviour away, say that they will stop using drugs and/or alcohol or say they were abusive because of work or because they were stressed – or because something you did made them do it.

You did not make them do it. You are never the cause of anyone's decision to use abusive behaviour.

The honeymoon phase:

This is the stage where everything seems great. You and your abusive partner could be in denial about the domestic violence you are experiencing. It is usually the case that both partners 're-commit' to the relationship during this stage, and you could both be in a position where you do not believe the abuse will happen again.

The abuse will happen again, however. The honeymoon phase is never permanent. It always ends with the build-up phase returning.

Further Information

Yemaya Women's Support Service

P: (03) 6334 0305

E: admin@yemaya.com.au

Please note that all information contained within this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only. If you require further information or assistance please contact Yemaya Women's Support Service.