

Domestic Violence: Why Change Is Not Possible

Many say “I can change,” but do they truly mean it? Domestic violence, also called domestic or partner abuse, refers to a pattern of behaviour in a domestic setting in which the abuser gains power or control over their partner. The abuse can be physical, emotional, verbal, or financial. Some examples of domestic violence include behaviours that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, blame, or injure someone. While domestic violence can be perpetrated by and affect anyone, a 2019 study by the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics reported that 79% of domestic violence victims are women.

First of all, most abusers share learned attitudes or feelings that make change an unlikely outcome. These people often feel a sense of entitlement or privilege, usually stemming from previous events or relationships in their lives. These traits make it very difficult for an abuser to change their ways. An example of this is how an abuser might be nice and charming between periods of abuse, causing them to be seen as a nice person outside of their relationship. This can be extremely harmful for the victims of abuse, as people might not believe them if they come forward. If victims of abuse do not feel like they are able to speak out, their abusers will not likely change. Another example of traits many abusers share is low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness. Regardless of socioeconomic standing or other means of success, abusers will often feel unworthy. This is dangerous if said people are in relationships, as they might perpetrate abuse to feel more powerful. One last attitude worth noting is how many abusers objectify their partner or see them as their property. Viewing their partners like this allows them to be seen not as a person, but as an object, usually of a sexual nature. This can lead to physical abuse, especially if the victim does not behave how their partner wants them to. These traits, most of which are common amongst all abusers, can be detrimental to the health, mental or physical, of their partners.

Many of these attitudes, while most of the time learned, are very difficult to unlearn, which is why many abusers do not change.

In addition to the traits numerous abusers share, many also believe in an intergenerational cycle of violence in which children or other family members related to the abuser feel that violence is acceptable. This, in turn, creates a pattern of abuse that many perpetrators do not even realize. It was noted that the rate of domestic violence in people with a history of being abused is almost six times higher than the rate of the general population. Without grasping the seriousness of their actions, said abusers will continue to execute their violence. Victims of abuse might also be attempting to take back power by abusing someone else. By perpetrating violence against someone else, abusers might be trying to “heal” in a way. Obviously, this can only cause more trauma for another person. Experiencing abuse and learning that it is condoned, especially as a child, makes it ingrained in your brain and, while it is possible to unlearn these customs, it is difficult and very unlikely. This learned acceptance of violence might also be extended onto the abusers' children, thus continuing the cycle of violence.

Mental illness can also be a factor in domestic abuse, which makes it difficult for the abuser to acknowledge their problems and get help. While mental illness is not a direct cause of abusive behaviour, there have been some links to certain mental illnesses and abusive behaviour. Some of these diagnoses include: post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder. Many of these illnesses cause an increased difficulty for the victims, as the blame is often placed on the diagnosis rather than the person. Narcissistic personality disorder, for example, can be linked to domestic abusers for many reasons. Many people with this disorder have a high sense of their own importance and lack the ability to

understand or care about the feelings of others. These traits, like briefly mentioned previously, are also some that many perpetrators of abuse share. Some of these various mental illnesses, like narcissistic personality disorder, consist of many behaviours that some abusers also have, which is why the two can sometimes be linked. While these links do exist, it is still important to not blame the mental illness, as it can cause harm to others with the same diagnosis, or diminish the pain victims of abuse feel. In short, mental illness can sometimes, but not always, be a factor in domestic abuse, and it can cloud abusers' judgement and ability to seek help.

Finally, there are many steps in truly changing a person's pattern of abuse, and these can sometimes take a lifetime to complete. An abuser must: admit to what they have done, make amends, accept responsibility, identify the attitudes and controlling behaviours that drive their abuse, stop making excuses, carry their weight, and more. While this may seem like a lot, all of these steps are necessary in an abuser changing. The sheer amount of work to be put in is why many abusive people do not change. Abusive people must be deeply committed to making these changes in order to become a better person. Many abusers will also only seek treatment if they desire to fix themselves. This can be a difficult thing for many to do, as there are often things preventing the abuser from seeing the reality of their situation. This can be related to mental health issues, or just their personalities and situation by themselves.

In conclusion, while there are definitely ways abusers can attempt to change their abusive attitudes and behaviours, true change is very unlikely. The learned feelings and traits make it difficult for perpetrators of abuse to not only acknowledge, but also change their behaviours. The intergenerational cycle of abuse can be a factor in why some people abuse their partners. While the two are not directly related, mental illness can also sometimes

have an influence in abusive people, as well as an influence for the victims of abuse. Overall, change for a domestic abuser, while not completely unfeasible, is improbable.

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