

**Part 2: The Domestic Abuse Group Members' Individual Tasks  
In The Domestic Abuse Group Treatment Program**  
*From Stopping The Violence: A Group Model To Change Men's Abusive Attitudes And  
Behaviors (Published by Haworth Press [New York] in 1999)*

**A Description Of The Domestic Abuse Group (Which Lasts 2 1/2 Hours Each Week):**

- **The Domestic Abuse Group Treatment Program Has Three Important Elements:**
  - The accomplishment of individual member tasks (10 tasks are mandatory; 2 tasks may be part of an man's program depending on his individual circumstances)
  - Education and skill development (12 units)
  - An extended period of time in the group treatment program:
    - ...most men use 45-60 sessions to complete the program to begin to really address the controlling and entitled attitudes that underlie the abuse and violence and to go beyond just education and behavior management
  
- **The Format Of Each Weekly Group Is As Follows:**
  - A "check-in" for each member (15-20 minutes)
    - ...whether he made phone calls and did the exercise plan, positive accomplishments or significant escalations during week and how these were handled, asking for personal time (to address a specific issue in his life at this moment) or time to present one of his "tasks" in group
  - Educational presentations (20-25 minutes)
  - Members taking individual time
    - ...to present their individual tasks or to discuss a current issue that is affecting their life
  - A check-out for each member at the end of each group (10-15 minutes)
    - ...his reactions to the group that night
    - ...discussing any potential escalations coming up within the next week

**The First Ten Individual Member Tasks Listed Below Need To Be Completed In Order  
To Successfully Complete The Domestic Abuse Group Program**

**1) An Introduction To The Other Group Members (At The First Group He Attends)**

- This task introduces each man to the other members in the group when he first joins the program
- He talks about why he has come to the group
  - ...and he needs to be specific about types of abuse and consequences he has experienced up to that time and to mention physical abuse specifically if it has been present:
    - ...this is an immediate way to decrease his shame by sharing something that no one in his life, besides his partner, generally knows about
- He talks about what he wants to learn from group and how he wants to change
- He discusses whether he is court-ordered, has a *Sobriety Contract*, or has a *"No-suicide Contract"*

- He provides a phone number where he can be reached by other members:
  - ...he needs to make at least one phone contact per week with another group member
    - ...to decrease social isolation and increase his emotional support system (in case there is an acute escalation or emergency)
  - ...some men make 2-3 calls or more each week and some develop friendships that continue after men have completed the group program
  - ...the phone call requirement is monitored by having men report in check-in whether they initiated and actually made contact with at least one other group member
- He shares one thing that he likes about himself
- He receives questions and feedback from other members:
  - ...these are the first positives/concerns/feedback about a new member's willingness to be honest and about his overall attitude related to coming to the group
- Other members also briefly introduce themselves to the new group member prior to his taking time when they are checking in:
  - ...all the men are at different stages in the group and this can be a time for testimonials, talk about what they are learning and the progress they see themselves making, and positive statements about the group and the program

## **2) Presenting His Personal *Exercise Program* (At The First Group He Attends)**

- Each man needs to set up and follow through with an exercise program (3-4 times per week of at least 20 minutes) that is:
  - ...non-violent (e.g. no hitting, striking, kicking actions)
  - ...non-competitive (no activities that will increase his stress level)
  - ...aerobic (to raise his heart rate for at least 20 minutes to create a stress release for him)
- Examples of the recommended types of exercise: walking (ideally brisk walking), jogging, swimming, biking, skating, cross country skiing, using an exercycle, calisthenics, rollerblading
- This exercise program serves as both:
  - ...preventative maintenance related to his overall stress level
    - ...to decrease the daily build-up of stress in his life
    - ...to help him deal more effectively with the surges of adrenaline and cortisol that are also part of the escalation process related to anger expression
  - ...and to assist him in handling acute escalations when they occur
    - ...e.g. getting into the habit of going for a walk during a time-out after an argument and actually working to physically calm himself down when he is escalated
- Most men report that getting into a regimen of structured exercise is an important part of the group program for them and they often continue this exercise after they leave the group
- This task is monitored in the program by having men report in the group check-in whether they have completed their exercise for the week

## **3) Presenting His *Individual Treatment Goals* (At The First Group He Attends)**

- Initially, he needs to agree to the general domestic abuse group goals:
  - ...to stop the violence and decrease the potential for emotional and verbal abuse
    - ...this provides him with a clear commitment to non-violence in the program
  - ...to accept full and unequivocal responsibility for his past controlling and abusive behavior

- ...to examine and actually work to intervene in his controlling attitudes and behaviors
- ...to use the group and its members for emotional support and sharing
- ...to improve his self-esteem and work at developing empathy and compassion for his partner, his children, and others
- In addition, each man needs to come up with at least 4 specific goals that relate to his own personal issues and his reasons for being in the group program
- This assists him in making a commitment to the group process for himself
  - ...this also helps clarify whether he actually sees controlling and abusive behavior as issues that he needs to address in the treatment program
- **Some Examples Of Other Treatment Goals That Men Have Set For Themselves:**
  - ...to identify, intervene in, and decrease my negative self-talk
  - ...to take respectful time-outs whenever necessary
  - ...to learn to listen more effectively with my partner and others
  - ...to learn and practice effective conflict resolution skills
  - ...to identify and express all my feelings (not just my anger)
  - ...to increase the frequency of my non-abusive parenting responses with my children
- He also needs to make commitment to remove firearms from his residence during his involvement in the group program
  
- **From This Point On, Men Write Out, Ask For Time, And Present Their Tasks When They Are Ready (The Process Is Thus Individualized):**
  - ...Tasks Need To Be Written Out Completely Before A Man Asks For Time To Present Them In The Group

#### **4) Presenting His *Escalation Prevention Plan (EPP)***

- This is the foundation of effective domestic abuse and anger management programs and this task can also be seen in the “Tasks” section under “Tools” on the home page of this website
- The *EPP* is first reviewed and begun in the intake process as part of an assessment of his level of motivation and of his ability to think about and understand his anger, his personal escalation process to abusive behavior, and his desire to control people and situations
- He needs to clearly identify cues and triggers that help to signal the gradual build-up of life stress and to alert him to his potential to become controlling and abusive
  - ...he needs to learn that his escalation includes any and all feelings that can lead him to become controlling and abusive
    - ...not just anger and feeling rageful and “out of control,” but also sadness, hurt, disappointment, anxiety, fear, and other more vulnerable feelings
  - ...he needs to learn any other signs that he also needs to recognize (increased heart rate, negative self-talk)
    - ...anything that increases the potential for the man to escalate to abusive behavior
  - ...he needs to identify triggers both inside and outside the relationship since these men tend to minimize and deny non-relationship stressors in their lives
  - ...this is an important self-awareness and self-monitoring tool (abusive men generally have little awareness of their internal process):
    - ...to learn to notice what is going on inside (feelings, physical sensations, thoughts) and what he is reacting to that is going on around him (situations, people, places)

- ...the categories of cues and triggers in the *Escalation Prevention Plan* are listed below:
  - ...problem situations and issues;
  - ...trigger people and animals;
  - ...trigger places (specific places where he is more likely to escalate);
  - ...trigger times (specific time where he is more likely to escalate, which can be during the day, the week, the month, or the year);
  - ...negative self-talk (that he experiences);
    - ...negative thoughts and worries (from the past and in the present);
    - ...negative rehearsal (negative thoughts about the future);
    - ...specific negative self-talk (specific words, phrases, and labels about himself or others that are judgmental, hostile, and demeaning);
  - ...trigger words and phrases (said to him by other people or by him to others);
  - ...trigger gestures (non-verbal and behavioral signals done by others around him);
  - ...physical cues (what happens to him physically when he is escalating);
  - ...emotional cues (anger and the other feelings that his anger is “hiding” from him)
- ...cross referencing and “cross-pollinating” can be helpful in identifying different cues and triggers:
  - ...Time: 7 AM when getting kids ready for school
  - ...Situation: getting the kids organized so they can get to school
  - ...People: the kids
  - ...Negative self-talk: *Those damn kids are always late! Why does this always happen to me?*
- ...cues may be blaming (“when my partner yells at me”) or even abusive (“my wife is a bitch”) in another context
  - ...but the expectation for the *EPP* is that he will use these triggers as a way to remind himself that he needs to do something different when they are “popping off” around him
  - ...the idea is that he needs to plan how he is going to address his escalation process and should not have the unrealistic expectation that the people or situations around him will necessarily change
  - ...this leaves him with the ultimate responsibility for addressing his escalation and his potential to become controlling and abusive
- He also needs to develop a *De-Escalation Strategies Plan* (as part of his *EPP*) with specific tools, techniques, and behaviors that will assist him in responding more positively and respectfully when he is frustrated, stressed, aggravated, angry and/or experiences a desire to control situations and people around him
  - ...what he will actually DO to address his escalation and his desire to control someone or something
  - ...e.g. time-out, exercise, call a group member, meditate, positive self-talk, listen to calming music, avoid drinking alcohol, attend AA or NA, deep breathing and other relaxation exercises
- The key is for the man to learn to slow his internal thought and emotional process in order to intervene in his reactivity and impulsivity and his desire to control
  - ...this helps him realize that he is making choices and has options rather than simply viewing himself as powerless or “out of control” in the situations where he tends to escalate
  - ...men often say “I just went off on her” or “and right then, I just went ballistic,” thereby essentially abdicating responsibility for what they say or do in the situation

- ...it is also important to build on his strengths and times when he does (did), in fact, make more positive choices about how he has handled his anger in the present and in the past ...e.g. at work, with friends, in a public setting
- He is encouraged to call other members for input if he is having difficulty understanding and writing out his own *EPP*
- We emphasize that some of these cues and triggers may be “buttons” that his partner “pushes” but it is he who is ultimately in charge of whether he allows an escalation, an explosion, or controlling behavior to occur
  - ...we use the metaphor of a puppet and a puppeteer to describe what happens when men simply REACT to the cues and triggers (rather than slow down and RESPOND in a more positive and effective manner)
  - ...i.e. when he simply “reacts,” he is literally giving away his power to be who he (hopefully) says he is (the positive “game plan” that he has for himself about who he really is and who he wants to be with his partner, his children, and others)

## 5) Presenting His *Time-Out Plan*

- Taking a respectful time-out is the cornerstone of effective domestic abuse and anger management programs and this task can also be seen in the “Tasks” section under “Tools” on the home page of this website
  - ...this is essentially “taking a break” from an escalating situation where a man has the potential to become abusive and controlling, calming himself down, and returning to the situation later to make an effort to address it in a more respectful and effective way
- The plan puts into a concrete and practical form how he will take a time-out when he is escalating to potentially becoming controlling or abusive
- He needs to identify the most important cues (from his *EPP*) and arrange them in a hierarchy of escalation (see the *Tower of Anger* on this website)
  - ...he needs to take the time-out as early as possible in his escalation process
  - ...however, we also stress that it is never too late to take one
  - ...some examples of the hierarchy of cues and triggers over the course of an escalation are listed below
    - ...lower-level: being tired/hungry, feeling lonely/rejected, having a bad day at work
    - ...middle-level: his kids misbehaving/screaming, being stuck in rush hour traffic, his voice getting louder, specific negative self-talk (“*Why does this always happen to me?, What the hell is the matter with her?*”)
    - ...upper-level: yelling/screaming, swearing/cussing, more intense and punishing negative self-talk (“*She’s really asking for it now, She can’t get away with saying/doing that to me, She is such a fucking bitch*”)
- He needs to describe how he will communicate the need for a time-out to his partner, his children, and others (and what he will do or say if his partner does not want him to take a time-out)
  - ...VERBAL: “*I need a time-out, I need some space, I need to get away for awhile, I need to go right now*”
  - ...NON-VERBAL: a “T” sign, holding up a hand
  - ...this method ideally needs to be talked about with his partner prior to actually even taking a time-out
  - ...part of communicating the time-out is stating explicitly when he will call or attempt to re-connect with his partner after he has calmed down

- The plan also outlines the procedure and where he will go in a variety of specific situations
  - ...and how the children will be cared for when a man or his partner is taking a time-out
  - ...at home:
    - ...go to a specific room or part of the house, go for a walk
    - ...at social gatherings (e.g. at friends' or relatives' homes)
      - ...go for a walk, go to the bathroom, go to another room
    - ...in the car
      - ...agree to stop talking; listen to relaxing music; pull over at a convenience store; get out and actually take a walk right then
  - ...at work
    - ...go to the bathroom, go to his office or a break room
  - ...in public places (e.g. shopping mall, restaurant, sporting events)
    - ...go to another store; walk around the mall or the stadium; step outside the restaurant
  - ...on the phone
    - ...end the conversation respectfully and actually “tell” the other person that he is going to hang up the phone (not just slamming the phone down or clicking the phone off)
- He needs to identify a minimum length of his time-out with his partner (we recommend 30-60 minutes)
- The plan also raises the idea of an extended time-out (for 2 or 3 days) if the situation has become particularly volatile and explosive and the potential for violence is increased
  - ...e.g. go to a hotel; friends,' extended family, or co-workers' homes
- He needs to discuss how he will actually re-connect with his partner after taking his time-out
  - ...e.g. call and ask if his partner is ready to talk and re-connect
  - ...he needs to continue to stay away if she is not ready to re-connect and address the issue and/or ask her to seek him out when she feels more comfortable talking again about their conflict
- He needs to talk about what he will do to take care of himself while he is taking the time-out
  - ...identifying specific positive de-escalation strategies (from his *EPP*) that he can use while actually taking the time-out
  - ...and he needs to identify people/activities/situations he needs to avoid that have the potential to only escalate him further
    - ...e.g. driving, drinking or using drugs, talking to friends who will blame/“bash” his partner
- He needs to identify the excuses he has used (or will use) to avoid taking respectful time-outs (i.e. his negative self-talk that interferes with his taking the time-out)
  - ...“*She won't let me*”
  - ...“*I'm not mad enough to take one*”
  - ...“*Taking a TO means you're a wimp*”
  - ...“*I don't have any place to go*”
  - ...“*It's too late*”/“*It's too cold*”
  - ...“*It won't help anyway*”
  - ...“*Why should I end this? I'm winning the argument*”
- He also needs to identify positive self-talk that will help motivate him to take a respectful time-out in the future whenever necessary
  - ...“*This can help make our relationship better*”
  - ...“*This is a caring and respectful thing to do when I love someone*”
  - ...“*This can help me avoid doing or saying something that I will only regret later*”

## 6) Presenting His *Abuse Inventory*

- In this task, the man writes out a thorough and comprehensive history of abusive and violent incidents with siblings, peers, friends, parents, strangers, acquaintances, girlfriends, wife or wives, and children
  - ...this includes the “worst abusive incident” with his current partner where he felt the most “out of control,” where he did the most damage, or where his partner seemed the most afraid of him
  - ...in this “worst abusive incident,” he describes the specific cues, specific forms of abuse he perpetrated, and other controlling behaviors that he used
  - ...part of what is helpful is to re-live this incident in as much detail as possible
- The *Abuse Inventory* is one of the most important tasks in the program
  - ...many programs ask only for the “worst abusive incident” with a partner
  - ...which can end up focusing exclusively on abuse and violence which he has directed toward his partner
- In this inventory, he can begin to see an ongoing pattern of how intimidation, abuse, and violence have “worked” to control his partner AND others throughout the course his life
  - ...which takes his abuse and violence out of the realm of “*this only happens with my wife*”
  - ...and takes the focus off the idea that his partner is his only “problem”
  - ...it also illustrates how he is generally less likely, at this point, to use abuse and violence with other men due to his very real concern about getting hurt or getting in trouble (e.g. with the law)
    - ...men often have a history of physical altercations or fights with peers and siblings as a child and adolescent, fights at parties and bar brawls, or fistfights in the military
    - ...men often can identify a specific altercation which becomes a “demarcation point” when he actually makes the decision to stop fighting with other men
    - ...he also begins to understand that he is now focused at this point in his life on what he perceives to be safer “targets” for him
    - ...i.e. his partner and his children
  - ...in the *Abuse Inventory*, he has the opportunity to begin to see how his intimidation and violence have been rewarded by others (especially men) throughout the course of his life
    - ...a peer group that respects him for fighting (in childhood and when he was a young adult)
    - ...peers who actually become his “good friend” after he fights with them (with the underlying message that violence can actually bring you “closer” to other people, an especially destructive message in a relationship with his partner and his children)
    - ...bullies who no longer “pick on” him or his friends after he “stands up to them” and fights them (with the underlying message that “violence works” for him in his life)
    - ...coaches who give him accolades and praise for “being tough,” “getting pissed off,” and “playing to win”
    - ...fathers who shows pride in his ability to “handle” (i.e. control) other boys
      - ...e.g. a father who asked if his son had won a fight with another boy and then physically abused him when his son told him that he did not win the fight
- He needs to identify the clear-cut choices he made in the process of becoming violent in his “worst abusive incident” with his partner (even if these were not conscious at the time)
  - ...these choices are escalating steps up the ladder toward actually becoming violent, e.g.
    - ...a man playing cards with his wife and some friends

- ...his wife got angry and threw her cards on the table and got up to leave
- ...he made the choice to get up and grab her by the shoulders and yell at her to stop acting the way she was acting
- ...she tried to get away and slapped him
- ...he made the choice to grab her again and throw her into another room
  - ...she got up and continued to yell and came toward him
- ...he then made the choice to punch her in the chest
  - ...she stayed down this time and their “fight” ended
- ...he talked about each of these choices as a decision to continue to escalate the situation until he finally got what he wanted in the situation
- ...men are often very resistant to seeing these choices due to wanting to continue to see themselves as “reactive,” “impulsive,” and completely “out of control” but eventually they are able to acknowledge many types of clear choices that they have made in the past:
  - ...HOW HE WAS VERBALLY ABUSIVE (e.g. using the term “*bitch*” but not using the term “*cunt*,” not saying “*God damn it*” if he has strong religious beliefs)
  - ...HOW HE WAS VIOLENT (e.g. pushing and grabbing vs. slapping; slapping vs. using his fist; hitting in the arm vs. hitting in her face)
  - ...WHERE HE WAS VIOLENT (at home or in the car and not in a public place)
  - ...WHEN THE DECISION TO BE VIOLENT WAS MADE (i.e. a negative cognitive rehearsal of the violence that is to come)
    - ...e.g. one man was served with divorce papers in the morning at work, he brooded about this all day and plotted what he planned to do; he then returned home after work to tie up his wife and take their children
  - ...HOW HE STOPS IF A THIRD PARTY INTERVENES
    - e.g. a man who was “drunk” outside a bar in an alley who immediately stopped being violent with his partner when a friend of his simply touched him on the shoulder
- He needs to identify negative self-talk prior to, during, and afterward which contributes to making their partner or others into “objects” and thus more easy to abuse
  - ...including swearing, cussing, name-calling, and put-downs
- He needs to identify the specific justifications, excuses, and the ways that he gave himself permission to be violent e.g.
  - ...“*She hit me first/She deserved it/She started it*”
  - ...“*I was drunk*”
  - ...“*She hurt me/She deserved to be punished*”
  - ...“*She pushed my buttons/She crossed the line*”
  - ...“*I was completely ‘out-of-control’/I didn’t know what I was doing*”
  - ...“*It’s the way I was raised/I’m a lot better than my father (mother) was*”
  - ...“*I guess I just love her too much*”
- He needs to discuss his “vision” of what he wanted and expected his partner to be: this is often contradictory and/or unrealistic
  - ...e.g. the idea that his partner is supposed to be strong and independent but also do whatever he wants her to do
  - ...some men are very clear that they wanted a “mother” figure as a partner (especially if their own mother was nurturing and caring), rather than an adult partner who is “her own person”

- He also needs to look at chemical use issues as they relate to his past abuse and violence
  - ...to determine whether abuse and chemical use are interrelated and whether he needs to address sobriety issues during or beyond his involvement in group and to no longer allow this to be an excuse for him as he moves forward in his life
  - ...this can help him realize that he made clear choices even when he was “blitzed” or “hammered”
- He needs to identify “advantages and payoffs” in his being violent with his partner and others
  - ...this is a way to stress that his behavior is always purposeful and has meaning (i.e. he becomes abusive and violent “for a reason;” it does not “just happen”)
  - ...Being in control/getting what he wants in a particular situation
    - ...to get her to stop nagging, to “calm down,” to “see things his way,” to do what he wants her to do
    - ...A temporary release of life stress
    - ...A way to allow him to “connect” with her, esp. if he is fearful about being truly intimate and emotionally “connected” in a healthy way with a partner
    - ...He may feel powerful, “tough,” strong, and “masculine”
    - ...It provides “a high” or a “rush”
- He needs to identify LEGAL consequences that he may have experienced
  - ...e.g. assault charges, an Order for Protection (OFP), time in court or jail, money spent on attorneys’ fees and court fines
- He needs to identify OTHER significant consequences related to his being abusive
  - ...e.g. separation/divorce, loss of trust/intimacy, becoming less effective/productive at work, shame/guilt/low self-esteem (losing respect for himself), depression/suicidal ideation, he may end up injuring his partner, estrangement from friends and family, loss of time with and access to his children, money spent for separate housing or paying attorneys’ fees
- Consequences are strongly stressed to help him realize the impact that the abuse and violence is having on him (these can be part of the de-escalation strategies portion of his *EPP*)
  - ...it can help him to focus on his own self-interest (i.e. how he has impacted his life in negative and destructive ways due to the abuse he has perpetrated against others)
  - ...it also addresses the anti-social and narcissistic qualities that are a part of many controlling and abusive men
- Men begin to understand that their “targets” are/were human beings (rather than objects) and, hopefully, they begin to develop empathy and compassion for those they have abused in the past
  - ...this often triggers enormous shame, which they are able to get through if they are willing to continue the recovery process
  - ...some men put this task off for a significant period of time or leave the group before they are ready to present it
- But, by the end, this assignment produces a decrease in shame and an enormous sense of relief
  - ...most men report feeling more comfortable in the group and are more open and honest with one another (and often others in their lives as well) as a result of the very personal sharing they have done during this task

## **7) Doing His *Mid-Group Evaluation***

- This is usually done at about the mid-point of his attendance in the group program
- And offers a man an opportunity to assess his progress made to date:
  - ...identifying the date of his last physical violence and the current frequency of his emotional and verbal abuse
  - ...taking clear responsibility for past and current abusive behavior
  - ...eliminating violence in his life
  - ...decreasing his incidence of verbal and emotional abuse
  - ...recognizing and intervening in his controlling attitudes and behaviors
  - ...acknowledging some ways that he is feeling better about himself
- It assesses specific ways he has attempted to control the group process
  - ...e.g. interrupting, not listening or explaining away feedback, withdrawing and becoming passive, acting “fragile”/like a “victim”
  - ...it begins to identify more subtle forms of control that he uses in the “here-and-now” with his partner and others
- It assesses his level of participation (becoming more active increases his self-esteem and self-confidence)
  - ...in educational discussions
  - ...in taking time about himself and actively listening to the feedback from others
  - ...in providing honest feedback for others about how he sees them
- It identifies specific ways for him to improve upon his *Escalation Prevention Plan*
  - ...serving as a reminder to continue looking at and actively using the plan as he moves forward
    - ...carrying a pocket-sized notebook
    - ...posting it on his bedroom mirror or in other places at home
    - ...keeping a copy of his *EPP* at work
- He sets specific treatment goals for the rest of his involvement in the domestic abuse group program
- Finally, he receives feedback (both positives and concerns) from other members and from the group therapist(s)

## **8) Presenting His *Family Of Origin And Childhood Task***

- This examines how he learned to be controlling and abusive and allows him to recognize and more fully understand and appreciate his own victimization (which is NOT to be used as “excuse” for his control and abuse in the present)
  - ...most men were verbally/physically abused or witnessed this type of abuse in their childhood homes
  - ...all experienced significant controlling behavior from one or both parents
  - ...some were treated as “golden boys” or “little princes”
    - ...they become self-absorbed and narcissistic and have unrealistic expectations that their partner will cater to them in their life together in the same way that their parents did when they were young
- It discusses family roles and how they have affected him in his current relationships and in his life
  - ...e.g. caretaker, scapegoat, savior, rebel, people pleaser, high achiever
- It discusses important family values, e.g.
  - ...honesty (but almost never about emotional expressions)
  - ...always being “tough” and “strong”
  - ...a lack of emotion (except for experiencing and expressing anger)

- ...having to “be the best”
- ...always having to be in control
- ...never making mistakes
- It discusses family rules and how they affect the way he looks at his partner and children in the present
  - ...how boys and girls were viewed and treated
    - ...there are often strong and rigid traditional messages about male and female roles and expectations
    - ...how anger was expressed and conflicts were handled
- It also addresses his parents’ relationship with each other and with their children, how feelings were expressed (or stifled) in the family, how he and siblings were disciplined, family “secrets,” how sex was addressed, and other important areas
- It discusses how he was treated by peers (i.e. was he a bully?; was he bullied by others?) and what effect that this had on him and how he felt (feels) about himself in the present as a result of these experiences
- It discusses who, if anyone, treated him in a respectful and caring way
  - ...if there were people who did this, he is encouraged to use those positive voices to assist him in changing his negative self-talk in the present
- It asks him to identify and clearly label who was controlling, abusive, and dependent on chemicals in the family
- It asks him to discuss and address both his positive and negative similarities to father and mother
- It asks the man to think about what he would like to say (or would have liked to say) to his parents about his childhood and upbringing through letters he writes to each of them and which he shares in group
- A important part of this task is to draw a significant parallel between the feeling of powerlessness and victimization that he experienced as a child growing up in an abusive and dysfunctional family and the powerlessness and victimization that he generally reports feeling with his partner (and others as well) just prior to “lashing out”
  - ...this helps him see how his partner is often the victim of his own unresolved feelings left over from his family of origin and childhood where he was unable to stand up to or assert himself with his controlling or abusive parent(s) or with others who were disrespectful and hurtful to him in the past
    - ...this helps him begin to understand how his partner literally becomes the “scapegoat” for his life’s pain
- This task often taps into intense anger and sadness about his victimization and the losses he has experienced over the course of his life
  - ...e.g. loss of his childhood, loss of a loving and nurturing relationship with a parent
- It also taps into issues with his mother even if she has not been abusive
  - ...her being over-indulgent, trying to protect him from his father, being there to try to meet his every need
    - ...which may create unrealistic expectations of his partner in the present
    - ...OR her not protecting him and his lack of trust, his anger, and his resentment regarding this
      - ...which he also may “take out” on his partner

## 9) Presenting His Amends Letter(s)

- This is another important part of effective domestic abuse and anger management programs and can also be seen in the “Tasks” section under “Tools” on the home page of this website  
...this is a letter written to his partner which he does not need to share with her if he does not wish to do so (however, if his plan is to attempt to reconcile with his partner, it is important to share this letter with her at some point in their recovery process)
- The primary purpose of the letter is to help him begin to forgive himself for perpetrating the abuse and violence he has done with her (and others) in the past
- It serves as a means to take clear responsibility for past abusive behavior and to make clear amends to his partner (and others)  
...we look for:
  - ...his being specific regarding controlling and abusive behavior that he has used with his partner
    - ...*“Times when I tried to humiliate you in front of our friends”*
    - ...*“Times when I called you names and put you down”*
    - ...*“Times when I grabbed, pushed, kicked and slapped you”*
  - ...his taking clear and unequivocal responsibility for his controlling and abusive behavior and not offering any excuses or justifications for his behavior
    - ...*“You didn’t deserve the abusive behavior I directed at you”*
    - ...*“I am completely responsible for all the things I said and did to you”*
    - ...*“I chose to hurt you rather than face my own fears/insecurity/emotional pain”*
  - ...his increasing his awareness of his hurtful and destructive impact on his partner and empathy for her feelings about what she has experienced
    - ...*“The fear I created in you”*
    - ...*“The terror you must have felt”*
    - ...*“The insecurity and anxiety you probably experienced just being around me”*
  - ...his expressing genuine remorse and making clear amends to his partner
    - ...*“I’m truly sorry for what I did to you in our relationship”*
    - ...*“I’m very sorry that I was controlling and abusive with you”*
  - ...his making a clear commitment to non-violence in the future
    - ...which is different from the “hollow promises” of the past in the sense that he also clearly articulates specifically how he will continue to work a recovery program so that the abuse and violence do not re-occur in his life
    - ...his sharing the sorts of things he has learned in the group treatment process about himself that he will continue to use in moving forward with his life
- Men also sometimes write letters to their children and to other people in their lives with whom they have been punishing, explosive, and abusive in the past
- It is especially important to expect to hear his clear commitment to non-violence
  - ...some men balk at making this commitment to non-violence
    - ...due to fear that it will be like the “hollow” promises he has made in the past in the “deception” or “honeymoon” phase of the cycle of abuse and violence
    - ...this, however, is intended to be a solid commitment to identify and continue to use what he has learned in the group and to work an ongoing program into the future (and talking specifically about how he will do that) which is very different from what he has done in the the past
      - ...*I will continue to stay aware of my negative self-talk and stop it before it becomes destructive to me or to you and others around me*

*...I will work hard to notice and respectfully share all my feelings, not just my anger*  
*...I will continue to stay sober and attend AA/NA regularly*  
*...I will continue to use my exercise program as a way to decrease the stress I carry with me in my ongoing life*  
*...I will continue to read through and think about the group materials*  
*...I will continue in individual therapy or an aftercare support group*

- It is also important to look for and point out subtle forms of control that the man may be using in his letter(s)
  - ...I only hope that you will give me the opportunity to make this up to you*
  - ...Thank you so much for giving me the chance to change and sticking with me*
  - ...I love you so very much; I hope you will forgive me for what I've done to you in the past*
- We strongly caution against seeking any kind of forgiveness from the partner at this point or having any expectations of her in this exercise
  - ...she does not “owe” him anything at this point and this can become just another way to try to control and manipulate her
  - ...his partner needs to decide, on her own, what she wishes to do with the relationship: he needs to “back off” and allow her time and space to heal herself and decide how she wants to proceed

**You Can See Some Examples Of Amends Letters That Men Have Written In The “Tasks” Section Under “Tools” On The Home Page Of This Website**

**10) Presenting His Aftercare/Final Feedback Task (At The Final Group He Attends)**

- This is also an important part of effective domestic abuse and anger management programs and can be seen in the “Tasks” section under “Tools” on the home page of this website
- This serves as an assessment of his overall progress during the course of his entire group involvement
  - ...he needs to identify the last time he was violent with his partner or children and the current and past (before the started group) frequency of his emotional and verbal abuse
- He discusses how he accomplished the goals he set for himself at the beginning and at the mid-point of the treatment process and identifies specific goals for the future and how he plans to achieve them
  - ...we emphasize that this group is the **FIRST STEP** in an ongoing and lifelong recovery process around the issues related to abuse and power and control:
    - ...we refer to men who successfully complete the expectations of the domestic abuse program as “completers” (of this first phase of their recovery process), not “graduates” (as completing the group is the first step of the process and is not a “cure” for the issues he has come to address; the process is, in fact, an ongoing process)
- He discusses what he has learned and how he is different, how he plans to continue to use his *Escalation Prevention Plan* and *Time-Out Plan* in the future, and how and with whom he is still being controlling and abusive in his life
  - ...concerns are expressed if he completely denies any current control or abuse in his life

- He receives feedback regarding both positives and concerns related to his involvement in the program from group members and therapists and recommendations for future work from his therapist(s)
  - ...attending couple therapy if both he and his partner wish to reconcile
    - ...to initially address the impact of the abuse and then to move on to general relationship issues (e.g. communication, conflict resolution, dysfunctional patterns);
  - ...attending individual and/or group therapy if he has additional issues related to shame, family of origin, depression, anxiety, and the like that he wishes to continue to address;
  - ...attending a men's self-help support group to continue to address ongoing power and control issues;
  - ...attending AA, NA, Al-Anon, ACA, Emotions Anonymous, or other support groups, if appropriate;
  - ...facilitating volunteer anger management classes at a local men's center in the Twin Cities which is:
    - ...a way to give back to other men who are struggling with anger and abuse issues in their own lives
    - ...a way to see himself in others and remind himself of and reinforce what he has learned in the program
  - ...we strongly stress that completing this program is only the beginning of a life-long process
    - ...we also ask how he will know if he needs to return to therapy or treatment in the future
- We give each completer a single red rose to symbolize:
  - ...both the "thorns" (the pain and hurt he has inflicted) and the "beauty" (who he can be) that are a part of who he is in the present
  - ...it also represents our hope that he will continue to open and blossom to his partner (if they stay together), to a new partner (if his current relationship ends), to his children (if he has any), and to the world around him
  - ...initially, some men are embarrassed about receiving the rose but they often also feel a significant sense of pride and accomplishment about what they have done in the treatment process
  - ...this group is often the first time many members have shared themselves so openly, honestly, and deeply with anyone, especially other men
  - ...he is also asked to share his feelings about completing the program
    - ...some men are relieved to be done and glad that the group is over for them
    - ...some men feel profound sadness and gratitude (he may "tear up" and even cry when saying goodbye to the group and the men he has gotten to know), saying that the group was:
      - ...*"the best thing that has ever happened to me"*
      - ...*"a real turning point in my life"*
    - ...some men feel anxious and fearful about completing the group because it means that they are "out on their own" and completely responsible for continuing to work their program (although they do, in fact, have resources that they can use to assist them in continuing to work at their recovery)

## **OTHER TASKS (ONGOING) WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BE A PART OF THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL MEN IN THE PROGRAM**

### **11) Presenting A Violent Incident Assessment (If He Uses Any Physical Force With Property, With His Partner, With His Children, Or With Anyone Else During His Time In The Group Program)**

- Any use of physical force needs to be reported in group as soon after the incident as possible
  - ...including grabbing or spanking children, throwing things, hitting a door
  - ...If violence is not reported and we find out about it (from his probation officer or his partner), he may face termination from the group
  - ...This assessment addresses:
    - ...the specifics of the situation where the violence was used,
    - ...identifying lower-, middle-, and upper-level cues prior to the violence,
    - ...his desire to control and his choice to be violent (and not take a time-out) in the incident, and
    - ...why he was unwilling to use his *Escalation Prevention Plan* to avoid being violent in this situation
- It also challenges him to identify how he can react differently at various points in the escalation process in the future so the violence does not recur

### **12) Presenting A Violation Of Sobriety Contract Assessment (If He Has Agreed To A Sobriety Contract As Part Of His Participation In The Group Program)**

- The *Sobriety Contract* reads as follows:
  - I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree not to use any mood-altering chemicals (alcohol and/or drugs) during my therapy involvement in the domestic abuse group treatment program*
- Any time a man uses chemicals during the course of the group when he has previously agreed a *Sobriety Contract*, he is asked to write out and present this assignment
- This task addresses:
  - ...the events leading up to the chemical use,
  - ...what and how much alcohol and/or drugs were used,
  - ...how he gave himself permission to violate the contract he had with himself, the therapist(s), and the other group members
  - ...when and how he made the choice to do this
    - ...this again assumes that the choice was made prior to his actually using and that he made clear choices that “set up” the alcohol or drug use
    - ...he did not have a “slip:” we call it a “relapse” (his decision to use chemicals is also always a choice!)
- He is also asked how he can use his *Escalation Prevention Plan* to help him make more positive choices regarding his chemical use in the future
  - ...the *EPP* can be helpful in identifying additional triggers that may be a part of his decision to use alcohol and/or drugs, e.g.
    - ...being around a lot of alcohol at social gatherings
    - ...being around specific “drinking buddies”

- ...being at certain places (i.e. bars where he used to “hang out”)**
  - ...feeling tense and anxious at the end of the work day**
- Additional consequences could include:**
  - ...a formal chemical dependency evaluation with the expectation that he will follow the recommendations that arise from this evaluation**
  - ...mandatory weekly attendance at AA or NA**
  - ...random urine testing**
    - ...probation officers will generally assist with this (if he is court-ordered)**