

Part 3: A Description of The Educational Units

In This 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)

Using the Educational Units in the Domestic Abuse Group Program

Education is a critically important part of the change process for controlling and abusive men according to this model. Abusive men need to learn new attitudes and skills and actually apply these with their partners and children if their abusive behavior is to stop. The education offers a method to give them some different ways of looking at themselves and the world around them. The educational units are generally presented after the 15-20 minute group check-in and are composed of handouts covering a variety of topics.

Since the group program is ongoing, the topics in Units 1 to 10 are gone through in a cyclical way as the weeks pass. This may mean that some members, who were in the group beyond 45-60 weeks that most men used to complete the programs, may hear the presentations twice. However, when this has occurred in the past, men have often reported that hearing the information the second time has been especially helpful since they hear it in a very different way from what they did the first time around. Units 11 and 12 are done every six months to make sure that all members experience these topics during the time they are in the group program. Efforts are made in all the units to directly relate the specific topic being discussed to anger, abuse, and control.

The educational section of the two and one-half hour group session lasts approximately 20-25 minutes. It is the group leader's responsibility to present information and handouts to men in the group, lead brainstorming sessions, and facilitate role-playing when necessary. Group leaders need to be familiar with the material and are encouraged to use the handouts and other materials as outlines for what they actually present in group.

The following section goes step-by-step through each of the educational units, describing in more detail how to actually use the educational material in each unit. Many of the handouts discussed below are part of this website.

Unit 1: Abuse and Its Effect on the Abusive Man and on the People Around Him

A critical part of the program is to help men learn about abuse and violence. Most men come into our domestic abuse program with little or no understanding about what constitutes abuse and how it affects the man himself and those with whom he is abusive. Several educational components that are covered in the intake are also addressed in the group itself to reinforce learning about these areas.

Types of Abusive Behavior defines a number of different types of abuse, giving specific examples from the experience of this model. This also addresses the difference between male and female violence and encourages men to "take the first step" toward eliminating violence in their relationship, even if their partner has also been abusive and violent with them. During this section, men are asked to identify the specific ways they have been abusive with their partners, their children, and others.

How Abuse and Violence May Occur in a Relationship offers a three-phase process, adapted from Lenore Walker's *The Battered Woman* (1979), to help explain how violence occurs over the course of a relationship. Men are generally able to recognize that the patterns discussed in the handout exist in their relationships. Some men are even able to recognize the specific time-line that they have followed. For example,

one man reported that he had violent incidents “just like clockwork” every six months. This helps men begin to see clearly that there is an escalation phase, an explosion phase (when more severe abuse and violence occur), and a deception phase (which is sometimes called the “honeymoon” phase). This model helps men understand that violence does not “just happen” and that they are, at no point, completely “out of control” (as they often believe that they are). Men are asked to comment on how this model fits for them in their relationship with their partner and then identify where they are in the phases at the present time.

This is also the time to introduce the notion that there is a hierarchy of triggers and cues that men experience and to encourage them to become more aware of the lower-, middle-, and upper-level cues which signal that an escalation is occurring. Recognition of the lower-level cues (e.g. feeling tired/ hungry, early stressors related to situations and the negative rehearsal they do in their lives) is particularly important since it is easier to take a respectful time-out when they are lower in their escalation process.

The section on *Myths About Domestic Abuse* asks men to brainstorm societal myths about abusers, victims of abuse, and the issue of domestic abuse in general. This helps to pinpoint some of the cultural misinformation about abuse and many of the ways that men have used these ideas to rationalize and excuse their own abuse and violence.

The *Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Abuse and Violence* is another opportunity for men to brainstorm in group, and men are asked to think about the advantages and disadvantages in being abusive and violent with their partners and others. The advantages section highlights the importance of realizing that there are always “payoffs” related to being violent and stressing the idea that there is purpose and intention behind their abusive behavior. Initially, men are often reticent or even completely unwilling to acknowledge that there may be advantages to their being violent. But eventually, many men are able to come up with a variety of ideas that make sense to them, most of which center around controlling their partners and the situations going on around them. One advantage that men occasionally cite that is actually a “true positive” is that their violence has brought them to treatment and has given them the opportunity to actually address and change their controlling and abusive behaviors if they decide to work at doing this.

The disadvantages tend to be much easier for men to identify. This is especially true if they have been involved with the legal system or their partner has begun to set limits with them, including filing for a restraining order or separating and/or starting a divorce process. Identifying the disadvantages is one way to begin to appeal to a man’s self-interest to end the violence and the abusive behavior. It helps him begin to think about the very real consequences that have arisen as a result of his abusive actions. Actively identifying and thinking about these sorts of consequences when men start to escalate is often one of the ideas that many men decide to use in their *Escalation Prevention Plans* in order to intervene in the escalation and make the choice to take a respectful time-out or respond in a different and more positive way.

The Effects of Violence and Abuse on Women and Violence, Abuse, and Their Effects on Children are specific ways to introduce the idea that men’s abuse and violence is having traumatic and devastating effects on the people they claim to love. This section begins with an exercise designed to give men a sense of the tension and “edginess” that exists for others in an abusive household. Men are asked to closely gather around a therapist who begins to blow up a balloon. As the balloon gets larger and larger, men begin to wince, to flinch, to feel uncomfortable, and to back away due to their fear that it may “pop.” A discussion follows about how these are the same types of reactions that women and children experience in a home where they also do not know when an abusive man may “pop” and become explosive, intimidating, or abusive with them. This is a powerful and graphic way to illustrate the fear that others may feel around them.

This entire section hopefully encourages men to start to develop some empathy and compassion for the other people in their lives who have been affected adversely by their abuse. It often serves to help them better understand some of their partner’s or their children’s behavior (e.g. dishonesty, “acting out”) that may have previously triggered a man’s frustration and aggravation and actually led to abusive or violent episodes. It also helps them begin to see the need for therapeutic intervention for their children, either to deal with current

symptoms or to help the children intervene in their own abusive attitudes and behaviors or, on the other hand, their lapsing into a “victim” stance with others in their lives (e.g. peers). Men are encouraged to have their children assessed by a therapist regarding the impact of their abuse and violence, particularly if the children are having problems at home, at school, or in other parts of their lives.

Finally, these handouts may give men some insight into messages about control and abuse that they have learned in their own families of origin, which they will directly address in the group task entitled ***Family of Origin and Childhood***. These sections are presented in lecture format and men are encouraged to comment on what aspects fit in their current families and in the families they themselves experienced when they were young.

Excuses and Justifications for Being Violent offers men another opportunity to look at how they have given themselves permission to be abusive and violent with partners, children, and others. Ideas in this section are brainstormed in the group and men are encouraged to accept more clear responsibility for their thoughts that lead to the abuse and for the abuse itself.

Videos can also be a helpful adjunct in this section on abuse and its effects. Short segments of videotape are used to illustrate examples of the different types of abusive behavior, the three phases in the cycle of abuse and violence, and the effects of abuse on women and children. Men are asked to comment on what they have seen and how it relates to their own personal experiences. Actually seeing the abuse acted out can be a powerful learning tool and often raises intense emotions for men in the group.

There are some excellent films and videotapes produced by organizations working with domestic abuse that can be used as resources. In addition, there are other productions (i.e. Hollywood movies) that can be helpful in demonstrating the dynamics of domestic abuse. One is *The Burning Bed*, the story of Francine Hughes, a woman who ended up killing her husband after years of his battering her. Another is *Shattered Dreams*, the story of Charlotte Fedders, the wife of a top Reagan official who abused her throughout their marriage. Another is *What's Love Got To Do With It*, the story of Ike and Tina Turner's relationship which included brutal violence perpetrated by Ike toward Tina. Another is *Sleeping With The Enemy*, the story of a woman who flees an abusive relationship and is then stalked by her husband. And a final example is *The Great Santini*, the story of a Marine fighter pilot who is controlling and abusive with his wife and children. These and other videos offer powerful enactments of abuse in relationships and are helpful in generating thought and discussion about control and abuse.

The Place of Generalized Violence In Our Lives gives men the opportunity to look at the potential for violence in other areas of their daily lives and the violence that is all around us in our culture-at-large. Most of the men in our groups have a significant history of violence with other people, male and female, in addition to the abuse and violence with their current partner. Often men have histories of violence in their childhood, in sports, in the military, at bars or parties, and with past partners. This recounting of the entire history of violence occurs in a group task entitled the ***Abuse Inventory***. For many men, their violence toward other males does not cease until they become fearful that they might be hurt or until there are potential legal consequences related to these sorts of altercations. And many still continue to escalate in other situations with non-family members, even if these may not currently lead to explosions and violence. Thus, the issue of generalized violence is a topic that can and does relate directly to abuse in the home.

This section is introduced by handing out and discussing newspaper and other articles that talk about violence on the highway (which includes shootings and assaults on local freeways), in the workplace, and in other settings. Some examples of these articles are listed below:

- *Driver shot for not yielding to pushy motorist* is a newspaper account of a man who was shot by another motorist when he failed to clear a lane on a St. Paul highway in 1990.
- *Violence on the job* is a newspaper article published in 1993 that discusses the increase in threats, harassment, and violence in the workplace in recent years.
- *Man is charged with felony assault* is a newspaper article that discusses a brutal assault of a man who attempted to intervene in a battering incident that was occurring on a downtown St. Paul sidewalk in 1992.

- *You can help create a violence free Minnesota*, a handout developed by 180 Degrees, Inc. identifies some specific strategies that parents, teachers, children, and organizations can use to decrease the level of violence in the community.

This discussion helps men to think about the possibility of being hurt themselves or severely hurting others and ending up with legal consequences as a result. In this section, men are asked to brainstorm solutions to a variety of hypothetical situations presented where verbal abuse or violence could occur. They are also asked to address the thought process that goes into the decision about how they will respond in the examples that are presented. This section again asks men to slow their escalation process and think about their options rather than simply reacting spontaneously with violence or some other abusive behavior in public situations. They are also asked to think about how their escalations in other situations, acted upon or not, affect their potential to escalate with their partners and children at home. This addresses the impact of their decisions on their relationships with their family members, who often feel fearful just being around when a man's escalation is occurring.

Unit 2: Understanding Stress and Effective Stress Management

Stress does not cause domestic abuse. But an important part of a man learning about his escalation process has to do with identifying what stress is and how it affects him and his reactions to his partner and children (Straus, 1980). This is the purpose of this educational unit. This unit relates directly to the cycle of abuse and violence that is discussed in the intake, the educational unit about abuse and its effects, and each member's *Escalation Prevention Plan*.

Most abusive men have little awareness of the stressors in their lives and the toll these stressors take on them emotionally and physically (Selye, 1978; Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 1982). Many men have completely shut themselves off from their reactions to what goes on around them. They often convince themselves that they are able to handle whatever happens in their lives, with the glaring exception of what happens in their families. They are often totally focused on the idea that their partner is the sole reason for their explosive and abusive behavior and their problems in living. The goal of this section is to help men understand what stress is and its relationship to their becoming angry and abusive. It can also alert them to new cues and triggers, particularly those that do not relate directly to their partners, which they can then add to their *Escalation Prevention Plans*.

This unit begins with a talk given by the group therapist about *Understanding What Stress Is and How It Affects You*. It presents basic information about what stress is, how it can be triggered, the various symptoms and compulsive and unhealthy behaviors (e.g. being abusive, drinking too much) that can be generated by handling stress poorly, and some discussion of the physiological process that occurs. An important part of this talk is to emphasize that stress, in and of itself, is not "bad" or an "evil" to be avoided. Rather, the focus is on the idea that human beings can never completely rid themselves of stress and that everyone has an optimum level of stress (i.e. "challenge") that helps him function more effectively in his life.

The key to beginning to better handle stress more effectively has to do with recognizing that it exists in the first place. The next step has to do with understanding that the way the effects of stress are experienced have more to do with our perceptions, thoughts, and self-talk about the stressor than the actual stressor itself. The cognitive labeling process that occurs around a stressor is absolutely critical in determining whether the emotional arousal becomes anger or some other emotional reaction or response (Schacter & Singer, 1962; Schacter, 1971). This concept flies in the face of the blaming and powerless attitude that abusive men tend to have. It also asks them once again to take responsibility for the stress they create in their lives with their partners, their children, and others by being controlling and abusive. This issue of taking clear responsibility for themselves is a constant thread throughout the educational portion of the domestic abuse group program.

Changes and Stress is a handout used to highlight the potential for any occurrence of change in a man's life to trigger stress reactions and helps men clearly identify specific changes that they have experienced in the

previous year. This handout also helps men understand that stress can be triggered by major or trivial events, positive or negative experiences, and from external situations happening around them or from their own internal attitudes, expectations, and self-talk.

The idea here is to get men to slow their process enough to see that, over the course of a few hours, a day, a week, a month, or even longer, they may be gradually building to a point where they make the decision to explode with their partner or others. With the explosion, their partner then becomes a convenient “dumping ground” for the accumulated stresses from the rest of their lives that they are often unaware of. Men are asked to go through this handout in group and identify changes they have experienced in the past year. Men are often surprised at the number of important changes that have been occurring in their lives.

Symptoms That Stress Can Trigger is a handout that helps men understand the physical, emotional, mental, relationship, and spiritual symptoms that can occur as a result of a lack of awareness or poor handling of life stressors. In group, men are asked to pick out symptoms that they have experienced. Most men clearly identify a large number of symptoms from the list. This helps them continue to become more knowledgeable about their own internal process and the impact that their stress is having on them.

The next handout, *Stress Management Techniques*, is discussed in group and offers some specific ideas to address and handle the stress in their lives more effectively. These ideas can be directly applied to the de-escalation strategies portion of their *Escalation Prevention Plan* and encourages them to identify specific ways to take better care of themselves physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually.

A part of this unit involves actually beginning to develop and practice some specific relaxation skills that are outlined in the handout, *Progressive Muscle Relaxation*. The most frequent exercise we use involves a progressive muscle relaxation exercise (Jacobson, 1938; Wolpe, 1973; Bernstein & Borkevec, 1973) which a therapist actually leads in the group. This is often particularly helpful because abusive men tend to be almost continually in a state of tension, frustration, and escalation. This exercise serves as an active way for men to relax and de-escalate and helps them clearly see the difference between their states of tension and relaxation. Men are instructed to sit or lie in a comfortable position, preferably with their eyes closed, as the therapist goes through a relaxation script. Other forms of relaxation that have been used in the group include visualization and meditation accompanied by calming music.

Finally, each year, in the middle of November, the upcoming holidays and the additional stressors they may bring, are discussed. We use the handout *Recognizing and Handling Holiday Stress More Effectively* as a guide for this discussion. Most men identify the holidays as one of their *Times* cues in the *Escalation Prevention Plan* and many men also report violent incidents during holidays in the past. This handout identifies expectations, pressures, and feelings that may trigger an increase in the potential for escalations and violence with partners, children, and others. It also offers some practical ideas about how to deal more effectively with attitudes and situations that may arise during the holidays.

Some men are physically separated from their partners and families, often for the first time, and the emotional pain they experience about this change is enormous. At a minimum, all men in the group are emotionally estranged from their partners at this point. Thus, it is important to help them notice and intervene in the unrealistic beliefs they hold about what the holidays “should” be for them and their families. This is a time when, because of the loneliness and resentment they may feel, their desire to control their partner often becomes even more pronounced. Part of this group discussion involves challenging men to come up with a more positive plan for how they will handle the holidays. They are also asked to discuss their plan in group. This plan often includes ideas like spending time with extended family and friends or volunteering their time to help others. But what is most important about this discussion is for them to make some conscious decisions about the holidays so that they don’t simply use the holidays to add to the hostility and resentment they already feel for their partners.

Unit 3: Anger: What It Is and What It Isn't and How to Handle It More Respectfully

Anger does not cause domestic abuse. But anger and how it is experienced and expressed are an important part of a domestic abuse group since abusive men tend to be more angry and hostile than men who are not abusive and violent in their relationships with their partners (Maiuro et al, 1988). Men often view their anger as the “problem” and want to eliminate it from their lives. But they are given the clear message by this model that this is not going to happen. Anger is a part of being human; being abusive does not have to be.

Many abusive men also equate their anger with hostility, threats, intimidation, abuse, and violence. Most learned this equation from their families of origin and from the cultural messages that men receive about what it is to be a “real man.” This unit seeks to break the rigid link between anger and abuse and help men understand that their anger and frustration are a natural and normal part of living. The critical issues become how effectively they learn to handle the anger they experience and how actively they are willing to work to decrease the level of hostility, cynicism, aggression, and withdrawal in their day-to-day lives.

Many abusive men feel intense shame about their anger because they have viewed it, up until now, as such a destructive force in their lives. Unfortunately, past attempts to overlook irritation and frustration in a passive manner have eventually led to passive-aggressive or aggressive displays of these emotions with their partners and others. Many want to completely rid themselves of this emotion, an unrealistic and unreachable goal in the treatment process and in life generally.

So men are constantly reminded that it is their controlling and abusive behavior, not the feeling of anger, that they need to alter. Anger, for many men, including abusive men, tends to be a cover for other more feelings like hurt, fear, sadness, anxiety, and disappointment which they often convert immediately into anger and abusive behavior (Ganley, 1981; Sonkin & Dunphy, 1982; McKay, Rogers & McKay, 1989). These “gentler” feelings tend to increase their vulnerability, which opens up the possibility, in their minds, of being hurt even further by other people. Part of the task for therapists in this unit is to help men begin to understand that healthy communication and genuine intimacy cannot exist in a relationship without this vulnerability.

This unit begins with *Understanding Your Anger*, a handout that helps men clearly differentiate between anger, cynicism/hostility/disgust/contempt/entitlement, and aggression/withdrawal. Anger is defined as a normal and natural human emotion which can serve as a “warning signal” that a physiological stress arousal is occurring and that there is something happening within or around them needs to be attended to. Cynicism, hostility, disgust, contempt, and entitlement are defined as a set of negative, self-defeating, and punishing attitudes, consisting of negative self-talk and subsequent feelings of victimization and powerlessness that contribute to eventually violating others’ boundaries (Williams & Williams, 1993). And aggression and withdrawal are framed as destructive behaviors, acted out with the intent to hurt, punish, demean, humiliate, intimidate, and control other people, which always result in disrespect, a lack of safety and trust, and emotional distance.

This handout also addresses some common distortions of anger, words that are often equated with anger but, in reality, fit more accurately in the realms of cynicism, hostility, aggression, and withdrawal. There is also a discussion focusing on when anger becomes a problem, which addresses an abusive man’s tendency to be, in reality, escalated for much of the time and the negative emotional and physical consequences that this creates in his life (for him and others). Finally, there is a discussion and brainstorming exercise about how to handle anger effectively, providing specific ideas, tools, and strategies that are expanded on throughout the man’s involvement in the group.

After the initial discussion noted above, men are given an *Anger Analysis* to take home and write out for the next group. This is a handout that helps men think and talk about their anger: what they learned about experiencing and expressing anger from family, friends, school, work, and the media; how they act and what they think about when expressing their anger at this point; and what it is about their anger and its expression that they want and need to change.

An important part of this homework assignment is to draw their anger at its worst, using pictures, symbols, words, and colors. This is shared with other members of the group at the next session. The anger drawings are often vivid and powerful depictions of explosive and destructive forces: tornados, volcanos, earthquakes, monsters, and demons. Men are asked to actively use these drawings in their programs by visualizing the drawing when they are becoming angry and then visualizing a “healing image” (e.g. a huge pail of water dousing the heat and destructive potential of the volcano) to transform the anger into something more positive. These visualizations can then become a part of their de-escalation strategies section in the *Escalation Prevention Plan*.

At this point, we discuss the handout, *Time-Outs: They’re Not Just For Kids*. This reiterates the importance of using time-outs as an initial strategy to defuse volatile anger and the potential for abuse. Time-outs are not a panacea but they are the cornerstone and a “first step” for learning to handle explosive anger more effectively (Bach & Wyden, 1970; Sonkin & Dunphy, 1982) and men are first introduced to the idea of time-out in the intake process. One of the tasks expected of all members of the group is formulating, writing out, and then actually using a *Time-Out Plan* for themselves.

This discussion provides, in an educational context, a review of the specific ideas that are important in using the time-out as a way to intervene in the potential to become controlling, explosive, and abusive. Part of this section also involves brainstorming in group some reasons and excuses that men may choose to use (or have used in the past) in order to avoid taking respectful time-outs with their partner. “Making these public” hopefully helps defuse some of the power these excuses have had in interfering with the man’s efforts to de-escalate in the past. Some examples of the excuses we have heard from men include the following:

- *My wife won’t let me take a time-out*
- *She’ll just get more angry if I actually take a time-out*
- *My partner doesn’t really want me to take a time-out*
- *I’m right/She’s wrong*
- *Why should I? I’m not really that mad*
- *She’s the one who needs to take a time-out/She started this whole mess*
- *I’m not escalated enough to take a time-out/I can handle this without taking a time-out*
- *It won’t help anyway/It doesn’t do any good to take a time-out*
- *It didn’t work the last time I tried it; why would it work this time?*
- *She needs to “understand” my point of view*
- *I have to get the “last word”*
- *Taking a time-out is just “running away”*
- *Taking a time-out means you’re a wimp/not a “real man”*
- *It’s manipulative to take a time-out*
- *I didn’t think about it/I just “snapped”*
- *I’m just too “crazy”/“out-of-control” to take a time-out when I get angry*
- *I forgot about it/It didn’t even occur to me at the time*
- *I’m “on a roll”/I’m winning this argument/I’ve got her “cornered”*
- *This issue has to be resolved right now/This issue can’t wait*
- *We have to “get to the bottom of this”*
- *I’ll forget the point that I’m trying to make right now if I take a time-out*
- *It’s too late at night to take a time-out*
- *It’s too cold (too hot) outside to take a time-out*
- *I don’t have any place to go*
- *I don’t want to*
- *I don’t have to*
- *There isn’t enough time to take a time-out/It takes too much time*
- *A time-out won’t change how I feel anyway*
- *I shouldn’t always have to be the one who has to leave*

We encourage men to be aware of their individual excuses (which is part of their negative self-talk) and to work actively at not letting these get in the way of their using this skill to help them handle their anger more effectively in the future. They are also expected to write out individual excuses they have used in the past on their own *Time-Out Plan*.

Another handout that forms the basis for a brainstorming session in the group is *Escalation Prevention Plan De-Escalation Strategies*. Men are asked to think of as many examples of de-escalation or calming strategies as they can that they have used or plan to begin using as they move forward. This exercise helps men to think about specific ideas that can be added to their *EPP*.

The final section in this unit involves additional homework, an *Anger Journal* (Sonkin and Durphy, 1982; Purdy and Nickle, 1981), which asks men to identify and discuss some specific situations where they have become angry and escalated and to think about their self-talk, cues, and “hidden” emotions. It also focuses on how they handled the situation and what they could do to improve the handling of similar situations in the future. This is handed out in group and men are asked to fill it out over the course of the week and bring it back to share in the following group.

Unit 4: Self-Talk: What It Is and How It Can Contribute To Controlling and Abusive Behavior

Negative self-talk does not cause domestic abuse. But the concept of self-talk is another critical component in addressing violence and explosive and abusive anger since irrational and arousing self-talk generally precedes the abusive behavior itself (Ganley, 1981; Edleson, 1984). Addressing negative self-talk is also an important part of intervening in the significant depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem that many abusive men struggle with. The goal in beginning to notice and change their negative self-talk is to ask men to look inside and slow their internal thought process enough to be more aware of it, often for the first time in their lives.

Self-talk is directly addressed in the *Escalation Prevention Plan* and often, when men first attempt to identify these cognitions in the intake, they report being completely unaware of any “negative” thoughts they may be having. This is especially true regarding negative thoughts about themselves, although they may be very aware of critical and shaming cognitions about other people. The self-talk concept and cognitive restructuring is addressed in a variety of educational contexts as the men progress through the group and is deemed to be a vital part of changing their controlling and abusive attitudes and behaviors (Ellis, 1970; Beck, 1976; Meichenbaum, 1977).

The first and a major section of this unit, *The Very Real Power of Self-Talk: How and What You Think Creates Who You Are in the Present; How and What You Think Creates Who You Will Become in the Future*, is a lengthy handout that discusses how self-talk arises, the three general types of negative self-talk (corresponding to the categories of self-talk cues in the *Escalation Prevention Plan*), how thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs from childhood and from the culture-at-large are the underpinning for negative self-talk (offering specific examples of each), and a schematic representation of the negative self-talk process in action. This handout also discusses the idea of “victim thinking,” which involves the mistaken notion that we are merely passive observers of events in our lives and are powerless to intervene directly in how we react to what happens around us. It asks men to re-think this victimized, child-like stance that is common with abusive men and begin, instead, to take more responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Abusive men frequently personalize situations where there is no need to do so and the self-talk concept offers a powerful way to intervene in these “knee-jerk” reactions. This handout also offers some specific strategies to directly intervene in the negative self-talk process. The therapist goes over this handout in group and then asks men to take it home and read through it, paying particular attention to their individual thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs that directly lead to their negative self-talk.

Another handout, *Positive Self-Talk and Anger*, is also discussed in group and ties self-talk to the escalation process and offers some very specific positive self-talk that can be used in potentially volatile and explosive situations with partners, children, and others. Specific examples are helpful because abusive men frequently have great difficulty generating their own positive self-talk to effectively intervene in the negative self-talk that is so much a part of their daily lives. However, given some guidance, they can start to integrate some of these examples into their day-to-day functioning almost immediately.

A second part of this handout gets even more specific and begins to build on the idea of a positive rehearsal (vs. a negative and powerless one) in preparing for and handling difficult situations that will occur in the future (Novaco, 1975). Again, specific examples are offered, this time throughout the course of the entire escalation process.

A final handout in this unit, the *Self-Talk Log*, gives specific examples of the entire self-talk process that are discussed in group. It is also assigned as homework for the next week. Men are asked to actually identify some activating situations and the negative self-talk they generate. It also asks members to think about specific positive self-talk that they could use in those same situations to reframe what is going on and “look at it in a different light.”

This practice is vital and needs to be ongoing if men are going to change their controlling and abusive attitudes and behaviors. Their negative self-talk is a way that they generally de-humanize and objectify their partners, their children, and others which leads directly to the abusive behavior that they perpetrate. If their self-talk doesn't change, their abuse and violence will continue unabated.

Unit 5: Understanding Shame and Moving Toward an Empowerment-Based Lifestyle

Shame does not cause domestic abuse. But shame, an overwhelming feeling of inadequacy, defectiveness, and worthlessness, appears to underlie all forms of dysfunctional behavior, including abuse and the desire to control people and situations (Kaufman, 1980; Miller, 1981 & 1983; Stosny, 1995; Dutton, 1995). Shame is a system of living based on old and automatic learned habits, control, perfectionism, and reactivity that leads to cynicism, negativity, and, ultimately stagnation and paralysis in our lives. Toxic shame is created when human beings are deeply wounded by the very people who are supposed to be there to take care of them when they are children (generally parents or caretakers but this can include others as well). These “original wounds” dramatically shape who they are and how they look at the world around them. These wounds also make them significantly more vulnerable to additional shame from others and the surrounding culture. In addition, there is an increased vulnerability to shame that arises as a result of their own unhealthy thought and behavior patterns in the present (of which their controlling and abusive attitudes and behaviors is one example).

The unit on shame is often an “eye opener” for many abusive men, who have had few words and no overriding concepts to attach to the gnawing internal sense that they have never been “quite good enough” and have never really “measured up” to their own or others’ expectations over the course of their lives. This concept naturally has strong roots embedded in the family of origin and this shame unit serves as an educational counterpart to the *Family of Origin and Childhood* task that members are expected to complete in the task portion of the program. Unfortunately, their partners have often become the “targets” for their unresolved shame and the emotional pain that accompanies it.

Men are also presented with an alternative vision, empowerment (Kaufman, 1983; Stosny, 1995), which is framed as a system of living based on respect (for yourself and others), the importance of making conscious and positive life choices, and the notions of accountability and proactivity which lead directly to a sense of optimism, higher self-esteem, increased self-respect, healing from emotional pain generated in the past, and personal growth. It is critical to present this material so that shame is not used as just another excuse for their own abuse and violence in the present. The therapist needs to clearly and repeatedly articulate the idea that being neglected and abused as a child does not mean that a man is not completely responsible for his current behavior in his adult life.

However, these concepts do offer many men a better understanding of their life process and what has happened in their past that continues to affect them currently. It also offers some concrete guideposts to more respectful, effective, and responsible living.

Understanding Your Shame is a handout given to group members that describes the concept of shame and discusses the sources of shame and the rules of shame-based systems. The sources of shame are discussed, including ways that the men were shamed and abused earlier in their lives and what they are doing at present to maintain the legacy of shame they are carrying from their family of origin and other sources. This “sustained shame” is particularly important because it directly addresses the abuse and violence they are currently perpetrating and how these behaviors are contributing to the burden of shame that they carry from the past. Finally, the rules of shame-based systems are discussed, which focus on some critical cornerstones related to their abusive behavior, including control, perfectionism, blame, denial, and minimizing.

Another handout, *Signals That Shame May Be Present (in You or Others)*, is then discussed by the therapist to highlight non-verbal or physical signs and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral signs that shame is at work within us. These signs include all types of abuse, compulsive and “addictive” behaviors, and a variety of other signals such as depression and anxiety that they may be experiencing. Men are asked to go through the list and check off the signals that fit for them at this point in their lives.

Some Potential Effects In Coming From A Shame-Based Family is another another handout that address how the man has believed the lies that he was told as a child and has learned unhealthy and dysfunctional coping methods, including control and abuse, as a result. Men are asked to look through this handout and identify ways they have taken on their childhood family’s shame. It reinforces the idea that he has learned to be controlling and abusive and helps him think about how he will answer the questions posed in the *Family of Origin and Childhood* task in the treatment portion of the program, which directly addresses how he developed his own shame and the control and abuse that has arisen from it.

Another important step in addressing this issue involves asking the men to draw their shame (“at its worst”), using pictures, symbols, words, and colors. They are then asked to bring the drawing back to group to share it with the other men. This homework gives a clear sense about whether they are truly understanding the concept of shame. It also gives them the opportunity to articulate how they experience their shame and how it feels to them when it becomes a part of their lives.

Sharing their drawings is often a powerful and moving experience in the group, as men offer pictures of a small child huddled in a basement corner after a physical beating or a child wearing a dunce cap with numerous sets of eyes all around staring at him. The therapist needs to look for, point out, and talk about themes of being exposed, feeling trapped, and being small, helpless, and powerless. Men are then asked to discuss what his drawing means to him. Rigid interpretations by the therapist(s) should be avoided but we do look for and point out themes that may relate to the concept of shame as it has been presented. Men are also encouraged, as with the anger drawing previously, to think about coming up with a “healing image” to transform the shame drawing into something less destructive for them.

Next, the discussion focuses on *Understanding Empowerment*, a handout that clearly distinguishes between the shame-based and empowerment-based ways of thinking, acting, and being and highlights the differences between the two concepts.

The *Cycles of Shame and Empowerment*, a pictorial representation of these two very different processes, reinforces the importance of self-talk and delineates two separate and distinct cycles that can begin with the same activating situation or irresponsible and compulsive behavior. This handout clearly illustrates the directions that the same event can send them, depending on their internal thought process and the interpretation they make about what is happening.

The keys to empowerment are framed as positive self-talk and conscious living and decision-making and is juxtaposed with the automatic and habitual negative self-talk and the notions that they are helpless victims or “out of control” in their lives. A specific example is also offered of these cycles in action and men are asked to come up with their own real-life examples of this process. This process is applied specifically to their decisions to become abusive and the difficulty they have had previously in intervening in their controlling and abusive behavior. The therapist talks about the cycles and then asks men to pick an activating situation in their own lives and follow it through in both cycles.

One of the important parts of the cycle of shame is the psychological defenses. Defenses, when used without conscious thought, keep others away and contribute to tension-building that sets the stage for more shame to be activated by a triggering event or irresponsible behavior, often an abusive or violent incident. ***Defenses: The Psychological “Shields” That We Use To Try To Protect Ourselves From The Shame Within Us*** is a handout that is assigned as homework which assists men in understanding more about the psychological defenses they employ to avoid shame and other more vulnerable emotions. It also assists them in identifying specific defenses that are an important part of how they currently function. Men are asked to specify four or five of the defenses they most frequently use and talk with the group about how they have used these with their partner, their children, or others.

The final section, ***Moving Toward Empowerment: Taking Some Steps To Overcome the Pain and Dysfunction From Your Past and Grow Into the Person You Truly Wish to Become***, is a handout and a talk presented by the therapist and addresses a variety of attitudes, skills, and strategies that can lead to empowerment and growth and away from shame, attempts to control, and perpetrating abuse in their lives. A vital step that is recommended early on is to stop doing the behaviors that maintain and perpetuate their shame in the present. The most obvious example for these men is their abusive and violent behavior. If their own abuse and violence continue, there is no possibility of making any real progress at addressing the places where their shame or their other self-defeating and self-destructive attitudes and behaviors actually originated. Domestic abuse is a primary issue and an enormous generator of shame, whether in a man’s past or present. Men cannot move on to a healthier place if the abuse and violence they are perpetrating do not stop. This is the reason that men are asked to take clear responsibility for their abusive behavior from their very first intake session. This is also the reason that men immediately begin working on a cognitive and behavioral plan to intervene in their escalations and their current potential for abuse (the ***EPP***). And, finally, this is the reason that the ***Family of Origin and Childhood*** assignment in the task portion of the program occurs later in the process. Men will have great difficulty effectively addressing their own victimization if they are continuing to actively practice abusive behaviors that only generate more shame for them (and others) in the present.

Unit 6: Culture of Origin and Male Socialization and How These Messages Affect Attitudes and Behaviors That Contribute To Men Becoming Controlling and Abusive With A Partner

The purpose of this section is to put men’s violence against women and children into the larger context of historical and societal messages about what it is to be a man. It also addresses how control, abuse, and violence are all too often viewed as positive and realistic options for males in a variety of situations (Bandura, 1973). This is not done to excuse the violence they have perpetrated against their partners. Rather, it is another way to assist men in seeing how they have been acculturated by the legacy of the past and by current societal messages to expect to be in control and to have power over their partners and other people. It also helps them recognize clearly that there are, in fact, alternatives to this “macho,” controlling, and entitled attitude.

Throughout history, men have received strong and consistent messages about their right and their obligation to control partners, other women, and children (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Gelles, 1980). The first law of marriage formulated by Romulus in ancient Rome “*obliged the married women...to conform themselves*

entirely to their husbands...to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions" (O'Faolain & Martines, 1973). Many abusive men selectively choose quotes from the Bible to reinforce their "rights" as husbands. An example I have heard is I Timothy 2:11-12 which states: "*Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.*"

More modern times aren't necessarily much better. English common law made a husband and a wife one legal entity. And as that legal entity, the husband answered for legal difficulties related to his wife and also had the right, and even the obligation, to chastise his woman, his children, and his servants (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The first states to rescind the ancient privilege of wife battering were Alabama and Massachusetts in 1871 when these courts ruled that, while the husband was still obliged to "*teach his wife her duty and subjection,*" he could no longer claim "*the privilege, ancient though it be, to beat her with a stick, to pull her hair, choke her, spit in her face, kick her about the floor, or to inflict upon her other like indignities.*" It took Mississippi 50 more years before it too repudiated battering (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Abusive men and all males also receive strong and consistent societal messages today about violence and its place in our lives as a problem-solving and conflict resolution tool. Children's cartoons show numerous acts of violence, all with little effect and with the battered character "bouncing back" in the next moment to continue the "adventure." Video games like "*Mortal Kombat*" offer graphic and explicit violence to young people. Most professional sports offer frequent examples of violence, not only in the context of the "game," but also in the fisticuffs and brawling that have become a regular and disheartening part of not only hockey but also football, baseball, basketball, and many other sporting contests. In addition, more and more professional athletes, including baseball star Darryl Strawberry and football quarterback Warren Moon are being charged with domestic assault.

Advertising like the "Swedish Bikini Team" from Stroh's beer commercials trumpets messages that sexually objectify and demean women and glorify male dominance and the need to be successful and "on top." Movies like "*Natural Born Killers*" and "*9 and 1/2 Weeks*" and now even television programming have violence and sexual exploitation as common themes. Music lyrics like the "Guns and Roses" verse: "*I used to love her but I had to kill her...and now I'm happier this way*" encourage violence and rape. Comedians like Eddie Murphy and Andrew Dice Clay view women in their routines as "bitches," "pussies," and "whores" to be abused and discarded at will. The pornography industry flourishes. This is the context in which domestic abuse occurs in this country.

The focus in this unit is on the omnipresent cultural messages that clearly communicate that men have the right to control partners and others and to use abuse and violence "whenever necessary" to get what they want and "do what needs to be done."

At the beginning of this unit, articles, editorials, and commentaries from newspapers, magazines, and other sources that highlight the ideas noted above are passed out and discussed. Some address male socialization regarding friendships, intimacy, expression of emotion, and the male role and how it affects our health and life expectancy. Others address cultural icons like O.J. Simpson, a football player, and John Daly, a professional golfer, and their abusive behavior and the excuses and rationalizations they offer for their violence. Still others present perspectives on the fear, intimidation, and degradation that women experience as a result of our society's acceptance and promotion of violence toward them. There are numerous examples of these sorts of articles that can provide an excellent vehicle for discussing the historical and cultural context of domestic abuse. Some of the ones used in the group are listed below:

- *Male Stereotype Teaches Suppression of Emotions*, from *In Touch*, a publication of the Mental Health Association, discusses how the male stereotype manifests itself and how these rigid gender roles cripple both sexes.
- *America's Slide Into The Sewer* is an editorial written by George Will that appeared in a 1990 *Newsweek* which juxtaposes testimony in the trial of the young men accused of gang rape and other sadistic violence against a female jogger in New York earlier in the year with the lyrics sung by several rap groups that demean, objectify, and brutalize women.

- *Remorse? Not In The NFL* is an editorial by Bruce Newman in *Sports Illustrated* that chronicled the story of a professional football player, Freeman McNeil, who felt compassion and lost his “game concentration” after accidentally “shredding” the knee of a linebacker he blocked and his then being “bully-ragged,” first by his coach and then by himself because he had “let the team down.”
- *Women’s lives now more restricted by fear than by discrimination*, a 1991 editorial by Ellen Goodman in the *Boston Globe*, discusses the constriction in daily life that occurs for women in this culture due to the danger that they feel and that, in reality, exists in their contacts with men.
- *The Masculine Gender Role and Its Implications for the Life Expectancy of Older Men*, a journal article written by Kenneth Solomon, M.D., addresses issues related to the stress involved with the traditional male role and how this affects both physical and emotional well-being for men.
- *Simpson charged with beating wife during New Year's fight* is a short article that appeared in the back pages of the sports section of a local newspaper in 1989 that chronicles the brutal assault that OJ perpetrated against his wife and the rationalizations that both he and his attorney used to justify and minimize the incident.
- *Men have buddies, but no real friends* is an editorial by Richard Cohen that appeared in the *Washington Post* that talks about the differences between male and female friendships and the isolation and loneliness that many men frequently experience due to fears about becoming intimate with other men.

Men’s programs are encouraged to find similar sorts of articles in their own communities and in the current events of our country. Examples similar to those listed above are everywhere.

This exercise hopefully broadens men’s appreciation for the cultural climate in which domestic abuse exists and helps sensitize them to women’s very real fear and their “one-down” position in many situations. This is a point where men are asked whether, if given the chance, they would become a woman in our country. Despite many abusive men’s beliefs that men are discriminated against at this time and that domestic abuse laws, in particular, highlight this discrimination, no man in the groups has ever stated that he would become a woman if this was actually possible. This question alone often serves as a powerful illustration of the positions that men and women occupy in our society.

A handout called *Male Socialization* is then used as a way to talk about how men learn what it is to be a man in our culture. To begin with, stereotypical, rigid, and traditional notions of what it is to be a man and a woman in our society are brainstormed.

Traits often identified for men include:

strong	confident	“in charge”
powerful	domineering	breadwinner
tough	unemotional	macho
successful	controlling	aggressive
assertive	decisive	knowledgeable
athletic	handsome	wealthy
adventurer	well-built	detached
“stud”	ambitious	driven
“fixer”	logical	“human doing”
silent	rational	boss
responsible	fearless	winner
soldier	hero	protector
don’t ask for help	rescuer	“more is always better”
“don’t cry”	“never say die”	doer

Traits often identified for women include:

warm	loving	nurturing
caretaker	emotional	soft
passive	homemaker	submissive
gentle	sentimental	domestic
sweet	supportive	attentive
romantic	sexy	beautiful
attractive	“good body”	passionate
affectionate	caring	sharing
cooperative	expressive	helpful

Men are asked to personalize this stereotype even further and to think about males they know who come closest to living up to this rigid traditional image. This often opens them to the realization that, generally, these are not the kind of men who are safe to be around, either physically or emotionally. The destructive impact of this traditional male role on our physical and emotional health and on our relationships with those close to us is also discussed. A case is then made for combining the best traits from both the male and female characteristics to form a person who can be strong, assertive, and confident and, at the same time, gentle, caring, and nurturing. Men are asked to think about other men they have known who combine the positive aspects of being male and female and who are more androgynous in their orientation to life. The group members’ feeling of safety and acceptance around these men tends to be significantly higher. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of being a non-traditional male are brainstormed, helping group members see clearly that there are certainly difficulties in assuming this more open role but that the advantages have the potential to far outweigh the disadvantages.

Another topic addressed in this section has to do with controlling attitudes and behaviors, which serve as the foundation and underpinning for abusive behavior but which can also take on more subtle but still destructive forms. Control is often a way to attempt to bring safety and predictability into our lives. Unfortunately, most attempts to control people and situations around us bring just the opposite. It is stressed that, in general, the more human beings attempt to control people and situations around them, the more “out-of-control” they end up **FEELING** (which does not mean that they **ARE**, in fact, out-of-control). *What Do You Mean I’m Being Controlling?* is a handout adapted from some of the ideas and work of Michael Obsatz, PhD, a college professor, trainer, and therapist, that addresses several different aspects of control, including over-control of others (which is most clearly associated with abusive men), over-control of self, lack of self-control, and the healthy alternative, self-control.

This tendency to want to control others around them is an important part of who these men have been and will continue to be. It is emphasized that a desire to control is not something that they will be able to totally eliminate from their personalities. Rather, men are encouraged to become more aware of this part of themselves and to intervene in these attitudes, when they arise, before they have manifested themselves in unhealthy and destructive ways. Men are asked to brainstorm ways that they and traditional males have attempted to overtly control the women in their lives (e.g. being demanding, using economic power, violence). They are also asked to begin to identify the more subtle forms of control that they use with their partners and others (e.g. “playing the victim,” “acting like a martyr”).

Finally, the handout, *Types Of Abusive Behavior*, is discussed again with the focus primarily on the categories “*Male Entitlement*” and “*Battering/Psychological Abuse.*” *Male Entitlement* is defined as “having an attitude that conveys male dominance, a general disrespect for women, and the belief that men are just naturally more competent and capable than women are.” This attitude leads to the belief, similar to what has existed in the historical roots of our culture, that a man has the right and the responsibility to control his partner and make her into the sort of person he believes she should be. This desire to control underlies all abusive behavior.

Male entitlement is rampant in our culture (and in many other cultures as well) and runs through all our societal institutions. Violence against partners cannot exist without a sense of male entitlement being present. We ask men to look through the examples, identify attitudes they have held and behaviors they have acted out with their partners, and come up with other examples that are not listed. Obvious manifestations of this attitude include things like expecting that he will have the final say on all important decisions in the relationship, controlling how finances are handled, and believing that a partner is his “property” or that he “owns” her once they are involved in a committed relationship.

Battering/Psychological Abuse is present in an intimate relationship when there is a consistent and ongoing pattern of controlling and abusive behavior by a person who is more powerful than his partner. It occurs when a less powerful partner believes there might be violence perpetrated against her or when there has been at least one incident of property destruction, violent threats, or physical or sexual abuse that she has experienced. This pattern adds a “terroristic” element to the relationship climate, creating a sense of fear and degradation that is always present (women often describe this as “*walking on eggshells*” around their partner). This is frequently recognized and discussed by men when they do the *Abuse Inventory* in the task portion of this domestic abuse program. The *Abuse Inventory* is a time when numerous men have described one or more violent incidents as similar to a “hostage situation” where their partner becomes their “captive” as they act out with an unrelenting and terrifying series of controlling and abusive words and actions.

A partner’s belief that violence may occur or when incidents of violence around or toward a partner have actually occurred mean that male entitlement behaviors, emotional and verbal abuse, and threats now take on added impact. At this point, men are significantly more able to create an atmosphere where humiliation, fear, and intimidation reign supreme in the relationship. Psychological abuse solidifies the “power and control” position that the abusive man desires to achieve with his partner and results in undermining her self-esteem, creating intense emotional insecurity in her, rendering her less capable of protecting and taking care of herself, and decreasing her potential to function independently in the future. This concept is discussed at some length to assist group members in understanding more fully how they are impacting their partner once violence (or the potential for it to occur) exists in their relationship.

Unit 7: Assertiveness and The Importance of Developing and Using a Direct But Also an Effective and Respectful “Voice” in Addressing Issues That Arise in a Man’s Life

A lack of assertiveness does not cause domestic abuse. However, assertiveness is included in the educational program because so many abusive men have so much difficulty being consistently assertive in their dealings with other people (Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981; Pagelow, 1984; Sonkin, Martin, & Walker, 1985; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Maiuro, Cahn, & Vitaliano, 1986). They tend to vacillate back and forth between being passive and withdrawing or becoming controlling, aggressive, and explosive with their partners and others. Their passivity in interactions often builds stress and tension within them which may then contribute to (but does not cause) their escalation and “blow-ups” with their partner and children, who are deemed safer targets than, for instance, an employer or a stranger would be.

Assertiveness, as one of the educational topics, however, merits some cautionary statements. Unfortunately, this topic in particular is one that abusive men may use to enhance the power and control stance they frequently use in their intimate relationships. Assertiveness skills can easily become just another “weapon” in their “war” to achieve dominance. They might proclaim innocently, “*I’m only being assertive*” when, in fact, they may be presenting themselves in an aggressive and intimidating manner (especially non-verbally). Or they may have the unrealistic expectation that their partner or others will do what they want if they are assertive “in just the right way.” It is particularly important to stress the importance of being assertive and respectful with everyone in their lives, as they tend to become overly-focused, once they begin to practice assertiveness skills, on becoming more assertive only with their partner. It needs to be strongly emphasized that assertiveness should not be used as just another tool to manipulate and control her.

Despite all of these potential problems, however, learning to be assertive in more life situations is still an important skill for abusive men to develop in the program. If they are able to do this, there is less likelihood that they will carry around the tension that tends to arise if they continue to handle day-to-day interactions in passive or ineffectual ways (Alberti & Emmons, 1970).

This unit starts with handouts that are given out and discussed with group members. The first is entitled *Some Different Styles of Communicating With Others*, which clearly defines and gives examples of being passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and assertive and notes the goal in each style of communication. It also clearly states that the goal of being assertive is NOT “winning” or “getting your way,” but rather communicating your thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs directly as a way to take care of yourself and set the stage for increased emotional connection and genuine intimacy with partners and others.

The second handout, *Aggressive Behavior*, highlights a variety of specific types of disrespectful and abusive actions and serves as a good reminder of the reasons that men are involved with the domestic abuse program.

Finally, another handout, *Verbal and Non-Verbal Elements of Assertive, Passive, and Aggressive Behavior* offers more specifics about different aspects of those styles of relating. It is important to give special emphasis to the non-verbal aspects since these are often overlooked or minimized by abusive men who deny the power and impact that they can actually have (e.g. glaring and staring at a partner to intimidate her).

The next section, *Assertiveness Synonyms*, is a brainstorming exercise held during the group session. In this exercise, men are asked to come up with different ways of describing the four styles of communicating with others. The purpose is to insure that men are understanding the concepts that have been presented and are clearly differentiating between assertive behavior and the other types of communicating. Commonly, men in the group may have some difficulty seeing and putting into practice the difference between being assertive and being aggressive.

The *Assertiveness Grid* is given as homework after the assertiveness information above has been discussed. It serves as a concrete means of asking men to look at how they communicate in their relationships with other people. This grid notes some specific behaviors and people and asks the men to identify whether they are generally passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive with those people in those situations (or use a combination of these communication styles). This is a place where many men start to see the patterns in their willingness to assert themselves with others in their daily lives. It also gives them an idea of where they can begin to focus if they wish to start changing some of these patterns. Two particularly interesting patterns to note are whether the men see themselves behaving differently with males and females or with those closer to them (e.g. partners and other family members) or those who are more “distant” (e.g. acquaintances or strangers).

Next, *The Process of Becoming More Assertive* is presented and discussed. This is a step-by-step method for identifying and doing something different in the situations where men have not been assertive in the past. It also assists them in preparing for and following through with some specific tasks to help them actually implement their new assertive behaviors into their daily lives.

Assertiveness Scenarios is a homework assignment that gives men the opportunity to clearly identify assertive, passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive ways to handle some common situations that could be problematic. After filling this out, men are given the chance to actually role-play the different behavioral responses in the group. This allows the therapist to see whether men are, in a practical way, integrating these ideas into their behavioral repertoire.

The final homework assignment in this section, the *Assertiveness Journal*, asks men to review situations that have occurred over the course of the week and note how they handled the situation, what their self-talk and feelings were, and how they might have handled the situation more effectively. Men are asked to come up with a situation relating both to their partner and to someone outside the family. This, again, gives the therapist a better idea of whether the men are understanding and integrating these concepts.

Unit 8: Effective Communication and Conflict Resolution

Often, when a man first appears for treatment related to domestic abuse issues, he will sometimes argue forcefully and eloquently that he and his partner “*just can’t communicate.*” And their communication patterns frequently are unhealthy and dysfunctional. But communication problems also do not cause domestic abuse. Nonetheless, learning effective communication and conflict resolution strategies are an important part of what an abusive man needs to take with him from his domestic abuse treatment (Bandura, 1973; Rosenbaum & Maiuro, 1989; Edleson & Tolman, 1992).

Words often become just another “weapon” for abusive men in the ongoing struggles with their partners. Abusive men at times report that it is their partners who are “*good with words*” and often complain about their partners’ finesse in “verbally abusing” them. However, many abusive men are also very adept at using words and the communication process as just another means to control, harass, and intimidate their partners. And women often report that it is the name-calling, put-downs, cursing, swearing, and verbal harassment that is most damaging to their self-esteem, self-respect, and their ability to make positive and healthy decisions for themselves.

This unit focuses on the communication process and how to make it more effective for both partners. Communication is presented in the group like practicing a game of tennis. However, the object is not to put the ball away and win the point, but rather to keep the ball going over the net. In addition, acknowledging and addressing conflicts directly when they arise and handling conflicts effectively and respectfully is an integral part of this unit.

Feelings, a lecture and handout, serves as an important introduction to the issue of communicating more effectively. Often, abusive men view their feelings and their emotional reactions as the “problem,” especially when it comes to experiencing and expressing their anger. This discussion attempts to normalize feelings as part of being human and links emotions to the self-talk that fuels them.

This handout again challenges men to slow their internal process in order to become more aware of how their emotional responses arise. It emphasizes the importance of accepting feelings and working with all of them rather than trying to ignore or deny them. It stresses that a man’s feelings are his responsibility and that his over-reactions may, in fact, stem from previous life experiences and might have little, if anything, to do with his partner or children in the present. It raises the issue of making choices about how the feelings are expressed and encourages respectful versus abusive communication. Finally, it addresses the whole issue of why feelings are shared and asks men to question their unrealistic and controlling expectation that, when they share their feelings “correctly,” other people will then respond as the men think they should.

Feeling Words, another handout, is a helpful supplement to the lecture above. Many abusive men come into the intake process with little or no awareness of any emotions that they experience besides anger and often label any emotion they feel as anger (Edleson & Tolman, 1992). Their anger serves as a “cover-up” for all sorts of other feelings (McKay, Rogers, & McKay), such as disappointment, fear, sadness, shame, and hurt, which, if shared, could leave them considerably more vulnerable than their explosive outbursts do. And they often have few words to even describe these other emotional experiences.

This handout offers general categories of emotions and specific feeling words within each of these. Since anger has often been their only recognizable emotion in the past, this handout opens up new possibilities

regarding communication and the expression of the feelings that they do experience. It can be very helpful for abusive men to learn new labels and descriptors to help broaden their “feeling word vocabulary.”

The next handout, *Elements of Effective Communication*, discusses specific components of the communication process and forms the basis for a lecture on this area. This handout pointedly begins with the concept of active listening and paraphrasing, which directly address an abusive man’s tendency to interrupt and race ahead to his own conclusions rather than tuning into his partner’s perspective and trying to understand her point of view. Other highlights of this section include:

- Using “I” language and assuming clear responsibility for his thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs;
- Being aware of non-verbal signals that he is giving off to and receiving from his partner;
- Accepting feedback from his partner and others as a way to learn more about himself (as he is asked to do in the group process);
- Offering descriptive and specific feedback to others that avoids evaluation and judgment (as he is asked to do in the group process);
- Staying tuned to the “emotional climate” and the “process” in communication efforts in addition to whatever the content of the communication happens to be; and
- Working hard to make communication a cooperative effort, rather than a competitive or destructive one.

Hitting Below the Belt: “Dirty Fighting” Strategies That Will Always Undermine Effective Conflict Resolution is a handout that outlines a number of different conflict strategies that tend to decrease trust, respect, safety, and intimacy in the process. Abusive men generally recognize numerous examples that they have used in their own relationships. This is assigned as homework and men are asked to identify four or five primary ones that they have tended to resort to most frequently with their partners in the past. In group, men are expected to talk about how they have used them.

A Conflict Resolution Model is a handout that forms the basis for a lecture on an alternative and more positive way to experience and work through conflict in a relationship. Conflict is presented as a “given” in intimate human relationships. Procedure-setting in conflict situations is encouraged so that there are specific guidelines that can promote safety and respect even in the midst of anger and disagreement. It is also recommended that men focus on specific behaviors, situations, and concerns that are problematic rather than generalizing and globalizing issues that they wish to address.

The model proposed here asks men to change their goal in conflict situations from **AGREEMENT**, which is part of their need to control their partners, to **UNDERSTANDING**, which has the potential to bring those in conflict closer to one another. This section builds on and reinforces other educational presentations on self-talk, the time-out concept, and effective communication. And it is stressed that, in conflict resolution, the bottom line is what the man is willing to give or do himself rather than the idea that it is his right to force his partner to do something different. This model also focuses on the notion that it is alright to “agree to disagree” about most issues and encourages ongoing evaluations of the decisions that are reached in the conflict resolution process (and also promotes the idea of “celebrating” when the process actually works).

Unit 9: Developing Self-Esteem and a Healthy Relationship with a Partner

Abusive men have few, if any, models of healthy attitudes and behaviors toward themselves, other people, and their relationships with others. Their own families of origin were often shaming, controlling, and abusive. Their friends and acquaintances frequently offer a similar vision to theirs about what it is to be a man and what it means to be in a relationship with a partner. Their own previous relationships with women were often unhealthy and dysfunctional. And their own controlling and abusive patterns are likely to continue if they do not begin to look at themselves and their relationships differently. These are generally men with low self-esteem (Pagelow,

1984; Goldstein & Rosenbaum, 1985). People who are controlling, shaming, and abusive with others do not, in fact, feel good about themselves (Stosny, 1995).

This section offers an alternative view: positive and healthy ways of being human, developing and maintaining self-esteem, and building respect, nurturing, and equality into their relationships with partners and children. It expands on the information discussed in the Culture of Origin section and reinforces the idea that men need to leave the “macho” power-based image behind if they are to feel better about themselves and develop true intimacy with their partners, their children, and others.

Some Signs That Higher Self-Esteem Is Present in You or Others is a handout which forms the basis for a talk by the therapist about self-esteem and highlights characteristics that indicate when self-esteem is present. It focuses on the importance of self-acceptance; taking responsibility for themselves; self-awareness, self-understanding and insight; truly living by their espoused values; treating others in a warm, humane, and respectful manner; realistically perceiving the outside world; and actively reaching out to what is happening around them. This talk gives another vision to what these men have previously experienced and reinforces much of the other learning that is offered over the course of their group involvement.

Men are cautioned not to measure themselves against this model in a perfectionistic way and thus use it as just another means to shame or demean themselves and others. Rather, men are encouraged to use it as a way to identify some specific attitudes and behaviors that they may wish to work on and change to improve their self-esteem.

Key Ingredients In Creating and Maintaining A Healthy Relationship With A Partner and *Some Different Types of Intimacy That Can Be a Part of Your Relationship With Your Partner* are handouts that extend and build on the individual focus above to help men become respectful, caring, and loving partners in a relationship. These address specific aspects of being a nurturing and non-abusive partner, including maintaining a spirit of trust and cooperation; appreciating and valuing differences; being aware of and intervening in controlling attitudes and behaviors; seeking equality in decision-making and task accomplishment; moderating the expression of anger; learning to compromise and “agree to disagree” at times; working together as a team in parenting; and spending time apart as well as time together.

The development of genuine intimacy is a difficult assignment for many abusive men. Most have few, if any, intimate experiences with others from their childhood to the present and part of this discussion may focus on the fears they feel about allowing themselves to become vulnerable in the ways that are recommended if they truly want to develop an intimate relationship with their partner.

Unit 10: Effective and Respectful Parenting

Although not all men in this program have been physically abusive with their children, the majority have been controlling and emotionally and verbally abusive with them. One of the reasons that women frequently make the decision to leave an abusive relationship has to do with their fears for their children or concerns that their children will learn unhealthy attitudes and behaviors about what it is to be a male or a female. This unit seeks to offer men some different ways to look at and approach their children.

Getting men to begin to use an alternative parenting style is often difficult because, by the time the men get to the group, their children have often already begun to “act out” in a variety of ways (often in response to shame and abuse that is directed at them or their mother. At this point, men frequently see their children as out-of-control and revert easily to the controlling and abusive parenting habits that they frequently experienced as children themselves.

One of the expectations in the program is that the men will not use physical discipline (i.e. spanking, hitting, ear-pulling) with their children during the time when they are in the group. If physical discipline is used, men need to fill out and share a *Violent Incident Assessment* which outlines the ways in which they chose not to

use their *Escalation Prevention Plan* to de-escalate and to identify what they can do differently the next time a similar situation arises.

This is not to say that men should never use physical restraint or control with their children. For example, standing back and calmly talking to a two-year-old who is playing with an electrical outlet is not responsible parenting either. However, if the physical restraint goes beyond moving the child from the dangerous situation to inflicting physical pain (e.g. squeezing arms or shoulders to hurt the child to “make a point” or erupting explosively to intimidate the child), concerns would be expressed.

The goal of this unit is to assist men in becoming non-violent and non-abusive parents with their children. This unit is not designed to be an exhaustive course on all aspects of parenting. Rather, the program simply hopes to introduce some basic concepts about nurturing and respectful parenting and then encourage men to look other places for more comprehensive groups or classes on parenting principles. A parenting class is often one of the final recommendations for men with children who complete the domestic abuse program. A critical piece for abusive men is to begin to intervene in their belief that their children are acting in a malicious way and “*are out to get me.*” When they are willing to step back from this negative mind-set, they are less likely to continually react in a frightening and intimidating manner when things don’t go as they would like.

The basic model that this unit uses comes from *STEP: Systematic Training In Effective Parenting*, by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay (1989), which builds on principles from Rudolph Dreikurs’ work (1964). It encourages democratic, nurturing, and respectful interactions with children as opposed to using authoritarian, shaming, and abusive methods. This book is strongly recommended to group members. A number of important concepts from the book are focused on and discussed in group through the handouts. These concepts include:

- *The Goals of Misbehavior*
- *The Goals of Positive Behavior*
- *Differences Between the ‘Good’ Parent and the Responsible Parent*
- *Differences Between Praise and Encouragement*
- *The Major Differences Between Punishment and Logical Consequences*

In addition, a variety of articles from newspapers, magazines, and other sources are used to address and discuss some other important parenting issues such as building children’s self-esteem, how to handle children’s “back talk,” the pro’s and con’s of spanking, and how to handle children’s anger. Some examples of these articles include:

- *Don’t Expect Too Much From Your Children*, an article written by Ronald Pitzer as part of the “*Young Families*” series through the Minnesota Extension Service at the University of Minnesota, which describes a number of unrealistic and unreasonable expectations that can damage a child’s self-esteem and the parent’s relationship with the child.
- *Spank or not spank? Some opinions*, from a newspaper advice column called “*Tender Years*” written by Pat Gardner, which addresses issues related to using physical punishment with children and the potential negative effects on them (at the time and in the future) and on the relationships that they have with their parents.
- *How To Raise A Violent Boy*, an article written by Peg Meier in a local newspaper, that clearly outlines what **NOT** to do if your intention is to see your son become a caring and respectful person.
- *Plain Talk About Dealing With The Angry Child*, an article from the National Institute of Mental Health (Hilda Fried, Editor), discusses some concrete and practical responses in handling children’s angry and aggressive outbursts.
- *Teach Responsibility with Consequences, Not Punishment*, another article written by Ronald Pitzer at the University of Minnesota, focuses on the difference between using natural and logical consequences, which teach children responsibility and increase their self-confidence, and using punishment, which may teach short-term compliance but takes a toll on a child’s self-esteem in the process.

- *Children Learn What They Live*, a poem by Dorothy Law Nolte, which talks about how children model themselves after what they are taught by their parents, caretakers, and other important adults.

The handout, *Some Practical Ways To Be a More Effective and Respectful Parent*, is passed out and discussed and offers some basic suggestions about respectful and effective parenting. It focuses on:

- parents moderating their own anger and emotional reactivity with their children,
- asking men to begin to try to understand their child's goals and the motivation behind his or her misbehavior,
- recommending that men learn more about their child's capabilities at particular developmental stages,
- encouraging men to take more time and look for opportunities to connect in a positive emotional way with their children,
- offering choices and alternatives instead of demands and directives to their children, and
- using logical and natural consequences to promote cooperation and responsibility.

These concepts are often strange and "foreign" to group members, who generally received the same shaming and autocratic approach directed at them when they were young that they are now using with their own children. It is also recommended that they attend, alone or with their partner, a parenting class to learn more about the concepts presented here and to begin applying these concepts to some practical "down-to-earth" situations that they confront with their children in their day-to-day life together.

Unit 11: Getting a Woman's Perspective on Abuse and Violence

An important part of what abusive men often initially fail to comprehend is the destructive and devastating impact that their abuse has on their partners. Looking at this impact is a theme throughout the program and the development of empathy and compassion for his partner, their children, and others are critical elements in the change process. One way that this is communicated to the men is through having a women therapist who works with women who are in controlling and abusive relationships come to the domestic abuse group and talk about the healing process for women. She also discusses the effects, from a woman's point of view, of the abuse and violence on their partners.

The therapist who comes to the group generally talks about the women's program that they have led, highlighting similarities and differences between the two groups. She often discusses the difference between male and female abuse and violence, as this is frequently an issue that arises during the time she is present at the men's group. Men are offered the opportunity to ask questions during this presentation as well, addressing topics that are of interest to them. These questions often revolve around why their partner is so angry with them, when she will "*get over this*," and how women heal from the abuse they have experienced. Men frequently look for hope regarding the future of their relationships in this session and are once again reminded that the only possible way to re-build trust and intimacy in the relationship is to provide their partners with a consistent pattern of behavior change over time which allows their partners to truly feel safe and to actually heal from the ongoing impact of the abuse from the past.

Prior to this unit, men are prepared around issues like the possibility of an escalation occurring during this unit and what to do in that situation. This is another opportunity for men to practice taking a time-out if the need arises, although no one has actually done this during this presentation. Despite the tension that this unit often creates when men are told that a woman therapist would be joining the group for this period of time, group members consistently found this exposure to the women's perspective helpful and enlightening. It also decreased the fear that men often verbalized during the group that their partners were being "brainwashed" in the women's program to despise and reject them and men in general.

A woman therapist comes to the group approximately every six months and thus this unit does not necessarily follow the order that occurs for Unit I to Unit 10.

Unit 12: The Ongoing Recovery Process for Men Who Have Been Controlling and Abusive

Part of what is emphasized with men from the very beginning of their domestic abuse treatment is that becoming and remaining non-abusive takes energy and effort long after they have completed this group program. Their completion of group is **NOT** seen as an “end point.” The importance of continuing to take care of themselves is regularly stressed. This means attending to their controlling attitudes and the potential for abuse and using the tools, skills, and strategies they have learned and hopefully put into practice during their group experience and into the future.

Many men start the treatment process with the unrealistic and unreachable goals of “*never getting angry*” and “*being cured*” by the end of the program. Part of what is necessary to teach them is that they will continue to get angry and that there is no “cure” that permanently ends their potential for becoming abusive again. The reality is that this potential to become controlling and abusive will always be with them. The only effective way to continue to be non-abusive is to stay aware of the cues and triggers that signal their stress, irritation, frustration, and anger and to intervene in the escalation process and their desire to control before they make the choice to become abusive.

There is no better way to reinforce this philosophy than to bring men back who have completed the group at an earlier time and have them talk about their ongoing recovery process. Since this program functioned for more than thirty years, since a number of our completers continued in their own individual or group therapy or other recovery services, and since a number of these men wanted to “give back” to the program as a means of enhancing their own recovery process (Adams, 1989), numerous men were willing to volunteer their time and become involved in this way.

We generally asked teams of two men to come to talk at group. One is a man who is still involved with his original partner and the other is a man who was not. This states clearly to the men in the group that, with hard work, there is some possibility that they can build a healthy and non-abusive relationship with their current partner. It also communicates the understanding that, even if they do not continue in their current relationship, they can still grow and feel good about themselves and be non-abusive with a new partner, if they choose to have one. The men who visited talked about their past abuse, their own experience in the domestic abuse treatment program, and what they did to continue their progress in addressing the controlling and abusive attitudes and behaviors in their current lives.

The hopeful aspect of this unit cannot be underestimated. Men in group are frequently separated, in the process of divorce, and, at a minimum, dramatically estranged from their partners and their children. A sense of despair and hopelessness is often rampant when this is occurring. These men who return, in telling their stories and talking about what they did to continue their recovery process, communicated the idea that, with hard work and a commitment to continue their recovery process, change is possible and men’s lives can become more fulfilling and satisfying, with or without their current partner.

This is a powerful message to men who are often focused on their despair and the bleakness of their own situations in the present. These men who returned to talk with the group also offer clear testimony that the anger and the desire to control remain within them, long after the group is over. But even more important than this is the idea that choices can be made in an ongoing way to deal more effectively with both the anger and the desire to control if the group members decide to do this.

Former members came to the group approximately every six months and thus this unit does not necessarily follow the order that occurs for the other educational units in the group program.