

# Breaking the cycle of domestic violence

By Liliana E. Sanchez

Each night, during the month of October, South Lake Tahoe Women's Center displayed purple lights on our building to honor Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



It is not uncommon for us to witness acts of domestic violence at places such as the market, at work, next door or possibly in our own home. It is our hope the purple lights will bring continued awareness well beyond that one month so the community of South Lake Tahoe does not tolerate domestic violence and victims have options.

For victims of domestic violence, every part of their life may feel turned upside-down and the abuse they experience may also affect friends and family. For those of you who have never experienced abuse from a partner or family member, a life "walking on eggshells" to avoid further abuse may be difficult to comprehend. To better understand what victims of domestic violence experience on a daily basis, we begin this four-part educational series by explaining the cycle of violence.

In every abusive relationship there are three defining phases which vary in time and intensity. These are commonly known as the honeymoon, tension, and explosion phases – the cycle of violence.

Each relationship starts out in the honeymoon phase regardless of whether the relationship becomes unhealthy. People pick partners based on mutual interest and affection. Both partners are on "good behavior" trying to show their best side to this new person in their life. People often describe this time as

perfect or everything they dreamed of. However, in any relationship you can't be 100 percent perfect all the time.

When you are trying to merge two lives together inevitably tension can arise. Tension in a relationship can be caused by anything, finances, weather, and even how someone spends their spare time. Relationships that are on their way to becoming unhealthy or abusive struggle to work through everyday issues due to lack of communication and respect which leads to the tension phase.

During the tension phase, one partner typically senses the stress of the other. They may try to change their own behavior in an effort to smooth things over. This phase is often described as "walking on eggshells". Jealousy, stress, and often brutality are shown by the abusive partner as a result of the tension. Victims are often blamed or blame the actions of their abusive partner on themselves, they may deny that any sort of problem exists, and do whatever they can to stop the tension from rising, frequently to protect their abusive partner or keep the family/relationship together.

The next phase is called the explosion. It is typically the shortest of all and can be the most dangerous. This phase involves an explosion of violence such as intimidation, threats or physical assault. The abusive partner may use physical abuse causing injury to their partner that can range from bruises and broken bones to hospitalization and even death. During this phase the abusive partner is thinking about "teaching him/her a lesson" and will minimize, deny or blame their partner so they do not have to take responsibility for their actions.

In order to complete the cycle, the couple comes back to the honeymoon phase. Commonly, after the explosion the abusive partner may attempt to apologize for their behavior and try to make up due to fear that their partner may leave them. They may claim that they will fall apart or kill themselves if they

lose their partner.

Different tactics are used to get their partner to believe them such as charm and/or manipulation. The abusive partner may believe and express he/she has total self control and will never cause them harm again. They may end up convincing their partner they are truly sorry. The couple has now come back to a place where they feel they can stay together and everything will be as it once was.

Unfortunately the cycle is cyclical, meaning it is only time before more tension arises and the abusive partner who is unable to healthily manage the tension will use abuse such as physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and financial to control their relationship and deal with stress. It is not uncommon for the honeymoon phase to fade leaving the abused partner going back and forth between tension and explosion.

So how do perpetrators use the different types of abuse? Why do they do it?

Look for the second piece in this series tomorrow on *Lake Tahoe News*.

If you have any questions about domestic violence, contact South Lake Tahoe Women's Center at (530) 544.

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