Understanding **Physical** Abuse

Physical abuse is a severe form of domestic violence that involves the intentional use of physical force against another person, causing injury, harm, or endangering their health and well-being. It is a criminal offense that

emotional, and psychological consequences for the victim.

Physical abuse encompasses a wide range of violent behaviors, including but not limited to:

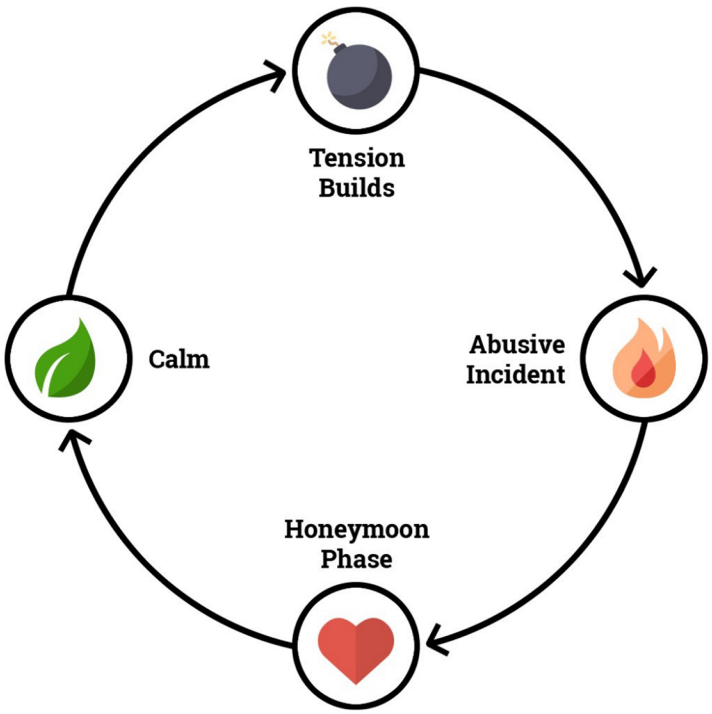
- Shaking, pushing, shoving, or forcefully grabbing the victim
- Slapping, punching, kicking, or hitting with objects
- Choking, strangling, or attempting to smother
- Burning with cigarettes, hot objects, or scalding liquids
- Biting, scratching, or pulling hair
- Using weapons such as knives, guns, or other objects to inflict harm
- Forcibly restraining or confining the victim against their will

Physical abuse can also involve threats of violence against the victim, their children, pets, or family members, creating an environment of fear and intimidation.

Visible Signs of Physical Abuse:

- Bruises, especially on areas not typically prone to accidental injury, such as the face, neck, or torso
- Broken bones or fractures in various stages of healing
- Burns, blisters, or scalding marks, particularly in unusual patterns or locations
- Cuts, lacerations, or puncture wounds
- Head injuries, including concussions or traumatic brain injuries
- Unexplained or inconsistent explanations for injuries

The Cycle of Abuse



Tension Builds
Stress begins to grow from the pressures of daily life or other points of conflict. The victim may attempt to reduce tension by complying with the abuser.

Abusive Incident
Verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse occurs. This includes anger, intimidation, threats, and other forms of abuse.

Honeymoon Phase
The abuser apologizes, shows remorse, and often begs for forgiveness. They may shower the victim with love and affection, and promise that the abuse will never happen again.

Calm
The relationship enters a period of calm where the abuse stops or slows. The abuser may continue to ask for forgiveness, or make positive gestures, but these tend to reduce in sincerity over time.

Tension Builds

Abuser May:
- Pick fights
- Act jealous & possessive
- Criticize, threaten
- Use alcohol, drugs
- Be moody, unpredictable

Victim May:
- Feel like their walking on egg-shells
- Try to reason with/calm/ appease abuser
- Keep silent, keep children quiet
- Feel afraid or anxious

Effect on children:
- Modify behaviour to avoid anger
- Manipulate either parent for own benefit
- Assume parental role
- Use drugs, alcohol
- Run away to escape

Abusive Incident/ Explosion

Abuser May:
- Blame victim for provoking abuse
- Increase control over money
- Restrain partner
- Destroy property
- Assault/abuse physically, verbally, sexually, emotionally

Victim May:
- Experience fear, shock
- Protect self/children
- Use self-defense
- Call for help
- Try to flee, leave
- Pray for it to stop
- Do what is necessary to survive

Effect on children:
May get hurt trying to intervene
- Attempt to hide and be frantic
- Display acting out behaviour
- Become clingy or withdrawn

Honeymoon

Abuser May:
- Ask for forgiveness
- Promise it won't happen again
- Stop using drugs, alcohol
- Be affectionate
- Initiate intimacy
- Minimize or deny abuse

Victim May:
- Forgive
- Return home
- Arrange for counselling
- Feel hopeful
- Feel manipulated
- Blame self
- Minimize or deny abuse

Effect on children:
- May be unable to believe in or trust either the victim or abuser
- Blame

Calm

Abuser May

Justify the abuse, claim external factors (e.g., stress, work problems) caused their actions.
Minimize the incident, downplay the seriousness of the abuse or deny it ever occurred.
Promising change, assuring victim that they will change, often promising that the abuse won't happen again.
Increased affection, being more loving, attentive, and understanding, trying to make up for their past behavior.

Breaking the cycle

Ending the cycle of abuse begins with identifying it. Abusive behavior is often part of a recurring pattern, rather than isolated incidents.

The calmer periods can make the abuser appear genuine, leading the victim to believe the abuse was a one-time occurrence. However, these calm phases are manipulative tactics used to regain control over the victim.

Here are some practical steps to break the cycle of abuse:

Acknowledge the abuse:
Recognizing the pattern is the first step toward breaking free. Accept that abuse is not an isolated incident, but part of a larger cycle.

Seek support: Speak with trusted friends, family members, or a counselor/therapist. It's crucial not to face the situation alone. You may also need legal assistance if considering separation or protection.

Therapy and interventions: Couple therapy may address dysfunctional patterns, but it is not suitable for abusive relationships where one partner asserts violence, power, and control over the other. In such cases, individual

abuse victims may be more effective.

Leaving safely: Create a safe exit strategy, including a place to go, important documents, and emergency contacts. Practice leaving quickly and privately, and seek guidance from domestic violence professionals to ensure your safety.

No one should endure abuse, and breaking the cycle requires recognizing the situation, seeking help, and taking steps to ensure your safety and well-being.