

The Red Marriage and Abuse

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It was in the late 80's.

A young woman entered my office for a late afternoon appointment. It was her first appointment, referred by a friend.



She presented herself as a reserved quiet person. Her eyes and body language spoke volumes of her sadness. She often breathed deeply and sighed.

She talked about her marriage, how she wanted to save the marriage. She was not specific about the status of the marriage other than she wanted her husband to love her.

We spent the 50 minutes with background information and building rapport.

The next afternoon, after getting home from the office, I opened the local newspaper and to my horror a picture of this young lady was on the front page.

She was brutally stabbed to death in the bathtub by her husband no more than 8 hours after I saw her in my office!

Although an idealist - trying to save relationships and bring people together in deeper intimacy - I was from that point forward, forever cognizant of the "at risk" potential in trouble relationships.

And, believe me, there are many women (and men) "at risk" in relationships that no longer hold potential for healing and growth but instead are a seed bed for violence and destruction.

In my therapy as an online coach I often encounter a spouse who out of his/her personal neediness or numbed by his/her sense of victimization will go to almost any length to "save the marriage" even though s/he and or the children are "at risk" by a spouse who uses and abuses.

Yes, it is laudable for us to write optimistic copy about the potential to bring the "spouse back." But, this sometimes flies in the face of reality.

So, what do we do?

I try to enable those who in their sense of victimization and helplessness - who believe their capacity to endure abuse will prevail - who live life focused exclusively on the degrading behavior of their spouse, to discover their sense of internal power - to begin setting protective boundaries - to begin examining their standards for a healthy relationship and the values they want to live with.

Don't be a Frog in the Water

You've probably heard the metaphor of the frog that is placed in water; the temperature of the water is raised and the frog's body accommodates the warmer temperature.

The water becomes warmer and warmer and still the frog does not seem to notice.

Eventually the temperature reaches boiling point and the frog, failing to realize his dilemma, is cooked.

Persistent and continual exposure to an abusive relationship is much the same.

You tend to build a tolerance for the abuse, rationalize many of the behaviors, continue to hope for the best and soon emotionally melt and sometimes are physically assaulted.

Functioning becomes difficult. You feel nothing or try to push away the pain and anger. You may withdraw into numbness with diminished self-respect.

The following exercise will enable you to evaluate your present situation and in that process reclaim, over time, your personal power.

This personal power will enable you to cope with yourself and the relationship with more effectiveness.

I suggest you follow the process very carefully at first. Take sufficient time to reflect on and answer the questions.

My Level of Abuse

Take a couple minutes to reflect on or write out your responses to these questions:
Answer these questions:
This is the problem of abuse as I experience it now.
These images come to my mind when I think of this problem.
Having this problem means I have this negative thought about myself.

This feeling emerges when I think of this problem.
This feeling is located in this part of my body.
On a scale of 1-10 (10 being as bad as it can be) I rate myself a when I now experience

this problem.

Abuse Evaluation Exercise

This exercise or questionnaire will enable you to make distinctions regarding the abuse and your response to it. Begin to put words and thoughts on what you experience. You will begin to discover the specifics of what the abuse means to you and the specific impact it has had on your life.

Be honest. Honesty will set you free.

Check yes or no to the questions:

Yes	No	Do you
۰	٠	Feel afraid of your partner much of the time?
		Tell yourself that if you just try harder and love your partner enough that everything will be just fine?
		3. Feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?
		4. Believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?

- 5. Find yourself worrying and obsessing about how to please your partner and keep them happy?
- 6. Wonder if you're the one who is crazy?
- 7. Feel emotionally numb or helpless?
- 8. Feel afraid to leave or divorce?
- 9. Feel tied down, feel like you have to check-in?
- 10. Feel afraid to make decisions or bring up certain subjects so that the other person won't get mad?
- 11. Find yourself crying a lot, being depressed or unhappy?
- 12. Find the physical or emotional abuse getting worse over time?

Does your spouse...

- 13. Humiliate or yell at you?
- 14. Criticize you and put you down?
- Treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see?
- 16. Ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?
- 17. Blame you for his own abusive behavior?
- 18. Act excessively jealous and possessive?
- 19. See you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?
- 20. Constantly check up on you?
- 21. Keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- 22. Limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?
- 23. Have a bad and unpredictable temper?

- 24. Hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you?
- 25. Threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- 26. Threaten to commit suicide if you leave or tell you s/he cannot live without you?
- 27. Destroy your belongings?
- 28. Abuse alcohol or other drugs?
- Have a history of trouble with the law, gets into fights, or 29. breaks and destroys property?
- 30. Does not work?
- 31. Blame you for how s/he treats you, or for anything bad that happens?
- 32. Abuse siblings, other family members, children or pets?
- Put down people, including your family and friends, or call them names?
- 34. Is always angry at someone or something?
- 35. Try to isolate you and control whom you see or where you go?
- 36. Nag you or force you to be sexual when you don't want to be?
- 37. Cheat on you or have lots of partners?
- 38. Is physically rough with you (push, shove, pull, yank, squeeze, restrain)?
- 39. Take your money or take advantage of you in other ways?
- 40. Accuse you of flirting or "coming on" to others or accuse you of cheating on him/her?
- Not listen to you or show interest in your opinions or feelings...things always have to be done his/her way?
- 42. Ignore you, give you the silent treatment, or hang up on you?

43.	Lie to you, doesn't show up, maybe even disappears for days?
44.	Make vulgar comments about others in your presence?
45.	Blame all arguments and problems on you?
46.	Tell you how to dress or act?
47.	Experience extreme mood swingstell you you're the greatest one minute and rips you apart the next minute?
48.	Tell you to shut up or tell you you're dumb, stupid, fat, or call you some other name (directly or indirectly)?
49.	Compare you to former partners?

Take a couple minutes to go back over your check marks, paying particular attention to the yeses.

(Vitally Important: If you checked mostly yes to numbers 1, 12, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, and 37 I strongly urge you to get away... NOW! If it seems impossible for you to do that now, promise that you will begin planning an exit strategy NOW. Begin contacting local community support groups, resource centers, etc. Please.)

Congratulate yourself for being honest and think: "This is one of my first steps in freeing me and claiming my power and respect as a person." Does that feel a little better? Just a little?

Distinctions and Shifts

In the next step you begin to make the mental shifts that you will place you on a more productive and effective path to marriage and love construction or reconstruction.

Distinctions

Making distinctions means you peel away the layers to discover what being in an abusive marriage means to you. You explore and become aware of your different responses. You begin to see specific patterns in your actions and thoughts.

You no longer are a helpless, victimized emotional blob that reacts without forethought or purpose. You begin to identify specific areas in which you want to assume control and express your power.

Here are possible distinctions you may make:

✓ I pay more attention to my spouse (his/her behavior) than I do to my well being.

✓ I cope with the pain by shutting down.
✓ I increasingly lose touch with my true feelings.
✓ I am persistent (stubborn!) in hanging in there with this marriage.
✓ I often don't realize how much I tolerate.
✓ I will suffer a great deal to "keep peace."
✓ I lost who I "used to be."
✓ The more I'm exposed to the abuse, the more confused I become.
Take a few minutes to note other distinctions (what you gleaned from the above exercise) important and more specific to you:
Shifts

Shifts are just that. You want to identify particular shifts in your thinking and acting that will shift the momentum away from the negativity and reactivity toward your health and well being.

Here are possible shifts to consider:

I feel numb and lifeless	→	I feel passion and excitement
I feel sad and depressed	→	I feel angry
I must isolate myself	→	I will gain from being with other and they will gain from me
I must tolerate his/her behavior	→	I can protect myself

I must stay in this marriage	→	I can and maybe must leave this abuse
I have nowhere to go	→	I can develop an exit plan
This mess is mostly my fault	→	I am not responsible for his/her abuse
I deserve to be treated badly	→	I am a person of worth whom demands respect
I am crazy	→	I can think clearly and act responsibly
I must help him/her with his/her pain	→	I cannot make him/her better
I am embarrassed around others	→	I can relate warmly and confidently to others
I am a wimp	→	I have courage
I am stubborn	→	I am persistent

List other shifts you would like to make:

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Engage yourself means spending some ti hinking about the above exercise; specific		e next day or two consciously and intentionally distinctions and shifts you desire.
Shift your focal point away from him/her to Be aware that s/he will probably notice an eacts.)		ee. This, in itself, may be a significant shift. react. If able, plan your response if s/he
Choose one shift and give that shift your f would you be doing as you make that shif		tion. What would that shift feel like? What would that shift bring to you?
Reflect on and Answer these questions:		
will be most aware of these new distincti lay.	ons and	or shifts at this time and place during the next
will use this trigger (mantra: I will do this, vrist, etc.) to keep me on track.	word: p	ower, feel good, etc., rubber band around
Reflect on and Answer these Questions:		

Evaluate what it was like to spend a day or two focusing on your desired shift and the distinctions you are beginning to make.

Notice any changes you experience in terms of your personal power, feelings and thoughts about yourself.

Remember, you are just beginning. Don't be upset or alarmed if you find it difficult to pinpoint change and shifts.

These questions will help you evaluate your experience:
On a scale of 1-10 (10 being as bad as it can get) I now rate my bad feelings as
I notice this new thought coming to mind after the engagement.
I notice this new image coming to mind after the engagement.
I notice this feeling located in this part of my body emerging after the engagement.
enlerging after the engagement.
I now think this of myself after the engagement.
Thow think this of myself after the engagement.

I hope this exercise creates some new thinking, a new appreciation for who you are and helps you being planning actions that help you reclaim your power and dignity.

Review Checklist:

Review I find myself giving thought to discovering my personal power It is unsettling by good to begin truly facing my situation. I am beginning to be aware of how much I've tolerated an unhealthy marriage. The more I specifically describe his/her behavior, the more I learn about me. I've identified one pattern in my life which tends to tolerate the abuse. I want to use the 3 specific shifts in thinking I've identified to break free from my pattern. I was able to think about this module at specific times during the day.