

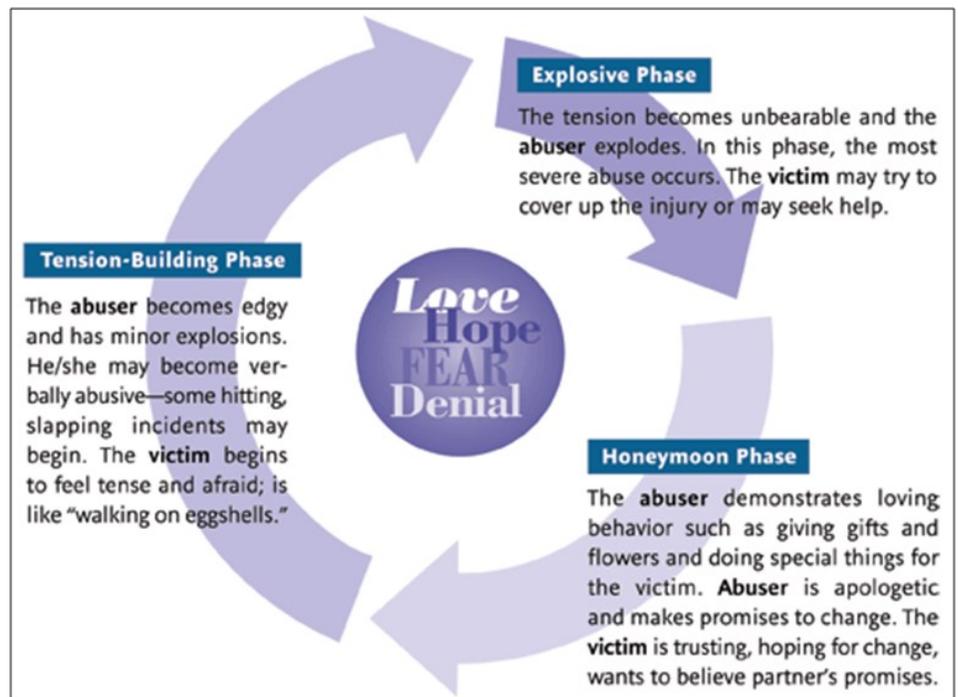


The Cycle of Abuse: The Difficulty of Ending an Abusive Relationship

There are many reasons that people stay in or return to abusive relationships. Often the fear of the unknown is greater than the fear of abuse. Sometimes, a person feels as if s/he will be unable to survive financially, or manage a life, or care for children on her or his own. Relationships that are abusive have a very powerful dynamic that often makes the person who is being abused feel isolated and trapped. An abuser can often emotionally manipulate a partner into believing that, despite the abuse, a very powerful bond connects them, one that is infinitely unbreakable. The abuser may make the partner feel as if s/he is the only one who can truly understand or help the person who is being abusive. Other emotionally manipulative strategies work to convince the person who is being abused that the abuse is her/his fault or that the abuse is not really happening. Pressure to keep a family together can also cause someone to stay in an abusive relationship, as can the fear that s/he will lose custody of children if the relationship breaks, or that the children will suffer more from the separation.

There is often a pattern that develops in abusive relationships that draws someone back into the relationship after an episode of abuse has occurred. This emotionally manipulative pattern is based on memory and faith. Particularly if the abuser apologizes for the abuse, someone who is abused may remember all of the times when the abuser was not abusive but loving and attentive, and s/he may begin to have faith that the most recent abuse was the last that will occur, that the abuser will stop being mean and begin to value his/her partner again. However, despite apologies and promises from the person who is being abusive, it is much more likely that abuse will escalate over time rather than go away.

Another powerful reason that someone might stay in an abusive relationship is abject fear for personal safety. There could be tremendous fear that the abuse will worsen if s/he attempts to leave or that it will continue once the relationship has ended. While these are valid fears, staying in a dangerous situation will not make the abuse lessen or go away. Advocates and shelter programs can help someone make a plan to leave a relationship safely.



Tension-Building Phase

The **abuser** becomes edgy and has minor explosions. He/she may become verbally abusive—some hitting, slapping incidents may begin. The **victim** begins to feel tense and afraid; is like “walking on eggshells.”

Explosive Phase

The tension becomes unbearable and the **abuser** explodes. In this phase, the most severe abuse occurs. The **victim** may try to cover up the injury or may seek help.

Honeymoon Phase

The **abuser** demonstrates loving behavior such as giving gifts and flowers and doing special things for the victim. **Abuser** is apologetic and makes promises to change. The **victim** is trusting, hoping for change, wants to believe partner’s promises.