



FearIsNotLove

CHOOSING TO CHANGE



**A handbook for individuals concerned
about their abusive behaviours
towards those they love**

FearIsNotLove.ca

CHOOSING TO CHANGE



“I’ve made big time changes. Now I am at peace, with a feeling of being relaxed and calm and not wanting to get into heated arguments anymore. I don’t want to hurt people with words anymore. I just don’t want to hurt anybody anymore and I am at peace with myself.”

“Things don’t bother me. Things that should bother me don’t bother me like they used to. I mean if somebody says the wrong thing to me, instead of getting pissed off and aggressive, I just don’t let it get to me. It’s becoming more natural to just be calm when things happen.”

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WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR

This handbook is written for anyone who is concerned their behaviours are hurting those they love and want to make changes to improve their relationships.

Maybe your partner told you they can't talk to you about how they really feel about things.

Maybe you are concerned by the look of fear on the face of your partner or the faces of your children when you are upset.

Maybe your relationship is "on the rocks" because of your abusive behaviour.

Or maybe you have already lost a relationship, and you don't want this to happen again.

Our message is one of hope. We believe that you can choose, at any time, to change and to stop your abusive behaviour. We also believe that you already have the ability within yourself to consistently act respectfully towards others in your life.

The ideas in this handbook were developed by three former staff of the Men's Counselling Service at FearIsNotLove in Calgary, Alberta. Since the program began in 1992, we have had the privilege of witnessing many people make many significant changes in their lives. Their stories and experiences can be found throughout this handbook.

Traditionally it is common for people to try to understand the reasons that people use abuse in their close relationships. For example, it has been suggested that perhaps people are abusive because they themselves were abused as children, or because they struggle with mental health and/or addictions.

While some clients have had these challenging experiences, this unfortunately can lead to excusing people for their behaviour and does not acknowledge the ability of people to be able to change.

It is our experience that people who do abusive things are in control of their actions and that they make deliberate choices about their abusive behaviours. The hopeful part of this is that if a person has purposely chosen to act in a certain way, then it is possible for them to make a different choice.

This handbook is written for anyone who is concerned about their use of abusive behaviour in their close relationships, regardless of their gender identity. It is important to note however, that women and girls represent 8 out of 10 victims of domestic violence, and that most perpetrators of violence against women are men.

Your abusive behaviours towards your family may have led people to label you as "an abuser" or "a wife beater." However, the abuse does not define you as a human being.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

Some ideas in this handbook may fit better for you than others. Our hope is that you think about these ideas and use whichever ones are helpful in your efforts to build healthier relationships.

The handbook has questions and space for answers. We encourage you to take time to think about and answer them. You may want to use the space provided or you may want to use a private notebook. The choice is yours.

**Our message is one of hope.
We believe that you can choose,
at any time, to change and to
stop your abusive behaviour.**



BUILDING A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER

Most people want to have a positive relationship with their partner and/or other family members. How to build close relationships is a difficult question with no totally right or wrong answers. Because we are all different, what works for one person may not work for another. Most people, however, agree that among the things they want in their relationships are safety, honesty, trust, communication and closeness.

Psychologist Frank McGrath put these five elements into a simple framework which can be used to guide the development of healthy relationships. Frank's framework arranged the steps to building healthy relationships as follows:

- 1) Safety**
- 2) Honesty**
- 3) Trust**

- 4) Communication**
- 5) Closeness**

These steps form a natural pyramid built on a foundation of safety.

SAFETY ► HONESTY ► TRUST ► COMMUNICATION ► CLOSENESS



Without openness and honesty, it is hard for your partner to build trust and respect with you. Without trust and respect, they will have a hard time communicating and doing the everyday problem solving that people in relationships need to do.

Finally, if they do not feel safe to communicate and work out differences with you, it is unlikely that they will feel close to you.

WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DO YOU WANT?

One of the individuals in our program explained how their desire to have a close relationship motivated them to change:

"It's first and foremost in my mind that I don't want to go through life seeming abrasive and pushing people away from me. I mean it's obvious that there's something wrong when you're hitting someone, but I think there's so many other more subtle things, too that get minimized, that can happen that might stifle a person, not have them feel like they're in a very open relationship or getting their needs met."



Describe your ideal relationship. Do you want the qualities described above or are there others you want to emphasize?

Would a foundation of safety help you build the kind of relationship you want? If so, how?

If you were to put safety as a foundation of your relationship, how would that change things?

What are some of the steps you could take to make your partner feel safer?

What would be one of the first things you would notice that would tell you that you are making your partner feel safer?

If you were to make safety a priority, how would you react in a challenging moment with your partner?

What are some of the ways you are already building safety for your partner?

What can you do to build safety for your partner more often?

HOW ABUSE DESTROYS RELATIONSHIPS

In our experience, when you behave abusively you destroy safety which is the basis of any intimate relationship. Hurtful words, frightening actions and intimidating gestures can destroy the foundation on which a good relationship is built.

Children may keep their concerns to themselves. Your partner might pretend things are better than they are to try to prevent being hurt emotionally and/or physically. People you are close to may end up feeling stressed, frustrated, isolated, betrayed and lonely on top of the ongoing feeling of being unsafe. Abuse destroys feelings of support and closeness, and leaves others around you living in fear.

While there is no hard and fast definition of what makes a behaviour abusive, the fact that it creates fear is a good place to start.



Coercive control is a term that is used to describe what happens when a person perpetrates abuse towards a partner or close family member over time. This pattern of abusive behaviour is intended to try to control or to have power over another person. Coercive control can be carried out when people are still together, and it can also be perpetrated after separation. Many of the following individual acts of abuse and violence (such as financial, emotional, sexual, psychological, threats and intimidation), when carried out as part of an ongoing pattern, may be considered “coercive control”.

Following is a list of some of the actions that can be considered abusive. We use the word “partner” below as most often domestic violence is directed towards an intimate partner, however the abusive actions described below may be perpetrated with other family members as well.

Abuse destroys feelings of support and closeness, and leaves family members living in fear.

Emotional and psychological abuse:

- Name calling, belittling, constant criticism
- Screaming at your partner
- Mocking your partner
- Putting down your partner's family and friends
- Threatening your partner about the children (e.g. telling your partner they will lose custody, saying you will leave town with the children)
- Minimizing or denying the abuse
- Blaming your partner for the abuse or for family problems
- Gaslighting—for example: refusing to admit things you said or did, saying that your partner is not remembering correctly or that they are imagining things
- Demanding household chores such as dinner, housework, laundry etc. are done in the way you want
- Abusing or neglecting children and not allowing your partner to intervene
- Not speaking to your partner for days at a time
- If applicable, using your partner's lack of legal rights to control them (e.g. threatening to get them deported if an immigrant, threatening to kick them out of the house with nothing)
- Ending a discussion and then making decisions without your partner
- Telling them they are a bad parent
- Stalking (e.g. harassing, following your partner around town, showing up where you know they will be, watching them at home through hidden cameras or windows, digital stalking)

Economic Abuse:

- Keeping money from the family
- Trying to stop your partner from making money
- Trying to make your partner hand over money
- Trying to make your partner account for how they spend money
- Forcing the family to live in poverty when money is available, depriving your partner of basic needs

Intimidation:

- Destroying property
- Giving your partner angry looks
- Making your partner do something humiliating or degrading (e.g. begging for forgiveness, having to ask your permission to use the car or go out)
- Saying things to scare your partner (e. g. telling them something bad will happen, threatening to commit suicide, threatening to hurt children, pets, friends, family or anyone that helps them.)
- Bossing your partner around, telling them to say or not say things
- Constantly calling or messaging your partner
- Constantly questioning your partner or accusing them of lying

Isolation:

- Trying to stop your partner from having access to family and/or friends
- Using jealousy to justify questioning and controlling your partner's movements
- Listening to phone calls, monitoring the mileage on the car, calling them repeatedly
- Trying to make them account for every minute of the day
- Putting them down in front of others
- Trying to keep your partner from doing things (going out with friends and family, going to work / school)
- Limiting your partner's access to a car or other transportation

Physical Abuse:

- Slapping, hitting, kicking, biting or punching your partner
- Pushing, grabbing, throwing or shoving your partner
- Driving recklessly with your partner in the car
- Causing bruises, cuts, broken bones, etc.
- Throwing, hitting, kicking, burning or smashing objects
- Threatening to become physically abusive towards your partner or their loved ones.
- Hurting other loved ones (e.g. children, pets, friends or family);
- Preventing them from leaving a room
- Threatening with a knife, gun or other weapon/object
- Trying to strangle your partner
- Using a knife, gun or other weapon
- Locking your partner in or out of the home
- Abandoning in an unsafe place
- Attempting to kill or murder

Sexual Abuse:

- Emotionally pressuring your partner to have sex when your partner doesn't want to
- Physically forcing them to have sex
- Emotionally pressuring your partner or forcing them to have sex with other people, animals, objects
- Threatening to "out" your partner's gender identity
- Demanding they wear more (or less) provocative clothing
- Denying your partner's sexuality
- Making degrading sexual comments
- Making threats if your partner doesn't comply with sex
- Forcing your partner to have sex for money or to participate in pornography

Technology-Facilitated Abuse:

- The misuse of technology to try to harm, stalk or threaten others
- Hacking social media and email accounts, accessing private information and/or altering this information
- Posting online images and videos without consent and with the intention of causing harm or fear
- Tracking location and activities without knowledge or consent
- Sending threatening or harassing messages
- Persistent or harassing phone calls or text messages
- Stalking using tracking apps, webcams, persistent text messages, calls, and instant messaging.

Cultural/Spiritual Abuse:

- Attacking or ridiculing your partner's belief system and/or culture
- Attempting to stop your partner from practicing or participating in spiritual practices
- Attempting to use spirituality or religion as a means of controlling your partner
- Destroying spiritual objects or scriptures
- Attempting to force your partner to accept spiritual beliefs or engage in spiritual practices

Litigation Abuse

- Filing repeated court applications over minor issues, or fabricated issues
- Frequently requesting court adjournments
- Appealing court decisions with no legal grounds to do so
- Frequently threatening court action
- Any other actions which force your ex-partner to attend court or to have to pay a lawyer, causing your partner to have large legal bills

How do you define abuse?

Have you done things that you think are abusive? If so, what are they?

Have other people in your life said you are abusive? If so, what are their concerns?

What is your reaction to their concerns?

If you were to take their concerns seriously, what would you do differently?



HOW OTHERS MAY RESPOND TO YOUR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS

The victims we have spoken to over the years have always been upset about the abuse they have experienced. One of the issues they raise is that there are times that they are afraid of their partner.

Depending on how you have treated your partner they might only be afraid when you act in intimidating, controlling or aggressive ways. Other victims have been treated badly by their partners so often that they are always afraid. Fear is a natural response to abuse. Fear tells victims that their safety is at risk and warns them to be careful.

When your behaviour is escalating, your partner and/ or children will take actions that will increase their safety.

For example, they may try to calm or please you, fight back with words or actions or reach out to others.

Because fear is an emotion that identifies unsafe situations, being afraid is one of the important ways that people resist abuse.

Since abusive situations can be dangerous, victims must often disguise their resistance. For instance, they may have to hide their fear and act calmly or put on an appearance that everything is okay even though it is not.

Sometimes people who use abuse miss the fact that others fear them because there are times that their partner stands up to them very strongly. We have talked to people who have said “my partner can’t possibly be afraid of me. You should have seen how they talked to me the other night.

If they were really afraid of me, they would have backed down and been quiet.” Like all people, your family members may sometimes feel that they have to put aside their fear in order to stand up for something they feel strongly about. This might include wanting to keep their self-respect, their dignity, or values that are important to them.

When abuse occurs, often the wrong people end up taking responsibility for the abuse. If children feel they must be quiet in order to avoid “setting my parent off” or a partner feels they must go without necessities such as a winter coat in order to avoid being verbally abused by her spouse, then the wrong person is feeling responsible for making things better.

Only the person who chooses to act out with verbal or physical aggression can make the decision to do things differently. If you are the aggressor, this requires you to look at your choices, admit that you can do better, and change your behaviour.

Sometimes people miss the fact their families fear them because there are times when their wives and children stand up to them very strongly.

DECIDING TO CHANGE

People instinctively know that they are harming their relationships when they do things to intimidate, control or scare their partner. Often this knowledge is what helps people to change:

"I didn't like what I was becoming. I don't like being so angry, so upset, so, like ... when I see the fear in my daughter's eyes and my partner's. I never physically abused ... well, I guess in some ways I did, but it was more verbally. And I have a rage in my face, and it just scared them. And lately, when I see that rage in me, it sort of scares me now. And I don't want that."

It can be painful to admit that your family is afraid of you. But this can also be one of the most powerful incentives to change. Often people decide to come to our program because they are so uncomfortable with their abusive behaviour and the effect it is having on their relationship:

"I want to handle the anger within myself about situations. Yelling and swearing and screaming at people when I'm angry: I didn't want to do that any longer, so I decided to come in for counselling."

Yet making the decision to change is often difficult. For one thing, abuse is not easy to think about or talk about; it takes courage to face up to how you have treated others badly.

"I was having problems at home, really with my temper and the relationship I was having with my kids. I tend to be very authoritarian so, because of that, I would come down on them a lot harder than I needed to and it would eventually cross the line into abuse. So, I wanted to come out of it where I did better with my kids than my parents did with me."

Another thing that makes thinking and talking about abusive behaviour challenging can be the negative judgement of others. Your abusive behaviours towards your family may have led people to label you as "an abuser" or "a wife beater." However, the abuse does not define you as a human being. Most people who act abusively to their partners will also treat them respectfully and appropriately at other times. Many people regret their harmful behaviour and express this regret in direct or indirect ways.

Rarely have we met a person who has acted abusively and does not have at least a slight, nagging feeling that what they did was not right. Exploring that flicker of doubt can be the key to changing because it indicates you know you have crossed your own lines about how you want to behave.

The counsellor helped me just by being there when I needed to say something.



Making Excuses

In our experience, it is often helpful to explore any excuses or justifications you have made for your abusive behaviour. For example, a person who says it was an accident his partner got hurt may be showing that they know it is wrong to hurt their partner on purpose.

One client identified that he had been using alcohol as an excuse for abusive behaviour:

"I would always apologize the next day, and I'd tell her that I couldn't help it—drinking just made me crazy. But I got thinking about that more and I realized how often I would set the whole thing up. Like, sometimes, I'd have a real crappy day at work, and I'd be planning my drunk the whole way home. I'd come in the door, and I'd be looking for an excuse to get mad. I'd always find it because I wanted to get mad, so I would go out and get drunk...then I'd come home and take it all out on her. Or sometimes, we'd have an argument and I'd be mad, real mad at her. I would never hit her when I was sober because that's not right eh? But at the same time, when I think back on it, I wanted to teach her a lesson, so of course, I'm a smart guy, I'd get drunk and then I'd come home and then I'd hurt her. When I thought about all that, I couldn't believe I'd be such a low life. That's when I thought "that's it, I'm not drinking anymore." That's when I started going to AA. For me, quitting drinking, which made total sense—then I'd never have the excuse to hit her. I've been sober now for five years and I've never touched her. But now I got to get my mouth under control. My mouth has become a weapon."

Another client said how important it had been to talk about his excuses for his violence openly:

"The counsellor helped me just by being there when I needed to say something. Like I needed to talk to somebody to hear the kind of the junk coming out my own mouth and just bring it more into focus ... excuses, you know, situations, just talking to people about what had happened during my week. And then, like I said, once I could hear it aloud, I could realize how much of it was like, okay, that's nothing more than an excuse. And excuses, you know, excuses are useless."

Yet another client described a similar experience:

"Counselling helped me by actually making me face the issues, some of the issues, and talking about them with people so I would actually say them aloud and then realize where I was coming from on it. I tend to, I can be brutally honest with myself and with other people, so you know, when I'm spewing something that once I actually hear it aloud, it's like, oh that's just a load of crap. And I can see it in myself as well and go from there. And that was something maybe I wasn't doing before was saying it aloud where I could actually recognize it as a load of crap."

What are some of the excuses you have used when you know you have acted badly?

What tells you these are excuses?

Why do you think you made these excuses?

What do these excuses say about your preferred ways of behaving?

MAKING DIFFERENT CHOICES

The people we have talked to have also found it helpful to look carefully at their behaviour and the choices they have made. Sometimes they were surprised to find how powerful their choices had been in influencing their life in both a positive and negative direction.

Ron's Story

Ron used the power of choice to steer his life in a different direction from his physically violent father but also had to make new choices to change his emotionally abusive ways.

Ron came to counselling after his wife left him for the first time in their 28-year marriage. Ron stated he did not have a problem because he didn't hit his wife, and he was a good father. Ron chose to maintain the position that the problem was his wife's rather than look more closely at the things his wife was telling him.



Ron realized that even though he had made many improvements over the physically abusive behaviour he saw growing up in his family home, there was still a long way to go.

She had told him that he was controlling and emotionally abusive in the way he blamed her for any unhappiness he experienced and the way he undermined her when other people were around. As a result of his decision not to change, Ron's wife, who still loved him and wanted to keep the marriage, reluctantly decided to separate from him.

Several months after the separation, Ron called the counselling program and said he had a change of heart and wanted to resume his counselling. Ron explained that during a recent visit to his brother's home he realized there was a lot of truth in what his wife had been saying. Ron said he saw his brother "acting just like I did" by ordering his wife around, never being happy with what she did and making fun of her when she was out of the room. Ron said he felt angry about how his brother was treating his wife. Ron said this made him reflect more deeply on what his wife had said about his own behaviour. As he thought about it, Ron realized that even though he had made many improvements over the physically abusive behaviour he saw growing up in his family home, there was still a long way to go. Ron applied himself to changing the unequal and undermining way he treated his wife. Eventually they were able to reunite and continue their marriage.

One of the things that most helped Ron to change his ways was to reflect on the things that hurt him most from his own childhood. Even though his father was a cruel and violent man who beat his children with rods and extension cords, Ron remembered that the emotional abuse was the thing that hurt him most deeply. Ron recalled a time that he worked hard in his wood-working class at school on a shoe rack he wanted to give to his father for a present, hoping that this might be a time his father would finally give him the positive attention and recognition he so badly wanted.

Instead, his father took one look at the shoe rack and threw it in the garbage, saying "don't bring trash like that into the house." Even though he was devastated, Ron remembered he made an instant decision that he would never do to another person what was done to him by his father.

Ron made good on his promise. He said that as his own children were growing up, he was always careful to validate and encourage them. Ron said, "Every little thing they did at school, every finger painting, was a masterpiece to me." Ron helped his children grow up with confidence and self esteem because he knew from personal experience the importance of supporting and encouraging people. As he reflected on these things, Ron decided that he would do the same things for his wife.

Joan's Story

Joan used some of her time in counselling to examine in detail her abusive behaviour. In the process, she concluded that she was making more choices than she originally thought and this realization helped her change for the better.

Joan came in because she was scaring her partner by throwing things around the house when she got angry. Her partner felt intimidated and was also afraid Joan would hit him. Joan was also concerned about how much it was costing her to replace what she broke.

Joan came in because she was scaring her partner by throwing things around the house when she got angry.

Joan revealed that in the midst of her rage she was making choices about what she would throw. She said that she was careful only to throw and break things that belonged to her partner. She only threw things in the \$35-70 dollar range—expensive enough that it meant something to her partner, but not so expensive that she could not replace it. She was also careful not to throw anything that held sentimental value for her partner, as she was concerned her partner would be very upset and might leave her if she did this. She also did not throw anything that she knew her partner really valued, such as his tablet, for the same reason.

After talking about the great number of choices she was making in the midst of an abusive episode,

Joan sat back in her chair and said, “Wow I realize that if I am making this many choices about what to throw, I can make the choice not to throw things at all!”



Describe in detail a time you became abusive. Be honest in identifying as many choices as you can. If you broke things, how did you decide what and how to break it? If you hit someone, where and how did you hit them?

What is it like to write about your choices?

Do you think writing about your choices could be useful in making changes? If so, how?

How can you use your ability to make choices to build the kind of relationship you want?



REBUILDING SAFETY TAKES TIME

While you may be able make immediate changes to your behaviour, in our experience it takes time for safety and trust to be re-established in your relationship. If you have sometimes treated your partner or children badly, they will be cautious around you. They are aware that you might treat them badly again. If you made promises to change in the past, but did not follow through or went back to your old abusive ways, your family members may be even more cautious of your current promise to change.

In our view, change starts with rebuilding safety. In rebuilding safety, what you do is more important than what you say, especially if you have broken promises or made false starts in the past. As in all areas of life, giving your word and keeping it is a powerful way to build trust. In the same way, giving your word and not keeping it is a powerful way to damage trust. Deciding to change and following through with changing your behaviour can be an important way to show you mean what you say.

One woman commented on how long it took her time to feel safe and to be able to trust her partner again:

"It's taken a long time, but I've regained my trust, my love for him and finally some respect because I'd lost all respect for him. Part of it was I could see he was working really hard to change things. It wasn't easy for him; he's not a very flexible person. He tried really hard in our day-to-day life, it did start improving, and the promises he made, he kept. It was a very slow, very, very long process. And I still sometimes think we're in that process but we're up on the top end of it."

Some people even find that their relationship gets worse after they start to change. They may find, for example, that their partner seems to complain more or gets angry more often. While you may be feeling disappointed about this, it may be helpful to see that this increased emotion may actually be a positive sign that there has been enough change that it is now safe for others to express themselves more openly. Though it may seem strange, getting worse may be a sign that things are actually getting better.

The following is one man's story of how things got worse before they got better.

Deciding to change and following through with changing your behaviour can be an important way to show you mean what you say.



Tom's Story

Tom had been physically and emotionally abusive to his wife for over ten years. A large man, he used his size and strength to try and intimidate and control his wife. On one occasion he picked her up and held her up against the wall with one hand in order to make her sign a cheque.

At the same time, Tom was unhappy with his own behaviour. He saw his father be controlling and intimidating toward him and his siblings and his mother. Tom said that he always knew that the excuses he made for behaving the same way were not good enough. After his wife left for the third time and this time went to a women's emergency shelter, Tom decided now was the time to act on his knowledge that he could do better.

Because he knew he was ready to change, Tom immediately sought help and was able in a very short time to stop his abusive and controlling behaviours. However, this did not mean things immediately got better in his marriage. Even though his wife appreciated the efforts Tom was making, she could not be certain the abuse was a thing of the past. She still had many feelings of hurt and anger that she had not dared to express over the years. Now that it was beginning to feel safer to do so, she sometimes felt that she wanted to show Tom what it was like to have been scared and humiliated for so many years.

Tom recalled one time when his wife's resentment about his past behaviour boiled over. They were sitting quietly watching TV one night several months after he started counselling, when his wife suddenly turned angrily toward him and said in a voice that was trembling with anger, "If I weighed 250 pounds I'd beat the crap out of you right now." Then she threw the remote control at him and walked out of the room.

Tom was stunned, but to his credit did not react in anger. Instead, Tom sat quietly while he tried to figure out what had happened. Tom quickly realized that his wife's anger did not "come out of the blue" but was a result of how he had treated her over ten years of marriage. He knew that she had a right to her feelings and that he had done far worse than tell her he would like to hurt her and throw a remote control at her. Tom made the decision to treat the incident as information that there was still a lot of work to do to repair the damage in his relationship. He continued to work on keeping his behaviour consistently safe and respectful and in time was able to regain his wife's trust.

Tom decided now was the time to act on his knowledge that he could do better.



A PROGRAM TO HELP YOU CHANGE

The Counselling Relationship

At FearIsNotLove, we believe that people need to feel comfortable, respected and not judged in order to talk freely about their abusive behaviour. Sometimes people who have been primarily victims of domestic violence also have concerns about how they have treated their partners. It is important that they are able to talk openly about these concerns as well.

In our view, building a comfortable, respectful relationship in counselling begins with a clear set of guidelines so that both client and counsellor know what they can expect from each other. Clients sometimes worry that what they say in counselling might be used against them. It is true there are always some limits to confidentiality in counselling. For example, professional counsellors are obliged by law to report threats of homicide or suicide in order to try to stop people from getting hurt. Counsellors are also obliged to report children who are experiencing or witnessing abuse. However, counsellors do not have to report past incidents of abuse or other things clients have done that might be illegal, as long as they do not immediately threaten the safety of others.

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We recognize that coming in to talk about how you have treated others badly takes courage, and you deserve respect for making this decision. We feel that you ultimately know what will work best for you in making changes in your life and it is a counsellor's job to support you in moving forward.



Individual and Group Counselling

Our program offers both individual and group counselling free of charge. One former client said that when he first came in, he was so ashamed of his abusive behaviour, that it was important for him to begin with individual counselling sessions:

“You feel you want to talk privately about it first. And then once you feel confident enough where you can talk to somebody privately about it, you seem to be a little freer to open up to it. Because you can admit to it, finally. Well, I don’t know if it’s “admit” to it, but I don’t feel ashamed about it, because I’ve been able to express it at one point in time in a private situation. And then it’s nice to go out into a group and then you can open it out and get a feeling, a feeling from others and hear how they feel.”

Clients are also offered the support of a group. In the group, clients can find support from those who have been there.

Sometimes, new clients are intimidated at the thought of going into a group. They may think that they will be embarrassed to admit to others what they have done or will be judged harshly when the truth comes out. The reality is usually the opposite – most clients feel relief to share their experiences with others and receive positive feedback for doing so. The group is there to help them make changes, not to make them feel badly about themselves. One past client commented:

“We can share ideas between men and nobody’s judging us. It was nice to share your feelings with the group. You met a lot of people with the same type of problems. You’re not really alone. And we all know how overwhelming it can be when you feel that you are alone and you don’t know how to deal with things.

I looked forward to every group; I enjoyed it immensely. If I had problems or something really bothering me, I would save it and be able to hold it until I got here and then we could deal with it.”

Some clients may see no point in group counselling because “I don’t want to hear a bunch of other people’s problems; I have enough of my own.” Sometimes this feeling comes from simply feeling overwhelmed and having little energy to help others. Actually, sitting through a few sessions is the best way to realize that it is not your job to fix other clients’ problems. We believe it is more important for the client to express their own doubts and reservations about their behaviour than it is for anyone else to suggest that they could do things differently.

Other clients may worry that they will feel negatively about some of the things they are likely to hear. Even if you do not like what another person is saying, it is usually possible to find respectful ways to tell them you disagree. In fact, a supportive group is one of the best places to practice respectfully disagreeing with others. We always respect client’s right to say no to going into the group, but we generally suggest they give it a try.

Our program offers both individual and group counselling free of charge.

QUOTES ABOUT CHANGE

People can make significant changes and stop their abusive behaviours. We would like to end this handbook with some quotes from clients and their partners talking about their changes and the impact of these changes on their relationships and family life.

The following quotes are from clients describing the changes they have made in their behaviours:

“And well, yes. I feel great. I have my bad days, I have my good days, but the good days start to outweigh the bad days. And I have a lot of pressure and a lot of problems at work and you know, because of this counselling program I can walk out the door end of the shift and shut that door and its like, it’s gone. I go home happy, even though I could have the worst day at the job, I don’t take it home anymore and it’s from these guys teaching me to deal with the stuff and then just let it go.”

“Like I said, things don’t bother me. Things that should bother me don’t bother me like they used to. I mean if somebody says the wrong thing to me, instead of getting pissed off and aggressive, I just don’t let it bother me. It’s becoming more natural to let things happen than to sit and think about what I should do to keep myself calm. It just comes to me.”

“I have situations arising in my life right now that in the old days, I would have kicked, screamed, fought, done all stupid things. Now I’m able to sit back and lay it out logically and look at it and then deal with it in a very appropriate and a very professional manner that I like to do things ... I mean I’m not angry, you know, fine, do what you want. I used to get so worried and obsessed with the problems that I would drive myself nuts.”

The following are quotes from the partners of people in our program, describing the changes they noticed:

“His whole way of thinking is changed. And that’s, I think, due to him going to counselling, on-going counselling. I think he’s changing for himself, and therefore, for us. He keeps saying that he likes who he is becoming. He likes how he handles things.

And that’s for him, so I think that it’s mostly that he’s getting a lot out of it, too. I feel I’m getting the husband that I wanted, the person, my soul mate that I wanted to be with.”

“It took a while. Because he initially didn’t believe anything I said and why I had left him in the first place. When he realized I was dead serious about not staying in the relationship if things didn’t change, he did start making changes. Very slow, very gradual, but he did make the changes. And now they are more natural than they would have been say two or three months ago when they were brand new behaviours.”

“He’s a whole new man! I don’t know what the counsellor did, but she should bottle it and sell it. She could retire tomorrow whatever she was able to do. Maybe she was able to get him to open up, or soul search, but he is a different person. I could talk to him about anything now, without fear of his anger. He’s showing more respect than he has ever done in the relationship.

He did admit to me that he felt that he had never totally been in the relationship. And at times, to be honest, over the years, I felt that anyway. But he feels that he hadn’t committed to the relationship, although we eventually got married, he hadn’t committed to it. And that he apologized for that. He’s... it’s amazing.”

I realize that anger is a waste of time. I think that’s really what I came for—to try and manage my temper.



OUR HOPE FOR YOU

We hope this handbook gave you the opportunity to think about how you have been treating those you love and to examine whether some of your behaviours have been abusive.

We also hope that you have been able to explore ideas about how you can create safety for your family.

Finally, we would like to add that many people find support from a counsellor can help them maintain their focus in consistently treating their loved ones with respect.

If you live in Calgary or the surrounding area, and are interested in counselling, you can contact the Men’s Counselling Service at 403-299-9680. If you do not live close enough to access these services, you still might want to find a counsellor that will support you as you make the changes that are important to you. A domestic violence helpline in your area may be able to help you find a counsellor that will be a good fit for you.

I am less frightening with my partner and have different ways of looking at things about my partner.

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- Linda Coates, Ph.D., University College of the Okanagan

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This handbook was written by former staff of the Men’s Counselling Service at FearIsNotLove:

- Nick Todd, M.Ed., R. Psych.
- Cindy Ogden, M.S.W., R.S.W.
- Jill Weaver-Dunlop, M.S.W., R.S.W.

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This handbook is the companion to another handbook which describes how victims resist abuse in intimate relationships. Both handbooks describe the Response-Based approach to working with victims and perpetrators of family violence.

Both handbooks can be found online at www.FearIsNotLove.ca. For print copies, please contact info@fearisnotlove.ca or call 403-290-1552 for reception. A small per handbook fee is charged to cover production costs, shipping and handling.

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CHOOSING TO CHANGE



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CONNECT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE HELPLINE:

(403) 234-SAFE (7233)

Email: help@fearisnotlove.ca

Men's Resource Line: 1 -833-327-MENS (6367)

GENERAL INQUIRIES

Administration: (403) 290-1552

Email: info@fearisnotlove.ca

**A handbook for individuals concerned
about their abusive behaviours
towards those they love**

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