Cycle of Abuse

The Cycle of Abuse Theory was developed in 1979 by Lenore E. Walker to help explain patterns of behaviour in an abusive relationship. Although not all relationships will follow the same cycle and individual experiences will vary, research suggests that once established abusive relationships are characterised by a predictable, repetitious pattern of abuse, whether, emotional psychological or physical with psychological abuse nearly always preceding and accompanying physical abuse. Each stage of the cycle can last from a few minutes to a number of months, but within an abusive relationship, the stages below can often be pinpointed.

The aim of this tool is to raise awareness about the cycle of abuse and the specific characteristics of each stage.

**Instructions:** In each ‘describe box’ list the behaviours or characteristics you think are apparent in each stage. You may want to reflect on your own experiences or just consider it more broadly.

Describe:

* Honeymoon or Reconciliation phase

Describe:

* Incident/Acting out phase

Describe:

* Tension Building phase

Describe:

* Calm phase

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**On the next page are examples of behaviours in each stage of cycle**

* Apologetic.
* Gives excuses for the abuse or blames you.
* Denies the abuse happened or says it was a one off.
* Claims the abuse ‘wasn’t that bad’.
* May exhibit loving, kind behaviour
* Promises of change or seek help
* May genuinely attempt to convince you that the abuse will not happen again
* Buys gifts and/or showers you with love and affection.
* Abuser may threaten or attempt suicide
* For new relationships Abuser could make lifelong promise or want the relationship to move at fast pace
* Honeymoon or Reconciliation phase

Act of abuse happens, this being:

* **Physical: towards -**
* you,
* the children
* pets or
* your possessions.
* **Sexual**
* **Psychological**
* Threats
* Intimidation,
* Incident/Acting out phase

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* Calm phase
* Tension Building phase
* The relationship is relatively calm
* No major incidents of abuse
* Breakdown of communication.
* Survivor is ‘treading on eggshells’.
* Abuser stops appearing ‘charming and loving’.
* Makes you believe you have done something wrong.
* Moody/stroppy behaviour – potentially shows signs of anger.
* Passive aggression
* Mind Games increase
* Moderate incidents of abuse could occur i.e. verbal abuse, name calling etc
* Survivor modifies behaviour in order to avoid triggering outburst. Potentially tries to please the perpetrator, and/or gives in to reduce the mood swings and attempt to turn the relationship back into the honeymoon/calm phase.
* Tension in the relationship
* Controlling behaviour can intensify