

Minutes from Tri-County Batterer Intervention Network Meeting
July 2, 2002

Members Present – Chris Huffine (Men’s Resource Center), Michael Davis (Changepoint), Paula Manley (Private Practice), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), Naomi Morena (Probation – Washington County), Songcha Bowman (private practice), Carla Pinto (Probation – Washington County), Gustavo Picazo (Changepoint), Stacey Womack (ARMS)

Minutes taken by: Courtenay Silvergleid

Topic for today: Amends

Seems like this is one of the most difficult concepts for people to grasp. Chris asked what providers do with the men in terms of amends?

One member discusses amends during the letter of accountability portion of her/his program. Giving participants options for how to make amends.

Several members actually ask men to identify on the check-in board whether or not they have done amends during the past week.

One member commented that s/he really tries to challenge men to perform amends rather than just working the program, rather than just being a “good” husband.

Most of what we do as batterer intervention program providers is about helping and/or improving the men. The problem with domestic violence of course is that there are other people involved and there is no direct attention on these other people during the batterer intervention program. Men need to understand that people have suffered because of their behavior. Stopping the abuse does not undo the abuse that they have already done. It needs to be above and beyond appropriate behavior. One question to ask of men is, if you had never been abusive in any way, would you still be doing this? Men need to be able to say that they are only doing this because they have been abusive and need to make up for it.

One member uses the following analogy to help men understand Amends. “Suppose that someone sideswipes your car. How would you feel if they come up to you and claim responsibility for damaging your car? What if they committed to never doing it again? What if they commit to taking a driver’s improvement course? You might be thinking to yourself, well, that is all well and good, but what about the damage to my car? Amends would be paying for the actual damage to the car and any lost wages accrued while the car is in the shop.

We tend to make up for DAMAGE.

Sometimes the men get caught up in how good they felt about it. Amends is about how it makes the victim feel, not how it made the man feel.

It is important to look at the long term impact of the abuse – ways that it will affect the children’s future relationships, ways that it will affect victim’s future friendships, work relationships, self-esteem, and future romantic relationships, etc.

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Amends are not supposed to be a time to spotlight the men – the spotlight should be on the women. Sometimes the men get in a “fix it” mode. “I apologized but she was still upset with me... why doesn’t she get over it?” Healing needs to be on HER timeline, not the batterer’s timeline. The only way to build trust with somebody is to be trustworthy.

Good intentions are not amends.

There are both direct amends and indirect amends. Directives are made directly towards healing the victim(s). There are many circumstances when direct amends are not possible. It is critical that the victim WANTS him to make amends to her. She may not want contact and that needs to be respected. Also a batterer may not know all the people who have suffered because of his abuse. He may not be able to trace all of the ripples of effect. Indirect amends are intended to target other people who are suffering from abusive behavior. Typically indirect amends are easier to do than direct amends. Indirect amends include publicly speaking about domestic violence, giving money to domestic violence shelters, working at a victim luncheon, speaking to or challenging other abusive men, providing direct support to other victims (neighbor, friend, etc.).

It is important that if the victim does want a direct amends, that those direct amends be prioritized over indirect amends. Some men will avoid the more emotionally difficult direct amends by focusing on indirect amends.

AA says that amends should not do any harm and always be done in consultation with a sponsor. It is really important for the men to talk with someone first about their idea.

Examples of things that are NOT amends:

Routine apologies (not adequate usually)

Taking responsibility for his half, but asking her to apologize for her half.

“If anything that I said offended you, then I apologize for that.”

Paying for things when a couple is married/shares income (it’s her money as much as his).

Childcare (even when couple is separated)

Surprising her with a gift because HE thinks she will like it – not really assessing whether SHE wants it. She needs to be involved, she needs to want the gift

Only making one amends to make things right. It is an ongoing process. Typically the abuse happened more than once, hence the amends should be more than once.

Examples of things that ARE amends:

- Listening with a thickened skin to the full, angry expression of the victim's pain.

It is important that men are really ready for this. Often men rush into this activity too soon, when they can’t deal with the intensity without defensiveness. Extended apologies that really move/touch victims. (For example, a man is abusive to his partner at work in front of co-workers. He expresses that he wants to apologize and asks the victim if it would be helpful to apologize in front of her co-workers and if she says yes, actually going to the workplace and apologizing. This can work in front of kids, family, friends, etc.)

Man was verbally abusive at his son’s birthday party and so six months later they threw another party for the son.

Above and beyond things (helping someone move after a couple is divorced) that are directly revealed by the batterer to the victim as an “amends”. It is ever important to assess what is the motivation – is it to look good? To check up on her? To reinforce how important you are and how she can’t live without you?

