

## TCBIP MINUTES

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### **Present:**

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**Topic:** *How to encourage non-abusive responses in men who perceive their spouses as being abusive.* (Comments recorded below are opinions expressed by various individuals and do not necessarily reflect opinions of anyone other than the person who said it.)

When men believe their spouses are abusive, usually the spouse is not crazy, violent, domineering, etc. as presented by her partner. It is important to be skeptical of what the men say if they claim their partner is violent. In general, facilitators should encourage men to see their partner as an ally.

There is a small group of women who have significant abusive behaviors of their own. The challenge is what to do then.

One suggested strategy is to tell men, "You are responsible for the safety in the relationship," and to minimize the possibility of damage in his relationship. A video was recently shown with a large woman beating a small man. The man's friend was videotaping the incident, which indicates a large level of acceptance of violence.

When a man says, "She always beats the \_\_\_\_\_ out of me," it's important to insist that he is responsible for ensuring the safety of the relationship. Options for men in the rare instances where a woman is an abuser include to ask her to stop the violence, to insist the violence stop or he will leave the relationship, and ultimately, if her violence doesn't stop, to leave the relationship. It needs to be addressed that he does not use threats of leaving to try to control her.

Real male victims don't focus on their partner's violence. He will talk about restraining her, perhaps, but will focus on his own violence in so doing. A true male victim will likely look for solutions; a perpetrator claiming to be a victim is looking for his partner to change and to control her. If you have a man who is blaming his partner, he is probably not truly a victim, but simply an abuser trying to avoid personal responsibility for his own actions.

It's important to go back in the man's story, when a man is saying he was victimized. Go into what happened before she reportedly reacted violently. Many times men start their story "part way in" so that her behavior is taken out of context, incorrectly implying that he did not play a significant role. Ask why has he stayed in the relationship, probe how has he tried to focus on his own abusive behavior.

We can point out that the man's partner is not here to present the other side and that he's the one here, let's focus on what *he* can do, since he can't change anyone else; he can only change his own behavior. You can discuss what he could do in terms of his own behavior to re-establish trust in the relationship.

As they are describing what they have done to maintain a relationship, you can expand the discussion to the social and cultural issues that contribute to DV. Discuss options when one feels there is no out; what other solutions are more appealing when someone feels stuck.

For perpetrators, you want to play the tape backward; for victims, you want to play the tape forward. "What's going to happen?"

You can ask, "What was she trying to get across to you? What did she want you to know? What were you not able to hear?"

Women and men use force for different reasons. Women use abuse more expressively while men use it more instrumentally. Usually women want men to hear them, while men want to control, in general. The impact of physical abuse is different for women than men.

A man who is a genuine victim when she abuses usually stays for the sake of the children, or to take care of her, or beliefs. The perpetrator who blames the victim usually can't give good reasons for staying in the relationship; he focuses more on blaming her.

Men who can honestly attach with their children (concerned with what they can do for a child rather than what they get from a child) have a better chance of being able to attach with others.

Some men may behave appropriately with their kids when the children are small. However, as the child gets older, he may treat them more as he treats their mother. This can be because he can no longer control them, or because he sees them as no longer an innocent child.

An African-American client asked his therapist if there were not a higher proportion of violence of women against men within the African-American community. The therapist responded this may be true, but that even so, the man is responsible for his behavior. The African-American community is more matriarchal, so the woman may have more power within the family. Women don't have any more power outside of the family, however. Often perceived violence of African-American women may be because she is assertive and verbal. She may tend less to pick up on the signals of violence, because of her power, and therefore may be more likely to be victimized because of this.

Whatever blame is put on the partner by the perpetrator must never be used as an excuse for him to react violently himself.

Three important factors to consider in looking at anyone's abuse: impact, intent, and context. Among men the impact of the woman's violence is typically much less than vis-versa (e.g., he rarely admits feeling afraid of her abuse while she is often quite fearful). As already mentioned, the intent of much of men's abuse is to control, while women's abuse is more often communicative. Finally, it's important to consider the larger context in which the abuse occurs. Women's abuse often occurs in response to abuse and control being perpetrated by the man.

Emphasize self-care, when he talks about her abuse. Ask him how he can take better care of himself (which refocuses things on him).

Point out to men that they are choosing to continue to be in the relationship, even if abusive, and that they need to take responsibility for that choice.

Encourage men to work their own program, regardless of what their partner may be doing. He needs to stay focused on where his genuine power is, which is over himself.

If other group members "jump on the bandwagon" of victim blaming, comment on how those individuals are doing victim blaming. Challenge such behavior immediately, encouraging men to refocus on themselves.