

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network meeting minutes--11/2/2004

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Terry Renzoni (East Hills Men's Anger Management), Matt Johnston (Changepoint), Brad Peterson (NW Christian Counseling Resources), Songcha Bowman (Multicultural Counseling Services), Elsie Garland (Mult. Co. Dept. of Justice, Juvenile Dept.), Amy Horwell (Therapeutic Strategies/Men's Resource Center), Don Voeks (Gresham Intimate Violence Program), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Cindy Lyndin (Mediator), William Warren (Portland Office of Neighborhood Intervention Crime Prevention), Bob Johnson (Landerholm Counseling/private practice)

Minutes by Paula Manley, edited by Chris Huffine

TOPIC OF THE DAY - Alcohol & Drug Use Among Abusive Men

The intent today is not only to look at the men who are abusing alcohol and/or other drugs but how even casual use can contribute to abuse and control.

This is a topic that should be brought up repeatedly in groups. How does drinking affect what you are doing? How does it affect your self-care?

Alcohol and other drugs affect judgment. Any level of use can lead to poorer choices, which, among men prone to abuse and control, can lead to greater chance of choosing to be abusive and controlling. When someone is working at developing new habits, on-going alcohol and drug use can reduce the likelihood of any real change occurring.

Twelve Steps groups are an excellent resource for men who have a problem with alcohol, or have other addictive behaviors. It is the primary resource available. Some groups require all clients to attend at least minimal AA groups. This is part of education. Many men are involved with women with substance abuse issues. It is also a preventive measure. It also exposes them to a different kind of group process and to people who have problems. Clients may be resistant. One person tells the clients that it's a program that works. Regardless of all the judgments the client can offer, they can decide to work it, and if they work it, it will work.

Some participants felt that as a general rule, men will under-report their alcohol use. Statistics show that over 50% of batterers have alcohol problems. Yet, there are many men who don't see the connection between their drinking/drug use and their abusive behavior. On the other hand, some men dodge responsibility by blaming their abusive behavior as solely being due to their alcohol and drug abuse. There is a general consensus that alcohol exacerbates domestic violence – however, it is not the primary cause.

There is more alcohol – and perhaps drug – abuse at this time of the year than at other times. Even men who don't have battering problems can become more abusive when they drink. Even if they aren't being abusive or abusing alcohol, their alcohol use may put them in an environment in which others are drinking excessively and/or being abusive.

In some cultures, men are taught rituals as to how to drink. It is a rite of passage. So some cultures tend to have less alcoholism, though it exists in all cultures. One person said that alcohol is not as associated with violence in some other cultures as it is here. In France

alcohol is not as associated with violence in some other cultures as it is here. In France, alcohol is everywhere. But they don't make a big deal of it. Here, the disinhibition is thought to be a learned behavior.

Without getting into addiction issues, you can discuss choice and effect. If you go to a party and plan to have a couple drinks--what is its effect? If you plan to do so, do you have more than what you planned? What are the effects? How do you feel about it? There is also the peer pressure issue, when the "good old boys" get together, and there is extreme pressure to conform. This is an issue whether or not you are an alcoholic. A very common occasion for this is concerning sporting events.

Adolescents, who have a lot of thinking errors about this, can be dealt with cognitively on this. We can point out that they have choices. Substance abuse can arrest emotional development. Many of the men we work with "are adolescents" emotionally, regardless of their actual age.

When we look at addiction, we typically look at alcohol and drug abuse. There are many chemicals (e.g., alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine) in many different forms (e.g., liquid, powder, injected, inhaled, eaten) that do different things (e.g., stimulate, sedate, hallucinate). For all their differences, the one thing they all have in common is they artificially modify how you feel. There are other behaviors that do this as well (e.g., food addiction, sexual addiction). One way of presenting this material to all of the men, rather than focusing on which ones have a "problem" with alcohol or other drugs, is to ask every man "What mood-altering behaviors do you resort to when you are not feeling good?" Perhaps the most widely used artificial mood altering behavior is watching television. Video games are another. If clients understand more broadly the addiction process, they can be honest with themselves as to what are their issues. You also can discuss how moderation among the non-addicts is a key principal (e.g., you don't need to stop watching television altogether, but rather you need to watch it in moderation).

The goal is to get the men to look at their substance abusing behaviors. Increasing awareness is important. We can discuss the impact of a given behavior on their partner and family. They should not be allowed to blame the violence on the alcohol. It is important to look at the circumstances surrounding where the drinking is happening.

Besides drinking leading to abuse, men can drink after the abuse to anesthetize their feelings about the abuse. The same thing applies to other potentially mood-altering behaviors such as TV, video games, shopping, eating, sex, etc. We need to assist the clients' honesty as to their reasons for their behavior – the circumstances under which they imbibe. Can discuss patterns, times of vulnerability.

Even alcohol or other drugs used on a low level but with regular frequency can be problematic. These can be high functioning people. They drink/use more nights than not, 2-3 drinks per day. However, because their alcohol/drug use happens near the end of the day when most people are getting their first chance to slow down, it can anesthetize them. Most of us have very little time to deal with our emotions. It is often at the end of the day. Some of these people are used to not dealing with their emotions. They are then stunting their emotional expression/awareness.

Another concern is how some men blame their abuse on alcohol. It is important to challenge this as quickly as possible. If the guy who has been abusive when he's drinking and he stops drinking, the actual physical abuse may indeed stop. However, we must challenge the other ongoing forms of abusive/controlling behavior.

Alcoholic blackouts – sometimes it's real and sometimes it's not. It is frequently used as an excuse by men who batter. Some of it is recallable if they start talking about it. A blackout can be chemically induced or shame-induced. (It can also be claimed when they

blackout can be chemistry-induced or shame-induced. (It can also be claimed when they don't want to admit.) If someone is having a blackout, they have an alcohol problem. (They still also have an abuse problem.)

Alcohol can be a model for male intimacy. We need to encourage them to find male intimacy in other ways!
