

What Do They Do In There Anyway?

In Iowa, we have guidelines developed by battered women's advocates that battering intervention programs should follow. If you're not sure whether the program your partner is in follows these standards, make it a point to find out.

- **Education on the Nature of Domestic Violence:** Many batterers do not understand that abuse includes not only physical battering, but also things like emotional and verbal assaults, destroying property, stalking and other intimidating behaviors. Batterers need to learn that there is no excuse for any behavior – and that it is never the victim's fault.
- **Changing Attitudes and Beliefs:** Batterers have beliefs and attitudes that lead to violence, such as: men are superior and aggression is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts. The program should work to establish new, non-aggressive attitudes.
- **Achieving Equality in Relationships:** The program should help batterers come up with long-term strategies for achieving mutual respect, trust, and support that is necessary to maintain a non-abusive relationship. It should also help them develop long-term plans for sharing family responsibilities with their partners.
- **Community Participation:** It is important that the program help the batterer understand that he has committed a crime against the community. He can acknowledge his violence by discussing his efforts to change with friends, referring other abusive men to the program and making meaningful amends for past offenses (such as replacing destroyed or stolen property).

Throughout the program, batterers should become aware of their own patterns of violent behavior. The program should offer them techniques for maintaining nonviolent behavior, including "time outs" that keep potential situations from escalating, along with ways of helping to maintain nonviolence, such as "buddy" phone calls, support groups, relaxation, and exercise.

Steps You Can Take to Keep Yourself Safe

If you have any reason to believe you may be at risk for abuse while your partner is in a program, there are several things you can do to protect yourself.

1. Contact a local battered women's shelter or battered women's support program for assistance.
2. Contact a legal advocate if you feel you need help in dealing with threats to take your children; your local battered women's program can provide referrals.
3. If you feel comfortable doing so, contact the program he is in to let them know about any threatening or potentially threatening behavior.
4. If you have left him, tell as few family members and friends as possible where you are. If they don't know how to find you, they can't be frightened or manipulated into telling him where you are staying.

Warning Signs: A Call From the Program

A battering intervention program should alert you if it is clear from your partner's behavior in the program that you are in danger. While most programs have confidentiality policies that prevent them from telling you specifically what he has discussed in group meetings, they are obligated to warn you if they believe any immediate danger exists. If you get a call from them about this, take it seriously.

Couples Counseling Won't Stop the Violence!

Your partner may try to get you to go to couples counseling, telling you that you both have a problem and should work on it together. Couples counseling does have its place in working out problems, but his abuse is not something it can help. That's his problem, and he needs to work on it in the program. If you think the two of you would benefit from joint counseling, then by all means, go – after he completes the program and is no longer violent.

The Six Big Lies If you hear your partner making statements like these while he is in a program, you should understand that he is lying to himself – and to you.

1. "I'm not the only one who needs counseling."
2. "I'm not as bad as a lot of the other guys in there."
3. "As soon as I'm done with this program, I'll be cured"
4. "We need to stay together to work this out."
5. "If I weren't under so much stress, I wouldn't have such a short fuse."
6. "Now that I'm in this program, you have to be more understanding.."

These statements have one thing in common: they let him off the hook for his abusive behavior. Remember, he needs to be willing to accept responsibility for his violence in order to change.

Important Phone Numbers

Iowa Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-942-0333
National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE
TDD: 1-800-787-3224

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Is He Really Going to Change This Time?

Here's How You'll Know

A guide for women whose partners are in a batterer's education program

If your partner has entered an intervention program for batterers, you're probably relieved that he's getting help. It's important to know that there are no miracle cures for violence – he is the only one that can make the decision to change. This pamphlet will tell you what you need to know about a good program, what signs to watch for in your partner, and what to do if you think you may still be in danger of being abused.

How Do You Know The Program Will Work?

There are no guarantees that any program will work; a lot depends on your partner's motivation and capacity for change. The programs that work well use the following standards:

- **Your safety is the first priority:** Programs should always assess your safety when communicating with you. A program should never disclose information that you have given them without your permission. It should not misrepresent its ability to change his behavior. A program's definition of success is the quality of you and your children's lives, starting with safety.
- **Lasts long enough:** Change takes time. Programs should last at least 16 weeks and require at least 32 hours of participation during that time – in addition to any individual sessions that may be scheduled for orientation or evaluation. The longer the program the better the chances are that he will change. A year or more in a program is preferable, although that is not always possible.
- **Holds him accountable:** The first step of accountability is that he takes responsibility for choosing to use violence in the relationship. A program should recognize that his behavior is the problem and will not allow him to use your behavior as an excuse. His violence is the problem, not you. Programs should hold him accountable for attendance, participation, and complying with the group's rules. (You can get a copy of their rules by calling the program).

- **The curriculum gets to the root of his problem:** The content of the program is set up to challenge his underlying belief system that he has the right to control and dominate you. Programs that only address his anger and communication skills do not get to the root of the problem.
- **Makes no demands on you to participate:** You're not the one with the problem. Some programs offer groups for partners of batterers. Your participation is entirely optional. Don't let anyone lead you to believe that his progress is dependent upon your participation.
- **Is open to your input:** If you initiate contact with the program to ask questions or give input you think may be useful, a program should welcome your participation. This is different from requiring you to participate. Sometimes a program may initiate contact with you to discuss your partner's behavior outside the program. You should not feel obligated to share information, especially if you feel it might create a risk of violence against you.
- **Encourages follow-up support:** Completing a program does not guarantee he will be nonviolent. Staying nonviolent can be a lifelong challenge. A program should promote self-help and social support beyond the duration of the program, in the form of activities such as community service or participation in self-help programs.

How Do You Know If He's Really Changing?

Positive signs include:

- He has stopped being violent to you or others.
- He acknowledges that his abusive behavior is wrong.
- He understands that he does not have the right to control and dominate you.
- You don't feel afraid when you are with him.
- He does not try to coerce you into having sex when you don't want to.
- You can express anger toward him without feeling intimidated.
- He does not make you feel responsible for his anger or frustration.
- He respects your opinion even if he doesn't agree with it.
- He respects your right to say "no."
- You can negotiate without being humiliated and belittled by him.
- You don't have to ask his permission to go out, go to school, or take other independent actions.
- He listens to you and respects what you have to say.
- He communicates honestly and does not try to manipulate.
- He recognizes that he is not "cured": and that changing his behavior, attitudes, and beliefs is a life-long process.
- He no longer does _____ (fill in the blank with any behavior that preceded his violence, manipulation, or emotional abuse.)

Manipulation

Old habits die hard. Your partner's abusive behavior is rooted in a desire to control the relationship, and that pattern isn't going to change overnight. He may no longer be violent, but he may still try to exert control by manipulating you into doing what he wants. Here are some common manipulative behaviors:

- Tries to invoke sympathy from you or family and friends.
- Is overly charming; reminds you of all the good times you've had together.
- Tries to buy you back with romantic gifts, dinners, flowers, etc.
- Tries to seduce you when you're vulnerable.
- Uses veiled threats – to take the kids away, to quit attending the program, to cut off financial support.
- His promises to change don't match his behavior.

You may be so hopeful for change that you don't feel any different. But trust your instincts. If you don't feel safe, then chances are, you're not.

How Do You Know You're Safe?

If you feel that you will be safer away from your partner while he is in an intervention program, you have every right to leave. It is important to note that the risk of violence toward you may even increase when you leave. For your own safety and the safety of your children, watch for these signs of a problem in the way he behaves toward you while he is the program.

- **He tries to find you if you've left.** He may try to get information from your family and friends about your whereabouts, either by threatening them or trying to get their sympathy.
- **He tries to get you to come back to him.** He may do anything to get you to come back. If promising to change and being charming or contrite does not work, his efforts could then escalate to threats and violence.
- **He tries to take away the children.** He may try to kidnap the children as a way of forcing you to stay with him.
- **He stalks you.** If you always seem to run into him when you are on your way to work, running errands or out with friends, or if you receive lots of mysterious phone calls, he could be stalking you.

Warning Signs: Venting is Not OK

Techniques and therapies like pillow-punching and primal-screaming are NOT appropriate for batterers. They tend to reinforce, rather than discourage violent behavior. These techniques should not be part of any intervention programs.