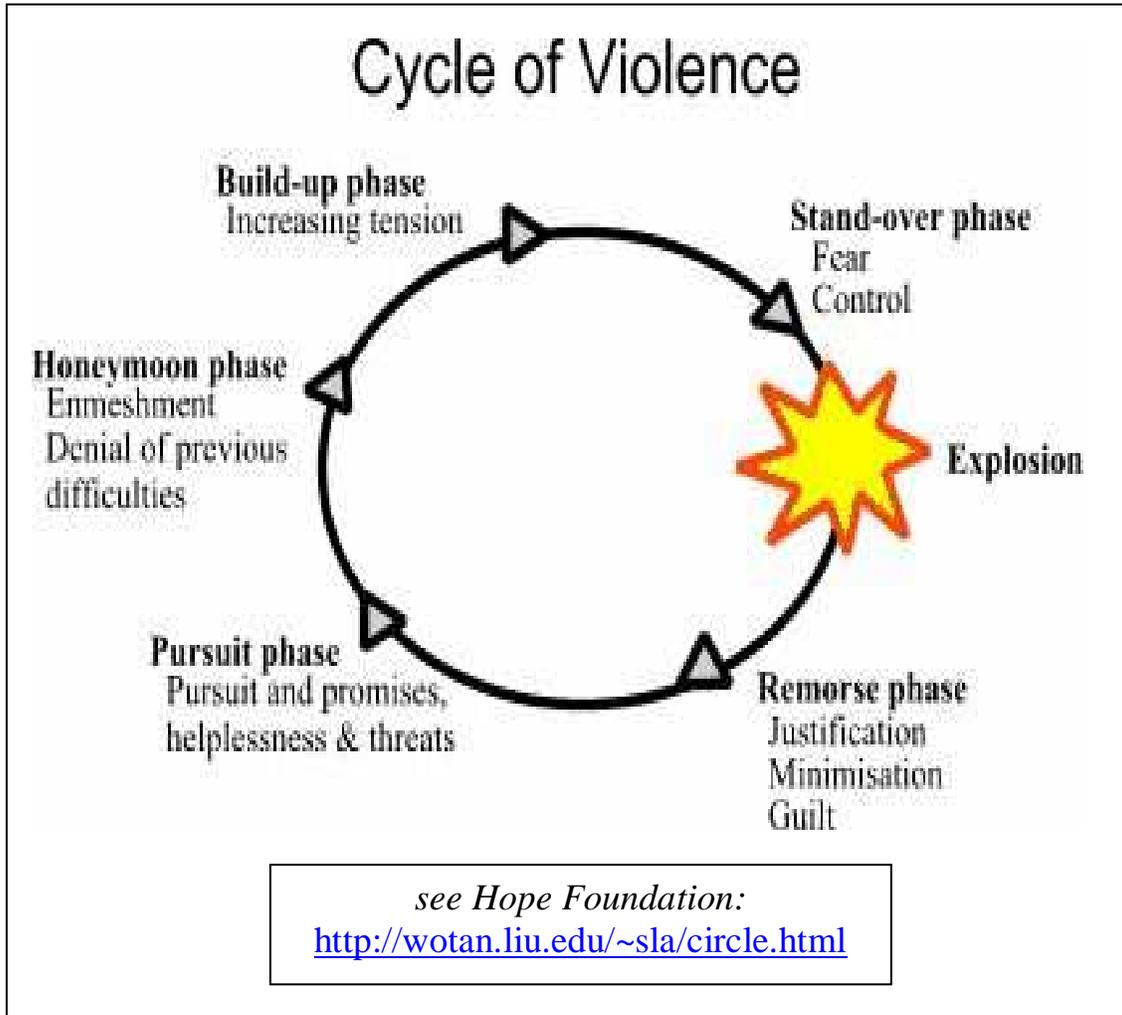


Cycles of Abuse

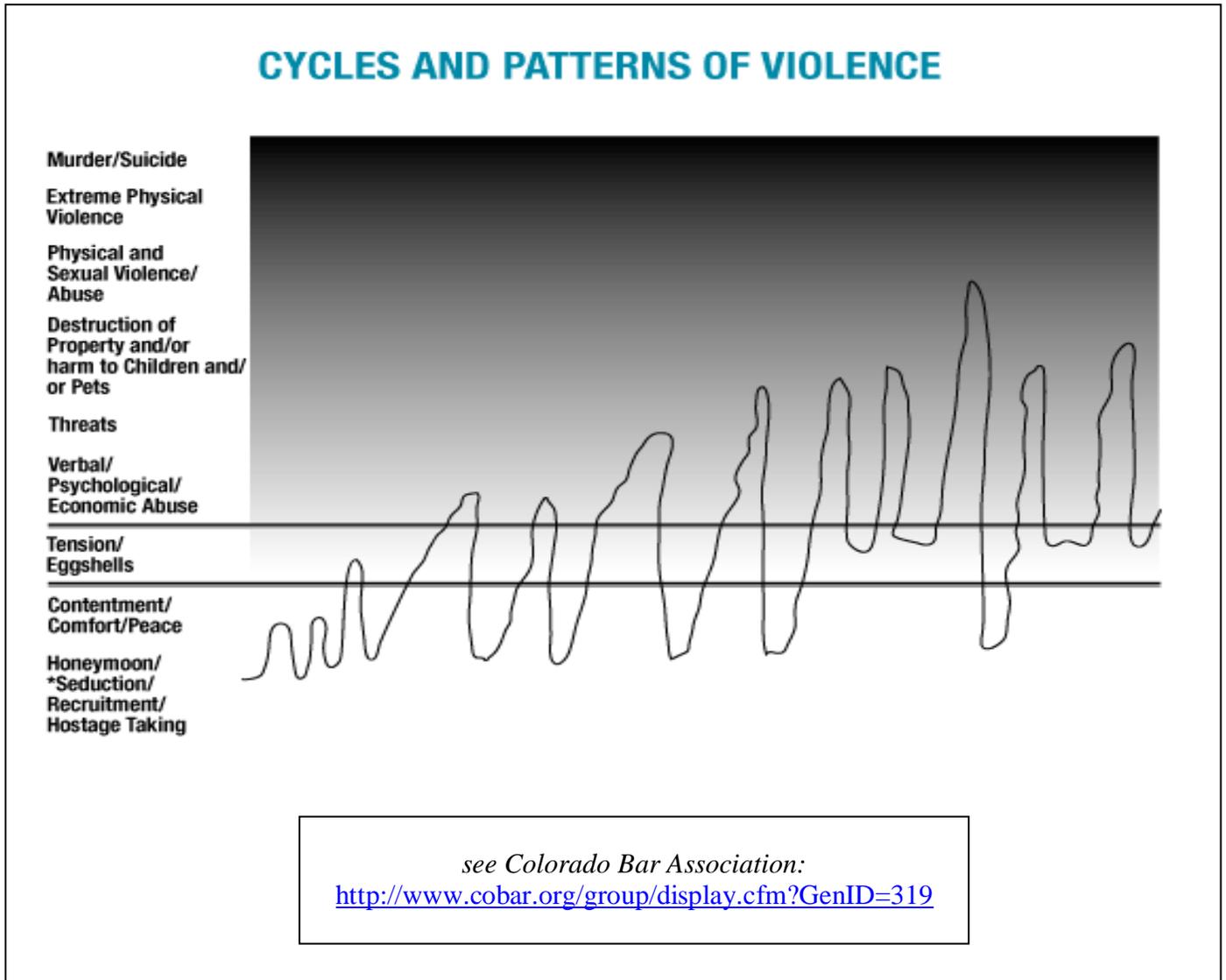
It can be very helpful for people trapped in cycles of abuse to become fully aware of the phases of this cycle. Changing these patterns of behavior can be very difficult. Insight, although in and of itself is not sufficient for change, is necessary for change. When God calls us to change and grow He gives us the power to do so. God's solutions are anchored in grace through a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Below are three similar but differing depictions of the cycle of abuse. Each has its own strengths to help us understand this destructive process.



If this cycle or ones like it are descriptive of your relationship it may be important to review the material in “[Appendix-1: Assessing for Group Readiness](#)” for further information. The fear of ending the cycle of abuse (by asking for help) can be over-powering. Finding safety and support in a non-judgmental setting can help break the silence and open the door to healing. To leave the cycle of abuse behind and enter a cycle of healing requires courage and trust. Receiving help from responsible godly people can be a frightening prospect. The 2B1 class is only a part of the necessary support. If there is a cycle of violence in your relationship then talking with the church staff or the leaders of your 2B1 class will help you take the next right step to freedom.

Uninterrupted cycles of abuse can lead to damaging scars that will last a lifetime. The earlier in a marital relationship that these unwanted patterns can be identified and changed the better for the family members trapped in these behaviors. As can be seen in the chart below the consequences can be tragic.

Cycles of Abuse



Abusive behavior is damaging and leaves its scars. Sometimes victims have had such a long history of bearing up under these wounds that it becomes “normal” and therefore can go unchallenged by the victim. It often takes an outside observer who is objective to help victims who have long standing histories of experiencing abuse to fully identify the scars left by abuse. Below are some of the emotional signs and symptoms that abuse can leave:

General Anxiety¹ and PTSD² Symptoms (Check symptoms you experience)

- Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation)
- The person finds it difficult to control the worrying
- Feeling keyed up or on edge
- Muscle tension
- The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms interferes with daily living

¹ Excerpted from Wikipedia, see link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generalized_anxiety_disorder#Diagnosis

² BehaveNet, Inc -- <http://www.behavenet.com/capsules/disorders/ptsd.htm>

Cycles of Abuse

- History of being exposed to traumatic scenes and/or events
- Intrusive images, thoughts, recollections, distressing dreams
- Flashbacks
- Intense psychological distress and physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external “cues”
- Avoidance of thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- Restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)
- Hyper-vigilance
- Exaggerated startle response

Symptoms and their possible explanations³

Symptoms can include general restlessness, [insomnia](#), [aggressiveness](#), [depression](#), [dissociation](#), emotional detachment, or nightmares. A potential symptom is the memory loss about an aspect of the traumatic event. Amplification of other underlying psychological conditions may also occur. Young children suffering from PTSD will often enact aspects of the trauma through their play, and may often have nightmares that lack any recognizable content.

Intrusion: Since the person cannot process difficult emotions in a normal way, he/she is plagued by recurrent nightmares, or daytime [flashbacks](#), while he/she realistically re-experiences the trauma. These re-experiences are characterized by high anxiety levels, and make up one part of the PTSD symptom cluster triad called intrusive symptoms.

Hyperarousal: PTSD is also characterized by a state of nervousness with the organism being prepared for "fight or flight". The typical hyperactive startle reaction, characterized by "jumpiness" in connection with high sounds or fast motions, is typical for another part of the PTSD cluster called hyperarousal symptoms, and could also be secondary to an incomplete processing.

Avoidance: The hyperarousal and the intrusive symptoms are eventually so distressing that the individual strives to avoid contact with everything, and everyone, even to his/her own thoughts, that can arouse memories of the trauma and thus cause the intrusive and hyperarousal states to go on. He/She isolates him/herself, being detached in his/her feelings with a restricted range of emotional response, and can experience so-called emotional detachment ("numbing"). This avoidance behavior is the third and most important part of the symptom triad that makes up the PTSD criteria.

Recognition of the developing process that leads to abuse is dependent upon knowing the early warning signs before the abusive patterns get established. Some of the early signs are:

1. Minimizing inappropriate or abusive behavior patterns in the home
2. Making excuses for inappropriate behavior to protect the “abuser” instead of the victim
3. Keeping a partner’s abusive behaviors secret for the sake of keeping up appearances
4. Trusting in promises to change even when promises are broken repeatedly
5. Ignoring a growing feeling of being trapped in the relationship
6. Feeling intimidated by the one you love and trusted
7. Fearful of speaking up for fear of rocking the boat
8. Making uncomfortable concessions to the abuser to protect the kids in some manner
9. Feeling controlled
10. Fear of facing life without sufficient resources if relationship was to end

These points are by no means exhaustive but give examples to help understand the process and how cycles of abuse get started.

³ Ibid