Identifying Appropriate Treatment For Those Who Have Used Violence in their Relationships

The Ending Relationship Abuse Society of BC (ERABC) maintains a list of counsellors and programs that work with assaultive men who have not been convicted of assault. BC Corrections runs Respectful Relationships and Relationship Violence Treatment Programs for convicted offenders. ERABC has also created formal Guiding Principles for practice in this area. Please visit the website for the Guiding Principles and the resource list of member counsellors of programs that subscribe to the standards of practice.

Violence can be perpetrated by both men and women and the information presented here is relevant for services for both men and women, we identify men as offenders in this bulletin because in cases of relationship violence men are most often the perpetrators of the violence and women are most often the victims. Important questions to ask prospective counsellors and programs in order to help identify appropriate services are listed below.

What questions should be asked when choosing an appropriate program or counsellor?

(Adapted from: Counselling Programs for Men Who Are Violent in Relationships by Dale Trimble published by Health Canada)

- Does the counsellor make the safety of women and children the first priority when working with violent men?
- Does the counsellor understand that couple’s counselling is not appropriate until the threat of violence is removed and the woman feels safe to say what she thinks?
- Does the counsellor invite the men to examine and change their attitudes that support violence against women?
- Does the counsellor contact the abused partner to:
  1. make sure she has support and a safety plan, and
  2. better understand the history of the violence and abuse that she has experienced to make an accurate assessment of the man’s violence?
- Does the counsellor refuse to advocate for men in legal proceedings? By working as the man’s advocate, a counsellor may allow the man’s needs for reconciliation with his family or a clean criminal record to become more important than the need for safety of the woman and children.
- Does the counsellor contact the woman and the criminal justice system to report non-attendance if the man is attending under court order?
- Does the counsellor coordinate with those who provide services to assaulted women?

Important Characteristics of Effective Programs

Adapted from the Guiding Principles (ERABC), these characteristics can help to identify a program that takes a safe and appropriate approach to stopping men’s violence:

- Services have a clear and consistent primary goal of ending violence. The physical and emotional safety of victims is the highest priority.
- Services recognize that abuse is a choice and they maintain a focus on the man’s responsibility for his actions.
- Effective programs for offenders will address all forms of abusive and controlling behaviours.
- As well as addressing violence/abuse directly, it is essential that programs support offenders in developing healthy relationship and parenting skills.
- Effective programs respect the language and rituals of all cultures but do not accept religious and cultural beliefs as justification for abuse in relationships.
- Counsellors have received specialized training in relationship abuse dynamics.
- Intervention services must be delivered in a manner that demonstrates respect for the dignity and potential of all individuals.
- It is essential that programs for offenders not operate in isolation, but be included in a coordinated system of services for victims and children.