INFO

ENDING RELATIONSHIP ABUSE
SOCIETY OF BC

Why Anger Management is NOT Enough when Intervening with those who use Violence in Relationships

The Vision of ERA is to contribute to stopping violence in relationships through province-wide provision of effective, accessible, ethical services for individuals who have used abuse in relationships. Although we wish to respond to all abuse in intimate relationships, our primary focus is on abuse against women given that official statistics indicate that 85% of reported incidents are of men abusing their female partners.

Although anger management skills are taught in most relationship violence treatment programs, these programs are not solely based on anger management counselling. Anger management can be described as focusing on identifying emotions, relaxation training, changing problematic thoughts related to anger and aggression, and interpersonal skills development. Anger management therapy is often a component of stopping relationship abuse.

Counselling that focuses mainly on anger management, however, misses the point that violence may be resorted to by a man when other techniques to maintain control over his partner have not worked. Relationship abuse involves a partner or ex-partner’s attempt to physically or psychologically harm, dominate or control the other. Relationship abuse has many forms, including physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, economic deprivation or threats of violence.

Furthermore, many men feel just as angry with others in their lives but do not “lose control” and become violent. Additionally, learning skills in emotional self-management will not be useful if the individual does not see abusive behaviour with a partner as inappropriate and does not take responsibility for his actions regardless of perceived provocation. It is important for counselling programs to assist men in confronting the attitudes about women that make her feelings, needs and ideas less important than his. It is also important to help men move beyond the excuses and justifications that sustain the use of controlling and abusive tactics regardless of the skills they possess.

Some key differences between anger management counselling and relationship violence treatment (RVT) include:

1. Anger management focuses on the triggers for the anger which are often seen by the abuser as the cause of the abuse. **RVT services recognize that abuse is a choice and they maintain a focus on the man’s responsibility for his actions.**

2. Anger management counselling focuses on the person attending counselling as the primary client. The goals of therapy is to help this person cope. **RVT Services have a clear and consistent primary goal of ending violence. The physical and emotional safety of victims is the highest priority.**

3. Anger management counselling focuses on emotional self-management as the goal of treatment. **RVT services not only address violence/abuse directly but also support men in developing healthy relationship and parenting skills.** See below for a list of typical topic areas covered by RVT services:

   - identifying abusive behaviours
   - confronting minimization, denial and blame
   - identifying individual factors that get in the way of having stable relationships and create high risk situations
   - gender-role socialization and power and control issues
   - identifying values, attitudes and beliefs that support violence
   - identifying values, attitudes and beliefs that support healthy relationships
   - teaching skills for managing difficult emotions including jealousy and anger
   - conflict resolution/problem solving and communication skills
   - understanding the impact of abuse on self, partner and children
   - empathy and compassion building
   - self-care
   - family of origin work
   - parenting skills
   - healthy intimacy and sexual interactions

Anger management counselling alone risks blaming the victim and leaving abusive behaviours as tactics of control unchanged. Anger management is only one component of an effective intervention for relationship abuse.