

When people talk about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), or domestic violence, they are referring to coercive and controlling actions used by one person to gain power and maintain control over the other in a relationship. In this brochure we explore the Power and Control Wheel\* and the ways that Minimizing, Denying and Blaming can be used as tactics of power and control. The primary purpose of these tactics is for the abuser to avoid being accountable and taking responsibility for their actions. Making the victim the cause of the violence allows the abuser to justify it and can make it seem as though the violence is normal – it's not a big deal.

Victims say that minimizing, denying, and blaming are the most crazy-making of tactics, as they begin to feel like they are out of touch with what is really going on. The significant issue is that abusers feel they are on top – that they have the right to make rules and decisions without questions. When they are questioned or challenged, they feel that they are the victim, because they believe their way is the right way.

\* The Power and Control Wheel was developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project Duluth, MN

## FACTS ABOUT ABUSIVE AND CONTROLLING RELATIONSHIPS:

Many people don't recognize controlling behavior as abusive – because of socialization, we might think it's normal. It also can be difficult to recognize because it escalates over time, making it hard to see how bad things have become.

It's a pattern of behaviors that makes you feel crazy or trapped. Many people state that they walk on egg shells, or sense trouble coming, or have changed their whole way of being in reaction to their abusive partner.

Conflict in relationships is normal, but when the belief is that someone has to win, be in charge, or "wear the pants" then it may be an abusive relationship. For more information or help call:

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[Insert your local contact info]

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## MINIMIZING, DENYING AND BLAMING



**What does it look like in  
abusive and controlling  
relationships?**



**Mending the Sacred Hoop**  
mshoop.org

Wilma and Archie have been together for over 30 years and have raised four kids. Both had been sober for over 10 years; recently one of their adult children unexpectedly died and they both relapsed. One night during a drunken argument, Wilma tried to leave and Archie blocked the door. During the fight over the car keys, he injured her by throwing her down on the glass coffee table with such force that it broke.

Abusers will avoid accountability for their actions by saying they don't remember; stating it was drugs or alcohol, or that they were provoked in some way.

Friends and family have been sympathetic to Wilma and Archie because of their loss. They compliment Archie for doing better now and are always insisting that Wilma get help.

Abusers can gain more power over victims through the response of family and friends. They can reinforce the abuser's minimizing, denying and blaming because he now appears to have handled his issues while she appears not to have handled hers.

There had been violence in the past. Most of it was mutual and occurred when Wilma and Archie drank. Wilma has been more depressed and bitter about the loss of their child, while Archie has become more aggressive and violent; he is the one now assaulting Wilma. When she told him he needs help, he said, "You hit too, maybe you need help."

Abusers tend to view their violence as less damaging or severe than it is. They minimize the effect of their violence, and often view it as a normal part of life and relationships.

Archie was eventually charged with domestic assault and court-ordered to refrain from alcohol and attend a batterer intervention program. In groups he says it was only because of the alcohol that there was violence – he was protecting Wilma from drinking and driving.

Blame is a huge part of coercive control in abusive relationships; it is an attempt to avoid accountability. There will always be something or someone who caused the abuse rather than the abuser.

Archie has been ordered not to drink, so he has been sober since the domestic violence charge. During this time, he has not assaulted Wilma, however, there have been many arguments. Archie insists these happen because Wilma is drinking and that Wilma needs treatment if their relationship is to improve.

Abusers will deny they have a responsibility in the on-going problems in the relationship; they expect others to change.

#### USING ISOLATION

Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes • limiting her outside involvement • using jealousy to justify actions.

#### MINIMIZING, DENYING AND BLAMING

Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously • saying the abuse didn't happen • shifting responsibility for abusive behavior • saying she caused it.