

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 Using Children is a tactic of power and control.

Children are powerful tools in abusive relationships. Many victims say they have tolerated the abuse and violence themselves for many years but it wasn't until their children started getting hurt that they considered it a bad relationship. Children become pawns in abusive relationships. During the relationship they can be used to attack, belittle, or undermine the victim. During separation, and long after, they can be used to spy on the other parent, control visitation/holiday schedules, while courts are used for on-going battles.

Abusers feel they have ownership over their wives and children. When others become involved, they can escalate their attempts to control, making separation one of the most dangerous times for the victim.

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

## Facts on the basis of a healthy relationship:

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:

[Insert your local contact info]

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## USING CHILDREN



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



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Cindy and Donovan are young parents in their twenties. They have a son, Jacob. Donovan has always wanted a son. He was very excited about being a father and bragged about it all through the pregnancy. After the child was born, he resented that he had to work more to pay the bills, so he went out more on weekends while Cindy stayed at home with the baby.

Society has different expectations for men and women when it comes to being a parent. Women are expected to take care of the babies, while men are not expected to care for infant children – there are low expectations of their ability parent.

Several months after Jacob was born Cindy started asking Donovan to do more so she had a chance to get out of the house for personal time and to socialize. Donovan said it was her job to raise the kids. If she wanted to go out, she needed to find babysitters.

Abusers will often use strict gender norms as a way to avoid responsibility. If they do something outside of the norm they believe they should be praised. If he does "babysit," or does other things deemed a woman's job, he will often feel entitled to some favor, rather than seeing it as doing his part.

Tensions continued and after a few years they escalated into physical violence. Cindy moved out and filed for a protection order and divorce. Donovan hadn't argued anything until he was ordered to pay child support and spousal support. After that he filed for custody.

When abusers are ordered to pay financial support they often see it as losing. Because they cannot have their former partner "getting one over on them" they will use institutions like courts and child protection to retaliate.

After the separation, Donovan would question Jacob about Cindy. He would ask questions like "Does mommy go out on weekends?" "Does mommy have any special friends?"

Post-separation control tactics include questioning kids on what the mother is doing, who she is seeing, or where they are living. Abusers will pump children for information with seemingly harmless questions in order to keep tabs on their former partner.

#### USING MALE PRIVILEGE

Treating her like a servant • making all the big decisions • acting like the "master of the castle" • being the one to define men's and women's roles

#### USING CHILDREN

Making her feel guilty about the children • using the children to relay messages • using visitation to harass her • threatening to take the children away.

The protection order restricted Donovan to only contacting Cindy regarding visitation. When Donovan heard that Cindy started dating someone he began using visitation times as opportunities to insult and threaten her. She stopped visitations, but the courts said he would be given custody if she denied him his parental rights to visit.

Abusers will use the child as a tool to further abuse or control their partner. They try to make it appear that their former partner is attempting to keep their children away from them.