

"How did I not see it?" The cycle of violence



It is very difficult for the victim to see clearly into a situation of intimate partner violence (IPV), since it is very unstable. Sometimes things are going well, sometimes less so but without a clear reason as to why... and other times it is hell. This instability is explained by the cycle of violence. This cycle is often described in three phases: crisis / aggression, remission and tension. Violence is present in all phases, but it takes on different forms.

1 Crisis / Aggression

The crisis phase, or aggression, occurs when the victim tries to exercise power over a decision that affects the family or her own life, and the abuser uses violence to "win" and impose his will. No matter what form the violence takes (psychological, verbal, physical, sexual, etc.), it has great repercussions on the victim: she is afraid, in pain, is hurt and does not understand why her partner reacted so harshly, why he went so far and how the situation got so out of hand. The victim feels helpless, because her efforts to appease her partner do not work. The victim may also react with violence to defend herself or to try to regain her legitimate power over the situation. After the crisis, the victim is destabilized and may question her partner's violence or the relationship.

2

Remission

To prevent the victim from leaving the relationship, the abuser must do something to influence her perception of the situation and give her hope for the future. The abuser may thus recognize certain wrongs, promise to improve and may even apologize and express remorse. However, he does so in a way that minimizes the severity of the violence. At the same time, the abuser may show affection for the victim, "take care of her" and overall show his good side. The victim's suffering subsides, she regains hope and is immensely relieved that her partner did not want to hurt her on purpose. However, the abuser also challenges the victim's perception of the crisis, to give her a share of responsibility. He twists the events and explain why the crisis happened in a way that blames the victim. He convinces her to "be more careful". This part of the remission gives the victim a false sense of power over the situation, because she "understands" why the crisis happened and "knows" how to make the relationship better. The feeling of helplessness and confusion she felt during the crisis are easing. The victim feels much better and perhaps even proud of how they were able to "overcome" such an event together.

3

Tension

After a while, the remission fades and the abuser uses subtle violence to reassert his power over the relationship (sighs, irritated looks, silences, veiled reproaches, disapproval...). The tension mounts but the victim has difficulty putting it into words. She feels anxious and apprehensive and redoubles her efforts to keep the peace. She adapts to the situation without realizing that she is losing more and more power... until the day she tries to exercise power over a decision that affects the family or her own life...

SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE IS AVAILABLE 24/7 ACROSS QUEBEC, AND PROVIDES ACCESS TO ALL THE APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) AND ANYONE WHO IS CONCERNED ABOUT A SITUATION OF IPV.

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** Although most victims of intimate partner violence are female, it can also affect some men and members of the GLBTQ and non-binary community.*