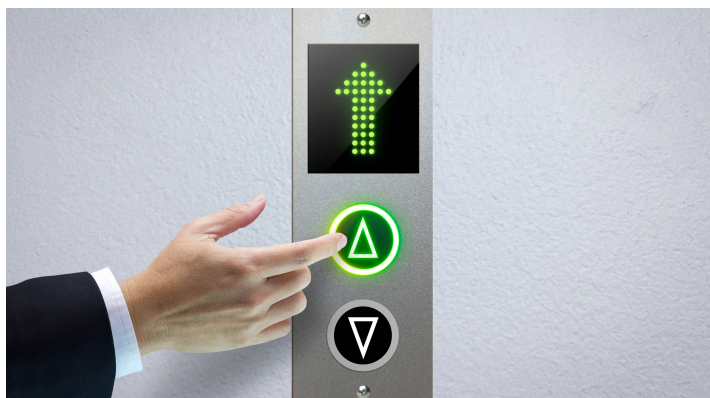


The escalation of violence



The goal of intimate partner violence (IPV) is to gain and then maintain power in the relationship. Of course, this dynamic does not happen overnight. Rather, intimate partner violence tends to develop gradually and increase over time.

1 Love as a trojan horse

At the beginning of the relationship, the partner shows affection, interest, patience, gentleness, openness, generosity, etc. Unfortunately, these manifestations of love are not entirely genuine and selfless as would be the case in a healthy relationship, but rather are intended to set the stage for future attempts to gain power. It is therefore already a form of psychological violence and some even use the expression "love bombing" to describe this technique of manipulation through seduction. The victim feels like she has access to her partner's true nature and it seems really beautiful.

Afterwards, the fact that she has already known her partner to be gentle and caring will nurture hope throughout the relationship, despite the appearance of violence.

2 The search for sensitive areas

By fostering attachment and investment in the relationship, the partner makes the victim open up. She confides her truth, talks about her dreams, her fears, her regrets, her failures... and the partner gains access to all the information needed to gain power : her frailties, her difficulties and her vulnerabilities. He is then able to target those sensitive areas to slowly install a hold on the relationship.

3 Slowly but surely : gaining power over the relationship

The abuser begins, very slowly, to "force" his partner's boundaries in order to put her in a state of inner imbalance and begin to gain power over the relationship. For example, an abuser who knows that his partner is sensitive to rejection might use distance or silence tactics when he wants to get something. If he knows she is insecure about her weight, he may use "heavy" looks or make comments about other people's weight. If he knows that she is shy, he may voluntarily make comments about her in front of friends to amplify her social discomfort. Because he targets very sensitive areas, he can use very subtle violent behaviours, but it will still be effective in affecting the victim.

Of course, the relationship is also characterized by the ups and downs of the cycle of violence (see SOS-INFO volume 10) and the victim is increasingly hurt by the violence she experiences (see SOS-INFO volume 6), which also contributes to building and maintaining the hold on the relationship.

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

The escalation of violence (continued)

4 Scaling up through engagement

When the relationship begins to be more seriously invested by the victim through various events that mark a commitment (making promises of eternity, publicly showing oneself as a couple, having long-term plans, moving in together, following the partner to another city, buying a car or a house, getting engaged, getting married, having a child, etc.) the violence may increase more markedly and suddenly become more intense and more frequent.

The partner allows himself to use more overt violence because it becomes increasingly difficult for the victim to break off the relationship. Undue pressure becomes rules and then obligations, innuendoes become insults or threats, dark looks turn into punches, harsh words become shouts and then blows, etc. For example, it is often during pregnancy or after a child is born that physical violence first occurs.

5 All the way to murder ?

IPV can escalate to extreme forms of violence, and can become a threat to the victims's physical safety and even for her life. However, because it is unstable and unpredictable, it is impossible to predict how far violence can go in a given relationship. Nor can it be assumed that the situation is still relatively "safe" if the violence has never been physical, because escalation can occur very gradually, as it can happen all of a sudden. However, one factor is known to be particularly conducive to a sudden escalation: when the victim questions the violence or the relationship. This is why it is far preferable that a break-up in a situation of IPV be prepared rather than precipitated, and why it is essential to respect the victim's decisions regarding the pace of the separation (see SOS-INFO volume 5).

6 The trap of hindsight

When victims of IPV examine their relationship after the fact, it is often fairly easy for them to identify the subtle violence and manipulation they experienced early in the relationship. They may then feel shame and guilt for not having "realized" the trap that was building around them or for not having "reacted" quickly enough. It can be very painful, especially since it's one of the most common misconceptions when it comes to IPV: *"I would never have accepted that!"*

We can then help victims realize that it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to identify IPV at the beginning of the relationship, since the subtle violent behaviours were skillfully camouflaged through expressions of love. It is only by knowing what happened next, in hindsight, that the psychological abuse and manipulation of the early stages of the relationship become visible.

It is also important to remind victims that it is normal (and healthy) to have believed in a partner's good faith, to have given the benefit of the doubt, to have accepted apologies, and to have believed in a potential for change. It is the abuser who choose to use the victim's qualities of openness and trust against her... and thus the abuser remains solely responsible for the situation of IPV.

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.