



Pre-Marital Counseling In View Of Abuse

My boyfriend and I getting married in a few months and I am worried because although he is so great, he does have a temper. When he gets mad he becomes scary. At times he yells and screams and at other times he throws and breaks things. He's only hit me once. I know he doesn't mean it, but I find myself walking on eggshells. Other than that, we get along great. He is amazing and we have so much in common and we really have an amazing relationship. Can you see us to help him with his temper?

This is a portrayal of many emails and phone messages I receive. Typically the person requesting service is a woman hooked into a relationship with an abusive partner. She believes that the abuse is an anomaly, something out of character for her boyfriend and that if that were dealt with, all else would be terrific. Apart from the abusive behaviour, the woman extols the virtue of the fellow. When not abusive, he is over-the-top-fantastic.

It is important to know that a person's behaviour repeated over time is not an anomaly, not something out of character for that person. When a person repeats behaviour consistently over time, that behaviour is typically part of the person's make-up.

In the above example, the abuse described has occurred enough times that a pattern emerges; one where abuse is followed by an intense period of terrific behaviour, likely making up for the abusive behaviour. This is the cycle of abuse. However, the victim, not recognizing the cycle and that both the bad and good are part of the same person, tries to split the good behaviour from the bad in order to believe that only the good truly represents her partner. What needs to be understood is that the good and the bad are both part of the same person in much the same way and the head and tail are part of the same coin and are inseparable. In other words, if you take one side, you are going to get both sides.

As much as the partner may need counselling to address the abusive behaviour, so too does the woman need counselling to address her needs in the relationship. More specifically, the woman needs counselling to understand the nature of the abusive relationship and to figure out if this relationship is really in her interest. She needs to be able to make choices about what is acceptable to her and to enter the marriage if she so chooses, with both eyes open.

In situations such as these it is often advisable to delay the marriage and it is also advisable to delay pregnancy. The self-imposed deadline of the wedding only increases the pressure on the couple and while he may promise to behave more reasonably, a promise doesn't equal change. Further, in many situations, the abuse not only continues after marriage, but intensifies as the pressure to change in view of the wedding, is gone.

If you are in a relationship such as described in this article, where you are subject to abuse, take a step back and examine your situation more closely. In so doing, ask yourself, what is it about you that keeps you hooked into an abusive relationship: Are you afraid to leave; are you insecure; do you have any other options; are you even safe?

The counselling you seek for him or you both, might be better for you alone.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.