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Guidelines for working with young men who use violence against their intimate partners

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Introduction to the guide

This guide provides comprehensive information and guidelines for practitioners working with young men who use violence against their partners in intimate relationships. Key components of the guide are outlined below to assist practitioners in understanding and addressing this complex issue effectively. The guide covers principles, work approaches and exercises to work with young men.

Before delving into the specific sections of this guide, practitioners should familiarise themselves with the content, keeping in mind that the guide's primary focus is on working with young men who exhibit violent behaviours in intimate partnerships. The guide offers insights into the meaning, function, and types of violence, as well as strategies for addressing and promoting healthy relationships. The guide is prepared given our experience in working with young men in our organization Men for Gender Equality (MÄN)[1], located in Sweden.

Defining the age group and relevant factors to keep in mind

This guide is designed to be applicable to boys and young men aged 15 to 25, who are in intimate partnerships. It is important to consider that this age group crosses over with legal definitions of childhood (under 18 years). Therefore, child protection issues need to be additionally considered when working with this group. In some European countries, such as the UK, the government definition of domestic abuse extends to 16-year olds, due to recognition that adolescents were experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in significant numbers. Any such age parameters can cause issues for those who fall outside. Recently, there was a case where a 16 year old boy committed stalking, abuse, and femicide against his 15 year old girlfriend. However, as the official definition of domestic abuse in the UK is 16 years old, this situation was not identified, nor recorded as domestic violence. This case has prompted a review into the age definition in the UK (BBC News, 2024). There is therefore a risk of a legislative gap in which young people who experience IPV within their own relationships are not formally recognised and specific support services not funded.

Intersecting aspects of marginalisation

As with all issues around abuse, victimization and perpetration, it is important to take an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991). Individuals will experience IPV different according to their own circumstances and experiences of oppression and social exclusion.

In a UK-based study looking into experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPVA) in adolescence, there were various risk factors which were associated with a 50% increase in the likelihood of IPVA victimization and perpetration. These include: "[h]istory of anxiety, self-harm, anti-social behaviour, cannabis or illicit (non-cannabis) drug use, or risky sexual behaviour. [...] Males reporting depression, sexual abuse (not by an intimate partner), witnessing domestic violence, or parental separation were also more likely to experience IPVA" (Herbert et al., 2021: 1).

A young person in an abusive relationship but who is also facing racial marginalization and poverty will have additional barriers to access support services.

[1] MÄN is a Swedish feminist civil society organization that seeks to engage men and boys to challenge destructive masculinities, with the purpose of ending men's violence against women and children.

Heightened risks of IPV around teenage pregnancy

In regard to teenage pregnancy, we need to consider the fact that children who are engaging in sexual activity from an early age may also be facing other forms of marginalization. Research suggests that early sexual risk-taking behaviour by both victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence may also coexist with racial marginalization and social exclusion. When a pregnancy has occurred, we also need to consider the additional barrier of poverty for the young family and the strains that this may put on the relationship. Parenting at a young age can also limit young people's ability to remain in school (O'Donnell et al., 2009).

In the European Union (EU), 4% of initial births were to females under 20 years old in 2017. The highest proportions of such births were observed in Bulgaria (12.5% of total initial births) and Romania (12.1%), with Hungary (8.5%) and Slovakia (8.1%) also showing relatively high percentages. Conversely, countries like Denmark, Italy, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Sweden had notably lower rates of initial births to young mothers under 20, ranging from 1.0% to 1.4% (Eurostat, 2019).

It is worth noting that dating violence and teen pregnancy are intricately linked. Research indicates that teen girls who are in abusive relationships are at a greater risk of becoming pregnant. Also, for many teens, the violence and abusive behaviours begin or increase when they become pregnant. For this reason, specific care should be given to the topic of birth control when working with young perpetrators.

Large age gaps in youth relationships

Young people in relationships with large age discrepancies can be at a heightened risk of IPV as it can impact on power differences in the relationship. Relationship power is, "the degree to which one can act independently of a partner's control, influence a partner's actions, and dominate decision-making; it includes domains of relationship control and decision-making dominance" (Volpe et al., 2013: 2). Among teenage girls, low relationship power has been linked to IPV and increased incidence of unprotected sex. A large age discrepancy in teenage relationships can also result in a significant difference in access to resources. For instance, if the perpetrator has access to a car, a house or money which the victim does not. So, we need to be particularly alert to the dynamics of perpetration by young men who seek out much younger partners and explore this with them.

Young people living away from home at university

Young people who live away from home at university will experience particular risk factors related to their isolation from their home support networks and families (Duval et al, 2020). Many students experience their first intimate relationships during their adolescence when away from home. Students are also particularly impacted by their peers when residing together. Due to students living arrangements being predominantly with other young peers, there is a need for specific risk management when supporting young perpetrators of IPV who are residing at university. Some universities have developed internal policies and support pathways for students who experience IPV, however this does not exist universally.

Additional barriers to police reporting for young people

Barriers exist that deter young people from reporting abusive relationships to the police. Some of these are similar to those among adults, including because of previous negative experiences with the

police, not feeling the incident is serious enough to report, a desire to avoid being labelled as a victim, shame and embarrassment, self-blame and fear, and not recognising that a crime has been committed against them (Herbert et al., 2014). Young people may also be under the age group that is officially recognised as being victims of domestic violence, as mentioned earlier. Professional agencies, including the police, can be used to framing domestic violence using adult language and understandings, such as associating domestic violence with couples who reside together. In Swedish research it was noted that professionals assumed that teenage domestic violence would not occur in the family/parental home when parents were around, yet it often can (Tagesson and Gallo, 2022). The co-existence of other forms of criminal activity present in young people's wider social contexts, such as illegal drug use, can deter them from accessing support from the police. Research from Australia noted that young people who used drugs either with their partners or wider social circles avoided police and other support services due to the perceived risk of criminalisation or stigmatisation. In such contexts, threats of disclosure to the authorities can also be leveraged by perpetrators as an abusive tactic (Hobbs, 2022).

Defining an "intimate relationship"

In our experience, young people's relationships change more frequently than those of adults. Young people are more likely to be in temporary or multiple relationships, short or long term and on-and-off relationships.

When counselling young men, practitioners need to be open to the fact that relationships may fluctuate, which will influence their responses to the clients' use of violence.

Intimate partnerships, as referred to in this guide, encompass romantic partnerships, dating relationships, and any connections where emotional and physical intimacy is present.

Understanding violence in young people's intimate relationships

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in young people's relationships is a critical issue and a concern that needs to be addressed. The consequences of violence can have a profound impact on a person's well-being and can perpetuate cycles of harm (Överlien 2018).

IPV in young people's intimate relationships is a global social problem and is not a new phenomenon (Korkmaz 2021). The existing research demonstrates that violence in young people's intimate relationships is a common phenomenon if coercion and control are included in the definition of violence (Korkmaz, 2021; Överlien, 2018; Barter et al. 2015). Furthermore, violence in young people's intimate relationships is clearly gendered, which means that boys and girls experience the consequences of violence in different ways and are exposed to different forms of violence. In a Swedish survey, 23% of young women and 14% of young men in the age group 16-24 answered that they had at some point been subjected to a violent crime from an intimate partner (BRÅ, 2021).

Tomaszewska and Schuster (2021) reviewed prevalence rates of teen dating violence in various European countries, particularly focusing on psychological, physical, and sexual victimization and perpetration among female and male adolescents. Here are their key findings:

1. Psychological victimization:
    - For female adolescents, prevalence rates ranged from 25.1% (mixed European sample) to 95.5% (Spain).

- For male adolescents, rates varied from 19.0% (Norway) to 94.5% (Spain).

2. Physical victimization:
    - Among female adolescents, rates ranged from 4.7% (Portugal) to 32.9% (Spain).
    - For male adolescents, the range was from 7.3% (mixed European sample) to 29.8% (Spain).
3. Sexual victimization:
    - Prevalence rates for female adolescents ranged from 7.8% (Portugal) to 41.0% (United Kingdom).
    - Among male adolescents, rates ranged from 6.1% (mixed European sample) to 39.0% (Italy).
4. Psychological dating violence perpetration:
    - For female adolescents, rates varied from 21.0% (Denmark) to 97.0% (Spain).
    - Among male adolescents, rates ranged from 19.9% (Denmark) to 95.3% (Spain).
5. Physical dating violence perpetration:
    - Prevalence rates for female adolescents ranged from 3.1% (Portugal) to 46.0% (Spain).
    - Among male adolescents, rates varied from 4.8% (Germany) to 37.0% (Spain).
6. Sexual dating violence perpetration:
    - Among female adolescents, rates ranged from 0.8% (Germany) to 23.6% (Spain).
    - For male adolescents, rates varied from 2.6% (Germany) to 43.6% (Spain).

The data highlights significant variation in the prevalence rates of teen dating violence across European countries and between genders, with Spain often having higher rates. Such meta studies on prevalence rates should be viewed having in mind that the included studies often differ from one another in several respects, such as the age range of young people included, and the methodology used to assess teen dating violence. Additionally, the level of recognition of teen dating violence among young people varies across countries which can have an impact on survey responses. High figures do not necessarily mean that there is more violence in that country, but that the violence is recognized as such by the young people included in the studies. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of teen dating violence and tailored interventions to address this issue in different cultural and regional contexts.

IPV becomes part of young people's intimate partnerships as it does in adult intimate partnerships, with unique aspects that make young people more vulnerable, such as:

- Early experience of IPV in childhood (Levell, 2022; Cheung & Huang, 2023)
    - Research has suggested that children who experience IPV at home among their caregivers are more likely to find themselves in an abusive relationship themselves in adolescence. Due to this co-prevalence professionals should be alert to the fact that some young perpetrators may still be residing with an abusive parent. In this situation, they should be recognized as victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and

consideration given to whether they would also benefit from support around their own victimization.

- Exposure to violence (Mulford & Giordano, 2008; Korkmaz, 2021.)
  - Both young men and women report being exposed to violence.
  - Responses may differ between genders, with young women being significantly more harmed by serious repeated violence and being more afraid of their partners compared to young men.
- Issues in intimate partnerships (Korkmaz 2021)
  - Control, abuse, sexualized violence, and stalking are prevalent issues in young people's intimate partnerships.
- Recognition of violence (Wade et al., 2007)
  - Youth may not recognize violence as such.
  - Many acts of violence may go unnoticed as criminal acts by youth.
  - Violence and abusive behaviour are often condoned within dominant discourses and social norms.
  - Language is used to minimize, mutualize, pathologize, and blame the victim.
- Normalization of coercive control (Korkmaz, 2021; Överlien, 2018)
  - Coercive control in relationships, particularly by young men, is normalized.
  - Checking a partner's mobile phone, for example, is often not reacted to by young people.
- Stalking (Korkmaz, 2021)
  - Control and stalking behaviours, such as monitoring a partner's movements and activities, are common in young people's relationships.
  - Stalking, whether physical or digital, can instil fear and threaten the victim's sense of safety and autonomy.
  - These behaviours contribute to a coercive and abusive dynamic within the relationship.
- Masculinity influencers
  - Influencers like Andrew Tate and others promote traditional, negative and sexist expressions of masculinity, which can reinforce abusive behaviours and attitudes in relationships.
  - Their messages may glorify dominance, control, and aggression, contributing to an environment where such behaviours are normalized.
- Peer communications, memes/jokes
  - Memes and jokes circulated among peers may trivialize or normalize abusive behaviours in relationships.

- Humour can serve as a tool to downplay the seriousness of violence and control, creating barriers to recognizing and addressing these issues.
- Linked to the increase in masculinity influencers mentioned above, there has been an increase in misogynistic memes circulated online as part of the 'manosphere', an online world which has been outlined as, „a loose online network of forums, podcasts, and blogs, which includes digital subcultures such as men's rights advocates (MRA), pick-up artists (PUA), male separatists or supremacists like Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), or [...] incels (involuntary celibates)" (Dafaure, 2022: 243).
  Emerging analysis of the manosphere indicates they it be a space where violence against women is actively discussed and promoted (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). Engagement with the manosphere has been linked across the world with various incidences of youth violence, including violence against women, that is not necessarily IPV but is indicative of violent misogyny.
- Music lyrics or celebrity behaviour, e.g. the widely discussed case of Amber Heard and Johnny Depp, can additionally have an impact on youth attitudes towards relationships.

- Substance misuse (Roberts & Klein, 2003; Haynie et al., 2013)
  - Research around teenage experiences of IPV suggest that substance misuse can be related. Studies based in the USA have suggested that IPV is associated with higher levels of risky behaviour among boys and girls, including increased substance use. The relationship between IPV and substance use has been because substance misuse can increase 'contextual vulnerability' both as a precursor to IPV, or used later as a coping mechanism for trauma and distress.

Adults play an important role in interrupting violence in young people's intimate relationships (Korkmaz, 2021). By being curious, asking questions about relationships, and speaking up when someone seems to be controlling, abusive or violent, youth can be supported to prevent and stop their use of violence. Often violence is not an established behaviour, which increases the chance that the behaviour can be stopped. Reflective conversations can invite more dignified and respectful ways of acting in challenging situations.

When youth seek support, they often turn to friends of the same age. This creates a challenge for young people in getting accurate and helpful information about how they can get support (Weisz et al. 2007; Black et al. 2008; Richard & Branch 2012). In light of this, adults need to inform young people about how they can support each other and where professional help is available. It is important to be attentive to how young people seek and want help.

Furthermore, adults need to reflect on how they provide support – are we sufficiently curious and responsive to what young people tell us? Do we misuse our position of power to tell young people how they should act? Do we recognize children's and young people's competency and their ability to know their best interests? Later in the guide, we will reflect on how we can treat youth as competent actors in their own lives.

More and more studies show that exposure to and/or use of violence early in life poses a risk to the development of healthy and non-violent future intimate relationships (Andersson et al., 2015). This compels adults to support young people's mental health and the development of respectful

relationships. Giving young people the opportunity to process their experiences increases the chance that they will form relationships differently in the future.

University Dating Violence

Another relevant type of young people's violence is related to university/ college dating violence. University years are formative times when young adults are exploring intimate relationships, often away from their traditional support systems. The dynamics of university life, including newfound independence and social pressures, can exacerbate the risks and challenges associated with dating violence.

Dating violence among university students is a complex and multifaceted issue, with prevalence rates varying widely depending on the type of violence considered. Drawing upon recent research from the United States, we gain a clearer understanding of how prevalent different forms of dating violence are within the university/ college population.

Research indicates that between 10% to 50% of college students have experienced at least one form of dating violence (Kaukinen, 2014). This broad range underscores the variability in experiences and reporting among college students across different campuses and demographics.

When breaking down the types of dating violence, the picture becomes even more detailed

- Physical Violence Victimization: Between 20% to 30% of college students report experiencing physical violence, with both men and women being affected at comparable rates (Shorey et al., 2008).
- Psychological Aggression Victimization: An astonishingly high prevalence of 70% to 90% is reported for psychological aggression among both genders, suggesting it is the most common form of dating violence in college settings (Shorey et al., 2008).
- Sexual Coercion Victimization: Around 30% of females and 12% of males report experiencing sexual coercion, highlighting a significant gender disparity in this form of victimization (Sabrina & Straus, 2008; Shorey et al., 2008).

Perpetration rates & severity

Perpetration rates offer another perspective on the issue:

- Physical Violence Perpetration: Ranges from 20% to 30% among college students.
- Psychological Aggression Perpetration: Approximately 80% of students report perpetrating psychological aggression.
- Sexual Coercion Perpetration: Between 10% to 20% of students report engaging in sexual coercion.

However, it's crucial to note that these prevalence rates encompass a wide range of behaviours, from minor to severe acts. For instance, minor acts might include throwing objects at a partner or shoving, whereas severe acts involve choking or the use of a weapon. When focusing solely on severe violence, the prevalence rates among college students drop significantly, with 8% to 16% perpetrating severe physical violence, 12% to 30% perpetrating severe psychological aggression, and 3% to 9% perpetrating severe sexual coercion annually (Bell & Naugle, 2007; Hines & Saudino, 2003).

Severe acts & gender differences

Victimization rates also differ when considering only severe acts, with 5% to 16% reporting severe physical aggression victimization, 23% to 27% reporting severe psychological aggression victimization, and 5% to 8% reporting severe sexual coercion victimization. Notably, men and women perpetrate and experience physical and psychological dating violence at comparable rates. However, there is a gender asymmetry in psychological aggression and sexual coercion, with women more likely to perpetrate psychological aggression and men more likely to perpetrate sexual coercion (Hines & Saudino, 2003).

Stalking behaviour

Stalking behaviour within intimate relationships, a less studied form of dating violence, has reported prevalence rates ranging from 6% to 27%. In some cases, the prevalence of stalking behaviours was as high as 38%, with minor differences between males and females in the types of stalking behaviour exhibited (Shorey et al., 2015).

This data paints a nuanced picture of dating violence among college students, highlighting the prevalence of different forms of violence and the importance of considering both the spectrum of behaviours involved and the severity of acts. This detailed understanding is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems that address the specific needs and experiences of college students facing dating violence.

Key points of the guide

Broadening the definition of violence

Including coercive control

In conversations with young men who use violence towards their partners, a broad definition of violence needs to be introduced so that they become aware that jealousy, controlling behaviour, sexual harassment and coercive pressure are forms of violence. Many young people assume that it is reasonable to be controlling and jealous, knowing where their partner is at all times, having access to each other's passwords on social media or smartphones and demanding sexual availability (Överlien, 2018; Korkmaz, 2021; Kruse et al., 2023).

The use of coercive control is very common in young peoples' intimate relationships. Coercive control is "an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim" (Women's Aid). Within this framework, young people may misuse power and exert coercive control to dominate their partner (Kruse et al., 2023). Young men may use abusive behaviours to dictate the development of the relationship. They may threaten to leave the relationship or take their own life (ibid). Often, the partner's response to these threats is ambivalence and a fear that if they do not do what the boyfriend wants, he will break up with them. Young partners may believe that if they leave the relationship, their boyfriend will commit suicide. Young men may leverage coercive behaviour with threats, ultimatums and surveillance as well as aggression and violence (ibid). In the abuse dynamic, the partner may not feel they have any agency, believing the only way to avoid more violence is to do what the boyfriend wants (ibid). When deciding to stay in the relationship, the partner becomes an expert at reading the abusive person's underlying messages and resisting his violence in a sophisticated way by using strategies to avoid further abuse (Barter et al., 2015). The young man, in turn, will use strategies of minimizing his violence and blaming the victim as a way to control his partner and making her responsible.

In counselling young men, it is important to communicate that psychological violence, for example in the form of coercive control, is as difficult for the partner as is physical violence (Stark, 2009). Coercive control may be overt or subtle and can include a pattern that permeates the entire relationship. Because coercive control is normalized by young people, it is harder to recognize and harder to address for the perpetrator and the victim (Kruse et al., 2023). For example, at the beginning of an intimate partnership, being picked up from school/work can be experienced as romantic and an act of love. However, when there is no consent and it is not possible to refuse, the experience of being picked up at school/work becomes abusive and threatening.

Young men's expectations of sexual availability increase the risk of sexualized violence

As youth enter their teenage years, sexual curiosity and longing for sexual intimacy begin to emerge. A normal part of youth development is to explore sexual desires with others (Magnusson & Häggström-Nordin, 2016; Kruse et al., 2023). The teenage years are also the time when intimate partnerships develop (Magnusson & Häggström-Nordin, 2016). For many, „being together" implies expectations of kissing, hugging, making out and having sex. At this stage of life, people do not have

much experience of sex with others, which means that they can get into situations for which they are not fully prepared (Korkmaz, 2021; Kruse et al, 2023). Many young people have few examples of healthy and respectful relationships and do not know what to expect from their partner and what they can tolerate.

When it comes to violence in young people's intimate relationships, it is often in negotiations about sexual interactions where abuse lurks around the corner. Neither the person who pushes for a sexual act nor the person who resists may understand what is happening: that sexualized contact without consent constitutes sexual assault. People minimize violence by calling sexualized violence „bad sex", as something you need to „put up with", but do not define it as assault (Kruse et al., 2023).

Therefore, it is important that we, as practitioners who work with young people, should invite honest reflections on sexual interactions that include clear and accurate accounts of sexualized abuse and violence (Wade et al., 2007). The starting point for talking about sexualized abuse is through conversations about how youth understand and seek consent from intimate partners.

Consent must be understood in context

Consent is about reciprocity, willingness, and interaction. For consent to work, it requires empathy and role taking, i.e. being willing to empathize with how actions affect others. This may sound straightforward but is in fact quite complicated.

Just being in a heterosexual relationship can complicate the ability to seek and give genuine consent within the context of dominant social norms. Young men may feel entitled to sex and may be less socialized to take other people's perspectives (Berg, 2016). Young men may believe they are expected to initiate sex and may receive social messages that they should overcome a partner's resistance (Wade et al., 2007). In this context, there is a risk that young men ignore their partners' girlfriends'/dates' signals (ibid; Kruse et al., 2023). Furthermore, partners may feel pressured to agree to sexual contact due to social (and their boyfriend's) expectations, even if they are unwilling (Korkmaz 2021; Kruse et al 2023). Partners may agree to sex to avoid sexualized violence, especially if coercion and aggression have been used in the past. Agreeing to sex or initiating sex can be a way to avoid further sexual violence or violence in general. Partners may resist violence and abuse by working to keep the violent boyfriend in a good mood, a strategy reinforced by young men to hold their partner responsible for their desires, emotions and behaviour (Kruse et al 2023).

In other words, consent needs to be interpreted within the specific relationship context to understand the sexual interaction within a given relationship. In their work with young men, practitioners need to ask targeted questions to really understand how the sexual and relational negotiation works.

In the exercises section, there is an exercise about how to seek consent.[2]

Young men who have raped their partners should abstain from sex

Given how difficult it is for an abused partner to give or assert their genuine consent, young men who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviours should be abstinent from sex for an indefinite period of time. Practitioners should communicate to young men who have crossed their partner's

[2] If you want more exercises regarding sexualized violence and consent, download "Good Practice in Addressing Sexualized Violence: Guidelines Document" from the WWP EN website

bodily boundaries that they will need to recreate a safe and secure sexual practice with their partner. The partner will need space and must be free from pressure, suggestions, and questions. Practitioners should assert that the best thing for the partner is separation, and to „break up“ the relationship for the time being. Young men who have used sexualized violence will do better apart, as will the victim in recognizing the changes they need to make and understanding what they really want and need.

If the young man is refusing to abstain from sex or to separate, practitioners will need to review with the client his responsibility for violence and the harm of his actions against his partner. The practitioner can mentally bring the partner into the conversation and ask the client to put himself in her shoes and invite reflections on his responsibility, his plans to deal with his abuse and how he may repair the relationship. The practitioner will want to elicit statements from the young man that recognize the harm of his behaviour. The young man will need to account for how he will contribute to his partner’s safety and restore dignity and respect. The practitioner will need to communicate how difficult it can be to repair the relationship and that the partner often needs distance to know whether they can feel safe enough to continue the relationship. The victim support worker in cases such as these should be informed and support the victim to access specific sexual violence services, and if appropriate, engage in a police report.

Technology assisted tools for IPV among young people: Tech abuse

Social media is an integral part of young people's daily lives. They are in contact with each other 24/7, sharing pictures and stories, texting/sexting and chatting with each other (Överlien, 2018; MIND, 2020).

As children are more prolific users of modern technologies, this enhances the chances of so-called technology-facilitated abuse in their relationships. NGOs who work with victims of intimate partner violence are increasingly aware of the technology-assisted abuse that can occur, including the use of tracking devices, such as with Apple AirTags. In 2019, Refuge found that 72% of women identified experiencing tech-facilitated abuse, ranging from persistent telephone calls from perpetrators, being targeted via social media, to having their location tracked or spyware installed in their homes (Refuge, 2020). Commonly used apps such as Find My Friends or Snapchat encourage sharing live locations, which can promote negative stalking behaviours in young people's relationships. The normalization of these changed expectations around privacy can result in “normalizing a ‘boundarylessness’ which may make them more accepting of-and more at risk from-abusive behaviours by their intimate partners” (King-Ries, 2011: 132).

Social media also plays an important role in their love relationships; allowing them to follow each other and providing affirmation through different apps.

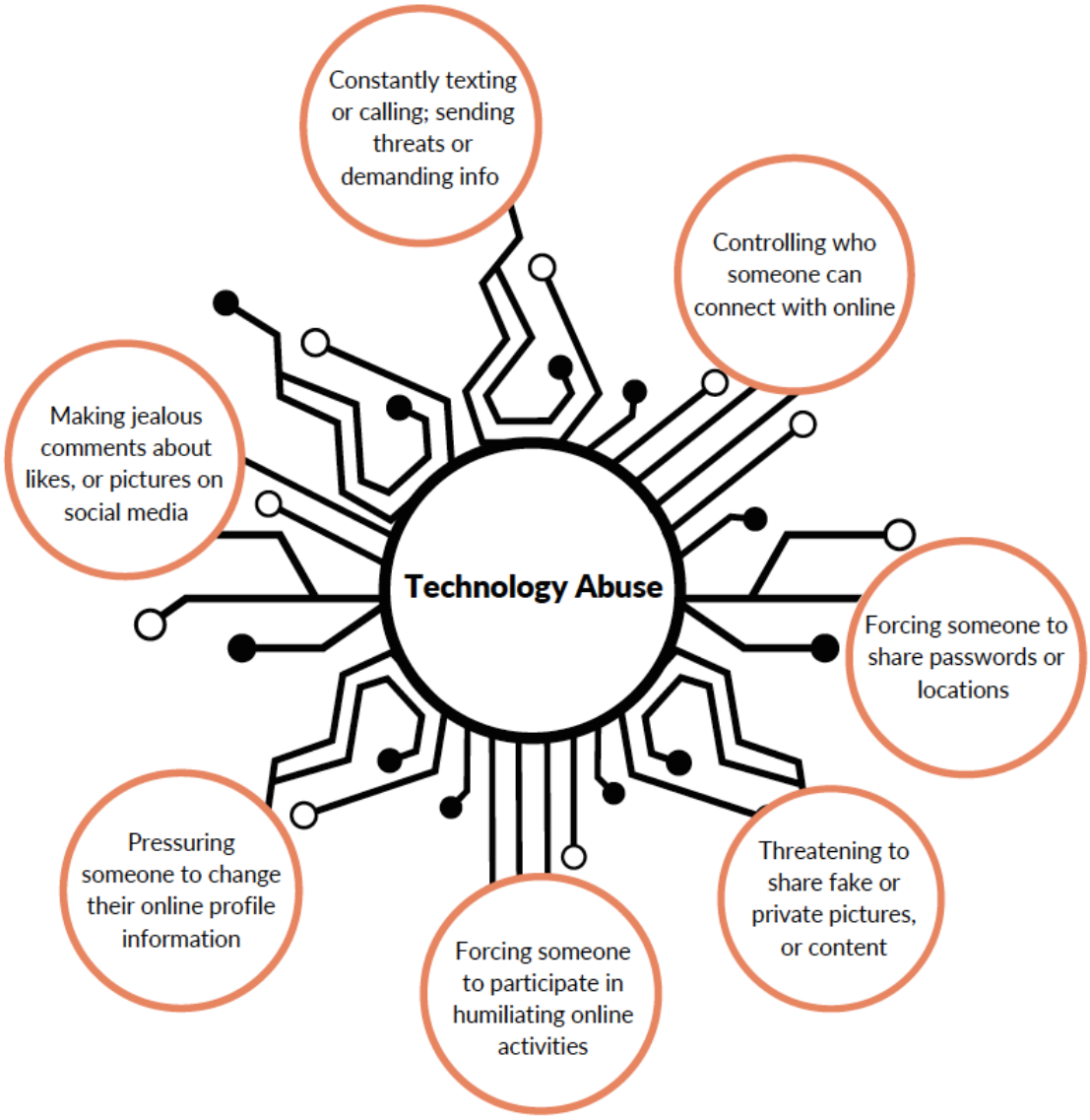


Figure 1: © National Network to End Domestic Violence, Safety Net Project, 2022

The downside of the digital arena is that it creates a longing for peer approval and demands instant response and availability. This creates a kind of stress in young people's lives that most adults have not experienced (MIND, 2020). Adults tend to be able to distinguish between online and offline socializing while young people often do not make that distinction (ibid). When working with young men who have abused their partners, it is important to talk about the role of social media in their intimate partnerships. Practitioners should pay attention to young people talking about controlling or wanting to harm someone via social media.

Some examples may be coercion or revenge, which may include sending or posting threatening messages or pictures on private or open social media forums. Other examples include spreading rumours or sharing private pictures and messages against the partner's wishes, blackmailing or threatening partners by posting or spreading pictures or messages (such as intimate ones) if the partner does not get what he wants. These are examples of psychological and sexualized violence and abuse (ibid; Stark, 2009).

It is becoming increasingly important to note that online spaces are also being used for malicious communications by young people, from within an IPV relationship as a threat or tool of coercive control. An increasing problem in particular is so-called "revenge porn"[3], which is defined as;

> "the sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person without their consent and with the purpose of causing embarrassment or distress. The images are sometimes accompanied by personal information about the subject, including their full name, address and links to their social media profiles." (UK Home Office, 2015).

Such images may have been initially gathered consensually or through the use of coercive control, whereby a partner will either consensually or coercively encourage girls to share or record nude or sexual images, which are often imparted in a relationship of trust, but then are maliciously communicated by young perpetrators or the threat of such activity. Is used as a tool of coercive control.

Image-based sexual abuse has started to be recognized in legislation across Europe[4]. It is important to be aware that this may breach rules around child sexual abuse materials, as the distribution of images of people who are under 18 years old is technically a child protection issue.

Aligned to this, there are also concerns around the predatory use of technology by people who are seeking to engage in child sexual exploitation. This overlaps with intimate partner abuse because at times young people will believe that they are in an intimate partnership with somebody who will then coerce or abuse them in so-called "sextortion" cases. Research suggests that boys are at particular risk of being targeted. In many cases, they find themselves talking to a stranger online who is posing as another teen. The boy shares an explicit image of himself and the stranger then threatens to release it unless a sizable financial payment is sent, or another condition is met. There are emerging reports of young people taking their own lives as a result of this violence. Therefore, with young people in particular, the boundaries between sexual exploitation, child abuse and intimate partner abuse are more blurred and we need to ensure that staff has adequate training on the child protection implications of their work.

Approaching violence

Six principles to help young men reject violence

Working with young men who use violence against their partners can be structured on principles developed among others by Nick Todd and Allan Wade, Canadian psychologists who have worked with men who use violence and abuse in a response-based practice approach (Todd et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2007). These principles can be divided into three broad groups[5]:

- Principles about violence that you carry in the back of your mind.
- Principles that emphasize people's agency and capacity.

[3] It is important to note that while the term "revenge porn" will lis the most commonly used term, this tactic of abuse is correctly referred to as "image based sexual abuse".

[4] For more information on the implementation of legislation against image-based sexual abuse, see Mania, 2022

[5] Read more at https://www.responsebasedpractice.com.

- Principles to give space and build trust in the process.

Principles about violence that you carry in the back of your mind

1. "Violence is intentional and a conscious choice."

One way to support the client to acknowledge that his choice of violence is deliberate and conscious is by exploring his decision to use violence. The interaction is shared in detail, looking for deliberation and decisions. What does that decision-making process look like if we disassemble what has happened? The client will need to put his partner's resistance into words. The client's intentions, the different strategies to stifle, belittle or hide his partner's resistance, will become clearer, for the practitioner and for himself.

2. "The assumption of pre-existing ability"

The starting point in an effective dialogue with young men who have used violence is to assume they have the necessary skills to act non-violently. Most young men have managed to handle difficult situations or conflicts without violence. With this principle in mind, it is important to highlight to the client the pro-social actions that show his ability to respond non-violently. Almost all clients have a functioning value system and know what constitutes respectful behaviour. This means that they know the difference between reciprocal and one-sided actions, but also that they know how to choose which action. Therefore, it becomes important that practitioners acknowledge when the client makes worthy and respectful choices in relationships.

Principles for approaches that emphasize client agency

3. "The client who commits violence usually uses the 'language of effects'"

How the client positions himself in relation to his violence is closely related to how much responsibility he is willing to take for his actions (Todd et al., 2014). When the client explains his use of violence against his partner, he will frequently talk about the situation as if he had no options to act differently; his behaviour is the result of some external influence which he cannot control and what Wade et al. (2007) have called the "language of effects". Using external reasons they cannot control is an externalizing behaviour and a common way of trying to escape responsibility from their violent actions. Explanations can come in many different forms: "I was so drunk I didn't know what I was doing", "I am so depressed", "I got so jealous I couldn't stand it", "I can't control my emotions", "the porn addiction drove me" or "she provoked my reaction".

The client's explanations may be reasonable and understandable but cannot be the basis of his choice to use violence as a solution. Your focus as a practitioner is to help him realize and acknowledge that whatever the reason, he has no right to use violence. You should not accept that violence is an inevitable symptom of drunkenness or depression, and is instead a choice. One way to uncover agency is to disassemble violent situations by focusing on details that clarify his choices. Facilitating his way of coping with his partner will make him see that he is an actor in his own life, making choices for which he is responsible.

4. “Young men also talk about the intention to use violence (language of responses) which you need to acknowledge”

It is important to encourage conversations when the client chooses to talk about his violence as intentional, when he uses the “language of responses”. When he talks about what he wants to achieve by controlling, abusing or using violence, he is aware of the intentions of his use of violence. The practitioner will need to explore more, e.g. by asking questions such as “What did you want to happen at that exact moment?”, ”If you were given a chance to do this again: What would you choose to do then?” or “What do you wish you had done instead?” These questions allow the client to respond in terms of their agency and responsibility.

The practitioner will need to be attuned to moments of responsibility by being sensitive to when the client problematizes his behaviour. This may include comments such as “I shouldn't have said that”, “maybe it wasn't just horniness that drove me” or “I'm usually able to control my emotions”. Such moments are key events that you need to follow up and deepen. These are moments when the client shows that he realizes he has done something wrong and has a sense of what he should have done instead. These are good therapeutic moments on which to focus.

Principles to give space and build trust in the process

5. “Apologies are valuable”

You should assume that the client will make excuses or try to justify his use of violence. These excuses imply that the client understands he has acted badly and is trying to explain himself. This can be revealed by a question that is seeking confirmation that their actions are not so serious. For example, the client may ask “do you think that what I did is as bad as raping someone?”. On the one hand, it is easy to answer the question in a way that intends to make him feel better by minimizing his behaviour. On the other hand, the impulse may be to respond harshly, showing irritation and judgement and to reprimand them. Excuses, apologies, or minimizing comments show that the client is concerned that what he has done is wrong (Todd et al., 2014). Apologizing can be seen as part of the process of taking responsibility for his use of violence. The clients know when they are acting contrary to social norms and recognize when they have victimized their partner. Again, this points to the client’s deliberation in their choices of behaviour. As practitioners, we try to listen for the underlying message of the apology as evidence of change. Your task is to help him take ownership of his own story, in deciding how to act in any situation. Young men are the main character in their story of using violence.

6. “You aim for the client to correct himself”

To create a good alliance between you and the client and to promote lasting change, the client should be invited to correct himself. The practitioner listens and acknowledges the efforts towards change the client shows in relation to others. Insights that come directly from the client are more effective and lasting than changes that are driven by the practitioner. You can validate his self-corrections by confirming that he knows what is right and what he should do. The practitioner’s affirmations will motivate the client’s goals to continue to change and do things differently in the future.

A gender transformative approach

In violence prevention, interventions with a gender transformative approach are more successful in preventing violence (Barker et al, 2007). A gender transformative approach includes the notion that one important source of violence is the misuse of power and power imbalances between men and women as a group. This gender order and binary of male and female supports norms to which boys and young men relate to in the process of "doing" [6] masculinity. Oransky and Fischer (2009) provide this summary of what boys and young men are expected to manage:

- Constant exertion: Having to make a constant effort to appear tough and strong.
- Emotional constraint: Being emotionally constrained both in terms of one's own feelings and those of others.
- Heterosexism: The categorical avoidance of femininity and homosexuality.
- Social teasing: Expected to be able to tease other boys and be teased by other boys.

These four expectations of boys and young men relate to the forming of their masculinity and growing into adulthood. How boys and young men perform masculinity is linked to the situation and the relationship in which the "doing" of masculinities takes place. Those who try to live up to these expectations are more likely to resort to violence, criminality and suffer from mental illness (ibid). Other power structures such as race, class, sexuality and ability additionally impact how young men perform masculinity and interact with their surroundings and should be taken into account in counselling.

Growing up in this gender order where boys and men as a group dominate over girls and women as a group, encourages young men to take up space and assert themselves rather than give space and listen curiously (ibid). Their position in the gender order allows young men to expect to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Furthermore, this gender order reduces young men's willingness to "put themselves in other people's shoes" and reflect on how their needs and desires affect others (Holmberg, 1993).

The more traditional norms of masculinity can be considered in opposition to forming a healthy (hetero-)relationship based on equality. In intimate relationships, there is a need for sensitivity, curiosity and care for each other, but also the ability to be vulnerable in front of each other.

Being in an intimate partnership is appreciated and longed for by young people, and perhaps even more so by young men. One reason could be that in an intimate partnership they do not have to live up to these expectations of masculinity. In an intimate partnership, they can be vulnerable, responsive and present. The relationship can serve as a free zone where young men can rest from the external expectations of taking up space, showing off, being stoic and putting up with social teasing (Oransky &Fischer, 2009). This can easily lead to one's partner becoming the only person with whom young men feel they can be themselves. One way to cope with this can be to control their

[6] The reason we use the word "doing" relationships/"doing" masculinity is to show that relationships and gender can be described as processes that are done together with others, are changing and under constant negotiation. If you want to read more: West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. Gender & society, 1(2), 125-151., and https://sociology.iresearchnet.com/sociology-of-gender/doing-gender/.

partners; for example, through knowing where their partner is, who they are hanging out with, or picking up the partner to take them home. At first, these behaviours may be perceived as loving, but over time the care becomes restrictive to the partner.

When counselling young men, it is important to bring this desire for intimacy into the conversation in order to listen for similar reasoning and enable reflection on their expectations of intimate partnerships.

In counselling, the conversation is about:

- Role-taking: A way to break "self-centeredness" by discussing how the client thinks his actions will affect his partner.
    - Questions to find out how the client does "role-taking" in the relationship:
      How does the client solve negotiations with his partner?
      How curious is the client about his partner's thoughts and way of thinking?
      How much does the client engage in understanding how his partner thinks and reacts?
      How does the client assert his wishes?
      What does the client think he is entitled to in a love relationship when it comes to sexual and care availability of his partner?
- Relationship focus: Listening to and challenging unreasonable expectations the client has, especially related to the partner's sexual availability and capacity for care.
- Consent: Focusing on how he seeks consent in the relationship, especially when it comes to sexual interactions.

In addition to the gender order that influences how young men negotiate their intimate partnerships, other power structures such as race, class, sexuality, religion, ability and more must be considered to understand the clients' choices of using control and violence against their partners.

Healthy relationships

Furthermore, young people have little experience of intimate partnerships, which can make it difficult to determine and set limits against behaviours such as jealousy, control, and more. Their lack of relationship experience makes them more vulnerable to abusing partners or experiencing abuse (Korkmaz, 2021; Kruse et al., 2023).

When counselling young men, you should reflect with clients on what is needed in an intimate partnership, so that it can be experienced as dignified and respectful.

The model below is a way to illustrate what a healthy relationship looks like. The foundation of a relationship is *safety*; if a partner feels safe it is more secure to be open and honest in an intimate partnership. *Safety* is the basis for *honesty* and *trust* to grow. With *honesty* and *trust*, it is easier to *communicate*, contributing to *closeness* and intimacy (Todd et al., 2009).

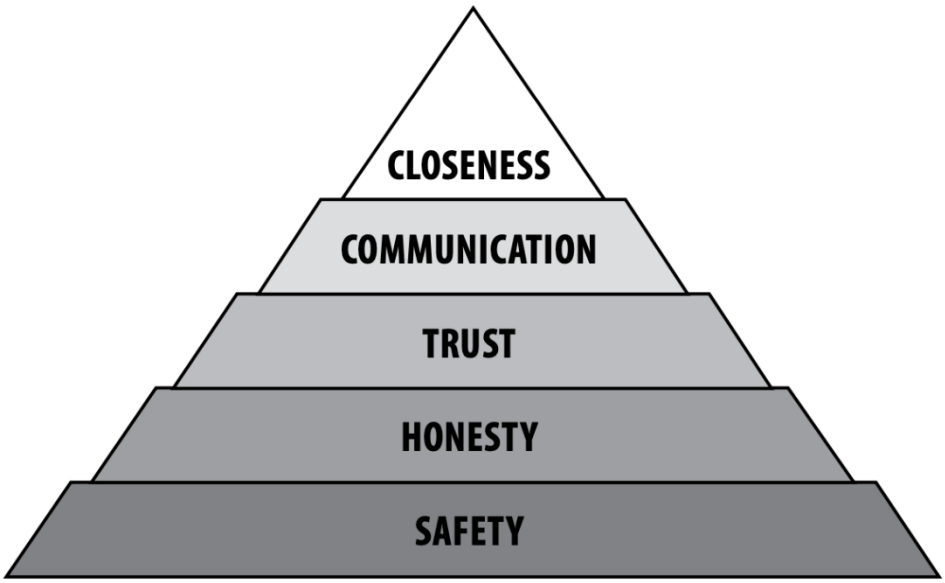


Figure 2: Todd, Ogden & Weaver-Dunlop (2009)

The aim of the "relationship pyramid" is to show the importance of safety for relationships to work. If a boyfriend has used violence against his partner, it is primarily that safety and accountability will need to be restored. Safety is not recreated by merely talking about what has happened, but by the client showing in their actions over time that he takes responsibility for his actions, has given the partner space to recover and that he has sought help to start the process of change. Young men must give their partner time and space to recover, for example by abstaining from sex, as well as encouraging their partner to talk to friends, family, and professionals about the violence and what he has put the partner through.

In the next conflict, the client must act safely by taking responsibility and listening, supporting their partner to say what they think. The client must understand that his partner will find it difficult to be completely honest. It will be a long process for the partner to trust that his change will be sustained. It is important to emphasize that in the long term, the best thing for the partner to do is to provide safety by leaving the relationship. Separation will create the space for both of them to genuinely discover what they need.

Practitioners responses

When working with young men who use violence in their intimate partnerships, you should consider the following principles:

Be genuinely curious

Practitioners should show a sincere interest in young people's experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Most young men who use violence know that they have done wrong and are afraid that they will be judged, which can make it even more difficult for them to talk about their actions (Gottzén, 2019; Uhnoo, 2011).

To support young men in talking, practitioners need to have a non-judgmental attitude. You need to ask gentle and open questions so the client understands that you are genuinely interested in how they will come to terms with their actions and what they have done.

Practitioners also need to ask specific questions about the violence. If you do not ask, they will likely not tell you, as a way to minimize and conceal their use of violence.

As stated above, using minimizing, concealing and other evasive strategies may be evidence of young men's remorse and concern about their use of violence. With this, you should validate client's prosocial and peaceful acts, to affirm that young people are capable of having relationships of dignity and respect. You should support young men to connect to hope and believe they are able to act well. You need to communicate that you believe in your clients' ability to use prosocial relationship skills in the future.

Find the balance in the dialogue

The challenge in counselling young men who have abused their intimate partners is to find the balance between providing support and confronting their harmful behaviour. The balancing act involves, among other things, balancing the often negative and judgmental social responses from the environment. As a practitioner, you need to convey confidence and hope that young people can change. At the same time, you need to distance yourself from the client's violent actions by confirming that violence is not the solution. Yet, the balance includes putting violence into words so that the client can take responsibility for his actions and is motivated to change.

This balancing act is not easy. If you become too focused on getting the young men to admit wrongdoing without taking their situation or context into account, their defensiveness will increase and the therapeutic alliance will be challenged. Your clients might need counselling regarding other difficult circumstances, such as their upbringing, friend group, mental health, or childhood abuse, etc. In counselling focused on abusive behaviour, you will likely not be able to offer the needed support. However, you should interrogate how these experiences influence their relationship behaviours and if necessary refer them to other counselling services related to the difficulties they raise. How to handle cases in which minors disclose abuse they experience at the hands of their parents should be included in your organization's child protection policy.

The client may also try to use his context as an excuse for his behaviour and his well-being will become the focus of the dialogue, rather than their accountability for violence. Todd et al. (2014) explained how in the everyday language of intimate partner violence "victims become perpetrators and perpetrators become victims". As a practitioner, you will find the balance by ensuring that the client has clarity about the use and direction of violence, while showing compassion for the context in which the client lives.

Practitioners should find this balanced approach with understanding and confidence in young men's ability to make different choices. In order for young men to be motivated, they need to be heard and taken seriously.

So, at the beginning of the contact, it can be helpful to let the client talk about their experience of the relationship and to externalize the problems, and build trust with you. It is also important, however, to shift the focus from their well-being to include their partner's experience of the situation. This shift in focus will start the client's reflection and challenge his choices of action. The

client may recognize that he is in control and responsible for his behaviour, regardless of what others do.[7]

Collusive Stance	Earlier in ←--- cycle of change or hyper-aroused	Neutral Useful Stance.	---→ Later in cycle of change or hypo-aroused	Persecutory Stance
You are like mates		You form an alliance with the side of them that wants to change		You are like enemies
There is little challenge or conflict	You work to get them ready for challenge	You make gentle but persistent invitations to them to challenge themselves	You can challenge them directly and effectively	There is a high level of challenge and judgement
You sit alongside them to look at others' wrong behaviour	You work on their behaviours that harm themself	You sit alongside them to look at their abusive behaviour	You work on their behaviours that harm others	You confront them with their wrongdoing
You empathise with them only as a victim of others	You empathise with them as victim sometimes for attunement and modelling	You empathise when they to feel things which could motivate them to stop their abuse	You use their victim experience to help them empathise with others	You don't empathise at all

Figure 3: Different approaches to client-practitioner relationships (Iwi & Eisenstadt 2020)

Address the distress

Violence is difficult to discuss, which can lead practitioners to be a bit cautious and rephrase violence instead of speaking of it in plain terms.

It is easy to use words that minimize the severity of the violence in order to get the conversation started. The violence slips out of the conversation, and suddenly the conversation is only about the client's explanations of "why he hurt his girlfriend".

Talking about the client's use of violence should feel slightly uncomfortable. If the conversation feels light and pleasant, likely the focus has shifted from their use of violence towards other matters such as how things have turned out for them. It can happen that practitioners allow violence to slip out of the dialogue because of their own discomfort.

Just as practitioners need to balance between collusion and confrontation, you need to find the balance between conversations that are too nice and those that are too uncomfortable. If you stay with the client in the discomfort of talking about abuse and violence, their shame, guilt and remorse will be activated as a first step towards wanting to change. As a practitioner, you can show the client that you will be there with them in their unpleasant and shameful feelings and tell them they are not alone. Together, you can explore his choices and intentions for creating safer relationships.

[7] Read more on https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Resources/Guidelines/sexual_violence_guidelines_final.pdf

Be careful with your words

One way for the practitioner to make it easier for the client to take responsibility for his violence is to be precise about the words you choose when questioning and summarizing the client's way of making sense of his actions.

If you refer to the client's violence in ambiguous and misleading terms such as "the incident", "the fight" or "the conflict" you are minimizing the client's actions and making one-sided acts of violence invisible (Wade et al., 2007). These words signal mutuality, i.e. two equal actors where violence goes both ways. In these cases, both partners may be found at fault or having caused the problem. However, when a young man crosses his partner's boundaries and works to overcome his partner's resistance, these actions cannot be referred to as a conflict between two equals.

If you use words like "affected by", "lost control" or "got into", client agency is removed and violence is minimized. This makes the client's agency invisible and it makes it difficult for the client to see and take responsibility for his choices. For example, using the client's word "kiss" when describing how he continues to press his mouth against his partner's diminishes the violence of his action. Compare these two different ways of expressing the same event:

- "So, you continued to kiss her, even though she indicated that she didn't want to?"
- "So, you continued to press your lips on her mouth, even though she indicated that she didn't want to?"

You don't have to "rename" the client's choice of words every chance you get, but asking detailed questions about what the client chose to do will help highlight the moment when a conflict turns into "one sided" acts of violence for which he is solely responsible. Your choice of words can support the client to acknowledge this.

Another of your tasks is to position the client as the active subject when you describe his violence. The violence is used by the client towards and against their intimate partner (Todd et al., 2014). We want to focus on the client as an active subject who chooses his actions:

- "When you chose to scare her by hitting the wall…"

Furthermore, in summaries and questions, you should put the client's intention and behaviour at the centre of your summary. Be aware that the client will use a "language of effects" where he presents his actions as a result of circumstances. Your role is then to see his actions as a response with an intention to get his will. You will notice when the client ascribes causation to his actions, when the cause is outside their control. This is the language of effects, where the client's behaviour is described as the result or effect of some external cause (Wade et al., 2007).

- Language of effects: "I had so much anxiety that I had to pull her down to the floor."
- Language of responses: "I pulled her down to the floor to make her stop complaining."

The focus on decisions, choices, responses and intention provides a clearer description of what the client wanted to achieve with his behaviour. The aim is to make him refer to himself as an actor who is able to decide his course of action, when he talks about his use of violence. If we consequently describe the client's actions in first person, the chances increase that he will open up to new ways of understanding his violent behaviour. This can he expressed as:

- “I regret that I wrote the message in that way.”
- “Maybe it wasn't just horniness that drove me.”
- “I can usually control my emotions.”

Such reflections are key events that you need to acknowledge and name as a start to take responsibility. It is a step for him to see that there are alternative ways to act. This is important steps towards changing his responses.

Follow up with questions:

- “What would you like to text next time?”
- “Tell me, what else besides horniness was going on inside your head then?”
- “How do you wish you had dealt with the emotions?”

By continuing to ask about the intention of his actions, we access his agency. These questions allow the client to respond in terms of agency and responsibility.

NOTE
To become aware of how you as a practitioner describe the client’s use of violence, you can get help from your colleagues. Together you can reflect on how you talk about and describe violence and strive toward clear and accurate accounts. Often, our choice of words is about working through the client’s defensiveness and wanting to make cooperation possible. We, too, may make use of the “language of effects” as a way to show that we understand their choices of behaviour. Practitioners may find talking about violence is easier when we use words and descriptions that tone down the client’s actions to get the conversation going. This may pull the practitioner off their course into collusion, minimizing and blaming the victim (Wade et al., 2007).

Remember: the client is the expert of his own life

When working with young men who use violence, we need to be aware of how we think about maturity and age because it will influence our approach.

Practitioners may understand age as divided into developmental phases, where the goal is for a child to become a “good”, i.e. a mature and responsible, adult. This might cause us to adopt an approach that aims to guide young people into becoming mature and responsible adults based on the idea that adults know better and are the authority and superior to children (Krekula, Närvänen & Näsman, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).

If we, as practitioners, view the position of children as one in which they are actors in their own lives, where they are seen as having control over themselves, knowing what they need to feel good, and as able to act in ways that meet their needs and care for others, something happens in our interaction. We begin to listen to young people in order to learn, but also to support young people’s attempts to understand themselves and the world around them. This approach recognizes the dignity and competency of children and young people (ibid).

We suggest you choose the second approach, as it supports the agency and capacity of young men who perpetrate violence against others. Most young men know when they have crossed the line, a recognizable boundary between conflict and abuse. They know that they get angry and act badly to express that anger or to dominate others. Young men also show their concern about the judgement of others, including their social network and practitioners (Gottzén, 2019). Young men want to be seen as worthy of respect from others; this implies that young men have an inner compass that needs to be strengthened. However, practitioners should be aware that this need to be respected can take on harmful aspects, where young men feel they will gain respect from peers and prove their masculinity through violence.

Many young men are familiar with being treated as a problem. They expect to be blamed for everything that goes wrong, which can contribute to a dismissive attitude towards adults and counselling. It is important to convey that you are an adult who wants to understand the client's experience and perspectives. If he feels appreciated and listened to, it will be easier to address his use of violence. Assuming that the client is an expert on his own life increases the chances that he will feel dignified and respected.

One way to convey that we believe in the client's competency is to genuinely explore how he makes sense of his violence, why he wants counselling, and how he describes the relationship with his intimate partner/date. Our role is to gain the client's trust so that we can challenge his ways of creating meaning of his violence and abuse.

Be open for his exposure to violence

A further challenge in counselling young men who have used violence is that they often have their own experiences of victimization. They may have experienced, for example, domestic violence, bullying at school or racism. They may also have been victimized by former partners or friends.

The fact that young men have this dual experience is something we need to bring into the counselling sessions. In one context the boy is the victim, but in another he is the one using violence against someone else. For some, the use of violence has resolved the feeling of powerlessness that comes from their own vulnerability (Isdal, 2001). Violence against others becomes a strategy of regaining power and control over one's life.

When violence is described as a form of defence or of gaining an upper hand, the responsibility for the abusive acts slips away. Young men may ascribe their victimization as cause for their actions, "If I had not been exposed to violence, I would not have...". As a practitioner, you must pay attention when the client denies responsibility and remember that the choice of violence has a purpose, such as to gain control. In counselling, you can help the client to discern in which interactions he is responsible, including his own acts of violence, and those where he has been the victim.

You may support the client's accounts of victimization by asking about and recognizing their acts of resistance (Wade et al., 2007). When listening to a client describing his experiences of abuse, note his responses and show compassion for how he has been harmed by others, recognizing these experiences are real but not the cause of his violence against others. Separating these two as distinct and maybe related, but not a cause and its effect, will provide a more useful conversation about responsibility and agency. In a sense, this is a form of youth empowerment, that they are in charge of themselves and have agency in their own life. These conversations treat young men with dignity and respect.

Focus on finding their motivation to change

In working with adult men, practitioners can motivate change through their clients' relationship with their children by asking them to reflect on the relationship with them, with questions such as "Are they afraid of you?", "Do they trust you?". In the case of young men, where they may not live with their partner and they rarely have children, other motivations will need to be explored.

So how are young men motivated to change? Young men seldom seek help to change their behaviour out of their own will. The reason for seeking counselling is often based on a social response from others, e.g. the partner, a parent, friends, their school or the police, that tell them that they are abusive and need help. These young men do not want to live with the label of "abusive boyfriend" and our approach may help them to become a safer partner.

In working with young men who have used violence, motivation work must keep the safety of victims as the first priority. Women-serving organizations and other organizations with safety as the first goal often recommend that victims separate from the abusive partner and end their intimate partnerships, which is an important guideline for working with young men who have used violence.

When young men come to counselling, their motivation is often to save the relationship. In light of how difficult it is to re-establish a relationship that is safe enough for the partner to set boundaries and communicate her wishes and needs, it is important to talk about separation to give the partner the space she requires to find out what she really needs.

Being out of the relationship may be a prerequisite for young men to clarify responsibility, wants and needs. It is important to communicate to young men that it is safer and more reasonable to expect that the relationship will end. In either case, the client's motivation for change cannot be placed on their partner and the decision to be safe must override the perceived reward of "having" the partner or not. These notions of ownership will distract the young men from a consistent change in behaviour related to being a respectful, caring safe person with others. The relationship is secondary to the young men's connection to their values and being a good human. Change comes first for themselves.

One approach in motivational work with young men who have used violence is inspired by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, 2019) which emphasizes the importance of developing a value direction in your life. The idea is that client's value direction works as an "inner compass" that guides them through difficult situations. The goal is to help the client develop a value direction about what kind of partner he would like to be in the future.

In the following exercises section, you will find an exercise about how to motivate the client towards change.

Exercises

The following is an excerpt from MÄN's broader guidelines for working with young men who act abusively towards their partners. Those guidelines were created so more practitioners who already work with young men could be prepared to explore conversations about control, abuse, and intimate partner violence with an aim towards dignity, safety and respect.

Below you will find a selection of exercises that can help you to start conversations with young men who have used violence against their intimate partners, using the principles and responses described in the previous section.

As the client group of young men is different from adult men, the selected exercises are about motivating change, helping him to recognize the violation and harm of abuse, supporting the client to revise their way of "doing" relationships by reflecting on their expectations of intimate partnerships, and finally, to help prepare the client for safe and secure sexual and intimate relations with others.

Let's start with the young man's motivation.

Motivation

Exercise: Value orientation and context

Step 1: Self-reflection

If you were to be in a relationship with yourself ...

- What would you appreciate?
- What would bother you?
- What would you miss?
- What would you have to change to 'get together' with yourself?

Step 2: Value orientation

Ask what kind of behaviour is characteristic of the boyfriend/partner he wants to be.

- Use the material from the self-reflection questions.
- Motivate him to formulate responses with concrete examples of behaviour that he wants to show in a relationship, as possible.
  For example, "being understanding" can be made more concrete with follow-up questions such as "What would that look like? Give me an example of when you used understanding? Where did you learn about that…?".
  Ask for the partner's perspective, especially in conflicts with the help of follow-up questions and reflections, such as "How do you think your girlfriend felt when she heard you say that?".

Write down the client's examples of behaviours on a flipchart/whiteboard/other tool that you can both observe.

Then draw a road sign around the behaviour that will give value directions for being a good partner. The road sign metaphor is useful and accessible to young men. For example, the stop sign may also help young men define their behavioural boundaries (others include staying in your own lane, not crossing the line, being in your driver's seat, etc.).

Example:

Alex came to counselling after his girlfriend demanded a change. Initially he downplayed his abusive behaviour, highlighted the circumstances of his problems, and wanted to discuss whether his partner's responses were reasonable. He tells me that he misses having a partner who listens without trying to change him and who shares their concerns at an early stage.

I started the conversation by asking him what it would be like to be in a relationship with himself. When he thinks about being together with himself, he realizes that he has to change how he handles his anger and how he acts in conflicts.

The next step is to create his value directions. He describes different qualities he wants to develop, such as being caring and safe. After follow-up questions, he developed his value directions like this: "managing my anger without taking it out on my girlfriend", "asking for my girlfriend's perspective, especially in conflicts", "expressing gratitude to my girlfriend" and "starting conversations when I feel the relationship is struggling".

I wrote those sentences on a flipchart and drew a sign around them with the title "Value - direction". I told him that this is the value-direction we will be working towards.

Step 3: The bus metaphor

The aim of the bus metaphor is to support the client in understanding that even if he has a lot of thoughts, feelings and experiences that make life/relationships difficult for him, he can choose to follow his inner compass, his chosen value direction.

To make this more understandable, a **bus** can serve as a metaphor for the client's life. He is the driver of the bus of life and the passengers are his thoughts, feelings and experiences so far in his life. The passengers want to go in different directions and interfere with his choice of route.

Introduce the bus metaphor. Here is an example of an introduction:

> "We could describe your life as a bus. You are the driver and steer your life forward and you decide which way to go in each situation. Most of the time you steer in the direction of your values, and it works fine. But in some situations, it is more difficult to steer where you want to go. On the bus there are some passengers: your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In difficult situations, there are some passengers who scream, almost demand, that you go in a different direction than the direction of your values. Sometimes you have steered the bus in the direction those passengers wanted. That's when you intimidated, hurt your partner and crossed their boundaries. You are always in control of the wheel, but when your thoughts, feelings, and experiences are screaming, it can be difficult to stay in control of the bus/your life. I would like us to find out what passengers you have on your bus that are screaming at you to steer in other directions than in the direction of your values."

Ask the client to put into words the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that make it difficult for him to steer towards his value orientation.

- Help the client by highlighting situations he has described as difficult. Ask about the thoughts, feelings, and experiences he relates to those situations.
- If he tells you a thought, ask about feelings and experiences related to it. Do the same if he talks about an experience or feeling.
- Register them as passengers on the bus.
- Name the passengers in a way the young man is comfortable with. The point here is not to teach him about affect, but rather to recognize challenging thoughts/feelings/experiences when he needs to pay extra attention to his behaviour.

Continued example:

I introduced the bus metaphor to Alex and asked him to verbalize the bus passengers who want him to steer in other directions. Alex started associating freely, naming anger and jealousy.

I highlighted a particular occasion when he described himself as very angry and asked what thoughts were running through his head at that time. “I wanted to be right”, Alex replied. When I asked what Alex's experience with anger was like, he told me how his father unleashed his anger growing up, so we also wrote “Dad” as a passenger.

I asked Alex to think of a time when he felt jealous and he shared his thoughts and experiences related to that time. He told me about his fear of being lonely and how he was excluded in high school. Alex described that at these times he thinks “I'm not good enough”.

Step 4: Summarize

Look together at the sign with value direction (the sign) and the client's bus with passengers.

Ask for the client's reflections.

Share your perspective on the exercise, highlighting the client as a key person in the change process. Here is an example of a summary:

> “We have developed a direction for the kind of boyfriend/partner you want to be and identified challenges that make it difficult to steer in that direction. It is not realistic to eliminate the passengers. No one can live a life without challenges or difficult situations in their relationships. Instead, we will focus on how you steer/how you act in these situations. The most important person on the bus is the driver. You are the driver and you will learn to steer safely. The training includes learning from the mistakes you made in the past and preparing you for the challenges ahead. When you can steer safely, which means acting in a way that does not harm your partner, even in difficult situations, it will be possible for us to try to understand your passengers better.”

Detailed interviews on violence and abuse

In order for the client to recognize and observe his use of violence and abuse, conversations with a focus on details in a violent situation can be helpful.

In detailed conversations with youth, the practitioner is alert to the clients efforts to minimize, conceal or give causes for the violence "they cannot control". These passive, effects based accounts of abuse and violence can be shifted to recognize that despite the circumstances, he chooses violence to achieve what he wants. Practitioners should focus on the young man's responses, how he chose to act and what his intentions were in the situation. Highlight his agency and he will also recognize how he can take control over the choices he has in a similar situation.

Remember; it is probably his first time talking about what he has done in detail – so you have to be patient, respectful and see the person behind the behaviour. Give time for the conversation to evolve, the practitioner holds the frame of the conversation so it feels safe for the client.

The method to get him to see his choices is called "movie recording".

Exercise: Movie Recording

In this exercise, the practitioner provides a thought exercise where the client imagines that there was a camera recording the situation that you and the client are going to explore. You and the client will watch the fictional recording together and go through the whole situation in slow motion. You have the "remote-control" and control the conversation by deciding when it is time to pause the story or switch to slow motion.

Step 1: Introduce the exercise

Here is an example of an introduction to the exercise:

> "I would like us to focus on the situation when Jasmine didn't want to talk to you after she gave you a blow-job.
> I think we should talk about this situation in detail to understand what happened.
> We can pretend that there was a camera in the room filming everything and we will watch the recording on an imaginary screen.
> You will tell me what is happening in the film.
> I will help you along by asking questions.
> Also, I have control of the remote control, which means that sometimes I will pause and ask you how you were thinking and sometimes I will ask you to describe in slow motion.
> It will probably be a challenging but helpful session.
> Does this sound okay?"

Step 2: Create a "here and now" feeling

Ask the client to describe...

- What the place looks like
- How the client and partner are positioned in relation to each other
- What the client's body and facial expressions look like
- What the partner's body and facial expressions look like

- When the situation takes place
- Whether there are others around

When the scenario is clear to both you and the client, press *play* on the imaginary remote control and ask the client to tell you what we see on the recording.

Step 3: Pause and describe in slow motion

When the client describes a key action, press *pause* and approach his story with the following questions:

- What did he choose to do?
- What did he want to achieve?
- Why didn't he do worse actions?
- How did the partner respond?

Let the client tell you how the situation continued in slow motion and continue to approach his story with the questions above.

> **NOTE**
> The question about why he did not do worse actions aims to engage him to comprehend his agency. In other words, that he is responsible for his actions. Often, he can reason about how he chose to control his actions, which opens the possibility of seeing that he chooses to let go of control instead of losing control.

Step 4: Summarize and reflect

When the "film" is done, connect back to the whole relationship.

Ask the client to reflect on how his actions in the current situation affect the relationship in general and the partner.

- What happened the next time you were in a similar situation? How did your partner act and how did you act?
- How have you communicated about what you exposed your partner to?
- How did you act immediately after what you did?
- How did the partner act immediately after what you exposed her to?

> **Important**
> The change between details and the whole is expected to help the client see that his choice of treatment in a specific situation is his responsibility. Partly, gain insight into the fact that this treatment will affect how the partner experiences the entire relationship – not just certain isolated events. Examine how he experiences the alternation between details and relational process.

Example: movie recording

Counsellor: Okay, this is where I take out the remote control and pause. What does the paused sequence look like?
Erik: We lie in bed before we go to sleep, and we cuddle.
C: What else can you tell me here to give me a sense of the situation? Are you wearing clothes? Does it smell a certain way? Are you alone? How do you cuddle? How does it feel in your body? Do you have a hard-on?
E: We are alone at home, and it smells the same as usual, it's an ordinary evening. I am naked and Jasmine is wearing panties. I'm the big spoon and I'm touching her breasts. I have a hard-on and feel horny.
C: Okay, so I press play on the remote control. What do you do then?
E: I pull down her panties and put my cock inside. After a while, she says it hurts, so I take my cock out and she gives me a blowjob instead.
C: Oh, let's pause before she says it hurts. You have pulled down Jasmine's panties and inserted your penis. What do you want to happen then?
E: For us to have sex, of course.
C: Does Jasmine want sex here too? What does she do when you pull down her panties?
E: I don't really know. She doesn't do much then, maybe says she's tired. But sometimes she gets going after a while.
C: And then you put your penis inside her. But you don't know if she consents or not?
E: I figure she's gonna tell me if she doesn't want to.
C: And that's when she says it hurts?
E: Yes. And then I take my cock out.
C: You said she gave you a blow job afterwards, how do you get there? Now I press slow-motion. What do you do, step by step?
E: I'm so fucking horny right now and I ask her to suck me off. I sit on top of her and bring my cock to her face. Then she starts sucking until I come. I was already pretty close to coming so it went pretty fast.
C: Where do you come?
E: On her face.
C: If we take the same steps but look at Jasmine, how does she respond to what you do?
E: She doesn't react much when I ask her to suck me off. That's why I sat on top of her. But she doesn't really seem to get it until I put my cock to her face, and then she starts sucking.
C: How did she respond to you coming on her face?
E: It was not so appreciated this time. She got sad and went to the bathroom. That's probably why she didn't want to talk later, it was too much. But I was so excited...by her...I couldn't control it.
C: But...you did control it when she said it hurt. How come you didn't continue to penetrate when she said it hurt?
E: I don't want her to hurt her.
C: Not hurting her is a good starting point as a boyfriend. But what I hear when we talk about this situation is that you have hurt Jasmine in ways other than physically. You did not seek consent, either before inserting your penis into her vagina or into her mouth. Instead of checking whether she agreed to oral sex, you sat on top of her and put your penis against her face. You left Jasmine no room to do anything but give in to your will. And what's more, you came on her face without checking if she was okay with it. Here you have crossed several of her boundaries. What do you think when I summarize it this way?
E: Well, everything went wrong. I didn't think much about it at the time, but now I see that she wasn't even in on it from the start.
C: I am thinking that Jasmine said that it hurt and that you listened then. The basis for sex is consent, saying or showing yes. Anything else is actually sexual abuse and Jasmine never said yes. On this night, physical pain was Jasmine's only way to influence your choices.
E: I haven't really thought about it that way. I've been thinking that she can kind of speak up.

Exercise: When do you cross the line?

One of the goals of counselling young men who have used abuse and violence is to have clients reduce their acceptance of abusive behaviour and recognize earlier those behaviours which are abusive. This exercise aims to establish a boundary for what is abusive behaviour for more than physical violence; *which of the actions that he used against his partner does he now perceive as controlling, abusive, and violent?*

The aim of the exercise is to support the client in recognizing these boundaries *before* he chooses to act in a controlling and abusive way towards his partner. We also want to reinforce the signals from himself and his partner that he should pay attention to decide when to stop. The exercise can also contest that he didn't know what the line was, and that rather the boundary and her resistance was overcome as the young man placed his will over her well-being and consent.

This exercise is based on the movie recording-exercise previously described.

Step 1: Clarify the interaction

Use a specific situation. Write down what he did and how his partner responded.

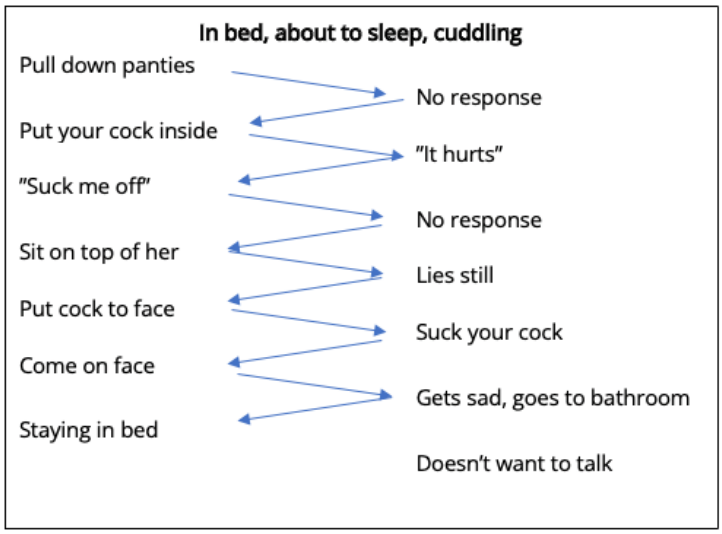
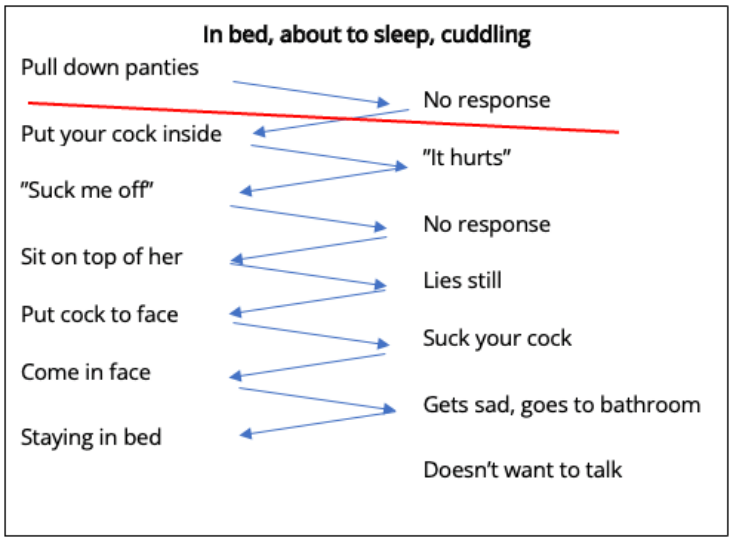


Figure 4: Example

Step 2: When do you cross the line?



- Ask the client to draw a line where he thinks he crossed his partner's boundaries. Where he should have backed off instead of continuing to push and enforce his will.
- Ask him to explain why the line is there.
- Ask the client where he thinks his partner considered he crossed the line.
- Presumably his boundary has been shifted by your conversation. Ask him to reflect on the shift.

Step 3: After he has crossed the line:

- Ask the client what he thinks his partner's needs are after he has crossed the line?
- What choices did he make?
- How did they correlate to his partner's needs?

Step 4: Next time he is approaching the line:

What could he do instead of crossing the line?

- Ask for 1-3 realistic alternatives based on what he experienced at that moment.
  Make it clear that you are not looking for the right answer but rather realistic alternatives, e.g. going to the bathroom and masturbate. Ask more about what the partner wants, etc.
- Practice those alternatives in a way that is helpful to the client. Through role play, writing a list, or describing the alternatives in detail.

Step 5: Summing up

In the exercises above, you focused on the client's abusive behaviour based on specific situations. It is equally important to also introduce the perspective of how the violence affects the dynamics of the relationship. The client may rarely choose to recognize the latent violence but remind him that his partner does and has provided covert and overt resistance to let him know.

Possible questions you could ask to further dig into these aspects:

- How have these situations affected the feeling of safety for his partner in their relationship?
- Have they talked about the situations?
- How has he then responded to his partner?
- Have they had sex since this situation?
- How comfortable has his partner been in recent post-assault sexual situations?

"Doing" relationships

The inspiration for the following exercise comes from queer communities talking about how expectations of (traditionally heterosexual) partnership can be limiting.

Young men can usually describe challenges such as jealousy, worrying that the partner's friends are more important than him, or that he and his partner experience different levels of sexual desire. When describing the challenges, they often compare their experiences to a concept of how things should be, such as "she shouldn't write to other guys", "my company should be enough for her", or "we should have sex every time we meet".

It is rare that young men themselves realize that their expectations are unreasonable Therefore it is important to have a conversation where he is invited to reflect on his expectations of romantic relationships and make him aware of that he has sometimes used violence to achieve his expectations.

Exercise: How do I want my intimate partnership to be?

The purpose of the exercise is to challenge expectations that are limiting the life space of partners. The first step is for the client to articulate his expectations of how intimate partnerships should work.

The practitioner's role is to ask questions and listen for unreasonable expectations. The aim is also to make the client aware that intimate partnerships can be organized in many ways. In this context, we want to make him aware that he is "doing" intimate partnerships based on his expectations and is thus responsible for how it turns out.

You need to follow up with questions such as, "How have you developed your expectations? Couldn't it be done differently?" In other words, questions that make him review his expectations fully. If his expectations are unreasonable and/or offensive to the partner, you will need to examine if he is aware of how his partner is responding.

The themes listed below are themes that are usually associated with love, intimacy, and relationships. If you think a theme is missing - add it. If you think a theme is unnecessary - remove it. The questions are designed to help crystallize what you need to explore and deepen in order to enable the client's future relationships to function with respect and dignity.

Step 1: Instructions

We present two versions of this exercise:

- Version 1: Choose themes from the topics below and write them as "conversation cards". The client draws cards from the pile, and you talk about the topics in the order he draws the cards.
- Version 2: Draw the headings you choose on a whiteboard/flipchart and lead the conversation using the topics as a common agenda. Under each topic, write down supporting words that reflect the client's expectations. In this way, a visual picture of the client's expectations of intimate partnerships will emerge during the conversation.

During the conversation, you should be curious, and if you need, challenge his expectations about intimate partnerships. Listen for respect for the partner's opinions, wishes, and freedom and also listen for expectations which are limiting and controlling for the partner.

These three questions will help you:

- How have you reached these expectations?
- How do you think your partner feels about your expectations?
- Is it in line with your value-direction?

Take your time, be patient…don't rush. Allow the conversation to develop, be curious and extend over several sessions if needed.

Questions about exclusivity

- Do you want one partner at a time? Do you want open relationships? Do you want polyamorous relationships?
    - What does the partner want? Why are they for or against these types of relationships?
- How do you interpret fidelity in an intimate partner relationship? What does fidelity mean to you? Why is fidelity important or not important?
    - When do you think your partner crosses the line of infidelity - for example, texting with another person, flirting, kissing, having sex, etc.?
    - Do you and your partner have the same limit?

Questions about jealousy

- What do you think jealousy is? Give examples of jealousy.
- How can you show or talk about jealousy with your partner?
- When does jealousy become too excessive?
- What is the function of jealousy? How does jealousy relate to relationships?

Questions about caring

- When do you want to be comforted, supported, or cared for by your partner?
- When it's come to caring - when do you get disappointed?
- Do the same expectations apply to you as to your partner?

Questions about sexual practice

- Do you expect to be able to touch your partner's body whenever you feel like it?
- Can your partner touch you when she wants to?
- Do you have the right to physical intimacy (hugging on the sofa, spooning, touching the neck, touching each other, etc.) when you are together? Do you need to ask beforehand?
- Is it obvious that sex should be part of a relationship?
- Can you demand to have sex with your partner?
- How often can your partner say no or yes to sex?
- Is it possible to negotiate certain acts of sex, such as having less penetration?

- Can an intimate partner relationship be sexless?
- What role does sex play?
    - Is sex a part of physical intimacy, or is it the only physical intimacy? Is sex the only time you are physical with each other?
- How to relate to previous sexual experiences? Should you talk about your sexual history, or cross it out?

Questions about former partners

- Is it okay to have contact with your ex?
- Is it okay to be close friends with your ex-partner?
- How much can you share about exes and previous relationships? What kinds of things are reasonable to share?
- When does it get tricky?
- Is there any difference between you or your partner if contacted by your ex?

Questions about friends

- How do you feel about your partner telling their friends about what's going on in your relationship? Is it okay for them to talk about what is not working?
- Is it okay for you to tell your friends about what's going on in your relationship?
- How do you feel about your partner hanging out with their friends instead of you? When does it become a problem?
- How do you feel about your partner going out and partying without you?
- Do you expect to spend time with each other's friends?

Questions about family and relatives

- How do you feel about spending time with your family or relatives? How close should they be?
- What can you tell your family or relatives about your relationship?
- What can family or relatives interfere with?
- Is it okay to opt out of spending time with each other's families? Is it okay to go spend time with them when you want to?
- How to deal with this if you have different expectations?

Questions about social media

- Should you share passwords with each other for social media accounts, mobile phones, and computers?
- Is it okay to go through each other's smart phones?

- Is it okay to have apps so you can follow where the other person is or what they are doing?
- When does it get tricky?
- Should you respond to messages or calls immediately?

Step 2: Follow up

If the partner's responses to the client's expectations have not been addressed, ask the following questions:

- Have you discussed your expectations of intimate partnerships with your partners - or is it something you have made assumptions without discussion?
- Have your expectations been formed together with your partner?
- How can you respectfully negotiate different or changing expectations?

If he has discussed his expectations with partners, find out how his wishes have been received by his partner, such as what have they found similar or different. How did these conversations go?

If the client has not addressed his expectations of relationships, how come he has not talked about this with his partners?

Finally, you can return to the client's value direction, in other words, how he wants to be as a partner:

- How does his expectations of relationships relate to his value orientation?
- What clashes, what helps, and what does he need to change?
- Is he prepared to change his expectations?

Sexual consent

In counselling with clients who have used violence against their partners, you can assume that clients have also violated their partner's bodily integrity. If the client is still with the partner he has abused, it will be important to emphasize abstinence on his behalf. He needs to hand over all initiative for sexual interactions to his partner to give them a chance to get in touch with her own desire for physical intimacy and pleasure. And you have to start with how he understands, seeks and gives consent.

If you ask your client, he would probably say that he already knows what consent is, but the conversations about his relationship show the opposite. The client needs to talk about what consent is in practice in great detail in order not to cross anyone's sexual boundaries again.

More exercises on safe and secure sexual interaction can be found in WWP EN's guidelines for working with sexualized violence.

Exercise: Reading sexual signals in different situations

The exercise consists of three situations: positive sexual experience, negative sexual experience, and dealing with rejection. Go through each scenario and ask the client to think about their sexual experiences with partners.

Step 1: Positive experience of sexual interaction

Ask the client to tell you about a sexual situation with a partner that he felt was rewarding, in which both enjoyed it, and both felt satisfied. Ask him to tell the story from the initiation of sexual contact, to making out, and on to sexual interaction, such as embracing sex.

Refer to these questions when talking about the situation:

- What made the sexual situation enjoyable?
- What was the build-up of the sexual situation?
- What were the actions or signals from your partner that you took as a sign that something sexual was going on?
- What was it in the interaction that made you interpret that you could take an initiative to kiss them or touch them in a sexual way?
- How did you notice that they appreciated your initiatives?
- What determined that you take more initiatives?
- How did your partner take initiative?
- How did it feel when you were done? How did it feel in your body and what were your thoughts? What did you say to each other? How did the contact feel after you were done?

When you wrap up the conversation, it's important to emphasize that he knows when things are going well and he can read his partner. Reinforce that he can and does have respectful sexual experiences.

Step 2: Negative experience of sexual interaction

Ask the client to tell you about a sexual situation with his partner that he experienced as less positive, where he suspects that his partner offered sex without fully wanting it, or maybe both of them did. Ask him to tell you in detail what happened and how it felt.

Use the questions below:

- What is the build-up to the sexual situation?
- What were the actions or signals that you took as signs that the situation/sex was not good/pleasant for the other person or for you?
- What was it in the interaction that made you experience the sex as less good/less pleasurable?
- Do you think your partner also experienced the situation as you did?
- What signals did the partner show? Did they say something/show with their body?

- How did you respond to these signals?
- How did you express your reluctance to have sex/that you didn't want to? How did the partner respond to your reluctance?

When summarizing the conversation, it is important to highlight that he seems to have sensed hesitations and “no” signals. If he didn't listen to them, encourage him to reflect on why and ask what he can do the next time he senses these signals. Encourage him that he has a compass that senses and reacts and that responding to his intuition is a good start to changing his way of seeking consent.

Step 3: Coping with sexual rejection

Further explore how the young man deals with being rejected by a partner:

- Which signals could be “no” signals?
- Which “no” signals are easiest for you to perceive? Which ones can be easy to miss?
- How do you respond if someone denies your sexual advances?
- Do you sometimes pretend that you didn't understand a “no”, even though you actually understood? What do you think might be the reason?
- How easy is it to say “no” to you?
- Can partners be afraid to say “no” to you?
- If we switch roles, so that you are the one who rejects a sexual proposal:
  - How does it feel to reject a sexual proposal?
  - How comfortable are you at saying “no”?
  - How easy/difficult is it for you to say “no” or express your reluctance?
  - When are you afraid to say “no”? What are you afraid will happen?

Step 4: Summarize all three scenarios

- Which signals do you find easy to perceive?
- Which signals do you find difficult to perceive?
- Which are the signals that you chose to ignore?
- What do you need to improve in your interaction so that your partner's consent is truly genuine?

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