

## Can an abusive partner really change?

While people do have the capacity to change, they need to deeply want to and be committed to all aspects of change in order to begin to do so — and even then, it's a lot easier said than done.

In discussing why abusers abuse, it's clear that a lot of the causal factors behind these behaviors are learned attitudes and feelings of entitlement and privilege, which can be extremely difficult to truly change. Because of this, there's a very low percentage of abusers who truly do change their ways.

One part of changing may involve an abusive partner willingly attending a certified batterer intervention program that focuses on behavior, reflection and accountability. At the Hotline we don't recommend couples counseling, anger management, substance abuse programs or mental health treatments for abusers to learn about and deal with their abusive patterns (although oftentimes these can helpfully supplement a batterer intervention program).

# About The Hotline

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is the only national organization that directly serves victims of domestic abuse, their friends and family. Highly-trained, expert advocates are available 24/7 by phone to talk with anyone who is affected by physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or financial abuse. The Hotline also offers an online chat service at [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org) that is available every day from 7 a.m. – 2 a.m. CST.

Our services are **completely free and confidential**. We offer lifesaving tools, immediate support and hope to empower victims to break free of abuse.



**CALL 24/7**

1.800.799.SAFE (7233)



**TTY 24/7**

1.800.787.3224



**CHAT**

every day 7 a.m. – 2 a.m. CST

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**FREE  
CONFIDENTIAL  
24/7/365**



**1.800.799.SAFE (7233)**





*People can change  
when they genuinely  
want to and devote  
themselves to doing so.*

*The big question is  
“How?”*

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## How can abusers change?

- Admitting fully to what they have done
- Stopping excuses and blaming
- Making amends
- Accepting responsibility and recognizing that abuse is a choice
- Identifying patterns of controlling behavior they use and the attitudes that drive their abuse
- Accepting that overcoming abusiveness is a decades-long process — not declaring themselves “cured”
- Not treating improvements as vouchers to be spent on occasional acts of abuse (ex. “I haven’t done anything like this in a long time, so it’s not a big deal.”)
- Developing respectful, kind, supportive behaviors
- Carrying their weight and sharing power
- Changing how they act in heated conflicts
- Accepting the consequences of their actions (including not feeling sorry for themselves about the consequences, and not blaming their partner or children for them)

## Batterer Intervention & Prevention Programs

A BIPP is different than other counseling and intervention programs in that it centers around complete accountability, victim safety and education about abusive behaviors. Certified batterer intervention programs have a wide range of durations, varying from a weekend retreat to 52 weekly meetings.

People enter into BIPPs for various reasons. Many are required by judges to attend as a condition of probation or as part of a sentence. Others enroll to try to save a relationship and keep their partner from leaving. **The best reason for joining a BIPP is genuine desire to change.**

These programs teach all about abuse: the range of coercive or abusive behaviors, common abusive tactics and the effects that abuse has on partners and families. Participants learn about healthy relationships and non-violent behaviors. BIPPs also challenge pre-existing beliefs that abusive partners might have, such as entitlement/ownership and gender roles. The program should be structured around a clear understanding that abusive behavior is chosen, and that while substance abuse or mental health issues can occur simultaneously, they should be addressed through separate services.

As a result of attending this type of program, the abusive partner would ideally learn how to:

- effectively communicate with their partner instead of being emotionally, verbally, or physically abusive
- support their partner’s decisions even if they disagree
- encourage their partner to spend time with friends and family
- build trust and empathy within the relationship
- refrain from using coercive actions to control and intimidate their partner
- identify ongoing harmful behavior
- behave respectfully toward their partner

### Why not Anger Management?

People who are abusive often express anger toward their partner, but having an anger problem means they would also behave the same way toward friends, family, coworkers and others – not just their partner. Examining what triggers their anger can reinforce the idea that the victim is responsible for the violence. This takes the abuser off the hook for their actions.

### Why not Couples Counseling?

Abuse is not a “relationship” problem. Couples counseling may imply that both partners contribute to the abusive behavior, when the choice to be abusive lies solely with the abusive partner. Focusing on communication or other relationship issues distracts from the abusive behavior, and may actually reinforce it in some cases. Additionally, a therapist may not be aware that abuse is present and inadvertently encourage the abuse to continue or escalate.