



News Release

For more information contact:

Dr. Gary L. Wood or Dr. Patricia N. Alexander
(813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County, Florida)
(727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County, Florida)
(800) 870-0392 (Out-of-area)

STICKS AND STONES... BUT NAMES WILL NEVER HURT?

Tampa, Fla. (November 1, 2008). There is a long held saying that “sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you” that isn’t accurate when it comes to abuse in relationships. And currently as we experience some significant economic stressors, a tendency to abuse may escalate. Relationship abuse occurs when an individual or individuals in a relationship or marriage attempt to dominate and/or control the other by using emotional intimidation. The goal of such intimidation is to wear down the other in order to achieve control. While many think of relationship abuse as being primarily physical, there are different types of abuse including emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Many abusers behave in ways that include more than one type of abuse. Such abuse is not gender specific (i.e., the abuser may be male or female) although women predominate in terms of being the one abused. Abuse occurs within all types of relationships (i.e., heterosexual as well as same-sex relationships), ethnic groups, and socio-economic status.

Research tends to indicate that such abuse is often a deliberate choice made by the abuser. How can this be so? Because usually the abuse is directed only toward a certain individual or individuals and can usually be brought to a halt if a potential witness arrives. When the abuse becomes physical, the abuser often hits areas where the bruises will not be evident.

So how do you know if you are in an abusive relationship? Ask yourself if any of the following questions apply to you. Do you

- **frequently feel afraid of your partner?**
- **avoid addressing certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?**
- **feel as if you can't do anything right?**
- **believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?**
- **wonder if you're the one who is responsible for what is happening?**
- **feel emotionally numb or helpless?**

Does your partner

- **have a bad or unpredictable temper?**
- **constantly have to know where you are and what you are doing?**
- **actually show up to see if you are where you say you are?**
- **treat you so badly that you are embarrassed for your friends or family to see**
- **ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?**
- **fault you for their own abusive behavior?**
- **act jealous and possessive?**
- **control where you go or what you do?**
- **keep you from seeing your friends or family?**
- **see you as property or an object rather than as a person?**
- **threaten to commit suicide if you leave?**
- **force you to have sex?**

- **destroy your belongings?**
- **limit your ability to leave by controlling finances, the phone, or the car?**

Remember that abuse may be more than physical. Emotional or psychological abuse chips away at an individual's feelings of self-worth and independence to the extent that one feels trapped in the relationship. One can begin to believe there is no way to survive outside of that relationship. Yelling, name-calling, blaming, criticizing, shaming, intimidation, and controlling behavior are all types of emotional abuse.

Physical abuse is the use of physical force to injure or endanger another. Such abuse may include hitting, slapping, punching, grabbing, restraining, choking, throwing objects and use of a weapon. Sometimes the abuser forces the other to engage in unwanted, unsafe or degrading sexual activity as well. Even if one is in a relationship where one has had consensual sex in the past, the abuser can use sex as another means of control.

And last but not least, the abuser can also control one's independence and way of getting out by affecting the economic or financial status of the other by withholding money, preventing the other from working or even sabotaging the other's job by making the person miss work.

There is a known cycle to such abuse:

- **First the abuser acts in an aggressive or violent manner in order to show the victim "who is boss."**
- **Second the abuser feels guilt: this guilt is not over what has been done to the victim but concern over being found out and facing the consequences.**
- **Next the abuser rationalizes what has been done by making excuses or even blaming the victim.**
- **The abuser then may act as if nothing happened or even be overly attentive in a positive manner. This intermittent reinforcement keeps the victim "hooked"**

into the roller coaster of emotions and belief that the abuser is really sorry and will change.

- **the abuser begins to fantasize about future abuse and develops a plan to set up a situation where the abuser can justify further abuse**

This cycle continues and repeats until someone seeks help and is able to get out of the relationship safely. Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don't have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. So, if you are faced with being in a relationship that is abusive and are not sure where to turn or what you should do, help is just a phone call away.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.