

PROJECT SARAH PRESENTS

A Conference for New Jersey Rabbanim

CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE FOR DISCLOSURES

Sunday, October 23

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PROJECT SARAH
Stop Abusive Relationships At Home

Resource Guide

Domestic violence and sexual abuse are human problems, not uniquely Jewish ones. As a human problem, responses to sexual abuse are subject to the same fallibilities and oversights present in any human endeavor. As a human problem, statistics on the prevalence of abuse do not discriminate between religion, culture, or ethnicity. Such statistics include:

- 1 in 4 Women and 1 in 9 Men experience "Severe Intimate Partner Physical Violence."
- 1 in 3 Women and 1 in 4 Men experience "Physical Violence" in their intimate relationships.
- 48% of Women and Men experience "Psychological Aggression" in their intimate relationships.*

** U.S. Department of Justice Special Report
Bureau of Justice Statistics April 2014
Nonfatal Domestic Violence, 2003–2012
Jennifer L. Truman, Ph.D., and Rachel E. Morgan, Ph.D., BJS Statisticians*

What is Abuse?

At the heart of abuse is an abuse of power and control. While various methods such as intimidation, emotional abuse, physical abuse, etc. may be deployed at various times, all of these actions are rooted in a sense of establishing and maintaining power and control in the relationship.

Within various cultures and religions, aspects of power and control may take form in different ways. Due to aspects of Halacha, power and control in a Jewish relationship can be established and maintained through other methods as well.

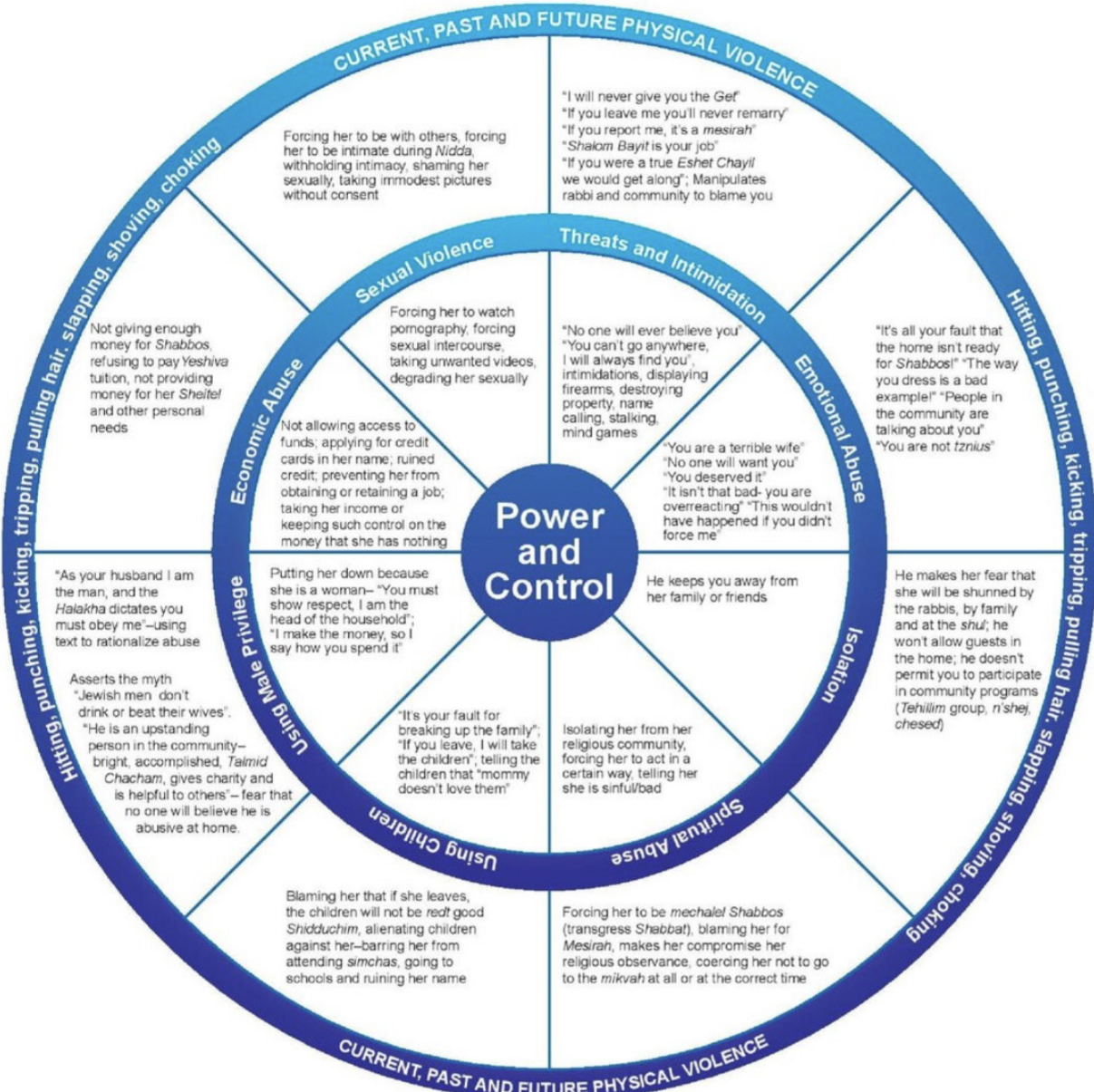




PROJECT SARAH

Stop Abusive Relationships At Home

Power and Control Wheel for the Jewish Woman



Adapted from original wheel by:
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How Does Abuse Affect Victims?

Domestic violence affects all aspects of a victim's life. When abuse victims are able to safely escape and remain free from their abuser, they often survive with long-lasting and sometimes permanent effects to their mental and physical health; relationships with friends, family, and children; their career; and their economic well-being.

Emotional Symptoms

- Feel isolated
- Feel depressed
- Feel helpless
- Be embarrassed of their situation
- Fear judgment or stigmatization if they reveal the abuse
- Deny or minimize the abuse or make excuses for the abuser
- Still love their abuser
- Withdraw emotionally
- Distance themselves from family or friends
- Be impulsive or aggressive
- Feel financially dependent on their abuser
- Have anxiety
- Have suicidal thoughts
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Be hopeful that their abuser will change and/or stop the abuse
- Have religious, cultural, or other beliefs that reinforce staying in the relationship
- Fear cultural, community, or societal backlash that may hinder escape or support
- Feel like they have nowhere to go or no ability to get away
- Fear they will not be able to support themselves after they escape the abuser
- Have children in common with their abuser and fear for their safety if the victim leaves relationships.



Physical Symptoms

What we see is the body begin to break down in the face of cortisol and other stress-related hormones that are released over years of unresolved trauma. One of the first indicators that drives individuals to seek medical help is usually a physical ailment. Often one experiences a few health issues, and ends up medicating the physical symptoms, but the underlying cause of trauma may never be treated.

Some predominant symptoms are:

- Migraines
- Bladder problems
- Hypertension
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Depression
- Chronic fatigue
- TMJ
- Irritable bowel
- Fibromialgia
- Non-epileptic seizures
- Diabetes (chronic stress makes it more difficult to control)

The Importance of the Rabbi

When allegations of abuse or concerning behavior are made, they may be communicated privately to a trusted member of the institution, most often a rabbi. The 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review stated that "during a trauma, victims are five times more likely to seek the aid of clergy than any other professional. Clergy are people they know and trust."

Clergy have a unique role in combating domestic abuse: To speak out; to listen; to strengthen spiritually; to refer to local resources; and to create safe environments within their institutions. Jewish Women International's "Needs Assessment: Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community" (2004) confirmed that clergy play an important role in supporting families experiencing abuse, and that women experiencing abuse are more likely to turn to clergy for support and guidance if they or he has publicly acknowledged that domestic abuse is experienced in Jewish homes and families. Additionally, Jewish Women International reported in A Portrait of Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community that "Women are more likely to go to a rabbi for help if the rabbi has previously spoken out about the issue [of domestic violence]."

The rabbi may very well be the first person with whom the person being abused shares his/her experience. This is a sacred and potentially life-saving conversation – a matter of pikuach nefesh. When a person confides that s/he is a victim of abuse, the recipient of the disclosure does not need to be sure that abuse has indeed taken place in order to act effectively, but does need to know how to create trust and security in the conversation so that support can be provided to the individual and make appropriate referrals to a direct service agency. In the moment of a disclosure, the recipient's only concern must be to believe and support the individual; Moreover, research tells us that being believed and supported at the moment of disclosure is a protective factor for victims that helps them develop greater resiliency in the long-run.

Statistics show that 20-40% of survivors have no negative effects later in life. This is dependent on the response of caregivers. If someone was supported, protected, validated and responded to in a therapeutic way, the individual has a higher chance of resiliency.



Themes within Abuse

Those who sexually abuse others are often exemplary community members in every other respect. If we persist in portraying sex offenders as ALL bad, we will overlook most sex offenders, and institutions will be unable to react responsibly when confronted with allegations of abuse against a person who has clearly done much good.

Victims may not act the way we expect them to act. The fact is that there is no "right" way to be a victim, and every victim reacts to the trauma of abuse differently. Like children, adults who disclose abuse must overcome tremendous internal and external pressures to do so. If they do eventually disclose, their many years of silence are often taken as evidence that the disclosure is untrue. When children do disclose, they often do so accidentally or tentatively and may later recant the disclosure even though the abuse happened. In a study of children with a sexually transmitted disease – proof of their having been sexually abused – more than half denied that they were abused and instead protected their abuser.

Do's and Don'ts

If someone discloses abuse to you, it is critical that you:

- Be an active and empathetic listener – take them seriously. Do not rush them – allow them to tell their story at their own pace and do not interrupt them; anticipate leaving enough time for a conversation when scheduling your meeting. Let them know that you are available for further conversations, if they so choose.
- Be aware of your own feelings, and control your visible and/or verbal reactions to what you are hearing so as not to upset, influence or silence them.
- Acknowledge their courage in coming forward. Consider that you may only be hearing a small part of a larger story. Be non-judgmental, respectful, and assure them of the confidentiality of your conversation.
- Assure them that they are not alone, neither as a person nor as a Jew. Affirm their perceptions of the situation by sharing that similar experiences take place in other families, including other Jewish homes.
- Assure them that they are not to blame – let them know that abuse is never the fault of the victim.



- Assure them that Judaism does not condone abuse. Offer spiritual counseling, prayer, and meditation as a way of supporting them.
- Acknowledge that psychological and emotional abuse are debilitating and traumatic.
- Do not rationalize the unacceptable behavior.
- Be supportive but do not tell the person being abused what to do or what you would do in their place. Telling them what to do echoes their experience at home, and may also have unintended legal consequences. Hear what they are willing to do and help them to weigh their options.
- Offer a 'warm' referral to Project SARAH (hereforyou@projectsarah.org, (973)777-7638 x300) or another domestic violence service agency, and/or suggest a call to a hotline or helpline.
- Encourage the person to make a safety plan with a domestic violence advocate.
- Support and respect their decision to protect themselves (and children) with financial assistance, if possible, as well as with emotional, social and spiritual support.
- Keep the disclosure confidential.
- Recognize that this initial conversation may be followed by a period during which you do not hear from them. It may take more time for their story to emerge. Do encourage further conversation but do not pressure them to schedule a follow-up meeting. If they are still with their abusive partner, ask them how they would like you to follow up. Do not initiate contact without prior permission from them, i.e. do not call them, even on their cell; do not email or text them, or approach them in public.
- Abuse generally takes place in private – when the abuse is public or publicly visible, it may be a sign of increasing lethality. Guidance from domestic violence advocates and additional input from the person being abused should be sought.
- Don't make an appointment for the victim to speak with a domestic violence counselor – just give them the contact information. When they are ready to reach out for more help, they will know who to call.



Resources

The following resource links are available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rSnziye3RzXCCopw7FLbC-o7IWb9ovjv?usp=sharing>:

Resources Include:

- "Institutional Abuse in the Jewish Community" by Shira Berkovitz
- "Sexual Abuse in the Orthodox Jewish Community: An Analysis of the Roots of the Failure to Effectively Respond to the Crisis" by Rabbi Yosef Blau
- "Breaking the Silence: Sexual Abuse in the Jewish Community" by Dr. Yitzzy Schechter
- Jewish Women's Initiative Clergy Guide 2022
- Dr. David Pelcovitz Presentation on Trauma Informed Care for Clergy:
- Jewish Women's Initiative Domestic Violence in the Jewish Community 2021 Needs Assessment
- Article on Forum Takana

