

# ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

## BEHAVIORAL DEFINITIONS

1. Avoids displeasing or angering the partner at all costs (e.g., misses classes or work, stops socializing with friends, or yields control of personal time and money to partner).
2. Feels intimidated by interactions with partner leading to pervasive worry, anxiety, and/or fear.
3. Attempts to control others and the environment to prevent anything that could serve as a catalyst for the partner's anger/violence.
4. Experiences feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and shame in reaction to the partner's constant criticism, belittling comments, and/or demeaning demands.
5. Feels invisible and/or unworthy because ideas, interests, and needs are ignored or dismissed by the partner.
6. Excuses the partner's abusive physical and sexual behavior and blames self for creating a situation in which the partner could not control rage and violent impulses.
7. Sustains physical injuries at the hands of the partner and lies to medical personnel and friends about the origin of the injuries.
8. Isolates self from family, friends, and campus personnel due to feelings of embarrassment and fear.
9. Believes that it is impossible to leave the relationship due to financial, emotional, and/or social dependence on the partner.
10. Believes that it is impossible to leave the relationship due to the partner's threats of physical violence, death, and/or suicide.

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## LONG-TERM GOALS

1. Terminate the abusive relationship and accept that no one deserves to be victimized by abuse.
2. Reclaim a personal vision of self as deserving kindness and respect.
3. Articulate his or her own views and perspectives independent of the partner's dictums.
4. Understand the impact of an abusive relationship on identity development and engage in behaviors that are emotionally and physically nurturing and strengthening.
5. Renew relationships with family, friends, and other sources of support, affirmation, and comfort.
6. Create and maintain healthy boundaries in intimate relationships.
7. Recommit to academic goals and create a plan of action.

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## SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the immediate abusive situation that precipitated seeking assistance. (1, 2, 3)

## THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

1. Explore the particular abusive incident or current situation that led the student to seek counseling.
2. Assess the level of danger to the student (e.g., is the partner violent; has the abuse been increasing lately; has the partner threatened to harm or kill the student, someone in the student's family, or him/herself; or does the partner have a weapon); contact campus safety and security, the police, and/or other crisis intervention personnel to ensure his/her immediate safety.

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2. Describe the history and results of the abusive relationship. (4, 5, 6)
3. Sort out and identify the feelings that are generated by this abusive relationship. (7, 8, 9)
4. Verbalize an understanding of the facts about abusive relationships, in general. (10)
3. Encourage the student to utilize the student health center, campus legal clinic, or other campus/community services to ensure his/her safety and well-being.
4. Explore the history of and feelings about the student's relationship with his/her abusive partner.
5. Encourage the student to describe the initial incidents that were indicative of the partner's potential for abuse.
6. Explore the student's abusive incidents in depth and assist him/her in identifying relationship patterns that led to or resulted from the abuse and the effects of the abuse on his/her self-esteem.
7. Clarify the types of feelings that are typically generated by an abusive relationship (e.g., anxiety, self-blame, fear, embarrassment, or shame) for the student.
8. Assist the student in identifying, as specifically as possible, his/her own feelings about the abuse and help him/her normalize them.
9. Encourage the student to use a journal to record his/her feelings and thoughts about this relationship; ask him/her to recall in the journal any previous relationships that have generated similar emotions and thinking.
10. Provide the student with facts about abusive relationships to help him/her recognize the need

to protect him/herself from the partner (e.g., 50% of violent crimes are committed by the victim's partner; one out of three high school and college-aged youth experience abuse at some point in a relationship; battering is the single major cause of injury to women; or abuse rarely occurs once and usually increases in frequency and severity over time).

5. Articulate thoughts, feelings, and a plan that supports terminating the abusive relationship. (11, 12, 13)
11. Explore the student's fears of reprisal from the partner (e.g., threats of physical or sexual or financial harm) and develop a plan of action to respond to these fears (e.g., obtain a court order of protection; change locks, bank accounts, and routes to class/work; have a bag packed and stored in an accessible location and a spare set of car keys hidden for a quick escape; have an emergency money fund; have a friend's name, phone number, and house keys in a safe and accessible location).
12. Explore the student's feelings about the partner or about himself/herself that makes leaving the relationship difficult (e.g., believes the partner really loves him/her; is always very sorry after an abusive episode and promises to never do it again; cries and begs him/her not to leave; does wonderful things immediately after an episode to make up for the abuse; or is really a great person who had a terrible life and just needs someone to love and

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- understand him/her); reframe these experiences and beliefs with a stronger reality basis.
13. Discuss the partner's responses to the student's attempts to end the relationship (e.g., who else would want or put up with you; it's your fault for making me so angry; where else do you have to go; without me, you will be all alone; I'll find you and kill you if you try to leave; or I'll kill myself if you leave me); emphasize that certain responses are typical and geared to make the student feel guilty or afraid.
  6. Verbalize a deeper understanding of the effects of abuse after educating self on the subject. (14, 15)
  14. As homework, ask the student to read material that will help him/her understand the effects of abuse (e.g., *The Paper Bag Princess* by Munsch, *Women Who Love Too Much* by Norwood, or *Shame and Guilt: Masters of Disguise* by Middleton-Moz); process the material with the student after it has been read.
  15. Encourage the student to participate in a support group for victims of abuse, Al-Anon, or a therapy group where he/she can obtain education as well as the support and companionship of individuals who struggle with similar issues; provide information to him/her about such group opportunities on campus or in the community.
  7. Implement physical fitness and stress management behaviors that result in increased verbalizations of personal safety and a sense of self-efficacy. (16, 17)
  16. Refer the student to the campus recreation or wellness centers to participate in a self-defense class, yoga, or any program that teaches physical fitness and psychological centering to

- increase his/her feelings of self-confidence.
17. Outline stress-management techniques with the student and suggest that he/she select at least two techniques to include daily (e.g., time outs: moments that provide physical comfort and time to reflect; a healthy daily routine that includes sufficient time for sleeping, eating, studying, and socializing; or affirmations posted around the living space).
  18. Review the syllabi for each class in which the student is enrolled and have him/her record any concerns about understanding class material, missing assignments, poor grades, papers due, or attendance.
  19. Help the student create a plan of action to improve his/her academic performance (e.g., obtain a tutor at the campus learning assistance center, make appointments with professors to discuss their concerns with his/her performance and elicit their suggestions for improvement, or withdraw from a class if necessary and possible).
  20. Assist the student in designing a time-management program that will ensure the completion of all academic work and review his/her program at each session (see the Time Management chapter in this *Planner*).
  21. Encourage the student to make study dates and socialization/recreation dates with friends and
8. Take action that results in improved academic performance. (18, 19, 20)
  9. Resume involvement in personal interests and social activities that were sacrificed

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- to please the partner.  
(21, 22, 23)
10. Increase contact with friends and family members who will provide ongoing support.  
(24, 25)
11. Verbalize and emulate behaviors that characterize healthy relationships.  
(26, 27, 28, 29)
- classmates; reinforce success and redirect failure.
22. Explore the student's interest in campus organizations and promote his/her involvement.
23. Encourage the student to share his/her interests and passions and help him/her identify campus/community resources that would welcome his/her contributions.
24. Explore the student's relationships with friends and family members, identifying the individuals who are most likely to model healthy behaviors in relationships as well as be supportive of the student's efforts to implement positive relationship behaviors in his/her own life.
25. Reinforce the student's efforts to connect with supportive, affirming individuals by phone, e-mail, or visits.
26. Discuss the student's positive relationships with friends and relatives, asking him/her to pay particular attention to the interactions that make him/her feel safe, capable, and cared for.
27. Suggest that the student begin to emulate the behaviors and emotional qualities found in healthy interactions with potential partners; assist him/her in listing behaviors that characterize healthy relationships.
28. Encourage the student to read *Dance of Intimacy* (Lerner) and/or *Men, Women and Relationships: Making Peace*

*with the Opposite Sex* (Gray);  
process the material read.

12. Develop a track record of abuse-free relationships. (30, 31, 32)
29. Coach the student in maintaining appropriate personal boundaries, improving interpersonal communication skills, and taking responsibility for his/her own happiness.
30. Meet weekly with the student until there is evidence that his/her relationship with the abusive partner has terminated or substantively changed (e.g., no report of violent behaviors; conflict is managed in healthy ways; or has resumed active involvement in school, work, friendships, and outside interests).
31. If the relationship continues to be unsafe, assist the student in managing the termination process.
32. Meet weekly until the student demonstrates that he/she can set appropriate limits within relationships and will not tolerate a partner or friend who uses abusive tactics.

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**DIAGNOSTIC SUGGESTIONS:**

**Axis I:**            308.3      Acute Stress Disorder  
                      300.02    Generalized Anxiety Disorder  
                      300.00    Anxiety Disorder NOS  
                      309.xx    Adjustment Disorder  
                      309.24    Adjustment Disorder with Anxiety  
                      296.2x    Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode  
                      305.00    Alcohol Abuse  
                      V71.09    No Diagnosis  
                      799.9     Diagnosis Deferred

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**Axis II:**            301.9      Personality Disorder NOS  
                      V71.09    No Diagnosis  
                      799.9     Diagnosis Deferred

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