

Are you a Real Man? PowerPoint Narration

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She says, "Are you a real man?"

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He says, "Of course I am, baby. Was there any doubt?"

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She says, "Then you have to treat me with respect. That means no name calling, no pushing me around, and I'm not sure I like you calling me 'baby.' I hardly know you."

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What is relationship aggression? Relationship aggression is domestic violence and abuse, and dating violence and abuse. It's hurting another person, causing them pain, or forcing them to do something they don't want to do.

Relationship aggression can be physical, sexual or psychological. This activity will focus on physical relationship aggression. Physical relationship aggression includes, among other things, hitting, kicking and using physical force against someone.

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Who participates in relationship aggression? Relationship aggression occurs in all types of relationships. The aggressor can be male or female, and the victim can be of either sex too. The most common scenario is a male aggressor and female victim, but females can also act as the aggressor, and same-sex couples can be involved in relationship aggression too. This activity will refer to a male aggressor and female victim for simplicity's sake, and because it is the most common. However, it's important to remember that this is not always the case.

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"But she started it!"

This is a common reaction to have when you are accused of using violence against someone. Who knows – you may be right. It's possible that she did start it. The trouble is, in our society, we tend to overlook violence more when the violence is begun by the woman. So you have to be careful when you use this excuse. It's not fair, but it's the way it is. Even if she did start it, it's up to you to not continue it. Using "she started it" as an excuse for violence just won't hold up in most cases.

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"Well, she deserved it."

This is another common reaction to relationship aggression, and again, one that just doesn't work. Whether or not a person thinks that their partner deserved the violence does not make violence acceptable. No one deserves to be the victim of violence.

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“I didn’t do it!”

This statement is yet another reaction to relationship aggression. It’s important, when your first reaction is “I didn’t do it” to look at why the claim is being made. It’s possible that you did something violent and weren’t aware of it, or maybe you don’t think it counts as violence. People have a lot of different definitions of violence, and it’s important to respect those definitions. So what you saw as playful wrestling might have been seen by someone else as violence. That’s why it’s so important to pay attention to the reactions of your partner, to see how she is taking it. If she doesn’t seem to be enjoying what you’re doing, or finding it funny, that’s probably a hint that you should stop. If she thinks it’s violence, don’t do it.

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The Duluth Model Cycle of Violence is a model that describes the cycle of violence in relationships. There are three stages in the cycle: the tension-building stage, the explosion stage, and the remission stage, sometimes called the honeymoon stage. One stage usually leads to the next stage, so that the cycle keeps repeating itself.

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Picture this: A woman is very nervous around her boyfriend. She tries to act perfect, so that she won’t make him angry. Little things annoy him – when she leaves clothes on the floor, when she forgets to pick up his favorite kind of cereal at the grocery store. Sometimes it feels like he hates just having her around. He is acting more and more tense around her, and she is nervous that something will happen, that he might hit her. She tries to please him so that he won’t get angry, but nothing she does is good enough.

This scenario is an example of the tension-building stage. In this stage, the tension is beginning to build around the victim, because of things she did or didn’t say, and did or didn’t do. The aggressor begins to argue and fight with the victim, blaming her for little things that annoy him. This phase can last anywhere from days to weeks.

During this stage, the victim is usually trying to please the aggressor. She may change her behavior to try and keep the aggressor happy and calm. However, it usually doesn’t matter what she does. She feels like she can’t please the aggressor, and is angry that he doesn’t trust her and isn’t keeping promises he’s made to her. She often is nervous and cautious, afraid of setting him off.

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Now imagine that one day he comes home after a bad day and she says something to annoy him. It’s the last straw for him and he explodes. He hits her, kicks her, and throws her against the wall, screaming at her the entire time. She tries to escape, but he is bigger than her and stronger than her, and she can’t get away.

This is the explosion stage. The explosion stage is the second stage of the cycle, and is when the violent event actually occurs. The aggressor controls the event, choosing when and how the violence happens. This violence releases the built-up stress and tension in the aggressor, usually leaving him quieter after the incident. If the police do get involved in the case, it is at this point.

Although the aggressor is calmed down after the violence, the victim is most often left feeling terrified and ashamed. She usually blames herself for the violence.

Once he is done beating her, he goes to watch some TV. She crawls to the bedroom, crying and shaking. I shouldn't have said that, she thinks to herself. I should've just left him alone, gotten him something to eat, let him just watch TV before I talked to him. This is all my fault.

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The next day he brings her flowers after work. "I'm so sorry," he says. "I was just so stressed out with work and the holidays and everything. I love you so much. It'll never happen again." She doesn't let herself think of the last time this happened, the flowers he bought her a month ago with the same excuses. Instead, she believes him. He looks so sad and so sorry, and he loves her so much – why else would he bring her flowers, and be so nice to her? He just gets stressed and she should know better than to bother him when that happens. It won't happen again. He promised, she tells herself, and she loves him, so she believes him.

This is the remission, or “honeymoon,” stage, which takes place right after the explosion. This is a time when the victim is in need of support to recover from the violence, support that is usually provided to her by the aggressor himself. The aggressor offers excuses and apologies for his behavior, often promising never to do it again, saying that he has changed. The victim, depressed and feeling helpless and trapped, wants to believe the aggressor.

Unfortunately, the remission stage only lasts for so long. As time goes on, it becomes shorter and shorter in length, and may disappear altogether. Despite the aggressor's and victim's best efforts, after a while, the tension begins to build again, and soon the tension-building stage has begun again. This leads to the explosion, and then to the honeymoon period, and over and over and over again. The cycle does not end.

A few weeks later, after the flowers have wilted and been thrown away, she find herself trying to please him again. He's stopped apologizing and instead snaps at her whenever she does something wrong, and it seems like everything she does is wrong. She is afraid of upsetting him, because she doesn't want him to explode again and hurt her. But sooner or later, he does.

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Let's do some reflection now. Try to place experiences from your life into the Duluth Model. We'll start with tension building. Remember, this is the stage that is leading up to the violent act, while things between the two of you are becoming more and more tense. Think about the last time you were in a situation that turned violent or aggressive, for any reason. How was the tension building between the two of you before the violence happened? What was happening? What were you feeling?

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Keep thinking about that same situation, but this time, let's look at the explosion stage, when the violent act occurs. What happened during the explosion? What were you feeling at the time?

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We're going to move on to the honeymoon stage now. Remember, this stage happens right after the explosion. How did you act after the violence? How did you feel? How long did the honeymoon stage last?

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The Duluth Model Cycle of Violence often repeats itself over and over again – that's why it's called a cycle. Was this true for you? Did the honeymoon stage lead to another period of tension-building, and then another explosion, and so on and so on? Were you aware of it before?

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Let's talk about violence itself now. What do you consider to be violence? Is it worse to hit someone or call someone bad name? What types of violence have you engaged in? How does violence affect you?

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We're going to turn now to different ways we see violence in the environment. You hear all the time about how violence on television, and video games, are making kids grow up to be more aggressive. Although this idea is debatable, it can still be important to look at what messages you received about violence as you grew up. Were you taught that violence was never acceptable? Or were you taught that violence can solve some problems? What were your models like? For example, how did the people you grew up with approach violence? Did you witness a lot of violence?

It's important to realize here that these reflections are not meant to serve as excuses. It is important that you take responsibility for your actions, and not simply blame them on the way you were raised. However, it can be informative and eye-opening to look at the messages and models of your past, as they can shed some light on how you interpret and act in situations today.

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While you're getting all this information, and while you're out in the real world, living your life, it's important to not lose sight of your personal strengths: the things that you do well, that you are good at. Your personal strengths contribute toward what makes you *you*, and can also be put to use in situations that could potentially turn violent, and help you avoid that violence. Fill out the worksheet called "My Personal Strengths". Just put a checkmark next to all of the strengths that you think you have. This isn't a time to be modest – if you think you have a strength, put it down! If your friends would think this, put it down! Feel free to write in other strengths you have that aren't on the worksheet.

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Now it's time to create your crisis prevention plan. A crisis prevention plan is made up of guidelines that you can use to help you avoid using violence in the future. You should have a worksheet that says "My Plan for Keeping a Cool Head" on the top. This is the sheet you'll be filling out for this exercise.

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The first step is to identify warning signs that a situation might trigger violence in you. Some possible warning signs are on the screen. Write down all of these that apply to you. You can also think back to the reflections we did about the situation you were in that became violent. Were there any signs that you were going to become violent? Write these things down as well. These will help you pinpoint when a situation may turn violent in the future

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The next step is to write down some positive things you'd like to tell yourself right now. Look back over the personal strengths exercise you just did. What are some of the strengths that you have that you're proud of? Are there any that might help you avoid using violence when a situation is displaying warning signs? Write all or some of your personal strengths in this space.

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The third step is to write down some things you can do to avoid using violence. Some ideas are on the screen. Write down the ones on the screen that will work for you, as well as any others that you can think of. These can use your personal strengths, or be as simple as "Walk away" or "Take three deep breaths." You can also put bigger actions here, like seeing a therapist or taking steps in the relationship.

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The final step is to write down the names of some people you can talk to. Some ideas are on the screen. Wherever you can, write down the actual names of the people you can talk to. These people can help you stick to your crisis prevention plan, and also help you when things get tough.

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So now you have a finished plan to help you keep your cool. What are you going to do with it? Where will you keep it? You should keep it somewhere where you won't lose it and where you can get to it easily. Look over it frequently to remind yourself of what you can do to avoid using violence. Really try to follow it. That's what it's there for.

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So what are you going to do now? How are you going to change your behavior? Remember, changing behavior is hard. You're going to need to really *want* to do it, and commit to it. It won't happen overnight. You have to be patient – but don't be too patient or you might do something you'll regret, something that will really get you in trouble. Remember to use your plan for keeping a cool head. You can do it.