

INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE CASE EXAMPLE OF PROCHASKA'S STAGES OF CHANGE

Pre-contemplation:

Marty presented with concerns about increased alcohol usage and said partner Blake accused her of having a problem. Upon assessment, Marty acknowledged using alcohol to manage anxiety. Further therapy revealed that it revolved around Blake becoming angry. Marty acknowledged that displeasing Blake was a preoccupation, but felt it was a personal problem and defended Blake's right to be angry. Marty did not identify what happened as abuse. The counselor saw Blake's outbursts as abusive and controlling but did not push the issue. Treatment goals centered on abstaining from alcohol and developing new coping strategies.

Contemplation:

Marty's plan to stop drinking was successful for brief periods, but when there was conflict and anxiety increased, it was difficult to abstain. After Blake became physically abusive one night, Marty acknowledged his behavior was inappropriate but felt ashamed and responsible. Marty decided that alcohol use was tied to feeling helpless about the relationship. Therapy began centering on the effects of living with coercive behavior and how to cope with it instead of using alcohol. They began talking about how isolated Marty was and who would be supportive. Marty joined a support group, something that helped alleviate shame as well as giving a place to process feelings, opinions, and thoughts about the future. Marty stopped feeling responsible for the abuse, and worked on low self-esteem and indecisiveness.

Preparation:

Marty began standing up to Blake more, trusting her opinions, but this increased the conflict and abuse. The support group agency developed a safety plan. Marty tried to talk to Blake about getting help but now is grieving and working on acceptance that there will be no change. Periods of sobriety grew since learning new coping strategies and becoming connected to supportive others. Marty continued to work on roadblocks to leaving, such as self-esteem and believing in the ability to live without Blake. Marty talked to family and friends about wanting to leave. Therapy focused on cognitive behavioral skills that supported sobriety and leaving.

Action:

Marty is ready to leave Blake, so found an attorney that understood the dynamics of emotional and physical abuse. The support group agency helped obtain a restraining order when Blake did not accept the relationship ending and continued to harass Marty. Therapy focused on the process of grieving and maintaining trust in self in the face of Blake's resistance.

Maintenance:

Marty continued therapy to maintain progress when faced with Blake's manipulating and alienating behaviors with the children after their divorce. Marty believed in her perceptions, but found it was easy to react to lies and accusations. Therapy focused on learning to disengage emotionally and communicate effectively without being distracted by Blake's behaviors.