

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR COUPLE'S QUARREL?

Considering the fact that one out of five women living in Quebec is exposed to domestic violence, it is very possible that this will happen to an individual we know. In such a situation, we would undoubtedly want to provide safety and support to the person subjected to such violence.

Because of its complex and subtle nature, domestic violence can be confused with a couple's quarrel. While it would be unfair to presume domestic violence in all relationships, it is truly important to recognise such violence where it does exist. And so, this article aims to provide the information needed to successfully make the distinction between the two.

MAKING THE DISTINCTION

Domestic violence occurs in the setting of an intimate relationship where the male partner attempts to take control over the female partner and this, with the objective(s): that she will submit to him, that he limit her activities, change her behaviours, reduce the control and power she possess in and of her life, rob her of her personal freedoms as well as her rights. In such a relationship, where the female is denied the role of an equal, the possibility of discussion does not exist. Instead violent episodes occur through which the aggressor asserts his dominance. Over time, the male partner will use different means to sustain his control over his victim.

In contrast, the objective to control does not exist within a couple's quarrel. A couple's quarrel can be defined as a disagreement, usually concerning a specific issue, between partners who consider each other to be equals. In spite of an emotional and sometimes even aggressive presence during this disagreement, each partner is simply attempting to be heard and to have their respective points of view recognised.

EXPLORING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The following questions and answers can be helpful in identifying a situation of domestic violence:

1. Does the male partner aim to gain control of the female partner? For example: does he try to control her outings, does he impose sexual relations, has he chosen their personal residence in hopes of socially isolating her, etc. ?
2. Can we observe certain defence mechanisms possessed by the victim? For example: does she trivialise or minimise her partner's violent behaviours, does she blame herself for his violent actions, has she modified her own behaviours and actions in hopes of ending the violence, does she try to protect herself from her partner, etc?
3. Do the violent episodes occur when the aggressor aims to protect the gains he has acquired as a result of his control? Or when he feels his control of his victim is compromised? For example: does the aggressor threaten his victim once she announces her plans of leaving him, do violent episodes become more frequent once the female attempts to regain control and reclaim power in her life, etc. ?
4. Does the aggressor attempt to *win back* his victim? For example: does he apologise for his behaviour, does he make promises concerning issues he continuously refused in the past, does he offer her gifts, etc. ?
5. And finally, are the woman experiencing, economic, emotional, psychological, as well as physical consequences due to the situation? Is she injured, humiliated, impoverished and isolated from her family and friends?

**You can also contact the following organisation for referral services:
SOS Violence Conjugale: 1-800-363-9010**

**And, if there is a threat of, or an actual occurrence of violence:
Please contact 911.**

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