

Information for Professionals

Overview

MENERGY'S primary service is the outpatient group treatment and rehabilitation of English- or Spanish-speaking adult men who abuse their intimate partners. We also provide services to straight and lesbian women who are abusive in their relationships (Triangle Space). A client is an appropriate candidate for **MENERGY** if he or she exhibits a significant pattern of physical or emotional abuse in relationship with his or her partner. The frequency, intensity and the duration of the abuse can be as variable as the kinds of abusive tactics (see the section on **Defining Abuse** below).

Because abuse can become so dangerous on the physical level, so destructive on the emotional level, and such an impediment to the growth of all involved, we view ongoing abuse as a priority problem that needs to be focused on and dealt with safely before most other family issues are addressed. Like substance abuse, intimate partner abuse is a problem that gets in the way of dealing with other things.

MENERGY focuses on abuse through a process beginning with a thorough assessment session designed to screen according to certain basic criteria (see **Intake Criteria** below). *Those clients accepted into the program continue to be evaluated as they are prepared for group treatment through a limited number of individual sessions (usually three).* During these sessions the clients will experience a supportive confrontation of their abuse with a contract for ceasing violent and/or particularly destructive behavior. Careful assessment is made of a client's current lethality, substance abuse, history of partner abuse or child abuse, early history of the client's own experience of abuse, character structure, and current mental status. *Partners are independently interviewed, usually by phone, about the relationship and the abuse, warned about the danger of their situation and the limitations of treatment. Partners are told that they will be informed if the client terminates treatment.*

MENERGY is primarily a *group treatment* program. Clients are screened and prepared for group treatment whenever appropriate. The group program is 30 weeks long and consists of 10 weeks of psychoeducational treatment followed by 20 weeks of therapy group. Clients can opt to continue on in an advanced group.

The psychoeducational part of the program quickly confronts the client with his or her own particular style and frequency of abuse through the use of weekly self reports, and structured exercises, and videos. As they gain greater comprehension of the issues involved in being abuse-free, group members learn new approaches with which to deal with conflict, disappointment and meeting their needs.

We try as much as possible to mix our groups heterogeneously with regard to relational status, race, socioeconomic status and interactional style. Groups are constructed homogeneously with respect to gender. Due to safety concerns for gay men, our men's groups are not mixed with respect to sexual orientation. When deemed safe and appropriate, women's groups may be mixed with straight and gay women.

We operate our program under the following basic principles and constructs:

1. Physical assault in the home is just as criminal as assault in the street. **MENERGY** is not in the business of helping anyone avoid legal consequences for criminal behavior. We are in the business of helping men or women who have a problem with physical or emotional abuse to stop abusing their partners. We are willing to let the program be a legal consequence for a client's behavior if he or she contracts to complete the program, pays the fees and conforms to program requirements.
2. Abuse is wrong. Our philosophic, ethical and therapeutic position is that nobody *makes* anybody abuse him or her. Violence is a choice. We aim to make the choice as conscious as possible. The norms and values of **MENERGY** dictate that choosing violence, abusive control and destructive coercion is wrong. While we condemn the offense, we try not to condemn the offender.
3. Violence is learned; so is blaming, dominance and a variety of vulnerabilities. In most instances, these behaviors and predispositions can be unlearned and replaced by other ways of behaving and being. The therapeutic learning is both cognitive and emotional. It usually takes time in the context of some interpersonal fellowship. It also requires a consistent will to change.
4. Fundamental ingredients of the process of change for perpetrators of abuse seem to be *accountability to others* and a willingness to have their behavior *monitored* over time. Our treatment emphasizes both these factors.
5. The abusive person is responsible for controlling his or her abuse. It is not the abused partners' job to "take care of" their partner's abusiveness.
6. Domestic violence is usually about power and control. The violence is usually part of a larger pattern of coercion (emotional or financial or sexual) that permeates the relationship. Often, a dominance pattern is clear. Sometimes, the pattern of control observed is one of resentful passive surrender followed by explosive outbursts of revenge or punishment. Learning about entitlements to power, control and privilege is usually part of the process of learning and choosing to give up abuse.
7. In cases of serious and/or patterned domestic violence, it is frequently dangerous to the safety of victims to do conjoint couple or family therapy. We usually recommend separate treatment of partners until safety is more predictable. If a client is violence-free for 3 months, is taking responsibility for his or her abuse, and the partner is interested, couple work can be arranged with **MENERGY** staff.
8. Violence is damaging to all the family members. It is physically harmful to victims. It humiliates and terrorizes the woman and children. It degrades and diminishes the real integrity of the abusive person. It poisons intimacy and sharing in the family. It represents a dysfunctional role model for problem solving in close relationships.

9. Safety precedes healing. Safety for victims is the primary value. Many perpetrators have been victims. Many perpetrators claim to be violent because they feel victimized. Harming others because of profound feelings of injury *is not acceptable*. We strive to provide abusive men and women with a supportive safe environment where they will be confronted firmly and directly about what must stop. Condemning abuse without condemning the abuser is a delicate therapeutic matter. In our work with perpetrators, support for the client does not extend to support for their continued abuse. We pledge to provide them a place to work out their victimization *if they stop victimizing others*.

Defining Abuse

We view *Domestic Abuse* as having a number of sub-categories: ***Physical Abuse*** includes a wide range of behaviors from forced restraint, through slapping and hitting, to aggravated assault. ***Sexual Abuse*** is defined as anything from sexual activity pressed after a physically abusive incident, to coerced sex acts to forcible intercourse. ***Emotional Abuse*** includes threats, verbal disparagement, degrading or contemptuous behavior and yelling. ***Economic Abuse*** occurs through manipulation or domination of family finances. ***Damage to property or pets*** is a common, yet frequently overlooked, form of domestic abuse.

Battering can be defined as *patterned abuse in the presence of terror*: repetitive abuse that has at least once been physical and is either repeated or threatened to be repeated in such a way as to engender ongoing fear in the mind of the victim.

At MENERGY, we treat a broad spectrum of men and women who abuse in a wide variety of styles. We often see clients who have never been physically abusive, but who offend with one or more of the other styles. We also see clients who have been severely assaultive.

Intake Criteria

As a *voluntary* treatment program, **MENERGY** *only accepts clients who acknowledge some problem with partner abuse*. While some denial and minimization is typical, our limited resources don't allow us to accept clients in complete denial.

- Clients should be 19 years of age or older.
- Men and women who are exclusively child abusers are not usually appropriate.
- Substance abusers must be clean and sober at least 30 days before being accepted into our treatment program.
- Clients must be willing to make three separate incremental commitments to regular weekly appointments. The initial commitment is to **3** one-hour evaluation sessions over the course of three weeks. The next is to a two-hour, once-a-week beginner group, for **10** weeks. Then, if appropriate, the final commitment is to a two-hour, once-a-week advanced group, for **20** weeks.

- Clients must be outpatient-group appropriate. Seriously psychiatrically disabled clients are generally not able to handle the rigors of high-level group interaction in our program. (Schizophrenics in remission, paranoid disordered clients and sociopaths are not good candidates).
- Clients should be amenable to group therapy. We do not have the staffing, resources, nor inclination to see clients individually for long periods.
- Clients in deep mourning or acute depression due to the loss of or separation from a partner may need to be stabilized before acceptance to our program.

Who Actually Comes to MENERGY

Our clinical population is drawn from a broad cross section of the Philadelphia and suburban population. The overwhelming majority of our clients are employed in jobs ranging from blue collar to executive positions. We see tradespeople, postal employees, university professors, computer industry workers, health-care providers and social service workers. Our clientele is racially mixed. They are usually about evenly distributed between living with and separated from their partners. Most of our clients have not been to therapy before. A few are in individual or couple treatment elsewhere and were referred to us for adjunctive work. Often couple or family therapists send clients when abuse interrupts their work. About a half of our cases have had criminal or family court procedures (Protection Orders) filed against them. Our referrals come from other service agencies, mental health practitioners, battered women's programs, lawyers, etc.

Referral Process

The client must call him or herself. English-speaking men and women should call the main office at 215-242-2235. Spanish-speaking men and women may call 267-625-6135. He or she will be given basic information about the program and assessed a fee for an evaluation session. *After the fee has been paid in advance, the client will be given an initial appointment.* During this intake session he or she will be asked very specific questions about abuse, current and past relationship, and about drug and alcohol history. The client will be informed about **MENERGY'S** approach and policies (*including our policy of notifying and warning partners*) and asked about his or her level of commitment *and willingness to acknowledge having a problem with abuse.* If the client is acceptable to us and accepts the program he or she will be entered into the appropriate beginner-level group.

Location for MENERGY and Triangle Space

Main office: 7500 Germantown Avenue, Elders Hall, Suite 5, Philadelphia, PA 19119. (In Mount Airy at the foot of Chestnut Hill, between Mount Pleasant Avenue and Mount Airy Avenue near Lincoln Drive.)

Directions: Bus Routes: 23, H. Suburban trains: Chestnut Hill West (R8) to Allens Lane stop, and Chestnut Hill East (R7) to Mount Airy stop.

Group for Spanish-speaking men: MENERGY offers a group for Spanish-speaking abusive men at María de los Santos Health Center, at the corner of 5th Street and Allegheny Avenue, Philadelphia.

Business Hours: The main office at MENERGY is open four evenings a week till 9 p.m. and Monday to Friday during usual business hours. Our staff is small, but we spread our coverage to meet the needs of most of our working clients. Most of our groups are in the evenings from 7 to 9 p.m. The group for Spanish speaking men at María de los Santos Health Center meets on Monday evenings from 6-8 p.m.

Fees

Clients are charged on a sliding scale according to income: \$0 to \$100 for each individual session; \$0 to \$50 per group session. All fees are pre-paid. No-shows are charged. Some insurance may apply. Clients referred by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services are not charged a fee.