

Questions to help to respond to MINIMISATION

Police style interview. Persist in order to get detail of what happened:

"When did you first lay a hand on her?"

"Where were you?"

"Where was she?"

"What violence did you use?"

"On a scale of 1-5 with 5 equalling punching her as hard as you can, how hard did you punch her?"

"Where on the body did you grab/slap/punch her?"

"How many times did you hit her?"

"How did you hit her, with an open palm or with a weapon?"

Ask for exact details of the words that the abuser used. What was said and how.
"I asked her to be quiet" might mean "I shouted at her to shut the fuck up"

So...

"Were you shouting?"

"How loud?"

"What names did you call her?"

Name what has happened and reflect back:

"So you punched her twice to the face".

But be careful not to repeat the language which hides the violence.

E.g. AVOID SAYING "Ok so you had a bit of a barney".

& reflect back without the minimising...

E.g. he says "I just slapped her" – reflect back "Ok. You slapped her. Then what happened?"

It is also useful to make suggestions and start at higher levels of violence than you believe has been used e.g. "Did you stab her" so that client can then work back to the level of violence he used.

Finally, acknowledge the barriers to disclosure

"I know this is difficult to say"

"This is not about making you feel bad"

"Feeling ashamed is a normal human response"

"This is about talking about what you did so that we can support you & you can move forward"

Questions to help respond to DENIAL

Denial of responsibility is about him placing responsibility for his actions somewhere outside himself.

Challenge by explaining what denying responsibility for his actions allows him to achieve.

"It makes you feel better in the short term: if you're not responsible for your violence, then you don't have to feel bad about it. How does this help you to be non-abusive?"

"Denying responsibility means that you don't have to do anything about it: if you're not the one responsible for the violence then there's no point looking at your own behaviour and attitudes or trying to change them. This leaves you stuck instead of changing – what would be positive about changing?"

"It means you can't stop your violence: if you aren't responsible for it, then there's nothing you can do to prevent it happening again, so while you continue to deny responsibility for your violence, you cannot stop it – this leaves you stuck. What would it be like to take responsibility for your actions and for changing?"

"Would you like to start feeling as if you can change the situation and have a different sort of relationship?"

"You told me you wanted things to change – how do you think you will be able to change if you can't take responsibility for what you have done?"

"You're telling me it's not your fault, that it's the drink/drugs. If you are abusive when you are drunk or on drugs you could start by taking responsibility to stop drinking or taking drugs. What would you need to do this?"

"You're telling me that it's your childhood or your parents who are to blame. Lots of people have very bad childhoods but decide not to let that be how they live their adult lives – what do you think about making that choice?"

Questions to respond to BLAME

You can state explicitly that men will go on feeling that they want to talk about their partners a lot as part of the explanation for their abuse. Acknowledge that they will feel frustrated when they're challenged on this:

You'll probably have to repeat yourself a lot in challenging partner blame; so, to extend your repertoire, here are a few different ways of saying the same thing:

"You're partner isn't here. Nothing that you and I can do in this room is going to change her. *The only person you can change is you.* So let's work on that for now."

"Even if your partner were willing to try to change, you don't have any control over her. The only person you have control over is yourself. So we'll try to help you get to a place where you can be sure of being non-abusive, no matter what she does."

"Let's assume that your partner isn't going to change. Let's look at how you can stop your abuse, even if she doesn't change."

"Your partner isn't here. I've never met her and I don't have any opinion on what she's like or what her version of events might be. And that's okay because I'm not interested in judging who was right and who was wrong. I'm only here to help you stop your violence and abuse, so let's get back to focusing on what you did."

"I don't doubt that you felt angry with your partner when you were abusive to her. I've not met anyone yet who'd been abusive without being angry. But I have met people who have been angry and not been abusive, and this is what we're going to be working towards."

"Okay, it's a given that you felt you were in the right and that you were angry when you were abusive. So what you need to learn is to stop your abuse even when you're furious and feeling in the right. After all, there's no point in learning to be non-abusive only when you're *not* angry."

"I'm not talking about stopping you feeling angry with your partner (although you may feel less angry as a result of some of the work you'll do on yourself) or about judging whether she's good, bad, right or wrong – merely about helping you to stop being violent and abusive to her."

"I see you have some very strong feelings about her. We can't take those feelings away – in fact, anyone in a long-term relationship will feel enraged at

their partner at some time. I guess you'll feel that angry again in the future. What we're working on is how you can have all those feelings and still not be abusive."

"This is about you not being abusive, and about what kind of person you want to be. If you want to continue to be abusive, you'll always be able to find plenty of opportunities to do so. This is your choice."

"Whatever your partner did, it was you who did your violence and abuse. It was you who controlled your mouth to say what you said, it was you who moved your legs to close in on her and it was you who lifted your arm to strike her – no-one and no-thing else."

"You've been violent because you were thinking about how you didn't like what she was doing or not doing, and wanted to change it – and you're still thinking that way. The only way to stop your violence is if you start thinking about what you don't like about what you do or don't do, and how you want to change you."

"Have you ever managed to be non-abusive when you felt your partner was out of order? Just as you were responsible for choosing to be non-abusive then, you're responsible for choosing to be abusive this time. It doesn't depend on what your partner does."

"While you focus all the time on who was right and who was wrong, you'll have a job stopping your abuse. There is no place for you to be asking, "Is she right or wrong?" – Only "What is the best that I can do in this situation?" So what would have been the best you could have done?"

"Probably your partner isn't perfect – few people are – but the bottom line is that if you can't be in a relationship with her without being abusive, you shouldn't be in that relationship at all."