



## **When It's Good, It's Very Good...**

Some people are in abusive relationships. They say they stay because when it's good, it's very good. Unfortunately, when it's bad, it is also very bad. So, some people weigh the good against the bad and it seems to come out even. Not so.

Abusive relationships must be assessed when under duress. The quality is determined then, by how people manage stress and conflict.

In view of stress, if a person's behaviour degenerates to the point of; name calling; making demands or moodiness such that you tiptoe around him or her; throwing or breaking things in frustration; slamming doors; yelling and screaming or disproportionately angry responses to minor events; then this is a seriously troubled relationship.

In view of conflict, if most resolutions favour one person over the other, or if a person uses bully tactics, mind games, intimidation or violence to get their way, then this is an abusive relationship where one holds power over the other.

While the good may be good, this kind of bad can harm you and your children.

Exposure to poor or abusive management of stress or conflict or the unilateral pursuit of power and control of another can lead to depression and anxiety in the partner and behavioral problems in the children.

Children may appear withdrawn, with a poor ability to concentrate or alternately may appear angry, hostile and aggressive in a manner that interferes with others. Either way, such an impact on the child undermines their ability to concentrate at school and get along with others. This in turn starts a cascade of problems for the child as academic performance suffers. Attention is then drawn to the child with little or no focus on the actual cause; the exposure to abuse at home.

For some persons there is the mistaken belief that taking the relationship to the next level, dating to cohabiting or cohabiting to marriage or having a baby together, will somehow fix the problem. Such misguided solutions only intensify the problem by causing the partner to feel even more trapped when the untoward behaviour continues. There is nothing

magical about taking a relationship to the next level or having a baby that changes behaviour despite what your partner may tell you or what you want to believe. The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. If indeed your partner promises change based on taking the relationship to the next level or a baby, and you follow through, all that will have been achieved is to reinforce a coercive strategy to help the partner gain their desire and hold over you.

If you are in a relationship where the good is good and the bad is bad, realize that this is one bigger pattern that continuously cycles through the good and the bad. You will not have one without the other in this kind of relationship and the only way out is by addressing the problem of abusive behaviour.

Typically to address the problem, both persons require counselling. The abusive partner needs to be held accountable for the untoward behaviour and to learn more appropriate methods to manage stress, resolve conflict and accept equality in the relationship. The non-abusive partner needs to learn more about the cycle of abuse, how to assert oneself to have needs met in an appropriate non-abusive manner and how to exit a relationship safely if the abuse continues. Further, both persons may need guidance to understand the impact of abuse on the well-being of children and seek to repair harmful effects.

Relationships are like coins. They all have two sides. You cannot have one side without the other. Pretending or only facing one side does not take away or diminish the other side. Turn things around to improve the bad because that is the side that will really determine the worth of the relationship. The shiny side is just a distraction.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847

[gary@yoursocialworker.com](mailto:gary@yoursocialworker.com)  
<http://www.yoursocialworker.com>

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.