



FROG IN A POT

"A tale of domestic abuse ..."

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Understanding domestic violence as an employer, family member, coworker, Human Resources professional, friend, law enforcement officer, teacher, and more, is extremely important so you can remain an active support person for a victim looking to leave an abusive situation. Being able to reflect and validate the victim's feelings matters greatly to the success of encouraging them on their path to a safer environment for home, work, school, and the community.

We have helped people further this understanding through the use of the old fable of a frog who starts out in a cold pot of water which slowly heats up and therefore will acclimate to the increasingly hot temperatures, to the point of boiling alive in the pot.

But other frogs, those who exist contentedly in the sink where there are lots of other happy frogs, jumping around on sponge lily pads and whatnot, if those frogs were to visit the stove and jump into the pot, they would immediately hop out, crying out a warning, "It's hot in there! You're gonna die!" But the

frog who lives, loves, laughs, raises a family of tadpoles, has everything in their community and those who mean the most to her in that pot, even when they struggle through the heat at times, says, "I don't know what you're talking about - it seems okay to me."

For us happy, kitchen sink frogs living without abuse, it is so difficult to understand why a frog might choose to stay in a pot of increasing heat.

But we fail to recognize the basic simplicity – that is THEIR pot. And that pot encompasses everything they have built in life and all who are in it, not just the one turning up the heat. The heat often fluctuates, too, and life in the pot can be quite happy for everyone at times, or perhaps life in the pot remains most often at the heat level to which they are accustomed. This reality, however, can actually cause others living off the stove - family, friends, colleagues - to encourage and even pressure the frog to stay in the pot.

The frog in a pot just wants the heat to go down.

As that heat rises slowly, but surely ... that first insult, demeaning comment, isolation, tearing down family and friends, accusations of not meeting needs, failing at loving, broken cell phones along with cheating accusations, increasing greater reliance on the abuser, leading to the first push, slap, hair pulled, arm grabbed, kick, punch, strangulation ... no one wants their whole pot, their whole life, everything they know, to be flipped over and all their water spilled out. They just want to lower the heat.

Sometimes ... the heat in that pot goes up extremely quickly.

Maybe it was the first comment that made the victim feel “less,” the first punch, or the first time an abuser wraps their hands around that frog’s neck so they can’t breathe. That heat gets high enough, quickly, suddenly, blatantly, so that the frog says, “Oh my god - it is hot in here! I am going to die!” and they hop out of the pot to survive.

Now, if that frog starts hopping fast to the sink for safety, the abuser frog gets angry because as far as they are concerned, that is *their* pot. THEY control the pot and no one leaves without their permission. This is when the frog hopping away is in the greatest danger because if they don’t want to return to the pot, the water can boil faster, hotter, and end up all over the stove, reaching the sink.

If the frog hops out next to the pot in response to the heat rising quickly, but unsure of their next move, the heat in the pot can go down very quickly, with promises of change, and the heat never

rising again. Where the abuser frog assures that the heat only goes up when the frog trying to leave the pot doesn’t meet expectations, fails to love the abuser frog enough, doesn’t care enough, should have done something differently, and if none of that happens again, then everything will be fine, the heat will stay off and all will be good again in the pot.

Sometimes ... there are tadpoles in that pot with the frog.

Leaving those little tadpoles behind in an already hot pot that threatens to boil over is not an option. But leaving the pot with those tadpoles does not guarantee safety, either. Instead of being where the frog can help control the heat the tadpoles may face, the tadpoles may be court-ordered to stay in the pot for periods of time alone with the abuser frog. Leaving that pot without knowing what will happen to the tadpoles, may not even seem like an option.

Then there are the times that little frog knows *exactly* how hot it is in their pot.

It is near boiling and getting hotter every day. They do whatever they can to keep everything at a simmer to survive. They desperately want to leave, to escape with their tadpoles.

But those frogs know that without help ... they may never, ever make it to the sink.

If you or anyone you know are in a domestic abuse situation, seek assistance at the National Domestic Violence hotline at www.thehotline.org or 800.799.SAFE (7233).