

# The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 341 - Your Marriage Abuse Cycle Exercise

**Heads up, friend:** What you're about to read is a raw, unedited transcript straight from the robots. That means you'll find some weird words, funky punctuation, and moments that make you go, "Huh?" If you want the real experience (and to actually know what's going on), I recommend reading the polished article, listening to the full episode, or watching it on 1.5x speed with captions on. Your brain will thank you.

**Natalie:** Have you ever felt trapped in the same painful cycle? Hoping he'll change while you keep losing yourself. In today's episode, I'm gonna share a powerful exercise that can crack open the denial and show you exactly what's happening in your relationship and then what you can actually do about it. Plus we're gonna talk about how to let go of what you can't control, and love yourself enough to step into freedom even if you're walking through the painful mess of divorce.

There are three things I wanna share with you today from our private community. The first is an amazing exercise that one of our members posted. She created this exercise to help herself see the abuse cycle more clearly in her own relationship, specifically identifying what she does at each phase of the cycle.

And what her husband does at each phase. The insights that she gained were profound since she posted it in our private kaleidoscope forum where the only people that get to see it are members. I decided that I wanted to share it with you to make sure that that more people could hear about it. Not everyone is in the kaleidoscope, and with so many valuable posts that are being shared every day, it's easy for important content to get overlooked, even by our members.

So when transformative material like the surfaces, I wanna make sure that it gets the attention that it deserves. Alright, the second tool is, it comes from something that I taught in my recent Flying higher Bible study a few weeks ago, and one of the Flying higher members posted her reflections after she went through that lesson.

And her insights are so valuable that I wanna share them with you. The third tool involves lessons learned from a custody evaluation experience. One of our

members had shared her journey through this challenging process, offering practical tips and valuable insights that I believe are gonna be helpful for anybody else facing similar circumstances.

So let's begin with the first tool we're gonna get specific with your relationships. Abuse cycle. And why don't we just call it that? This exercise is called the get specific with your relationships Abuse cycle exercise. So this member wrote out her relationships specific abuse cycle using one of the many different versions of the abuse cycle that you can find online.

Now this particular version of the cycle shows three distinct stages. There's the red stage, which is the abusive stage, the green stage, which is the honeymoon stage, and the yellow stage, which is the tension building stage. And then this particular model had a, like a blue circle in the very middle. And they labeled it denial.

Now, while there are many different versions of the abuse cycle online, if you Google abuse cycle, you're gonna find a lot of pictures and a lot of different versions and explanations. But this framework provided a clear structure for understanding the patterns, and that's the framework that she used.

And so that's what I'm gonna offer you right now. So first of all, let's talk about the green stage, the honeymoon phase. Now the abuser in the green stage might be making promises or sending you flowers, or buying you chocolate, or giving you gifts or declaring his undying love for you. Or maybe he's crying tears of remorse or saying that he's sorry.

He might blame other people for why he did the bad thing that he had to do or to justify his behavior. Um, he might beg you for forgiveness. He might say that he's changing and make promises for the future. He might want to make love to you. He might blame outside stress. He'll, he might say he'll never do it again.

He might enlist family support. These are all things that happen in the green stage. That's what the abuser does. So, but what does the victim do in this stage? The victim in the green stage will sometimes, like she might stop legal proceedings if she has already initiated something like that. Um, she might return to the relationship at this stage.

She might set up some counseling, some mutual marriage counseling. She might agree to stay. She might say, I forgive you. She will feel a flood of relief that is happy and hopeful. All right, but then the next stage comes, and that's the

yellow stage, the tension building stage. In this yellow stage, the abuser is beginning to get nitpicky, moody, offering some put downs.

He's maybe yelling a little bit more threatening or criticizing. Maybe he's playing some mind games. Intimidating you isolating the victim. He may stomp around because he is mad. He might slam a couple of doors, withdraw, affection, blame, or embarrass the victim, and or he might even be trying to stir up trouble in creating some arguments.

Now, it's really important to note that not all abusers are the same. They don't. It's like we've got lots of different kinds of cookies, right? They're all still called cookies, but there's all kinds of different cookies with different ingredients in each cookie. Well, abusers are the same way. They're all abusers, but they're all made a little bit differently and they all have a different set of ingredients to them.

So they're not all going to exhibit every behavior or example that I'm offering you. You know, some abusers are more verbal about their abuse. Some are very more silent and, you know, passive aggressive. Um, some are more overtly aggressive, but these are just typical behaviors that occur during the yellow stage.

Okay. So the victim in the yellow stage, now we're gonna, that's the abuser. Now we're gonna talk about the victim. The victim is usually, um, will be, will try to be more nurturing. She'll try to be more agreeable. She will begin to feel the tension building. She will feel like she's walking on eggshells or like she's walking through a minefield and has to be very careful about how she looks about her tone of voice, about, um.

You know what, how she's showing up in the relationship because what she knows that anything that she could say or do at this point might trigger the bomb to go off. She'll try to, maybe she'll try to reason with him or have a dis rational discussion with him. She'll attempt to maybe calm him down. She becomes very anxious in this stage.

She will sometimes stay away from others or cancel plans in order to keep the abuser calm and to not get him triggered. Um, she tries to appease him. That's what the, the victim will do in the yellow stage, the tension building stage. Alright, then comes the red stage. This is the abusive incident stage.

This is where the abuser may do things like, uh, he may sexually abuse her or demand sex. He may scream at her or swear at her, threaten her with his body or

even a weapon. He might hit or punch walls or he could hit or punch her. He might use humiliation, verbal abuse. He might kick things. He might hurt animals.

He might just give her the silent treatment for days at a time or just leave up and leave for days at a time. He may have an affair. He may use porn. He may violate her boundaries in various ways, like reading her journal or hijacking her phone. Alright, so that's what the, the abuser will do in the abuse stage.

And again, I didn't even cover all the different options. There's like, so there's that probably for as many different abusers as there are, there are that many different kinds of tactics that they will do to abuse their partner. Now the, what does the victim do in the red stage? Sometimes she will leave.

Sometimes she'll fight back. Sometimes she'll shut down. Sometimes she'll try to reason with him. Sometimes she may call the police. She tries to protest. Sometimes maybe she tries to say she's sorry. She does whatever she can in that moment or whatever she thinks would be the best thing for her to do to protect herself and to either placate the abuser or fight back or.

Protect herself in whatever way. We've talked about this in many other episodes, but these are the things that a victim will do in that red stage. Alright, so here's the powerful exercise that this member came up with and it was absolutely brilliant. It's so simple, but it's brilliant in its simplicity.

So you take this general cycle framework. You customize it for your specific relationship, because online, when you see a framework like this online, it's gonna give you a few ideas, but it's not really going to be your relationship. There's gonna be things in it that are like, well, my guy doesn't do that and I don't do that, and that doesn't seem like me, but what is your relationship like?

That's what you wanna drill down on. The template is gonna provide some generalized patterns, but the real insight is gonna come from examining what this looks like in your unique situation. So here's what you wanna ask yourself. Ask yourself, what does my husband do during the honeymoon stage, the green stage, and write down a list of all the things he does in that stage.

Then ask yourself, what does my husband do during the tension building phase, the yellow stage. And then again, what does my husband do in the abusive incident stage? Now, you might not know at first because a lot of times you remember that blue circle in the middle about denial. We, when a, when a, when

an abusive incident is over, we will sometimes dissociate and we'll want to forget.

Our brain does not wanna focus on it. We wanna just feel the relief of the green stage. We wanna move on. We've also been taught, we've, you know, we, we've spiritualized it by saying love doesn't, uh, keep a record of wrongs. And so now we've got the Bible, you know, a bible stamp of approval on, on that dissociation and that, um, denial part of it.

And, um, just from pulling a Bible verse out of context and using it for a, for a, a specific thing. But that is, so sometimes what we need to do is just start by documenting what's happening. Document an abusive incident. Write down what your husband did. Write down how you respond, how you, how you responded in that situation, and then start noticing what happens next.

What happens when your, you and your husband move into the green stage? What does he do? What do you do? And then once you start noticing those patterns because you've written them down, then you can start filling out this chart. Okay, so after you're done writing down what your husband does in each of these stages, you wanna, again, you wanna write down then what you do in each of these stages, okay?

What do you do when you're in the honeymoon stage? What do you do when you're in the tension building stage? What do you do when your husband is being abusive? This is not to pass judgment on you at all. This is just what victims do. We wanna see, what do I do as a victim in each stage in order to protect myself?

What tactics, what strategies am I using? And all of them, you, there's no judgment on any of them. They're all designed to keep you safe. All right? Now they might, they might not be helping you in the long run, but you need to understand that they are trying to keep you safe. Safe in the moment, all. Now I'm gonna give you her example.

Now I, and I'm not gonna include any identifying details, I took those out, but I'm going to share some of the high level patterns in her relationship just so that you can see what this looks like in practice. So in the honeymoon phase, her husband will hug her, he'll talk to her, he'll play with the kids nicely.

He sometimes will baby talk to her or say, I'm sorry that I got mad. He'll pick flowers for her. He'll rub her feet. He does her favors and gives her gifts. He'll

say she looks nice. He'll hold her hand in public. He'll open doors for her. He offers her the TV remote. He sometimes will deny being upset in the first place.

What does she do in the honeymoon phase? She accepts his gifts and hugs and favors. She hugs him back. She tries to please him. She feels relief. She feels loved. She feels hopeful. She forgets how bad he acted. She makes excuses for him. She tells herself it wasn't that bad. She will cook his favorite meals.

She'll relax into his shows of affection. I could deeply relate to all of these responses. What about you? So in the tension building phase, this is what she wrote that her husband does in this part of the phase. He pouts about a lack of sex. He uses a sharp tone of voice. He sighs. He rolls his eyes, he frowns.

He tells her a hurtful joke. He listens to music really loud. He insists or he resists if she tries to initiate sex. He exudes a victim demeanor. He acts secretive. He resists affection, and he withholds affection and he ignores her. What does she do in the tension building phase? She gets hypervigilant.

She asks him what's wrong. She tries to lie low. She encourages the kids not to upset their dad. She watches her words and expressions and her tone of voice very closely. She tries not to offend him. She tries to initiate sex. She ruminates. She obsesses about him and his mood. She tries to read more marriage books to help make it better.

She tries to stay out of his way. She worries. She tries to stay home so she can mitigate any issues with the kids. She tries to say, I love you more, and she tries to hug him more so that he feels loved. Alright. In the abusive incident stage, what does he do? This is what she wrote down. He will slam doors, he will yell commands.

He will give menacing looks. He might watch porn or even cheat. He will sulk, he'll criticize. He'll scare the kids. He'll offer threatening gestures. He'll play loud music and tv. He'll disappear for hours or even days. He'll drive aggressively. He'll drink aggressively, or use profanity. So what does she do in these abusive incidents?

She might leave the house with the kids. She might call for help. She might call her parents and tell on him to her parents. She might interview an attorney. She's done that in the past. She might kick him out for a while. She doesn't sleep. She goes looking for him. She threatens to leave. She gives ultimatums.

She hides. She shuts down. She'll call in sick to work. When she completed this exercise for herself, she could clearly see the repetitive patterns she recognized, how the cycle just continues around and around, and at the bottom of her chart, she wrote a profound truth. Nothing changes when nothing changes.

And this is exactly what we work on in Flying Free. In the Flying Free Program. We learn how to let go of what he does because we can't control his actions within the abuse cycle that is completely out of our control. We think we can, so everything that we're doing is trying to counteract what he does, but we can't.

We can't stop this cycle from happening because we can't stop him from being who he is. The only person that we have control over in that cycle is ourselves. Now, you might feel like you don't have choices within that cycle, and that's understandable, but through the work that you do inside of the Flying Free Program, you are gonna discover that you do have some choices.

You'll learn what those choices are and how to make different decisions even when your mind and your emotions and your body are screaming at you. To repeat the same familiar patterns we're drawn to repeat these patterns because they feel safer due to their familiarity, even though continuing this cycle is actually dangerous for us.

Okay, now since so I have this podcast episode all written out. I've developed a cold. I'm actually, I'm feeling a little bit better now, but I can tell I'm not gonna be able to make it through the end of this. So I think what I'm gonna do is, um, I'm gonna table the rest of this. This episode and, and then finish it next week.

But before I do that, she actually posted a new post where she filled in her part of the cycle in each of the sections with how she's changing things up after doing the work that she's done inside of Flying Free. I'm actually looking at the picture right now that she created, 'cause she actually made her own circle.

And instead of, you know, in the middle, that little blue circle that said, uh, denial. She wrote acceptance in the middle. This is what the abuse cycle would look like for her. 'cause she's still in the relationship with her husband. If she, instead of denying what was going on, she's now in acceptance of what's happening here.

All right. So first of all, we'll start with the honeymoon phase. Her husband is gonna continue to do all the things that he does. Nothing's gonna change there, but here's how she's going to change or what she wrote that she's changing. Um,

not cook special foods for him except gifts for what they are and not attach stories to them.

That's so good. Only have sex if I want to. Not to make him happy. Trust my memory of what happened. Feel hopeful about myself, not about him changing, not make excuses for him, to him or myself. Do not make the kids hug him or forgive him. Do not participate in future faking future. Faking meaning where he says, I'll make this is gonna happen in the future, and that's gonna happen in the future.

And instead of her believing it or buying into it, she's not participating in anymore. She does not believe the things that he says about how the future is going to be different. It's called future faking. Um, be honest about my feelings. Recognize and avoid his hooks. Alright, so this is what she said.

She's doing differently in the tension building stage. Remember, he stays the same, but what is she doing? Distract myself with things I enjoy. Stay in my lane, don't pursue him. Continue my usual routine and force my boundaries. Be authentic. Say only what I mean. Let him feel bad or mad. If he wants to, don't try to manipulate his moods or his feelings.

Keep myself safe. Trust my intuition and myself, um, yoga, calm app, read fun things. Okay? Then when the abusive incident happens, here's how she is. Wants to show up differently. She's going to leave the house. Call for help from the police. Don't ride in a car with him. Ask him to move out. Um, rest, even if I can't sleep.

Don't search for him or try to track him down. Say what I mean and mean what I say. Continue my life. Go to work. Um, reach out to trustworthy people, enforce my boundaries, and do not write him letters. That's what she said. Basically it says, let him, let him be angry. But I protect myself and the kids and the pets.

Alright, and how she called this the other one, one is called the abuse cycle, and this is what she, she had a title for this cycle too. It's called Our Cycle Wobbling Along. And remember how she wrote on the first one? Nothing changes. When Nothing changes. On this one she wrote, he's the same. But I have changed.

Okay, so I'm gonna stop there for this particular episode, and then next week we're going to talk about, I know at the beginning of this episode I said we were gonna do the, um, two other tools, but I'm gonna save those for next week.



'cause I can tell I'm losing my voice. I'm starting to ca it's starting to catch and I'm gonna end up hacking in your ear and that's not gonna be fun.

I hope that this podcast has been helpful. Uh, and YouTube channel has been helpful for, helpful. For those of you who aren't able to be in the Kaleidoscope, I definitely am committed to continuing to create this podcast. We've been doing it for six and a half years now, and we are putting everything on YouTube for people who prefer video, I'm committed to that, but I do need to let you know that.

Where you're gonna get down and dirty on making these transformational changes is by working more closely inside of the program. And I keep it very affordable at \$29 a month or \$290 for an entire year, that's where you'll be able to take the classes. You'll be able to listen to coaching, you'll be able to, um, ask me questions every day.

I'm in there every single day answering people's questions, helping them with their specific situations. I don't do any private coaching. This is what I do. I help people inside of this program in a group setting because I feel like I can help more people that way. We do have an application process now, so, um, you can go to join Flying Free dot com to get all the details and to complete an application and we'd love to see you on the inside.

Alright, that's all I can say 'cause my voice is ready to, can you hear it? It's like almost gone. Until next time, fly free.