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WHY ANGER MANAGEMENT IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE SENTENCE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

by [Quileute Tribe New Beginnings](#) on Monday, February 1, 2010 at 3:46pm

I just received an email with this article attached and thought that I would share it:

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WHY ANGER MANAGEMENT IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE SENTENCE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES
Identifying what domestic violence is and how dangerous these behaviors can be are best illustrated by the recent homicides in Washington State over the last few weeks/ months.

It is interesting to note that each individual that allegedly took the lives of our law enforcement officers had a history of domestic violence and to our knowledge was never ordered into domestic violence treatment. In one case in particular, the offender was ordered by the court to attend parenting classes even after long history of domestic violence with multiple family members. More often than not, the courts are electing to order anger management, which is not a regulated practice.

This article will explain why anger management is NOT an appropriate sentence in domestic violence cases and why its use in these types of cases should be prohibited. Rehabilitation that is not designed for domestic violence offenders, like anger management, can not only be counterproductive, but dangerous.

Currently, when an offender is convicted of domestic violence in Washington State the sentence may be jail time, batterer's intervention treatment as regulated by WAC 388.60, or anger management, which is not regulated.

Anger management programs are geared towards persons committing non-intimate violence. Unlike domestic violence treatment, anger management is not overseen by the State and these programs are not certified. Whether or not the facilitator in anger management treatment is trained in domestic violence issues is subject to agency discretion and is in no way required.

There are several reasons why the differences between domestic violence treatment and anger management are significant. First, unlike domestic violence treatment, anger management programs fail to take into account the premeditated and controlling behaviors associated with abuse. Domestic violence is not about anger-- it is about power and control, and in fact, abusers rarely lose control. Abuse usually occurs when the abuser feels control over the partner is slipping. Batterers engage in cold, calculated aggression, which is not something addressed in anger management.

Anger management may blame the partner who "acts to provoke the anger". Please be aware that the decision to be violent is independent of the perceived provocation and is NOT caused by another person.

Anger management tends to diffuse the responsibility of the abuse and prolong the batterer's denial. The batterers' denial of abuse, as a number of clinical reports suggest, is particularly acute.

Many batterers, therefore, use anger as another excuse for their abuse, much as they blame alcohol, stress, or other individuals. Regardless of whether these factors contribute to abuse, the abuser must therapeutically accept full responsibility for their behavior in order to begin the process of relinquishing abusive control.

Furthermore, anger management may feed the batterers' tendency toward self-pity and self-deception. The focus on their anger causes some abusers to dwell on their own emotional discomfort rather than the more severe pain that they have caused others. While this can be therapeutic, it can also lead to self justification and victim blaming.

A common conclusion is that anger management programs are simply a "band aid" and do not actually fix anything. As long as society does not take the criminal act of domestic violence seriously, abusers will manipulate the system, and we as a community, will therefore imply that domestic violence "is no big deal".

The federal government has recently made changes to its funding policy that reflects the growing concern with anger management programs. The Federal Office of Violence Against Women now prohibits any of the grant money given to the states to be used to fund anger management programs for domestic violence offenders. The federal prohibition shows the growing agreement among domestic violence professionals that anger management programs are inappropriate for domestic violence offenders.

There are approximately 50,000 domestic violence calls to law enforcement in this State each year resulting in serious injury or death and untold damage to families. Ordering anger management in domestic violence cases serves no legitimate purpose other than to place victims in further danger through inadequate treatment modalities.

A 2004 study by the Massachusetts Trial Court Office of the Commissioner of Probation is optimistic

about domestic violence treatment. Unlike earlier studies which tended to only look at the short term effect of batterer's intervention, the Massachusetts study followed batterers for a period of six years. The study found that the likelihood of an offender who completed batterer intervention program (BIP) being re-arrested for any subsequent offense was 47.7 percent; while for an offender who did not complete the program, the likelihood was 83.6 percent--a 35% increase. The likelihood of an offender who completed BIP to be arrested for another violent offense was 33.7 percent; while for an offender who did not complete the program the likelihood was 64.2 percent--a 30% increase. Lastly, the likelihood of a participant who completed the program, violating a restraining order was 17.4 percent compared to 41.8 percent for those who did not complete the program--a 24% increase. These statistics show that BIP may indeed be an effective form of rehabilitation.

For these reasons, we urge the courts, and prosecutors, to seriously reconsider recommending anger management treatment in place of domestic violence treatment. We urge this community to enter into a coordinated community response to domestic violence prevention. Only when we work together-- the courts, police, prosecutors, probation, victim advocates and community leaders, can we make a difference in the lives of survivors of abuse and assist the abuser to stop their violent acts.

For a list of state-certified domestic violence treatment providers:

www.dshs.wa.gov.ca/dvservices/license

*Much information came from: M.B. Bailey (2006), "Improving the Sentencing of Domestic Violence Offenders in Maine: A Proposal to Prohibit Anger Management Therapy". Maine Bar Journal

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