

## Reactive Abuse: What It is and Why Abusers Rely on It

One of the most common tactics abusers use is to shift blame for the abuse onto the victim. The abuser will claim the victim is the abuser because of the reaction the victim has. The abuser may even attempt to convince the victim that there is nothing worth reacting over and that the victim is overreacting to the abuse. What the victim is actually experiencing is called reactive abuse.

### Definition

Reactive abuse occurs when the victim reacts to the abuse they are experiencing. The victim may scream, toss out insults, or even lash out physically at the abuser. The abuser then retaliates by telling the victim that they are, in fact, the abuser.

### Why abusers rely on it

Abusers rely on this “reactive abuse” because it is their “proof” that the victim is unstable and mentally ill. The abuser will hold these reactions against the victims indefinitely. It could be years later and the abuser will say, “Well, back in (whatever year), you had this reaction and acted all crazy. You’re the crazy one! You need help.” Sometimes abusers use this reaction as an excuse to go to police or even file for protective orders of their own.

### A method of manipulation

To manipulate is to unfairly influence a situation. When an abuser claims they are the ones being abused, they are manipulating us into believing we are at fault for the abuse. The abusers are conditioning and manipulating us to accept the blame. The longer this blame shifting goes on, the longer we will believe we are to blame for the reactive outbursts and abuse that the abuser is dishing out. We will begin to believe we are the violent and unstable ones.

This manipulation can even go so far as to cause us to feel shame. When we react, it causes the abuser to claim we are the abusive ones. But these reactions also add a second element to the mix – they cause us to feel bad about ourselves to the point of guilt and shame. We act against what we know to be true about ourselves – that we are good, kind, capable, loving people. But that goes out the window when we experience the guilt and shame more and more. The guilt and shame that the abusers continue to condition us to feel.

### Reactive abuse vs. mutual abuse

According to domesticshelters.org, mutual abuse is when both partners are equally abusive to one another. Many survivors often ask themselves if they are abusive too because of how they react, but the truth is that mutual abuse is very rare and many experts don’t believe it exists. The power and control dynamics involved in domestic violence would make it nearly impossible for both partners to be abusive.

The key word here is “react.” That’s the difference between reactive abuse and mutual abuse. Victims and survivors *react* to the abuse doled out by the abuser.

### What we can do instead

When you see yourself reacting in this manner, many times you begin to say to yourself, “Whoa, this isn’t me. This isn’t how I am normally.” When you begin to ask yourself those questions, you know something is not right with the relationship. I know I thought those things before – that I knew how I was reacting wasn’t me. It wasn’t who I was. That’s what the abuser wants – to make you question yourself, your character, and your integrity. But many times, by the time we get to the point of asking ourselves those questions, we are either too scared to leave the abuser or we just don’t have the means to do so.

So what can we do instead? The abusers bank on us reacting negatively to their tactics.

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### SELF AWARENESS & REFLECTION - Caledonia

Childcare Provided **WITH 24 HOUR NOTICE**

to [selah.empowers@gmail.com](mailto:selah.empowers@gmail.com)

This class is intended to expand your skills when dealing with difficult relationships.

In-person and online: 5 - 6:30 pm, Fridays.

Location & Link: Contact [selah.empowers@gmail.com](mailto:selah.empowers@gmail.com) or [bridget@openchaircounseling.com](mailto:bridget@openchaircounseling.com)

May 17: Children’s Development/Trauma

May 24: Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

May 31: Grief and the Toxic Relationship

June 7: **No Class**

See page 2 for more class options!

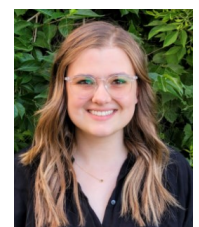
### FACILITATORS



Vicki Williams



Shari Murdock



Bridget Nash, MA LPC

## Journey to Understanding - Bryon Center Childcare Provided

This class is intended to expand your skills when dealing with difficult relationships.

**Online and In-person:** 7-8:30 pm, Wednesdays.

**Location & Link:** Contact [selah.empowers@gmail.com](mailto:selah.empowers@gmail.com)

May 15: Power and Control

May 22: Legal Advisor-Cynthia Rathburn

May 29: Verbal/Emotional/Psych. Abuse

June 5: **NO CLASS**

June 12: Characteristics - I

June 19: Characteristics - II

June 26: TBD

July 3: Trauma and the Brain

## Self Awareness & Reflection - Online Only

These classes will help bring clarity and validation to what you are experiencing.

**Online Only:** 10 am, Wednesdays.

**Link:** Contact [selah.empowers@gmail.com](mailto:selah.empowers@gmail.com)

May 15: Karpman Drama Triangle

May 22: Stink'n Thinking

May 29: Boundaries

June 5: **NO CLASS**

June 12: Emotional Disengagement

June 19: Co-Dependency/Trauma Bonding

June 26: Children's Development/Trauma

July 3: Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

## Growing Stronger Together- Byron Center

### Childcare Provided

This class focuses on growth and healing.

**Online and In-person:** 7-8:30 pm, Wednesdays.

**Location & Link:** Contact [selah.empowers@gmail.com](mailto:selah.empowers@gmail.com)

This week we will be discussing **Chapter Eight** of *I Don't Know Who I Am Anymore, Restoring Your Identity Shattered by Grief and Loss* by Carole Holiday. **This week we explore how to reframe painful thoughts with time and intention.** If you need a copy please reach out to Shirley Ritsema at [shirleyr@selah-empowers.org](mailto:shirleyr@selah-empowers.org) or receive it when you join class.

## FACILITATORS



Shari Murdock



Misty LaFree, LLPC



Erica Terry, Intern



Vicki Williams



Carol Bosch, LMSW

Selah Childcare  
Bryon Center  
Location



Elisabeth Richards



Shirley Ritsema

Don't miss the next pages with  
more info from Selah!

**Group Agreement:** We ask that everyone read the Group Agreement attached to the email. Attending the classes means you have read and agreed to the group agreement.

**Childcare:** Please let us know ahead of time if you will need childcare, however, we know schedules change, so if you don't get a chance to let us know before class that will be fine, too.

**Safe Environment:** We want to provide a confidential and safe environment for everyone to share and receive support. We also recognize that some material covered in this group is sensitive and can be triggering. Please practice healthy self-care and let us know if you are feeling overwhelmed or need to speak privately.

## How Can We be in Prayer For You?

In Selah online and in person classes, facilitators often extend the opportunity for participants to share a prayer request. These are anonymously passed along to a team of individuals who are committed to praying over Selah, it's leaders and most especially for Selah participants. If you have a prayer request you would like to submit, please feel free to do so by dropping an email to [shirleyr@selah-empowers.org](mailto:shirleyr@selah-empowers.org). Your email will be handled with confidentiality, care, and covered in prayer!



## Selah is grateful to be partnering with these local counseling centers:



When we begin to truly think about how we respond to them, we are taking back our power. We begin to respond and not react. To react is almost like an automatic thing – it's the fight or flight response. But responding involves a thought process that requires us to really consider our thoughts and actions.

Within the realm of domestic violence, there is always one who initiates or instigates the problems in the relationship. It comes back to that one person needing power and control over their victim. That's what abuse is – the imbalance of power. The abuser, however, would like us to believe otherwise and say, "Well, we were abusive to each other. It's mutual abuse." It's because the abusers will never accept responsibility for their actions and instead shift blame for the abuse onto us.

<https://breakthesilencedv.org/reactive-abuse-what-it-is-and-why-abusers-rely-on-it/>

Leslie Vernick quote on this same topic:

"Rage that is stirred in defense of human dignity (your own or someone else's) is God-breathed. Rage born in defense of oppressive power is manipulative, deformative, and self-centered. God knows from where your anger and resistance came."

The services and products noted below are those that Selah Empowers has become aware that may be useful given certain situations but are not intended to reflect an endorsement by Selah.

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES



**HYGIENE PANTRY**

3500 Byron Center Ave (616)528-4014  
Wyoming, MI 49509 lighthousewy@gmail.com

To locate a food pantry near you search:  
<https://www.feedwm.org/findfood/>



Serving Hudsonville, Jenison & Grandville  
Search <https://lovewm.org/>  
to learn more.



Also known as "Love Inc."  
To find one near you search:  
<https://www.loveinc.org/find-your-love-inc/>

### SAFETY




Search "Addalock" portable door lock on Amazon




Search Monsin Wedge Alarm on Amazon


**If one of these items would help ensure your safety but you cannot afford one, please reach out to Selah!**



[mi.gov/agacp](http://mi.gov/agacp)



[ag-acp@mi.gov](mailto:ag-acp@mi.gov)



313-456-0190