

***What people are saying about Jane Boucher and her book...***

“This book is a powerful tool that can change women’s lives.”

—*Valerie K. Sorosiak*  
*Professional clinical counselor*

“I feel grateful for Jane Boucher’s book and for all the other women who have broken the silence and created visible strategies that have empowered women.”

—*Olympia Dukakis*  
*Academy Award-winning actor*

“If you are in an abusive relationship, please read this book.”

—*Diana Curran, M.D.*  
*Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Michigan Health System*  
*Ann Arbor, Michigan*

“Jane Boucher’s book is enlightening and inspiring for all who seek freedom from oppressive relationships. *Escaping Domestic Abuse* breaks new ground and doesn’t look back.”

—*Patricia Evans*  
*Pioneer researcher of domestic violence issues*  
*Best-selling author of The Verbally Abusive Relationship*

“In my thirty years as a lawyer and judge, Jane’s book is the best I have ever seen to provide help in a way we have never had before. This work will save lives!”

—*Honorable Stephen Wolaver*  
*Judge, Greene County, Ohio*

“A book like this is desperately needed to give women the know-how and the courage to do what is best for their lives.”

—*Tony Campolo*  
*Professor Emeritus, Eastern University,*  
*St. David's, Pennsylvania*  
*Spiritual adviser to United States presidents*  
*Respected lecturer on family values*

“It’s a myth to assume that domestic violence victims invite abuse if they stay in an abusive relationship. Being abused slowly changes the brain’s chemistry. Jane’s book dispels that myth.”

—*Christina O’Neil*  
*Miss Nevada 2003*

“Women must break their silence and come together as a group to end this age-old dilemma. Jane’s book helps break the silence.”

—*Jackie Kallen*  
*Noted female boxing manager whose life was portrayed*  
*by Meg Ryan in the movie Against the Ropes*

“*Escaping Domestic Abuse* is a much needed escape plan for women experiencing relationship violence.”

—*Walt Dimitroff*  
*Nevada marriage and family therapist*

# Escaping

DOMESTIC ABUSE



# Escaping

## DOMESTIC ABUSE

How Women Get Out and Stay Out

JANE BOUCHER



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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## ESCAPING DOMESTIC ABUSE

### How Women Get Out and Stay Out

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*For Sarah  
and all the other children who never  
had the chance to grow up.*





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To protect your confidentiality, I am withholding names. You know who you are. Many of you had the courage to open old wounds. You

shared your secrets and your success stories. I sincerely thank you for contributing to this very important book, one that I hope is comprehensive enough to be the only tool people will ever need to get out and stay out of an abusive relationship. Ralph Waldo Emerson, U.S. essayist and poet, said it well: “To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

Thank you for caring.

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## FOREWORD

**I**t is an honor to write the foreword to this very important book. Domestic abuse is present in all levels of society. To ignore it is to permit it to continue. As a practicing obstetrician-gynecologist for more than twelve years, I have witnessed many women suffering from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Although my experience is with women, men are abused, as well. The overwhelming majority of abuse occurs against women. Abuse of women has far-reaching health consequences for a woman and her children.

Women who have been in abusive relationships suffer higher rates of health problems and social dysfunction. Many women are unable to obtain psychiatric care due to a lack of resources, an unawareness of mental health services, and a fear of the stigma of depression. Women who have suffered abuse are less productive at work, and millions of dollars are lost each year due to domestic violence. Other consequences include social isolation due to lost relationships.

Many women stay in abusive relationships because they have children. Often, women stay because of an inability to support themselves and their children. Fifty percent of children in houses where one parent is abused are abused themselves by a parent or the partner. Finding the courage to break free from the tangled bonds an abuser weaves takes strength and determination. Escaping is often scary, but the long-term benefits for women and their children are priceless.

If you are in an abusive relationship, please read this book and take heart. The courageous stories in Jane Boucher's book serve as beacons of hope. This book is a guide for abused women and for those who care about them. Thank you, Jane.

—Diana Curran, M.D.  
*Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology  
University of Michigan Health System  
Ann Arbor, Michigan*

## PREFACE

This book will be especially helpful to:

- 1) You who are being abused by a spouse or intimate partner.
- 2) You who have made the decision to leave and sincerely want to stay away.
- 3) Anyone who has been touched by domestic violence in any way. You may be part of a victim's support system. This book will keep you from giving up on her.
- 4) The employers of victims. Domestic violence doesn't stay home when its victims go to work. Often, the offender follows, resulting in violence in the workplace. In addition, domestic violence usually causes decreased productivity and increased absence due to illness or injury.



We need to stop minding our own business. What do I mean by that? Recently, one of my adult students called to share a story with me. She wanted to know whether she had done the wrong thing. She had been driving behind a car in which a man was slugging the woman next to him. My student did not dial 9-1-1, even though she could see the license plate number. She said the woman looked passive; her demeanor seemed to indicate that getting slugged was “normal” to her. *Escaping Domestic Abuse: How Women Get Out and Stay Out*



Many women suffer in silence because of the shame that is usually attached to domestic violence.

will tell you why the woman in the car showed little resistance to her violent male companion. She had become numb to the abuse.

Once, when I was traveling by plane, I noticed that one of the flight attendants wore on her lapel a pin depicting two silver hands touching. Intrigued, I started a discussion with the woman, whose name is Renee Jepsen. She told me that she had learned sign language and was working with Dove, a service that advocates on behalf of deaf women and children who have been victims of abuse. Many hearing women suffer in silence because of the shame that is usually attached to domestic violence. Imagine the added silence—and suffering—as a result of deafness. One deaf woman was arrested because her abuser spoke for her. The police officer did not understand sign language and could not interpret her body language, so he assumed she was guilty. A deaf mother may be afraid to leave her abuser for fear that her children will be taken away from her. After all, the court may decide, often based on the abuser’s persuasion, that a deaf mother cannot care for her child adequately if she cannot hear it cry, for example.

Many brave people have come together and shared their stories to help make *Escaping Domestic Abuse: How Women Get Out and Stay Out* a powerful survival manual. They have given voices to those who suffer in silence. The primary purpose of this book is to teach the reader how to stop the revolving door of abuse or to help someone else escape an abusive relationship. Most victims return to their abuser eight to eleven times before they finally get out for good. Those of you who had the bravery to share your stories are heroes, indeed.

I am ashamed to admit that until September 11, 2001, I did not know about the plight of Afghan women. Similarly, I believe that most Americans do not know that abuse exists in every

neighborhood and has nothing to do with socioeconomic status or educational level. Yes, it is an unpleasant topic. Most of us would prefer blissful ignorance. We don't want to admit that abuse exists in our families, our neighborhoods, our churches, and, God forbid, in our own marriages. We think that if we don't address it, it must not exist. The fact remains that one out of three families experiences the terror of abuse inside the home. Yours may be one of them. In this book are the tools to help you get out—and to stay out once you've gotten out. Put this book in a safe, private place. If you are able to admit and accept that abuse is happening to you or someone you know, this book is for you. Read it and build the courage to change your life. I'm already proud of you for reading these pages.

I have learned not to give flippant answers to people who are thinking about leaving an abuser. Someone who does not understand the deliberation involved will impatiently exclaim, "Just get out!" "I can't understand why you stay!" "I give up!" or "You must be a masochist." The truth is that most women have good basic instincts. Their reasons for staying with an abuser are usually rational and realistic, as we will discuss further in this book.

What can we do to help? We can stop minding our own business and start realizing that domestic violence is everyone's business. As a first step, we must decide that domestic violence is never acceptable. Abuse is abhorrent to most of us, but if we react with apathy and fail to offer help when we see a woman being beaten in the car in front of us, we simply perpetuate the problem.

This book is unique in that it shows victims of abuse not only how to *get out*, but also how to *stop returning to the abuser*. I hope that the words in this book may save your life or the life of someone you know.

The cycle of abuse can be broken. This book is filled with stories of transformations—stories that have happy endings. You will learn practical steps to take in order to *get out and stay out*, and you will learn how to get your life back. You will read stories of others' struggles and the abuse they endured. But, most importantly, you

will hear how they escaped. Each happy ending is actually a beginning of a new, meaningful life.

This book will show you the seven secrets of how to *stay out once you get out* of a destructive relationship. *Escaping Domestic Abuse* begins with real stories about real people. Some of them are uplifting—others are devastating. If you want to go straight for the answers on how to *stay out once you get out*, skip the stories and read chapter 9, which reveals “The Seven Secrets of Staying Out.”

You will discover that you are not alone, especially if you have returned numerous times to your abuser. Most women do this many times before finally leaving. Again, you will also learn that



You are not alone, especially if you have returned numerous times to your abuser.

it takes time to recover—approximately three months for every year you spent with an abusive partner. Domestic violence is not just a family matter; it is a serious crime that deserves to be treated seriously by friends, family, and employers.

Whether you are trying to manage your own relationship, having recently mustered the courage to leave your abuser, or are being counseled or working with other hurting women, this book will equip you to *get out and stay out once you get out* when getting out is the only option. Even after you say that you’ve left for good, you may still experience overwhelming urges to return. This book will help you put up barriers to keep you out forever!

In spite of all the physical and emotional turmoil you may have endured, you can create a new life. I want to help you. Your journey to freedom is about to begin. In fact, it is already underway—it began when you picked up this book. With adequate resources and support, you can *begin again*. This book will equip you with the tools needed to *get out and stay out*. I am proud of you for having the courage to decide to change your life, just as I am proud of

the many individuals I interviewed for this book who changed their lives by escaping abusive relationships. I have tried to provide true-to-life snapshots of what they went through. Most of their names have been changed to guard their privacy. None of their stories is pretty. All of their situations were tough. If you see yourself in any of these scenarios and you respond by *getting out and staying out*, this book will not have been written in vain.

—Jane Boucher



## INTRODUCTION

### THE STAGGERING SCOPE AND INSIDIOUS CYCLE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Laura and her husband lived with their young daughter, Sarah, in Orlando, Florida. When Laura's husband verbally abused her and then started using physical violence, she sought help from a domestic violence counselor. She learned that her husband was trying to wield power over her with his escalating abuse, and her eyes were opened to the reality of her situation. When she asked him to leave, he filed for divorce, and their settlement entitled him to weekend visitation with their daughter, Sarah. On November 7, 1996, Sarah was not dropped off at her daycare center. November 7 seemed just like any other day—that is, until Laura's husband's employer called inquiring about his absence at work. Laura's mind started racing. Sure that her ex-husband had kidnapped Sarah, she called 9-1-1. The Orlando police came to Laura's workplace, and she drove with them to her husband's apartment. When they arrived, the area was cordoned off. Laura's eyes met those of a victim's advocate, and she knew the worst had happened. Still, Laura asked, "Is Sarah okay?" When the advocate looked away, Laura asked, "Is she dead?" The advocate nodded. Sarah's father had fired four .45-caliber bullets into Sarah's chest before taking his own life.

Domestic violence is a bigger problem than you might think. One out of every four women in this country will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> But few people know the scope of this

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes (National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention), "Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey," 2000.

national epidemic, much less understand the nature of how it begins and becomes inescapable. The problem was long swept under the carpet by cultural norms and gender traditions that treated what we classify as “abuse” as a nonissue. In the 1920s, social workers considered battered women to be mentally retarded. In the 1940s, psychologists claimed that battered women were masochistic; in other words, women who were battered *liked* being abused. In the State of Arkansas, an archaic law that legalizes beating one’s wife once a month remains on the books, and the phrase “rule of thumb” originally meant that it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife with a stick as long as it was no wider than his thumb.

People are finally waking up to the gravity of this problem in our country and around the world, but misconceptions still abound, and counselors, psychologists, and other professionals aren’t immune to this ignorance, either. Many of the people I interviewed in writing this book had taken their abusive spouses to meet with counselors who came highly recommended. One particular story is of a woman who took her husband to meet with a therapist, only to be attacked verbally by the counselor during their second session. The counselor exploded, “If you’d only go to Al-Anon! Why haven’t you gone yet? You have no one to blame but yourself for all of these marital prob-

lems!” The therapist whose help this woman was seeking to keep her marriage together actually told her that if she would learn to detach, all would be well. The woman responded, “I did not get married to detach.”

  
 Domestic violence experts know that being “more unconditionally loving” will never solve the problem.

On top of this confusion, many therapists who don’t know any better tell victims of domestic abuse simply to “love him harder” or “love him more unconditionally.” They remind them, “It always takes two.” But nothing could be further from the truth. Domestic violence experts know that being “more unconditionally loving” will never solve the problem, and

that in abusive relationships, “it does not take two; it only takes one.” In fact, overlooking the abusive behavior and loving someone in spite of it often makes the abuse worse.

Many women stay with their abusive partners or spouses because of the fear of retribution—if they leave, they know they may be harmed or killed. Lisa Bianco’s husband was in prison for assaulting her and kidnapping their children. His good behavior earned him a day pass, and on his day away from prison, he drove to Lisa’s Indiana home and clubbed her to death. Lisa’s grieving mother told television reporters, “People ask, ‘Why don’t battered women leave?’ They get killed....”

Starting over isn’t easy. Leaving an abuser for good can be an extremely difficult decision to make. I hope that this book will help you feel less alone. Current research helps explain why people stay with their abusers. Now, you can learn how to stay *away*. You can also learn that there is life after abuse.

Why do you stay? The reasons are highly complex, and they vary from woman to woman. You may be lonely, depressed, or in poor health; you may lack self-esteem or self-confidence. Maybe you’re afraid of further abuse or violence; you may fear taking the risk of leaving. Perhaps you feel guilty. Perhaps you have no place to go, no family to take you in, and no access to money. Maybe your religious beliefs or ethnic traditions compel you to stay...the list goes on. You need to be understood and *not judged* for deciding to stay for however long you may have remained with your abuser. Unfortunately, even our legal and social systems will often give up on you if you return again and again to the abusive relationship. With courage and wise counsel, you can break the cycle. The good news is that most women eventually leave their abusers for good. You need to understand that leaving is a process, not an event!

Add to this scenario the fact that most women living in abusive home environments become physically ill. Many gynecological, urinary, and bowel problems can result from constant emotional abuse,

and in 2000, a study coauthored by Dr. Brenda B. Toner linked women's experience of emotional abuse with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a digestive disorder.<sup>2</sup> Worse, this long-term stress can cause heart disease, chronic pain, and even cancer. There is a direct correlation between abuse and disease. If you have an abuse-related illness or disease, your life is often out of balance and out of "ease." The distress in your life will cause dis-ease, which means your life is out of ease. *Your body knows what your mind cannot accept.* Your relationship is toxic. As the years pass and the abuse escalates, your body responds in kind. Listen to your body. It is screaming for you to relax. Your body is a gifted communicator. It may motivate you to leave. You will not get well as long as you remain in a sick relationship. On the other hand, if you leave and find peace elsewhere, your body will respond positively. You will get well again.

Research shows that most batterers are men. In 2001, 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence were women, totaling 588,490.<sup>3</sup> But it is quite possible for a female to abuse a male partner, so if you are a man being battered, simply change the feminine pronouns to masculine ones throughout this book. It is important to understand that this book was not written to hurt or indict "him." If, by helping *her*, this book helps *him*, too, that's a bonus. Furthermore, this book is not written to condemn an entire population of men. There are many good men who despise what the abusive man represents and practices.

Domestic violence is *not* caused by alcohol use or drug addictions. People may try to blame domestic violence on substance abuse, but half of all batterers do not use drugs or drink. Abuse does *not* happen because you cooked the wrong meal for dinner or because another man looked at you. It is *not* happening because you spent too long at the grocery store. It is *not* happening because your abuser just

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<sup>2</sup> Alisha Ali, Brenda B. Toner, Noreen Stuckless, Ruth Gallop, Nicholas E. Diamant, Michael I. Gould, and Eva I. Vidins, "Emotional Abuse, Self-Blame, and Self-Silencing in Women with Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 62 [Issue 1] (January/February 2000): 76–82.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993–2001, February 2003.

“snapped” or is “out of control.” Just the opposite. Abuse is all about *power and control*. The abuser’s behavior is quite intentional, and you are not to blame.

☞

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to blame.

Maybe you have already escaped an abuser and are now encountering the daily challenges of your new life of freedom. Within the first five minutes of this newfound freedom, some of you will have these internal conversations: *Why did he treat me the way he did? Why did I lose my life, my career, my friends, my family—even my church—why didn’t people believe me? He treated me so lovingly in public, but no one saw how he was in private. And why do I still vacillate in my feelings toward him? Why does he get to keep his career, his life, our family, and our church?*

It takes many women an experience near death in order to wake up. Some of you never suffered physical harm, but your spirits were broken. You may have lost your identity to an abuser who snuffed it out or stole it away. You became accustomed to something that should never be normal or customary. It often takes many years to reclaim your broken pieces. It takes approximately three months for every year you remained with an abuser to recover fully once you’ve escaped.

On a global level, one out of three women is abused, according to a United Nations report released on October 10, 2006.<sup>4</sup> The United States Department of Justice reports that women are the primary victims of intimate partner violence.<sup>5</sup> The majority of domestic violence occurrences are those committed by men against a female partner, but abuse of a male partner is a troubling but little discussed issue. *In fact, a leading cause of death among pregnant women is*

<sup>4</sup> “Violence against Women: Causes and Costs of a Global Curse,” *DESA News* 10, no. 6 (November–December 2006): 1–4.

<sup>5</sup> *Injury Research Agenda*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006.

murder.<sup>6</sup> And usually at the hand of a husband or intimate partner.<sup>7</sup> The statistics below will help you to gain a better understanding of the scope of domestic violence, both in this country and in the world.

### ***The Staggering Scope of Domestic Violence***

- Every fifteen seconds, a woman somewhere in America is battered, usually by her husband or intimate partner.<sup>8</sup>
- Every day, 1,871 women in the U.S. are raped.<sup>9</sup>
- One-third of all murdered women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.<sup>10</sup>
- Every day in our country, more than three women are murdered by a husband or intimate partner.<sup>11</sup>
- One-third of American women will experience intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.<sup>12</sup>
- According to the National Coalition against Domestic Violence, a woman is battered by her husband or boyfriend in this country every fifteen seconds, which makes domestic violence the most common crime—and least reported one—in the U.S.

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<sup>6</sup> Jeani Chang, Cynthia J. Berg, Linda E. Saltzman, and Joy Herndon, *Homicide: A Leading Cause of Injury Deaths among Pregnant and Postpartum Women in the United States, 1991–1999*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 3 (March 2005): 471–477.

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Frye, “Examining Homicide’s Contribution to Pregnancy-Associated Deaths,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 285, no. 11 (2001): 1510–1511.

<sup>8</sup> *UN Study on the Status of Women, 2000*.

<sup>9</sup> National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports*, “Crime in the United States, 2000,” 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993–2001*, February 2003.

<sup>12</sup> The Commonwealth Fund, “Health Concerns Across a Woman’s Lifespan: The Commonwealth Fund 1998 Survey of Women’s Health,” May 1989.

- In fact, physical battery is the number one cause of injuries among women—more than automobile accidents, rapes, and muggings combined.<sup>13</sup>
- Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted a two-year study of 3,300 women. The results, released in 2003, revealed that the women’s own personal safety was the issue of most concern—of greater concern than even work or other personal priorities.
- Every year, more than one million women seek medical assistance for injuries they incurred as a result of being battered.<sup>14</sup>
- Every year, domestic violence results in almost 100,000 days of hospitalizations, almost 30,000 emergency room visits, and almost 40,000 visits to a physician.<sup>15</sup>
- The Blue Shield Institute says that the total health-care costs of family violence are in the hundreds of millions each year.<sup>16</sup>
- Domestic abuse accounts for three times as many emergency room visits by women as motor vehicle accidents and muggings combined.<sup>17</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 37 percent of women who end up in the emergency room are there because they were abused by a husband or boyfriend.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> League of Women Voters of New Jersey Education Fund, 1999–2000.

<sup>14</sup> Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft, “Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of the Battered Woman,” *Health and Medicine* (Summer/Fall 1981): 29–32.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen W. Ninger, “Addressing the Needs of DV Victims in the Emergency Room,” *Coalition Reporter* (New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women) (December 1999): 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> Pennsylvania Blue Shield Institute, *Social Problems and Rising Health Care Costs in Pennsylvania*, 1992: 3–5.

<sup>17</sup> CMA White Paper, “Report on Physicians Confronting Violence in California,” August 1995. Copies: CMA FAX ON DEMAND 800/592–4262.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Violence Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments*, August 1997.

- Fifty percent of the men who assault their wives also frequently abuse their children.<sup>19</sup>
- As domestic violence against women becomes more severe and more frequent, children experience a 300 percent increase in physical violence by male batterers.<sup>20</sup>
- Even children whose fathers do not injure them physically still suffer emotional, developmental, and psychological damage.<sup>21</sup>
- Most adult males who are incarcerated were either childhood victims of abuse or witnessed it in their homes.<sup>22</sup>
- If a boy watches his father abuse his mother—or witnesses another type of adult-to-adult violence during his childhood—he is seven hundred times more likely to become an abuser himself and beat his female partner, according to the Sam Houston State University Counseling Center.
- Ninety-four percent of corporate security directors rank domestic violence as a high security problem within their organizations.<sup>23</sup>
- Some people believe that if they are not being physically abused but are “only” emotionally abused, they are not *really* being abused. Nothing could be further from the truth. The threat alone of physical violence or imminent harm is often as

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<sup>19</sup> Murray A. Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and Christine Smith, *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Murray A. Straus and Richard J. Gelles, *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 386.

<sup>21</sup> S. A. Graham-Bermann and J. Seng, J. “Violence Exposure and Traumatic Stress Symptoms as Additional Predictors of Health Problems in High-Risk Children,” *Journal of Pediatrics* 146 [Issue 3] (2005): 309–310.

<sup>22</sup> 2000 Pennsylvania prison study, cited by SAFENET, Erie, Pa.

<sup>23</sup> National Safe Workplace Institute survey, as cited in “Talking Frankly about Domestic Violence,” *Personnel Journal*, 1995.

damaging as being physically hurt. (Remember the scene from the film *The Godfather* in which a dead horse's bloody head was placed in the bed? The message was clear.)

- Abuse of any kind can cause long-term anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychiatric disorder that can occur following one's experience of a life-threatening event.
- For every year a woman spends with an abusive partner or spouse, three months are required for recovery. In other words, if you were with an abusive partner for ten years, you might need two and a half years to recover.
- One of every five female high school students has been sexually or physically abused by a boyfriend.<sup>24</sup>
- In 1996, a survey conducted for the Advertising Council and the Family Violence Prevention Fund reported that 30 percent of Americans know a woman who has been physically abused by her husband or boyfriend in the past year.<sup>25</sup>
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) predicts that between one-quarter and one-half of women worldwide have suffered physical abuse by an intimate partner.<sup>26</sup>
- Every year, an estimated two to four million women of all races and classes are battered by a spouse or intimate partner in the United States (The Family Prevention Fund, San Francisco, California).
- At least 6 percent of pregnant women are battered by their spouses or partners.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jay G. Silverman, Anita Raj, Lorelei A. Mucci, and Jeanne E. Hathaway, "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286, no. 5 (2001): 572–579.

<sup>25</sup> Lieberman Research Inc., Tracking Survey conducted for The Advertising Council and the Family Violence Prevention Fund, July–October 1996.

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization, *Violence against Women*, 1996. WHO Consultation, Geneva: WHO, quoted in "Domestic Violence against Women and Girls," *Innocenti Digest* no. 6 (June 2000): 2.

<sup>27</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 1994.

- Of all homeless women and children in the U.S., 50 percent are fleeing domestic violence.<sup>28</sup>
- Between 2001 and 2005, more than 80 percent of assaults committed by spouses, ex-spouses, and boyfriends against women were physical attacks. The remaining cases involved the perpetrators' attempting to attack or threatening violence, either verbally or by showing a weapon.<sup>29</sup>
- Over 90 percent of all domestic violence crimes against spouses or ex-spouses are committed by men.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2000, 1,247 women were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>31</sup>



The American woman typically goes back to her abuser up to eleven times. This behavior is difficult for friends, family members, and legal authorities to comprehend. This book explores the main reasons that women go back repetitively and explains how to break away from the revolving door of abuse.

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<sup>28</sup> Sen. Joseph Biden, U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, "Violence against Women: Victims of the System," 1991.

<sup>29</sup> *Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007. Dr. Shannan Catalano, BJS statistician.

<sup>30</sup> United States Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice* (Darby, Pennsylvania: Diane Publishing, 1988), 33.

<sup>31</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993–2001*, February 2003.

## SELF TESTS



## TRUTHS ABOUT ABUSE

### *A True-False Test about Abuse*

To gauge your knowledge of domestic abuse, answer the following questions. Then, use the self-assessments to find out whether you are a victim who needs to seek help in escaping an abusive relationship.

- 1) An abusive person is someone who loses his or her temper too often.

**False.** *Although someone who is abusive may have a hot temper, domestic violence is more than just a passing mood. It is a pattern of behaviors used to control partners or other family members. Many people who abuse others will do so even when they are not angry.*

- 2) People who batter their partners always act abusively toward them.

**False.** *Some people who batter their partners tend to become apologetic and more loving after the abuse, often to manipulate the victim into forgiving them or overlooking the abuse. This cycle of mounting tension and violence, followed by what is sometimes called a “honeymoon period,” can confuse people who are being abused.*

- 3) Abusers may act quite normally in public and at social events.

**True.** *It is possible for someone to act violently at home but show no signs of being an abuser in public.*

- 4) Drinking alcohol or using drugs can cause someone to become a batterer.

**False.** *Although many abusers are intoxicated when they become violent, alcohol and drugs themselves are not thought to be the causes of abusive behavior. Research also shows that many recovering alcoholics and addicts still tend to be abusive after becoming clean or sober.*

- 5) People who hit their partners do so because the partners won't stop talking, yelling, or telling them what to do.

**False.** *Abusers hit people because they need to dominate the relationship. The abused person can act demanding or passive—either way, she will still be hit. It is common for people who abuse their partners to blame these partners for their own abusive behavior.*

- 6) The person being abused can make the abuse stop.

**False.** *The only person who can stop the abuse is the person being abusive. The person being abused can take steps to protect herself or to increase her safety, but she cannot stop the other person from engaging in abusive behavior.*

- 7) People learn to become abusive.

**True.** *Violence is a behavior learned in abusive families, on the playground at school, from the media, and from many other observed instances of violent social behavior. On a positive note, violent behavior can also be unlearned; people who believe that violence is an acceptable behavior can also learn that it is not acceptable. This shift, however, takes incredible commitment and can be extremely difficult to instill in an abusive person.*

### ***Are You Being Abused?***

- Are you cursed, called names, or blamed whenever things go wrong?

- Is the way you spend “free time” limited exclusively to your partner’s interests?
- Does your partner have an alcohol or drug dependency?
- Does your partner control all access to money?
- Is it impossible for you to enjoy outside friendships due to your partner’s jealousy?
- Does your partner have a Jekyll and Hyde personality?
- Do you “cover” or make excuses for your partner’s behavior?
- Do you do more than a fair share of the work, paid or unpaid?
- Are you forced to have sex when you don’t want to?
- Do you feel obligated to ask and obtain permission to do things?
- Are you sometimes punished for “misbehaving”?
- During childhood, was your partner or his mother abused?
- Are you the brunt of humiliating jokes?
- Does your partner make a scene if you express a contrary opinion?
- Do you live in fear of your loved one?

If you answered yes to **one or two** of the above questions, take note of trouble areas and work with your partner to improve them.

If you answered yes to **three or four** of the above questions, seriously examine your relationship and seek help from a qualified counselor.

If you answered yes to **five or six** of the above questions, your relationship is breaking down and abuse is the issue. Go to a counsel-

or who understands domestic violence, and go alone! Relationship counseling is not appropriate at this stage.

If you answered yes to **seven or more** of the above questions, you are absolutely being abused and crisis intervention is needed!

### ***Are You Ready to Leave?***

- Are you currently in an abusive relationship? How many years have you been in this relationship?
- Have you lost the self-confidence you had at the beginning of this relationship?
- Did your partner promise to change, and are you still waiting for this to happen?
- How many times have you left him and gone back again? What are the reasons that you keep returning to the relationship? What has been the most difficult part of staying away?
- Do you make excuses for your partner's abusive behavior?
- Is the abuse getting worse?
- What are your physical and emotional symptoms?
- If you have children, how is your relationship affecting them? How is it affecting the other areas of your life?
- Do you have a support system that will help you through this transition?
- Do you have a place where you can live when you leave?
- Do you have adequate financial resources to support yourself apart from your partner?
- Do you see no other alternative but to end this relationship?

- Was there some specific incident that made you realize that there was no turning back?
- Are you really ready to leave?

**Keep in mind one woman's mantra: "I have a chance for a life if I leave; I die if I stay."**

### *Identifying Your Relationship Preferences*

A. List three or four people (not in your immediate family) with whom you have had an important or significant relationship during the past five years.

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 3. |
| 2. | 4. |

B. For each individual in the list above, make a list of his or her most salient characteristics. Examples include: affectionate, critical, good listener, kind, demanding, and so forth.

- |    |       |       |       |       |
|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

C. Circle the characteristics above that are most important to you in someone with whom you would want to have a significant relationship.

D. Look at List A and write the names below of any significant people from your *childhood* who possessed the characteristics you wrote in List B.

1. 3.
2. 4.

E. Return to List C and cross off all the characteristics but the five most important to you. Write those five here.

1. 4.
2. 5.
- 3.

On the list above, cross off all but the three most important characteristics.

On the list above, cross off all but the single most important characteristic.

Write that most important characteristic here:

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This is the most important quality you seek in other people.

### ***What Is a Healthy Relationship?***

Put a check mark by the statements that apply to you in your current relationship.

- You feel you are respected as a person.
- Your physical and emotional needs are met.
- You like the other person, and you feel liked in return.
- You are appreciated and not taken for granted.
- You are not afraid to be yourself.
- You can communicate effectively with your partner.
- You can affirm and support one another.

- \_\_\_ Trust, trust, trust is everywhere.
- \_\_\_ There is an atmosphere of humor and play.
- \_\_\_ Responsibilities are shared.
- \_\_\_ Your privacy is respected.
- \_\_\_ You are not constantly fighting for control.
- \_\_\_ You and your partner admit and seek help for any problems you may have.
- \_\_\_ You want to spend time together.
- \_\_\_ Love is a verb, not a noun.
- \_\_\_ You are growing and the relationship is growing.
- \_\_\_ You feel good about yourself and feel free to be yourself.



*Part I*

WHY WOMEN STAY OR KEEP COMING BACK



1  
“I JUST LOVE HIM”



*Mary's Story*

Mary was in the hospital to give birth. By her side in the delivery room was her husband, Tom. After giving birth, Mary was on morphine to ease her pain, so she cannot recall what she said while she was recovering. Whatever it was, Tom didn't like it; the next thing she knew, Mary was with a madman. Tom became violent and loud to the point where the night nurse had to order his removal from Mary's room. Her doctor was afraid for her and for the baby, so he kept her in the hospital for an extra week—something that's unheard of in most hospitals, where doctors usually aim to send patients home as soon as possible. Mary's doctor was frightened for her life, and he told her so. Mary was forced to face the truth: riding her husband's roller coaster of abuse and tenderness was killing her.

To excuse his behavior, Tom wrote Mary a letter that went something like this: “I couldn't help myself. Can't you understand how I was treated when I was growing up? My dad pushed, punched, pulled, screamed, and cursed at me. I was blamed for everything that went wrong at home. I was his scapegoat.” Tom's father had terrorized him; now, Tom was terrorizing Mary. Still, Mary felt sorry for him. Many women think that they can love their men out of their

pain and emotional scars. This almost never works, as Mary found out. She eventually moved to a new state, made new friends, and started a new life. Today, she enjoys a sense of peace and the knowledge that she is no longer dependent on her ex-husband.



### ***Why Do Women Stay?***

Why do you stay with your abuser or continue going back to him? In some of the scenarios described in this book, you will probably notice aspects of yourself. One major reason women stay with their abusers or return to them is *emotional hunger*. Emotional hunger is analogous to physical hunger: you may feel as if you're starving when he is no longer in your life. Often, your emotions will drive your behavior. Most abusers act remorseful after episodes of violence. Your abusive partner may make wonderful promises, shower you with expensive gifts, and even beg for forgiveness. If you are a woman of deep faith, you were taught to forgive and to turn the other cheek when hurt or offended, and you will probably feel guilty if you don't forgive him and start again. You *want* to believe that he will change. After all, wasn't he once your knight in shining armor?

Because women tend to internalize their thoughts and emotions, you may even blame yourself for his violent eruptions, saying to yourself, *If I were a better wife, he wouldn't blow up*. You begin to think that you could be—and should be—a better wife. You begin to believe in your own mind what you've heard him say over and over again about your “inadequacies.” His truth becomes what you hold true about yourself. You've also built your life around your relationship with him. You want to believe that counseling, substance abuse treatment, or stress reduction will put a stop to his violence. You want to do something—*anything*—to “fix it.”

### ***His Excuse Becomes Your Reality***

Women often view their boyfriends, partners, and husbands through a filtered lens. No matter how cruelly he acts, you still see a good man underneath it all. You become skilled at

ignoring or blocking out violent outbursts—that is, until they start happening frequently.

He repeats statements such as these: “You never listen to me,” “You think you’re so perfect,” “You’re too sensitive,” “You can’t take a joke,” “You’re pressuring me,” and “You’re trying to control me.” Many women then look at themselves and perform self-evaluations. They wonder, *Did I listen to him? Did I think I was so perfect?* Then, they blame themselves. If you blame yourself, you will do anything to be what he wants you to be. But however hard you try, you never seem to measure up. Still, you keep trying. At first, the verbal abuse is sporadic. If he had a good day at work, he is in a good mood. But if he had a bad day—watch out! He will invent things to be angry about when he gets home. And when he is angry, he is so articulate that you may believe his logic. *The more you believe him, the more you lose yourself.* When you entered into the relationship, you were self-confident. But the longer you stay in the demeaning situation, the shakier your sense of identity becomes. Suddenly, women who were once independent and self-assured don’t know who they are.

By nature, women tend to be nurturers. Without realizing it, you become the caretaker of your significant other. You think you are being helpful by paying his bills and covering for him, making excuses for his eccentric behavior and angry outbursts. In reality, though, you are making it worse for him because he is never faced with the painful consequences of his behavior. You have absorbed the pain on his behalf, and he continues along in blissful obliviousness. A well-meaning wife may consult psychiatrists, doctors, counselors, and pastors in her search for answers. You may stay with your abusive husband because a therapist told you that your husband is depressed. You think, *How can I leave a sick person?* After all, most women take their commitments seriously, especially those sealed with marriage vows. To add fuel to the fire, many therapists tell the women they counsel, “All you have to do is love him more unconditionally,” or “It always takes two.” Women with



Abused women often believe that they are part of the problem.

a shaky sense of identity stop trusting themselves and adopt their partners' views of reality instead. Adopting a skewed view of reality keeps many women in abusive relationships for years. Abused women often believe that they are part of the problem. Many pastors, knowing a woman is being abused, still recommend that she stay with the abuser, urging self-sacrifice for the sake of the man she loves.

### ***Why Joint Counseling Doesn't Work***

The research on couples who attend domestic violence counseling together is not encouraging. Studies show that 50 percent of the men surveyed abused their partners again within six weeks following treatment. Domestic violence is about *power and control*. The abuser must feel *power over* his victim. He achieves the “power over” feeling by a variety of methods, including abuse—whether emotional, verbal, or physical. His victim feels threatened and intimidated by his behavior. If she speaks up during counseling sessions, she is often afraid of the repercussions she will suffer at home afterward. In fact, couples' counseling can sometimes be counterproductive. Not only is the woman often afraid to tell her truth, but she may also gain an ill-founded sense of relief and hope that keeps her in the destructive relationship even longer. Therapists need to work with victims in private sessions—without the abuser's presence—so that these women can extricate themselves from their harmful relationships.

Often, when you are asked why you stayed for so long, you may answer, “I just love him.” He has become your sole source of emotional support—but only because he has isolated you from your family and friends. You know that your relationship is unhealthy, but you don't seem to have the emotional reserves of strength and determination necessary to leave. You continually talk to yourself, making mental excuses for his behavior and telling yourself, *He's not that bad*. You have trouble facing the truth of who he really is. In

your heart, you know something is wrong, but the experts are telling you not to give up; your mind makes rationalizations and tells you to stay. You can't imagine life without him. He has become your best friend, your only family. The thought of leaving him terrifies you. You weigh your options, trying to determine what would feel worse: staying with him and enduring the abuse or leaving him and possibly leaving your children. For a time, staying wins out.

### ***Sam's Story***

Sam adored his wife, Judy; though she often demeaned him verbally, he would quietly accept it without complaint. One afternoon, they were traveling in a taxi with Judy's sister, Janice, when the driver suddenly drove over a bump, jolting the passengers abruptly. Judy erupted at Sam, then jumped out of the taxi at the next traffic light and ran away, leaving Sam and Janice in the cab. Janice asked Sam what had just happened. She couldn't understand why Judy had blown up at him because of the cab driver's poor driving. Sam said little, but what he did say was in defense of his wife's abusive behavior. Janice told Sam that only a man with no self-esteem would take that kind of verbal abuse. When Sam and Janice finally exited the cab, they entered a jewelry store, where Sam decided to purchase a piece of jewelry for his wife. Further befuddled, Janice asked Sam what he was doing. She wondered why he would reward Judy's unacceptable behavior. He responded, “I can't help myself; *I just love her.*” This happened twenty years ago. Sam and Judy are still together today, and Sam still endures her verbal degradation.

### ***The Roller Coaster of Abuse***

Life often runs the course of a roller coaster, filled with ups and downs. The ups are moments of decisiveness—*I'm not going to take this abuse anymore.* The downs are the moments when you buy into your abuser's mentality and think, *Maybe I am stupid—I deserve to be treated this way.* You may be called demeaning names: “bitch,” “idiot,” “stupid,” and so forth. You may feel ashamed that you have

“taken” the abuse; you may believe that he is right about your “deficiencies.” You may have been mocked or been the object of sarcasm. Self-absorbed, narcissistic people who put others down always have excuses for their behavior—it’s never their fault and always the fault of others. In spite of the way he treats you, you still love him.

☞  
Most abused  
women are in  
love with  
a dream  
or illusion.  
Prince  
Charming  
was a passing  
charade.

Studies show that many women think they’re crazy because they love the “good part” of their abusive partners. Furthermore, many women hold to the ideal that “love conquers all.” Even though you know you married a Jekyll and Hyde personality, you hope that if you stick it out, he will change: mercurial Mr. Hyde will go away forever and leave the kind, endearing Dr. Jekyll in his wake. You remember how chivalrous he was when you first started dating, and you hope and pray that he will be like that again. Most abused women are in love with a dream or an illusion. Prince Charming was a passing charade. He wasn’t the real person with whom you now find yourself.

You start blocking out his ugly outbursts and eventually become numb, completely desensitized to his abusive language and behavior. You tell yourself that you aren’t really being abused. But you *are* being abused if you’re always afraid to express your opinions or feelings because you know that he will retaliate. You *are* being abused if you are kicked, shoved, chased, slapped, punched, thrown around, or hit with objects he throws at you. Forced sex or sexual behavior that makes you afraid or ashamed is another form of abuse—even in the marriage bed.

Verbal abuse can be even more painful than physical abuse. While bruises from physical abuse will heal, verbal abuse can break your spirit irreparably. Your abuser has probably said or done things to keep your family and friends away, which isolates you further. And if he feels he’s been crossed in any way, he’ll make it even worse for

you. Still, you may keep telling yourself, *I’ve got to forget the past. I’ll make it work.* You take a heavy burden on yourself—one that’s impossible to bear, especially alone.

If you have been seeing a therapist, you may have been told to do the impossible. Many well-meaning therapists convince their clients that “it always takes two.” In the case of domestic violence, it takes only one to destroy or poison a healthy relationship. Unless the violence has stopped completely and the batterer has completed counseling for his harmful habits, couples’ counseling might even increase the level of violence. The primary goal of counseling should be to stop the violence, not necessarily to save the marriage.

Actor Olympia Dukakis said, “I feel grateful for all the women who have broken their silence. These women have created visible strategies that empower women. Unless we speak out, more and more women will suffer. When a woman enters a couple’s relationship, she expects mutual nurturing and caring. When her partner destroys this bond, it can be devastating. It also impacts her trust and faith in future relationships.”

### ***A Life-Saving Resource***

Many women have sought answers to their questions from Patricia Evans, author of *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*. From speaking with her or reading her books, these women come to realize that their abusive partners probably aren’t going to change. If they desire new circumstances, some of these women will have to move away from their men—sometimes at a significant distance.

Women frequently suffer physical illness as a result of abuse. Ironically, many men responsible for these symptoms will treat their partners better if they are sickly and dependent. This “caring” treatment reinforces the men’s perceived *power and control* over the women. If a woman dares to assert her independence, her partner will probably degrade her even more harshly in an attempt to quash this attitude that threatens his control. Patricia Evans encourages

women in unhealthy relationships such as these to break away and stay away—for good. Then and only then will these women get their lives back.

### ***Christina's Story***

A prevailing fallacy about domestic violence is the assumption that abused women wouldn't stay with their abusers if they weren't receiving some payoff from the abuse. Debunking this fallacy is the mission of Christina O'Neil, a beautiful young woman who was named Miss Nevada 2003. Since then, she has become an advocate for victims of domestic violence. "It's a myth that victims of abuse like being abused if they stay in the relationship," Christina said. "Nothing could be farther from the truth. Being abused slowly changes a person's brain chemistry. It is like boiling a frog. If you put a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will jump out. However, if you put a frog in a pot of cool water and gradually turn up the heat, the frog will eventually boil to death, never realizing what happened."

Christina continued, "If my ex-boyfriend had walked up to me and punched me in the face the first time I met him, I would have called the police. He did not do that. Instead, the abuse came on *gradually* over the five years I was with him. It began with name-calling and then slowly moved to more aggressive verbal abuse. Then, he threw things. Eventually, he threw things at me. The physical abuse followed, and finally, he tried to kill me."

It's not easy for women to tell their stories of abuse, but Christina and the other women who contributed to this book are *brave* women.

Christina said that a counselor's wisdom changed her life. "The counselor told me that when injured troops come home from war, they often receive a Purple Heart for their bravery. If you have survived domestic violence, do not be ashamed. Instead, award yourself a symbolic Purple Heart. You were also injured and had the courage to overcome incredible obstacles."

### ***Delving into the Dynamics of Abusive Relationships***

Let's explore the dynamics of abusive relationships and how they function.

First, read the **myths** about abusive relationships, taken from *The Battered Woman* by Dr. Lenore Walker:

- The battered woman syndrome affects only a small percentage of the population.
- Battered women are masochistic.
- Battered women are crazy.
- Middle-class women do not get battered as frequently or as violently as do poorer women.
- Minority women are battered more frequently than Caucasians.
- Lesbians do not abuse their partners.
- Religious beliefs will prevent battering.
- Battered women are uneducated and have few job skills.
- Batterers are violent in all of their relationships.
- Batterers are unsuccessful and lack resources to cope with the world.
- Drinking excessively makes someone become a batterer.
- Batterers are psychopathic personalities.
- Police can protect the battered woman.
- The batterer is not a loving partner.
- A wife batterer always beats his children, too.

- Once a battered woman, always a battered woman.
- Once a batterer, always a batterer.
- Battered women deserve to be beaten.
- Women abused in prostitution are not really battered women.
- Batterers will cease their violence when they get married.
- Children need their father, even if he is violent.



In reality, abused women who remain with their partners do so for complex reasons.

### ***Why Does She Stay?***

This is the question most often asked about women who remain with their abusive partners. But we should be asking instead, *Why does anybody batter a woman in the first place?* Our society has a prevailing attitude that tends to blame victims for their own suffering. People think, *Victims of abuse must need or like such treatment; otherwise, wouldn't they leave?* The answer isn't that simple. In reality, abused women who remain with their partners do so for

complex reasons. Chaer Robert, director of the Denver Commission on Community Relations, offered the following reasons to explain why women stay with their batterers:

- They feel safer with their batterers because they know what they are up to. Often, he is her only psychological support system, having destroyed her other friendships. Others feel uncomfortable around violence and will withdraw from it.
- They are afraid of their abusers. Victims believe that if they leave the relationship, their abusers will act on threats they've made in the past. Batterers often tell their victims they will hurt or kill them or people close to them, report them for welfare fraud, report them to Children Services, call the police on them for domestic violence, or "out" them to their family, friends, or coworkers. The likelihood that an abused woman

will be murdered is greatest when she is attempting to report the abuse or to leave the abusive relationship.<sup>32</sup>

- They are severely depressed and thus cannot take action.
- Batterers often do not get serious consequences for their abusive behavior.
- They are afraid that getting the police involved will only make the violence worse. If a batterer is arrested, he is often released from jail within a few hours. He might go after the victim for reporting the abuse. Even if another person reports the abuse or the state charges the batterer, the batterer will blame the victim. Victims know this and will often deny the abuse to avoid repercussions from the abuser.
- They may not know of any community resources for victims, or if the resources exist, they may not be easily accessed or used. Victims may not know their options.
- They may not receive help from the community because their abusers may be rich, well-known, or respected. Abusers are adept at changing their personalities in public to conceal abusive tendencies.
- They are accustomed to focusing on the needs of their abusers and often ignore their own needs. When they reach out for help, professionals often ask them to make quick decisions about their futures. They are often uncomfortable with quick decision-making, as it may trigger further violence.
- They have no financial resources. If they leave their partners and have nowhere else to turn, they face certain homelessness.
- They are afraid that if they report the violence, their batterers will lose their jobs or have their reputations ruined.

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<sup>32</sup> Angela Browne, *When Battered Women Kill* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

- They feel ashamed and embarrassed about the abuse.
- They believe that outsiders shouldn't be involved in family matters.
- They feel obligated to pretend that nothing is wrong because of their religious convictions or their beliefs about gender roles. Victims may also define their senses of self-worth by their intimate relationships, however abusive.
- They believe that their children will be better-off in a two-parent household. An abusive father will often use his children's well-being as a way to keep his wife from leaving. He might even threaten to take the children away from their mother or to hurt them if she leaves.
- They feel isolated from their family members and friends. This perceived isolation makes it harder for them to leave their abusive partners or spouses. The batterer may be the only person to whom his victim can turn for support. Because abusers feel threatened by the relationships their victims have with other people, they often try to keep them from growing close to others and spending time with friends outside the home.
- They may receive only limited support from family and friends. Victims make an average of four attempts to leave before actually succeeding. People close to the victims may not understand that leaving an abusive relationship is a long and difficult process. They will blame the victims when they return to their abusers. They may also tell the victims that their abusers are good people, or that the abuse is not as bad as it seems. They may even suggest that these abused women go back to their abusers and try harder to make things work.
- They feel responsible for the abuse or believe that it happens because of alcohol or drug use. They may believe that their abusers just can't control their anger. An abusive man will

often tell his victim that no one else will ever love her as he does. Her self-esteem becomes dependent on his attention, and she tells herself that she can handle the abuse, figuring it's better to be with an abuser who “loves” her than to be alone and never again be loved.

- They experience episodes of physical violence in relatively short bursts, after which their batterers become gentle and loving, promising to change for good. This alternating cycle confuses victims, who see their batterers as loving partners some—even most—of the time. The batterers may convince their victims that they will change and that the relationship will get better. Victims don't want the relationship to end; they just want the violence to end.
- They witnessed fighting in their homes while they were growing up. If this is true of a victim, it makes it easier for her to accept violence as “okay.” Most abusers learn violence from their own families. If both the abuser and the victim grew up in homes where violence was frequent, it may forge a bond of common experience between them that makes separation more difficult.
- They feel needed by their abusers and feel capable of helping them change.
- They feel that if they could only change and stop making mistakes, their abusers would be satisfied and stop hurting them. They blame themselves and their own “imperfections.”
- They have difficulty knowing what really constitutes abuse. They may sense that their relationships are bad, but they fail to see a connection between the abuse and the bad relationships. They may identify their batterers' substance abuse, money problems, or stress outside the relationship as the real problem. These women may not know that they have the right to feel safe and to live without the threat of violence.

The majority of abused women eventually leave their abusers, but leaving an abuser is a process, not an event. A woman may make several attempts to leave her abuser before she is ultimately successful. Leaving an abuser before she is ready or leaving without ample resources and support will often result in a woman's returning to her abuser. It takes a great deal of resolve, energy, and courage to leave an abusive relationship for good.