



# Charmed & Dangerous



A Woman's Guide  
to Reclaiming a  
Healthy Relationship

NSW statewide edition



# Introduction

This booklet “Charmed and Dangerous: A Woman’s Guide to Reclaiming a Healthy Relationship” has been developed for women by women. This booklet is the initiative of the Tweed Shire Women’s Services Inc.

We hope this sharing of information may assist you in your journey to achieving and maintaining a healthy relationship; a relationship based on trust, respect, positive communication, honesty and balanced power.

The Tweed Shire Women’s Service’s introduction to the booklet follows.

Domestic and family violence is not just about the family; it is a social concern. As a result of cultural and social beliefs millions of women globally from all socio-economic groups are abused and treated violently by men every day. Domestic and family violence is not about a male partner being angry or losing it, it is a way for the abuser to have control over and dominate their partner and/or children. Statistically women and children are the most likely victims of domestic and family violence; hence this booklet is written for women, as a tool to break free of controlling, abusive or violent relationships and reclaim a healthy relationship.

Domestic and family violence is a crime and we are working locally and nationally to uphold the inherent right of women and children to be safe from abuse and violence and to build a network of resources for women to access in times of need.

Many women have contributed their experience and knowledge to the development of this booklet. To all those women who have contributed – Thank you.

The journey of reclaiming a healthy relationship differs for each woman; there is no right way or wrong way - only your way. Take what information you need from this booklet, give yourself time, ask for help when needed and remember to congratulate yourself on your achievements – which have been many.

It may not be the right time for you to read this booklet right now. If not put it aside in a safe place. You will know when you are ready to take this journey.

Tracy Asby  
Manager  
Tweed Shire Women’s Service Inc.

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## How Did I Get Here?

**Do you deserve to be abused?**

**The answer is 'NO'**

**Did you ask for it?**

**The answer is 'NO'**

**Are you alone?**

**The answer is 'NO'**

Violence against women and children is not acceptable for any reason. You are not responsible for any form of abuse and are not alone with the pain and suffering you are experiencing. Unfortunately, domestic and family violence is everywhere in our community, especially behind closed doors.

You may ask 'how did I allow myself to get into this situation and what did I do?' You did nothing; it has been a gradual process for you to be where you are today. It starts with subtle put-downs until it comes to a point where you begin to feel unsafe for

yourself and your children. You begin to feel isolated and alone; reinforcing the fact that you are to blame, which is untrue.

There is always the hope that the situation will improve and this keeps us locked into the abusive situation with our dreams of a happy and harmonious family life. To hold on to this hope and dream we will keep peace at all cost. This is where we start 'walking on egg shells' waiting for the next cycle of abusive behaviour. Our hope is sustained by the promises by the abuser and the disappointments when the behaviour reappears. We begin to feel trapped and alone with no-one to talk to. There is a sense of shame as we believe it is our fault and that no-one will believe what we say. So we often suffer the abuse in silence.

## How You May Feel

### *“If this is love, why do I feel so sad?”*

Often the first indication that there is something wrong with the way you are being treated is how you feel. You may feel uneasy, tense, confused, like something isn't right. Trust your feelings/gut instinct – they are important. Think about how you feel when you are with your partner.

#### **If you are experiencing domestic or family violence you may feel:**

- Constantly fearful and 'on edge'
- Like you have lost belief in yourself
- Isolated and alone
- Like you are going mad
- Pain / suffering from physical injuries
- Ashamed or embarrassed
- Guilty or depressed
- Exhausted and without energy
- Anxious
- Confused about what is real and what's not
- Sad, angry, tearful and fearful
- Pressured and uncomfortable
- Humiliated and confused

- Restricted and controlled
- Full of self blame and self loathing
- Confused about what to do

The effects of violence on women can include:

- Feeling trapped
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol
- Sleeping problems
- Mental illness
- Self harm
- Nausea or headaches
- Violence against children or partner
- Losing touch with who you are
- Feeling alone, confused and afraid
- Not feeling like you can trust anyone
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Emotional distress

You **DON'T** deserve to be treated this way! Domestic and family violence is a crime. There are many excuses that can be used to justify violence but it is important to remember that people **CHOOSE** to be violent.

## Understanding Domestic and Family Violence

To determine if your relationship is abusive you need to look at what the other person is doing, how it affects your life, how it makes you feel and where the balance of power lies in the relationship. Trust your intuition - if something does not feel right to you then it is not ok.

#### **Forms of Domestic Violence**

**Fear** can be the most powerful means of control. Fear can be created through any behaviour which is used to intimidate you

and which takes away your power

**Intimidation** includes breaking your possessions, intimidating body language, hostile and aggressive questioning, constant calls, emails, text messages and stalking.

**Physical abuse** includes physical harm to you, your children, your property, family, friends and pets. It may also involve the threat of weapons.

**Sexual abuse** includes any forced or unwarranted sexual interaction. This may include: forced sexual acts, harassment, or sexual harm.

**Verbal abuse** includes constant put-downs, insults and verbal threats. Verbal abuse is a humiliating experience and over time can destroy your self-esteem and self-belief.

**Emotional / psychological abuse** includes behaviour / actions and comments to undermine your sense of self and destroy your self confidence / worth.

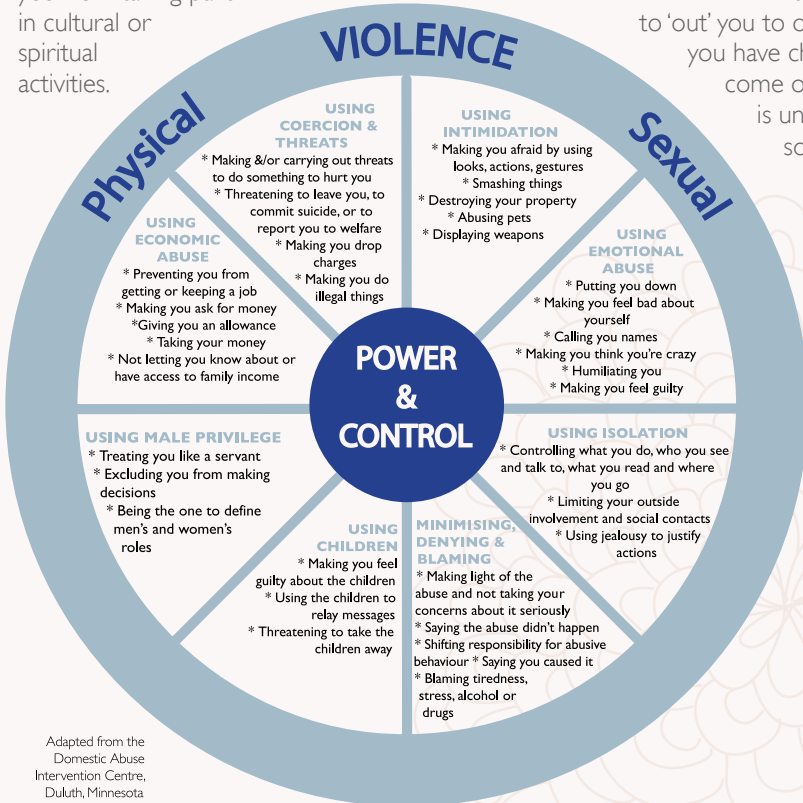
**Spiritual abuse** – includes ridiculing your spiritual beliefs and/or excluding you from taking part in cultural or spiritual activities.

**Financial abuse** occurs when the abuser takes control over your financial resources. This may include not allowing you to work or controlling the money you earn or spend.

**Social abuse** is when the abuser criticises, jokes about or puts you down in front of family, friends, work friends etc and/or controls where you go and who you see.

**Cyber bullying / cyber harassment** includes use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, mobile phones or other forms of information and digital technology to harass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate you.

**Sexual control** – threatening to 'out' you to others where you have chosen not to come out or feel it is unsafe to do so.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre, Duluth, Minnesota



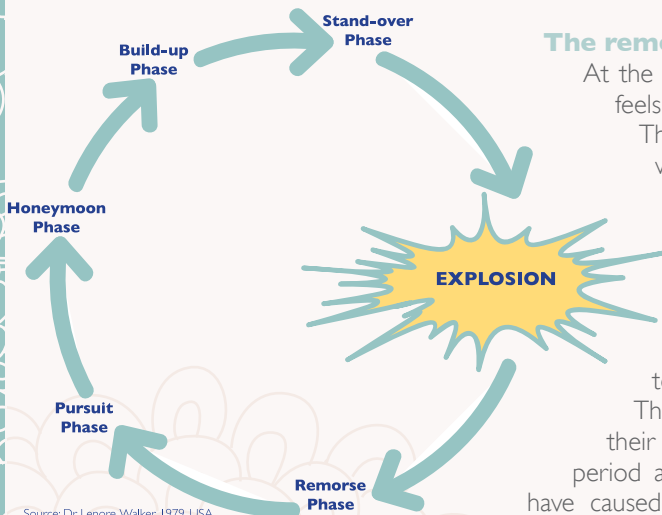
# Cycle of Violence

In a healthy relationship there are periods of happiness as well as times of tension between partners. This tension is generally followed by a phase of problem-solving that signifies an equality and respect between these partners. In an unhealthy relationship, times of tension often lead to periods of abuse and violence. These explosions are followed by a time of apologies and return to the honeymoon phase, where things appear on the surface to be normal again.

abuser escalates and becomes increasingly unpredictable. You may feel that you are 'walking on egg shells' and fear that anything you do will cause the situation to deteriorate further.

## Explosion

The explosion stage marks the peak of violence in the relationship. The abuser experiences a release of tension during an explosion phase, which may become addictive.



Source: Dr Lenore Walker, 1979, USA

It is important to remember that the abuser controls this cycle. They may skip some stages or they may travel through it over and over quickly.

## The build-up phase

This phase involves escalating tension marked by increased verbal, physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse; the behaviour is often volatile and unpredictable.

## The stand over phase

This is an extremely frightening period for you and your family. The behaviour of the

## The remorse phase

At the remorse stage, the abuser feels ashamed of their behaviour. They retreat and become withdrawn from the relationship; justifying their actions to themselves and to others.

## The pursuit phase

The abuser may promise to never be violent again. They may try to make up for their past behaviour during this period and say that other factors have caused them to be violent, for example, work, stress, drugs, or alcohol. The abuser becomes attentive, purchasing gifts, and promising that the violence will never happen again.

## The honeymoon phase

During the honeymoon phase of the cycle of violence, both people in the relationship may be in denial as to how bad the abuse and violence was. Both people do not want the relationship to end, so are happy to ignore the possibility that the violence could occur again. After some time, this stage will fade and the cycle may begin again.

**CHARMED AND DANGEROUS:**

# Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

The effects of domestic and family violence are experienced by all family members. Living with violence can have as much of an impact on children as the victims themselves. Children who witness abuse or live in a violent household experience the same fear, intimidation and threat to safety that you experience.

Children need a safe and supportive environment to develop their emotional, social, intellectual and physical wellbeing and to grow up to be healthy and well-adjusted. Children learn by what they see and are influenced by what they experience in the home. Often children will take on the role of protector and

peace-keeper; this places the child at considerable emotional and physical risk and can result in long term emotionally damaging behaviours.

Studies show that children who have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to:

- display aggressive and/or socially inappropriate behaviours
- have diminished self-esteem and self-worth
- have poor academic performance, problem-solving skills and concentration
- show emotional distress, phobias, anxiety or depression
- have physical complaints



Adapted from the  
Domestic Abuse  
Intervention Centre,  
Duluth, Minnesota

# What is a Healthy Relationship?

A healthy relationship is what we all strive to achieve. A healthy relationship is identified through the presence of equality. The elements of a healthy relationship are applicable to all forms of relationships; with friends, dating partners, intimate partners, life partners, or family members. Each component of the wheel supports and reinforces the others, with equality always at the centre.



**Respect:** Respect other people's boundaries. Learn other people's boundaries and do not infringe upon them.

**Responsibility:** A shared responsibility for maintaining the relationship. Both people in a relationship should be included in making decisions.

**Communication:** Communicate effectively. Effective communication involves clearly expressing your thoughts and feelings and listening to those of others.

**Boundaries:** Maintain healthy boundaries. Create a safe and comfortable space to experience relationships by defining and communicating your boundaries to others.

**Honesty:** Be open and honest. It is important for both people in a relationship to be honest about their intentions, feelings or desires.

**Trust:** Trust lies at the heart of a strong relationship and is the foundation that love and respect are built on.

**Support:** Support and encouragement of each other to achieve their goals and dreams, and personal growth.

**Accountability:** Be responsible for your own actions. Talk to others to understand how your actions affect them.

**There is no place in a healthy relationship for controlling, abusive and violent behaviour.**



# Relationship Warning Signs

Before an abuser starts physically assaulting his victim, he typically demonstrates his abusive tactics through certain behaviours. The following are five major warning signs:

## Charm

Abusive men are often very charming. At the start of a relationship abusers may seem like Prince Charming, charming you, your friends and family. Abusers have times in which they can be very engaging, thoughtful, considerate and charismatic. An abuser may use their charm to gain very personal information about you which he may later use against you. Charm can be used to deceive you, your family and friends.

## Control

Abusers are obsessed with control. Over time the abuser may control every aspect of your life, e.g. who you talk to, what you wear, where and when you go out and your access to money. Whilst at times abusers may appear to lose control when they go into a rage it is important to remember that they are actually very much in control of their behaviour.

We know the abuser's behaviour is not about anger but is a controlled action because:

- The abuser is often not violent towards other people.
- The abuse often occurs when there are no witnesses. The abuser is able to stop their violence when the police arrive or when the phone rings.

- The abuser is able to direct where they punch or kick so any bruising or marks can be hidden from other people.

## Emotional abuse

The abuser may use emotional abuse to destroy your self-esteem. You may experience being falsely blamed for the violence; you may be put down, called names or be threatened. Over time you may find you are blaming yourself for the violence and forgetting that you deserve to be treated with respect. Some women find emotional abuse is more difficult to heal from than physical abuse: the bruises and broken bones mend, yet the emotional scars remain.

## Isolation

Abusers isolate their victims geographically and socially. Geographic isolation involves moving you (often long distances) away from your friends, family and other support networks; over time isolating you from everyone. It often begins with the abuser wanting you to spend more and more time with him; and can often be misinterpreted as him caring about you.

## Jealousy

Jealousy can be used by the abuser as a means of controlling you. Abusers may accuse you of having affairs and seeing other men. Jealousy can escalate from name-calling to jealous rage.

# Information for Women in Same Sex Relationships

Domestic violence in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (GLBTI) community is a serious issue. The rate of domestic violence in same-sex relationships is roughly the same as domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. As in opposite-sex relationships, the problem is likely underreported. Facing a system which is often oppressive and hostile towards those who identify as anything other than "straight", those involved in same-sex domestic violence frequently report being afraid of revealing their sexual orientation or the nature of their relationship.

Additionally, even those who attempt to report violence in their same-sex relationship run into obstacles. Police officers, prosecutors, judges and others to whom a GLBTI victim may turn to for help may have difficulty in providing the same level of service as to other victims. Not only might personal attitudes towards the GLBTI community come into play, but these providers may have inadequate levels of experience and training to work with GLBTI victims and flimsy or non-existent laws to enforce on behalf of the victim.

Although advances have been made in the provision of services, the enforcement of the law, and the equality of protections available to those in same-sex relationships over the last decade, it is important for you to be aware of your rights and options as they relate to your attempt to escape an abusive relationship.

## Unique aspects of same sex domestic violence

Domestic violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships share many

similarities, including the types of abuse and the impact on the abused partner. However, there are a number of aspects that are unique to same sex domestic violence.

These include:

### 'Outing' as a method of control

If the abused partner isn't out to their family, friends, and workmates or within their cultural community the abusive partner may use 'outing' or the threat of 'outing' as a method of control.

### Domestic violence isn't well understood in the GLBT community

There hasn't been much information or discussion in the GLBTI community about domestic violence in relationships. Most information on domestic violence relates to heterosexual relationships with the man as the perpetrator.

### This lack of understanding means that some people may not:

- Believe it happens in same sex relationships;
- Recognise abuse as domestic violence if it does happen to them; or
- Know how to respond if they see domestic violence in their friend's or family member's relationship.

### Confidentiality and isolation within the GLBTI community

The relatively small size of the GLBTI community, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, can make it difficult for the abused partner to seek help. They may feel embarrassed about the abuse or their

partner may have tried to turn others in the community against them. An abusive partner may isolate the other from contact with the GLBTI community by preventing them from reading the community media, attending events or seeing their friends. This is especially true for people in their first same-sex relationship who may not have had much contact with the community before the relationship began.

### Services may not be well developed

Although women can access most general

domestic violence services, like refuges, court assistance schemes, and counselling services, these services may have little experience in working with same sex domestic violence and therefore, may not offer the most appropriate service. For gay men there are currently few specific services that offer assistance or support.

However same-sex, intersex and transgender victims can access the Safe Relationships Project for help (see page 25 for details).



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre, Duluth, Minnesota

# Information for Aboriginal Women

Privacy and confidentiality can be complex issues for Aboriginal women and their families when seeking to separate from abusive partners or family members.

“The interconnected nature of Aboriginal communities can mean a woman’s ability to maintain anonymity is compromised and this undermines her ability to establish a safe space for herself and her children away from violence.” (Elizabeth Hoffman House)

“The blackfella grapevine is deadly when you want to find family, but not so great when you’re having problems and everyone knows.” (Northern Rivers worker)

Most Aboriginal services and specialist Aboriginal workers within mainstream or white services understand these issues and can assist with maintaining confidentiality and establishing safety.

## Safety Planning

Think of ideas that will help keep you safe and put them into action. Here are some things you can do now to make it safer for you and your children.

### Safety during an abusive incident

- Be aware of all exit routes and safety spots for you and your children.
- Seek support from neighbours to call the police if they hear a disturbance.
- Develop a safety plan for your children; e.g. how to call 000, how to safely exit the house and how to get help.

- Phone police as soon as you can.
- Seek medical support for any injuries.
- Keep a diary of violent incidents, including dates.

### Safety at Work

- Inform someone at your workplace about your current situation.
- Avoid taking the same route to work each day.
- Develop a safety plan for arriving and leaving work.

**If you decide to leave refer to page 17 for more safety tips.**

# Where to From Here

A few things to remember when seeking support are:

- Violence is NEVER acceptable and violence is a CRIME
- You are not to blame for the abuse. Abusers make decisions about their behaviour
- Domestic violence has a damaging effect on children, extended families and communities

## Child & Family Counselling Service

Family support and counselling is available to assist in developing a safe and healthy family relationship. Contact Community Health Centre's in your town.

## Domestic Violence Crisis Support

Provides 24/7 counselling, information and referrals to women's refuges and services that offer support, guidance and legal advice.

**NSW Domestic Violence Line:**

**1800 656 463**

## Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services

An independent service that helps women and children experiencing domestic violence to obtain legal protection through Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) at NSW Local Courts.

(More info on pg 15 - Your Legal Rights)

## Community Legal Service

An independent community organisation providing equitable and accessible legal services. See Community Legal Centres NSW for your nearest centre.

**[www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)**

## Lifeline & Kids Helpline

National 24/7 crisis telephone counselling, information and referral services.

**Lifeline: 131 114**

**Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800**

## Doctor

Your GP can offer a wide range of emotional and medical support services, as well as access to Medicare-funded counselling.

## Safe Beds for Pets

Provides temporary housing for pets of women and children seeking refuge from domestic violence, allowing them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future. **(02) 9770 7555**



# What if your partner starts a men's anger program?

## Is he likely to change?

Men's use of violent and controlling behaviour rarely just stops. Your partner or family member might be quite sincere when he promises it will never happen again. Unfortunately, most men find that they cannot keep such promises without support and assistance from others.

Participating in a men's behaviour change group is no guarantee of change. Some men do give up controlling their partner and stop their use of violence. Others might stop their use of physical violence but continue other forms of abuse or control. Men who attend, but do not really make an effort might not change their ways at all. Others might take a long time to change, or change for a while but slip back into their old ways.

You are the best judge of whether your partner or family member is changing, or changing enough for you. You should make that judgement based on his actions, not your hopes.

## What might his participation be like for me?

You should not base your decisions about whether to stay or go, or about safety, on whether or not your partner or male family member is participating in a behaviour change group.

## What about 'anger management'?

Men's behaviour change groups are for men who are using violent and controlling behaviour towards their partner and/or children. Some of these men might have a problem with expressing angry feelings. Others might be experiencing difficulties expressing other feelings, such as fear, anxiety or frustration. Most people experience anger, but this doesn't mean they use violence or control. Men always

make choices everyday about how they express their feelings.

Stopping the use of violent and controlling actions is about a lot more than managing anger. One of the facts that best highlights this is that men who use violent and controlling behaviour towards their partner often don't use it towards anyone else. They can control their anger, but in certain settings, with certain people, they choose not to. This is why we encourage men who use violence to participate in a men's behaviour change program - not an anger management group.

## What about relationship counselling or mediation?

Men's use of violent and controlling behaviour is about their choices. Choosing to be non-violent and then really making it happen requires very specialised support. Relationship counselling is based on both parties having a reasonably equal distribution of power. If your partner or family member is using violent and controlling behaviour, you probably won't be able to make fully free decisions or act on your own needs.

If your relationship is in trouble, this is likely to be because of your partner's actions. There might be other reasons for conflict (all couples disagree!), but these are secondary. Until you feel safe enough to talk about your own needs, feelings and perspectives, relationship counselling isn't going to work for either of you. If your partner or male family member is using or threatening physical violence against you, we strongly recommend you do not suggest relationship counselling to him.

If you are being required to participate in mediation, we encourage you to seek information and legal advice about how you can participate safely.

# Your Legal Rights

Every woman has a right to live in a safe and peaceful home with her children. Police can make an application on their behalf for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) to protect them from future threats and/or violence. An ADVO is an order made by the court to protect people from future harm. The ADVO restricts the behaviour of the person they fear. This order can include an Exclusion Order which prohibits the abusive person from returning to the home. An ADVO is not a criminal charge unless the violent person breaches the order.

An Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) is an order made by a court to restrict the behaviour of the abuser. The purpose of an ADVO is to protect you from violence, harassment or intimidation.

## Things to remember about ADVOs

- An ADVO can be amended to ensure your safety if you want to maintain contact or continue to live with the abusive person.
- Police are required to include any children under the age of 18 on your ADVO
- An ADVO is not a criminal conviction. However the police may feel that criminal charges should be laid to maintain you and your children's safety.
- When the ADVO is broken or breached the abuser can be charged with a criminal offence. For this to occur you must report all breaches to the Police

An **Exclusion Order** can be issued by the local Magistrate to exclude the violent person from the home when requested in the ADVO application. Discuss this option with a police officer, lawyer or court advocacy worker when applying for an ADVO. The attending Police Officer can apply for an immediate interim order on your behalf.

## Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS)

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services are locally based independent services for women and children seeking help and information about how to get protection through the Local Court from domestic violence.

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services are funded by Legal Aid NSW.

## [www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

Home > What we do > Community partnerships > Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program

## LawAccess

A free government telephone service that provides legal information, advice and referrals for people who have a legal problem in NSW.

Phone: **1300 888 529**

## Law Assist

Law Assist is an online resource which is a good first stop for clients wanting to understand ADVOs. It explains legal procedures and forms for Local Court cases.

[www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au/lawassist](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au/lawassist)



From Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program 2004

# Deciding to Leave

It is a common misunderstanding that it is easy for a woman to leave a violent, controlling and abusive relationship. Many women do leave and many try to leave; however leaving an abusive relationship can be a very difficult, lonely and often a very dangerous time. For some women leaving can mean they risk losing their family and community support networks, financial security, homes, hopes and dreams. Leaving a violent relationship permanently can take on average six attempts; each time women find they become stronger, clearer and more confident. The number of barriers faced by women leaving violence may seem overwhelming but it is important to remember that many women leave violent relationships and find safe and fulfilling lives for themselves and their children.

Women leave a violent relationship to become safe however; it is important to remember that this safety may not occur immediately. **Separation can be the time of greatest danger.** It is important to have a clear safety plan for you and your children before you leave.

## Safety When Preparing to Leave

- Contact the Domestic Violence Hotline and arrange safe accommodation for you and your children
- Contact RSPCA to arrange safe accommodation for your pets
- Seek support from a domestic violence worker and consider getting an ADVO
- Arrange your transportation in advance
- Practice travelling to your intended safe spot
- Prepare and safely store a leaving

package with money, documents, clothes, spare keys

- Seek legal advice
- Program emergency support service contacts into your phone
- Ask your doctor to document any injuries
- Only tell trusted people of your intended new location

## What to take when you leave

The safety of you and your children is paramount. Take the items below only if it is safe to do so. It is important to remember you may be able to return with Police support at a later time to collect your possessions.

### Checklist

- ☐ Driver's licence, bank details, credit cards, birth/marriage/divorce certificate/s for you and your children
- ☐ Centrelink, immigration documents
- ☐ Car & house keys
- ☐ Passports for you and your children
- ☐ Car registration papers
- ☐ Medical records, medication & Medicare details
- ☐ Taxation and employment documents
- ☐ Court papers including protection and family law papers
- ☐ Rental, mortgage, legal papers, copy of ADVO
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Personal address book
- ☐ Your children's favourite toys and other items of comfort
- ☐ Personal items which have value or you fear may be destroyed such as jewellery and photographs

# Staying Safe After Separation

Leaving an abusive relationship does not always result in immediate safety. Here are some tips you and your children can use to maintain safety after separation.

- Seek legal advice; be informed of your rights
- Program emergency service contacts into your phone
- Inform your children's school/day care of collection arrangements for your children
- Keep your ADVO with you at all times. Store a copy with someone you trust. If your circumstances change, apply to the Local Court for a variation
- Request police support if you need to return to the house to retrieve your possessions
- Consider changing your bank, postal and phone contacts
- Consider using a silent number and using caller ID
- Consider asking the Australian Electoral Commission to exclude your name and contact details from the Electoral Roll
- Avoid using your usual shopping centre – change your routines
- Increase home security (changing locks, security chains, sensor lights)
- Seek support from neighbours to call the police if they hear a disturbance
- If your partner breaches an ADVO inform the police immediately
- Seek support from a domestic violence support worker / counsellor
- Contact Centrelink to ensure any joint correspondence to you and your partner is changed immediately.

## On-line safety

Abusers often use ways of controlling or monitoring their victim's actions, which can include their online activities. Internet browsers generally record the websites that an Internet user has visited, and 'spyware' and 'keylogging' programs can allow a computer user's actions to be tracked without them being aware of it.

If you are in an abusive relationship, there are some precautions that you should take when using the Internet.

Use a safer computer. If you need to use the Internet, try to use a computer at work, a public library, community centre, a trustworthy friend's house, an Internet café, or a women's refuge. This is particularly important if you are looking at sensitive websites. It is safer to use a computer that is less accessible to your abuser.

Clear your internet history. While it is difficult to completely delete your Internet history, you can make it less readily accessible. Please read instructions for Windows, Mac and iPhone. Be aware that your partner may notice if the address history on the PC has been cleared, and this may raise suspicion.

Be careful when communicating online. Because messages sent through email accounts, social networking sites (such as Facebook) and instant messaging services can be tracked and recorded, it is preferable to use other ways of seeking help, if they are available to you. These could include telephoning a domestic violence helpline, women's refuge or the NSW Police Force. After communicating



online, always ensure that you properly log out of websites.

**Create an alternative email account.** Do not create or use an alternative account on any computer that your abuser may have access to. Create an anonymous user name and account you can use on a safer computer, but do not provide detailed information about yourself.

### **Protect or change your passwords.**

Choose passwords for your email and other online accounts (such as online banking accounts) that would be difficult for your abuser to guess, particularly by avoiding personal details such as birthdays, nicknames or family details. You should also try to avoid sharing your passwords with other people.

Reference:

[http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/internet\\_safety](http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/internet_safety)

## **Resisting the Urge to Return**

After leaving a controlling, abusive and violent relationship there may be moments of regret and thoughts of reuniting. These feelings are a natural part of the grief process when dealing with the loss of a relationship. It is important to acknowledge these feelings.

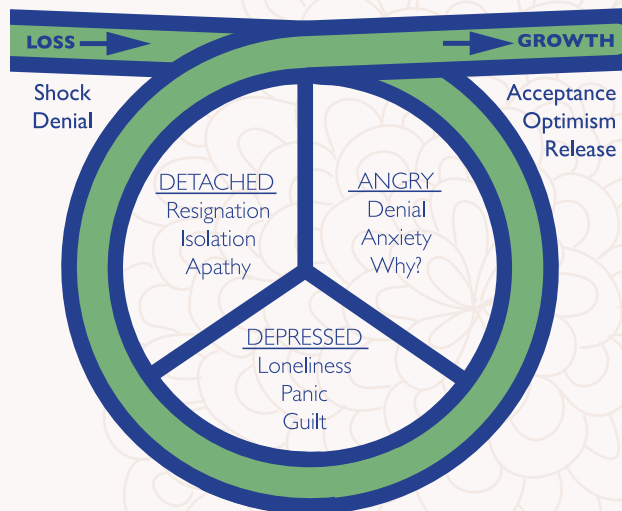
There are many strategies which may be used by the abuser to encourage you to return. They may include:

- Purchase of gifts with promises of continued generosity and a better future.
- Promises of change – saying they are sorry and that the abuse will never happen again
- Use of emotional blackmail - attempts to make you feel guilty, or unable to survive without them
- Threats to self-harm, harm you, your children, or property
- Harassing and intimidating visits, phone calls and text messages

The strategies used will vary for each relationship and there are ways in which you can deal with them including:

- Acknowledging that the abuser's behaviours are an extension of his need to control and abuse you
- Seek support through professional counselling
- Attend a domestic violence support group
- Build strong social networks
- Get legal advice and/or take out an ADVO.

This is an important time to stay connected to local support services.



# How You May Feel After Leaving an Abusive Relationship

Leaving an abusive relationship is a positive choice for you and your children. The process however, can still be difficult. It can also be difficult to make the transition alone. It is helpful to have the support of people who are experienced with assisting women in abusive relationships. Your personal safety and your legal rights become more difficult to ensure when an abusive partner is involved.

## **Separation - How Will It Feel?**

Separation is not easy. It may take some time to work through the steps and become re-established. It is common to identify yourself with your relationship. Your role as a wife/partner and/or mother may be the way you see yourself. When you leave the relationship you may experience a real sense of loss of your identity. The process of moving from your role of wife/partner to a single person is painful and not always as fast as you might want it to be.

The transition involves getting to know yourself in a new way. Now you can become your own person. Being on your own is a wonderful feeling as well as a scary one. It may be the first time you have had the freedom to experience this responsibility. It sometimes takes many trials to discover who you are and what you want in life. This is normal. It is OK to learn from your mistakes and learn from what you do well. You will probably feel all your emotions more strongly than ever. You may feel betrayal, grief, anger, joy and freedom, weakness and strength, often at the same time. You may feel that you are going crazy because of all the emotions you have, which are sometimes overwhelming, contradictory, and unexpected.

You are not crazy. Remember that your emotions are just a part of you, a changing part. This is a normal process. It is helpful to let yourself feel your emotions fully and not judge yourself for having them. You will pass through each one in time.

## **Grief**

Grief is a large part of the process of letting go of a relationship. When you feel grief, feel free to let yourself cry. It may feel like you will never stop. Remember, you are facing a death - the death of your relationship and you will stop crying when the mourning is over. You may not understand why you are sad, especially if you were badly abused. There were probably some good things that you will miss. This is the reality. Remember - you did have to pay a price for the good things - a very high price.

## **Euphoria**

You may experience a great sense of euphoria when you leave the relationship. This may last for weeks or months. This is usually felt if you have made a clear decision. This euphoria can help give you energy to get yourself on your feet again. Don't be surprised if, a month or a year later, you feel grief or anger or depression. This is normal and part of the process of change or separation. You will have to work through the grief stages at some time. The timing may vary with each individual and the process is usually finished after you have let yourself feel fully at each stage.

## **Anger**

You may feel more anger after separation than you have ever felt before. You may suddenly experience all the anger that was stockpiled and denied during your relationship, along with the built-up

frustration of not getting your needs met, and the powerlessness of the position you were in. It is safe to feel angry now. Try to accept that your anger is normal. Anger can give you power and motivation. Use it to your advantage. The goal of letting yourself feel anger is to express it constructively so that you become free of it. Do not turn it on those around you and don't use it for revenge. Acting in revenge may destroy your self-respect in the long run; although it is okay to fantasize about it.

### **Grieving Symptoms**

While you are going through the separation, it is normal for you to experience both physical and emotional stress reactions. Physical symptoms you may experience include: sleep disturbances; diarrhea or constipation; nausea; changes in heart rate; menstrual changes; weight gain or loss. Psychological symptoms may include: sadness, hopelessness or feelings of futility; edginess and being easily irritated; crying often; poor concentration; great difficulty making decisions; and, poor memory. Good physical exercise (i.e. walking, jogging, cycling, etc.) can help you cope.

### **Anxiety & Loss of Control**

You are probably accustomed to judging your safety by predicting your partner's mood and picking up the signals from him/her, so you could anticipate and react. When you leave, the absence of your partner may feel frightening. You may feel you have lost control. Your feelings of safety are gone when you lose those signals. The feelings of loss of control are normal in transition. You are moving the centre of control from your partner to yourself. It can be as frightening as it is freeing and it just takes time.

### **Disorientation**

Because your perspective on your relationship has changed, you may see your past, yourself, and your partner differently. This can make you feel disoriented and you may doubt your memories and the decisions you have made. You may selectively remember only the good or only the bad times. This is normal. Your situation has changed and you now have additional information so your view of the past will change too.

### **Loneliness**

Your friends may change over time, as well as your interests and concerns. Friends may feel threatened by your new position. They may take sides with your partner. It may hurt you a great deal if your former in-laws reject you. Family blood is often thicker than you want to believe. It may take you a while to trust, or to have energy for anyone else. This is normal and self-protective. You may want to isolate yourself, but friendships are very important. Friends are especially important at this time, especially those who don't judge us. You don't have to wait for an invitation. Reach out. Even though it may seem less painful to isolate yourself, in the long run it is not.

### **Temptation to Reconcile**

Many women who leave go back a number of times before leaving permanently. What some call the "honeymoon" period, is in actuality a tactic of manipulation used by the abuser to continue to maintain power and control. When you have been away for a while and your partner is pleading with you to return, promising you that he/she has changed and will not hurt you again, the temptation to reconcile may seem overwhelming. You have

heard promises before. If you think your relationship is worth saving, take the time that is necessary to be sure there is now a strong foundation of mutual respect for you to build your lives on. Generally, as time passes, indicators of whether or not your partner is following through on his/her promise to change may become clear.

## New Relationships

New relationships may trigger memories of your old relationship. It takes hard work, a great deal of commitment, and communication to be in a relationship. Be sure you feel strong enough to live independently before you make the choice of living inter-dependently again. It is important to remember that life is up and down. You will have good days, when you are feeling strong and capable, and bad days, when you are feeling depressed and vulnerable. Know that feeling bad will not last forever and there are things you can do to help yourself through the down times. Many women find that the first anniversary of their leaving is particularly painful. It may be important for you to be aware of that and plan for it. You may arrange to spend that time with close friends. You may also wish to get in touch with a worker to get reinforcement and support.

## WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF

- Let yourself feel your emotions fully. Do not judge yourself for having them. You will pass through each one.
- Take time out for you. Do what feels nurturing for yourself, i.e. take a hot bath, go for a walk, curl up in bed and read a book. You have a right to pamper yourself.
- Eat small, nutritious meals regularly, rest when you can, even if you cannot sleep,

and exercise to release tension. Treat yourself to a massage.

- To regain a feeling of control in your new environment: develop a daily routine; set and accomplish small goals each day; control where you go and who you are with so that you are safe.
- Find out about and use community resources for support: support groups; single parent support services; free community counselling services; recreation centres; educational resources. If you don't know what these services are, check the numbers at the back of this booklet.
- Holidays and special occasions such as anniversaries can be especially hard times. It is important to establish new customs for yourself and your children. You can spend these times with close friends who are experiencing the same feelings and difficulties. Do something different. For example, organise a dinner or barbeque with friends or neighbours, or spend the holiday out of town.

## When You Need More Help

When you leave an abusive relationship, it is normal to feel any or all of the emotions outlined here and it is normal to feel that your life is in a state of upheaval. However, it would be wise to seek more help for yourself if you feel any of the following: suicidal; depressed to the point of not looking after yourself or your children; euphoria to the point of threatening your own safety by drinking too much; spending excessive amounts of money or being promiscuous; rage that expresses itself by hurting people or destroying property. A counsellor can help you work through the emotions that are overwhelming you.

# Parenting after Domestic Violence

Your parenting may have changed over time as a result of the abuse. In difficult and traumatic situations our behaviour and the way we connect with people can change without us realising. Spend this time to think about what is important to you as a parent and develop some steps to assist you in being the woman and the parent you would like to be.

## Some parenting tips that may be useful for you at this time include:

- Talk to your children about the situation and what is happening and will happen
- Be honest about your feelings and let them know you love them. Let them know they are safe
- Maintain consistency in your parenting
- Establish a normal routine

- Be present, listen to their concerns, keep the communication channels open
- Develop and maintain support networks such as grandparents, teachers, youth workers, professional counselling
- Take time to do fun things as a family.

## What you can do:

- Teach children that abuse is unacceptable
- Role model non-violent problem solving techniques
- Talk to your children about their experiences and listen to their concerns
- Promote independence and acknowledge children's right to have their own feelings, friends, activities and opinions
- Provide a safe environment with a stable routine
- Design a safety plan with your child.





## Emergency Services

Emergency

000 or

112 from mobiles

## Hotlines

1800 Respect	1800 737 732
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Child Protection Helpline	132 111
Domestic Violence Hotline NSW	1800 656 463
Domestic Violence Advocacy Service	1800 810 784
Family Relationship Advice	1800 050 321
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800
Lifeline	131 114
Mensline	1300 789 978
Mission Australia Helpline	1300 886 999
NSW Rape Crisis Line	1800 424 017
Parentline	132 055
Police Customer Assistance Unit (Police Complaints)	1800 622 571
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277
Victims Access Line	1800 633 063
Victims of Crime Helpline	1800 656 463

## Indigenous Services

Aboriginal Contact Line	1800 019 123
Indigenous Women's Legal Advice Line	1800 639 784
Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre (for remote communities)	136 380
Victims Services Aboriginal Contact Line	1800 019 123

## Legal Services

Law Access NSW	1300 888 529
Women's Legal Services	1800 801 501
Indigenous Women's Legal Services	1800 639 784
The Older Person's Legal Service	1800 424 079
Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line	1800 810 784

Community Legal Centres NSW	02 9212 7333
NSW Legal Aid Child Support Services	1800 451 784
Safe Relationship Project	02 9332 1966 or
(Same Sex, Transgender, Intersex)	1800 244 481

## **Emergency Accommodation Services**

Homeless Persons Information Service	02 9265 9081 or
	1800 234 566
Domestic Violence Line	1800 65 64 63
Department of Housing	1300 468 746

## **Mental Health Services**

Mental Health Line	1800 011 511
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## **Financial Services**

Centrelink	131 794
Child Support Agency	131 272
Indigenous Call Centre	136 380
Multicultural Services	131 202

## **Counselling**

Victims Access Line	1800 633 063 or
	02 8688 5511
1800 Respect	1800 737 732
(National Sexual Assault and Family Violence Counselling Service)	
Immigrant Women's Speakout Association	02 9281 1627
Immigration Advice & Rights Centre	02 9281 1627

## **Children & Young People**

Youth Line (Lifeline) 24 hours, free call	13 11 14
Kids Help Line	1800 551 800
Under 18 Legal Aid Youth Hotline	1800 101 810
National Children and Youth Law Centre	02 9398 7488
Youth Accommodation Line	1800 424 830

## Weblinks

I 800 Respect online	<a href="http://www.1800respect.org.au">www.1800respect.org.au</a>
Department of Community Services Helpline	<a href="http://www.community.nsw.gov.au">www.community.nsw.gov.au</a>
Domestic Violence: it can happen to anyone	<a href="http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au">www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au</a>
Domestic Violence Resource Centre	<a href="http://www.dvrcv.org.au">www.dvrcv.org.au</a>
Family law information for parents and children	<a href="http://www.bestforkids.org.au">www.bestforkids.org.au</a>
Information for same-sex domestic violence	<a href="http://www.anothercloset.com.au">www.anothercloset.com.au</a>
Information for teenagers about domestic violence	<a href="http://www.burstingbubble.com">www.burstingbubble.com</a>
Interrelate Family Centres	<a href="http://www.interrelate.org.au">www.interrelate.org.au</a>
LawAccess NSW	<a href="http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au">www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au</a>
Tenants Advice & Advocacy Service	<a href="http://www.tenants.org.au">www.tenants.org.au</a>
NSW Legal Aid	<a href="http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au">www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au</a>
NSW Rape Crisis Centre	<a href="http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au">www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</a>
Safe Beds for Pets Program	<a href="http://www.rspcansw.org.au/programs/safe_beds_for_pet">www.rspcansw.org.au/programs/safe_beds_for_pet</a>
Victims Access Line	<a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs</a>
Women's Legal Services	<a href="http://www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au">www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au</a>



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on (02) 6672 4188 or visit our resources page at  
[www.tswomen.org.au](http://www.tswomen.org.au)