



Courage

Domestic violence: leaving your abuser

“Why doesn’t she just leave?”
This is a common question
when it comes to domestic
violence.

But this question is flawed. Asking why the victim stays in the relationship puts the responsibility on the wrong person. Shouldn't we ask "Why do abusers abuse?" Abused partners can do leave. Here is some information that might help you understand what it means to leave and how that process can be made safer.

Leaving can be hard

Domestic violence is a complex issue. There are many reasons why leaving is so hard. Often, victims don't leave because of:

- Fear of more violence: Trying to leave can lead to more attacks and more danger. Abusers may threaten to hurt themselves, pets or children. The time when a victim leaves tends to be the most dangerous time in their relationship.¹
- Financial dependence: Many abusers gain power by controlling all the money in the relationship. This often leaves victims with no means of providing for themselves and their children. Survivors often state lack of money as a top reason for staying in an abusive relationship.²
- Children: An abuser may threaten to take or harm the victim's children.

¹50 Obstacles to Leaving. The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Accessed February 2018.

²Renzulli, Kerri Anne. Money Fears Keep Women in Abusive Relationships. Here's How to Change That. Money. Accessed February 2018.

- **Low sense of self-worth:** Repeated abuse can chip away at a person's self-worth. This can make it hard to even think about leaving.
- **False hope:** Abusers often show remorse for abuse and promise it will stop. And while victims want the abuse to end, they may not want the relationship to end. The victim cares about the abuser and wants to believe he or she will change.
- **Religious or cultural beliefs:** Some religions and cultures don't support divorce or may endorse outdated or unrealistic gender roles. These beliefs may lead a victim to stay and try to keep the family together no matter what happens.
- **Isolation:** An abuser might keep the victim from talking to or seeing friends and family. After losing these supports, the victim may feel even more alone. And this can make leaving harder.
- **Self-blame:** Many victims are made to feel like the abuse is their fault. Abusers might convince them that ending the abuse is up to them. But abuse is never the victim's fault. No one deserves to be abused.

Preparing to leave

It's not easy to end an abusive relationship. And since it can be a risky time, it helps to have a plan in place. Here are some steps that can help:

- Open a bank account in your name only. Add money to it as you are able.
- Get a new cell phone. Abusers can track your location, text messages, calls and more on your current phone.
- Have a list of friends, hotlines and shelters that might help.
- Know where you can go to be safe.
- Talk to an expert. You can call a shelter or the National Domestic Violence Hotline **(1-800-799-7233)**.
- Practice ways to get out of your home and keep a bag packed. You may want to leave the bag with a trusted friend.
- Get rid of any weapons in your home. Make sure they're locked away or put in a safe place.
- Teach children how to dial 911 and make up a code word if you need them to call.
- Tell friends and loved ones about your situation.

Items to take

If you need to leave quickly, keep these items together in a place that's easy to access:

- ___ Personal identification (driver's license, passport, military ID card, birth certificate, INS green card, VISA, welfare identification, etc.)
- ___ Children's identification (birth certificates, military ID cards, INS green cards, etc.)
- ___ Social Security cards for you and your children
- ___ Medical insurance card
- ___ Wedding certificate
- ___ Divorce papers
- ___ Protective order
- ___ Insurance papers (for health, life, auto, etc.)
- ___ Car registration
- ___ School records
- ___ Bankbooks and checkbook
- ___ Money
- ___ ATM or debit card
- ___ Credit cards
- ___ Keys to car, house, office
- ___ Medications you and your children need
- ___ Medical records for all family members, including children's immunization records
- ___ Lease or rental agreements
- ___ Mortgage payment book and deed to house
- ___ Address book
- ___ Photos of you, your children, your abuser
- ___ Jewelry
- ___ Children's favorite toy or blanket
- ___ Personal care items and diapers, if needed
- ___ Small items you can sell

Finding a shelter

Domestic violence shelters can provide victims with a safe place to go and get help. Many shelters provide both short- and long-term housing options. This gives victims time to recover and rebuild their lives. And some shelters offer legal services, childcare, employment help and counseling.

Learn about your local shelters. Find out where shelters are and what they offer before you leave. Find out:

- Will you feel safe there?
- What services do they offer? Do they help with housing?
- Does someone there speak your language? If not, can they still help you?
- Can you get emergency transportation?

Leaving

When it comes to leaving an abusive relationship, safety needs to come first. Here are some things to think about:

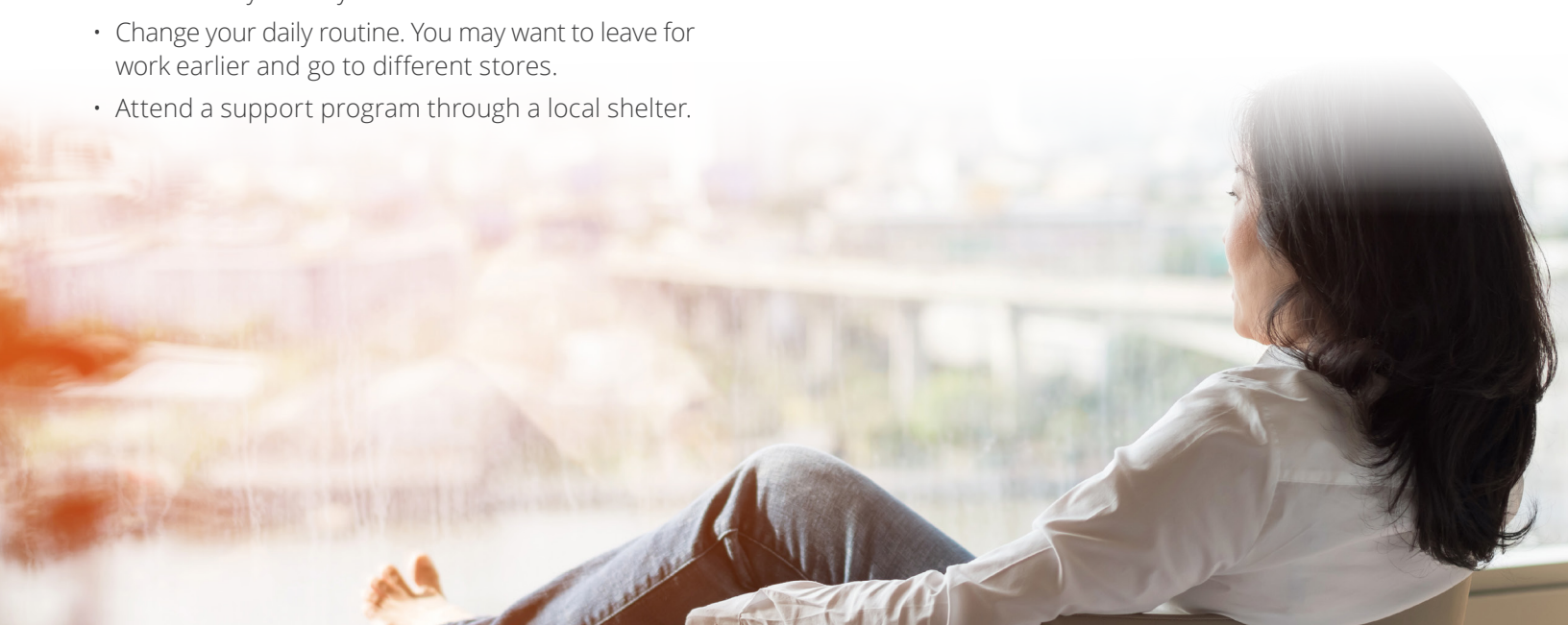
- Take out a restraining order. Be sure to include your workplace.
- Tell friends and neighbors to call the police if they see your abuser in the area.
- At work, inform your supervisor, Human Resources and security so they can be alert.
- Change your daily routine. You may want to leave for work earlier and go to different stores.
- Attend a support program through a local shelter.

Resources

Computer use is never completely private. Consider using a computer at work or the library where abusers can't track your activity. If you're worried someone may be looking at your search history, you may want to call a hotline instead. Here are some resources:

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
1-800-799-7233
- **National Coalition Against Domestic Violence**
- **No More**
- **Love Is Respect**

Leaving an abusive situation is hard. But you can do it. Just be sure to put your safety first.



The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC.

All EAP calls are confidential, except as required by law. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions about specific needs. There may be other explanations for any or all of the above [behaviors/ characteristics/ symptoms]. This information is not a complete list of all signs concerning such [behaviors/ characteristics/ symptoms] and should not be used as a stand-alone instrument.