

Marilyn Merritt-Gray and *Judith Wuest*, UNB Faculty of Nursing, would like to thank the women of New Brunswick who shared their experience of leaving and also The Victim Services Fund, Office of the Solicitor General, NB, who helped fund this research.



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A Brighter

Tomorrow:

Insight into Abusive

Relationships

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide information that can be used to help people who have experienced partner abuse.

Types of Abuse

Often people believe that if they have never been hit, they have not been abused. This is not true. Abuse can affect anyone regardless of income, age, race, culture, education, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability.

Abuse can be emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, or financial.

Signs of Abuse

Does the person:

- Control what you do and who you see - become jealous easily
- Do or say things to make you feel useless, or stupid
- Repeatedly criticize and put you down privately or publicly
- Try to control the money
- Refuse to give you money
- Destroy your credit rating
- Treat you like they own you
- Withhold medicine or give you too much
- Refuse to let you see the doctor
- Not trust you and check up on you
- Harm or threaten to destroy your belongings
- Tell you "you're crazy" and threaten to have you locked up
- Threaten to tell others about things you want to keep private
- Hurt or threaten to hurt you, your children, or your pets
- Hit, pinch, slap, kick, punch, choke, or push you
- Burn, cut, stab, shoot, or threaten you with a weapon
- Destroy or refuse to give you your wheelchair or crutches
- Force you to take part in unwanted sexual touching or activity
- Force you to look at pornographic material

If you answered yes to one or more of the above, you may be in an abusive relationship. Even if the abuser did not intend to abuse, the above behaviours are abusive.

Other Things to Plan For

- ***Put in a safe place:*** Birth certificates (yours and children's), marriage records or binding documents, house deeds, rental or lease agreement, passports, immigration papers, copy of income tax statements, all bank account names and numbers (his and yours), insurance policies, school records, restraining order, address book.
- ***Keep in purse:*** Money (credit cards, cash, coin, ATM cards, bank books), driver's license, health and immunization records, social insurance cards, medicare cards, health cards, keys, important phone numbers (shelter, police, hospital).
- ***Pack:*** Clothes for you and the children, medications, prescriptions, and children's favorite toys or blankets.

*****Sometimes you will have to leave without one or more of the above. The most important thing is to leave the violence.***

After Leaving

- Go to a friend, nearest shelter, or hotel
- See a lawyer or call Legal Aid - Domestic
- Inform the children's school of their absence. Tell them not to give out your address or telephone number
- You are eligible for emergency financial assistance through Family and Community Services.

Effects on Children

Children exposed to violence may have the following problems:

- ***Very young children*** may have sleep problems, weight change, and cry more than usual.
- ***Preschoolers*** may become clingy, or aggressive, and may begin to wet the bed, suck their thumb, or have changes in speech.
- ***6 to 10 year-old children*** may have problems with school or friendships.
- ***Teenagers*** may run away, drop out of school, date early, and have troubled relationships.
- ***Girls*** often become over-achievers, withdraw, and experience depression and anxiety.
- ***Boys*** tend to act with aggression. They may strike out, lose their temper, and get in trouble with the law.

People who have witnessed violence are more likely to use violence as a way to handle conflict in relationships.

Safety Plan

When thinking about leaving, planning for your safety is important.

Make Connections

- Tell a friend or family member you trust about the abuse
- Choose a code **word** that will alert the friend or family member of danger when the abuser is present. Tell them that this **word** means you are in trouble and to call **911**
- Ask neighbours to call **911** if they hear violence begin or see your prearranged signal
- Talk to your children about what to do when you are in danger such as go to the neighbours, call **911**.

If Violence Begins

- Alert someone. Use your code word
- Keep your back toward an open space
- Look for an escape route
- Keep away from corners
- Stay out of the garage, bathroom or kitchen, where there are weapons, sharp or heavy items.

Plan Ahead

- Write down or memorize a list of important telephone numbers: transition house, friends. **NB phonebooks list crisis numbers on page 2. You can dial 911 at no cost from most telephones**
- Hide money for transportation or phone calls in case you have to leave quickly
- Open a bank account in your name
- Leave money, extra keys, important documents (identification and financial) and clothes with someone you trust
- Keep a journal or pictures of abuse for evidence
- Make sure your car has gas.

Make a Plan to Leave

- Plan an exit route from each floor and room of the house. Know what doors in the house lock. Think of an exit route for night time
- Know the places in town that are open 24 hours a day
- Know who will help you hide
- Know the route to the shelter, police station, and hospital

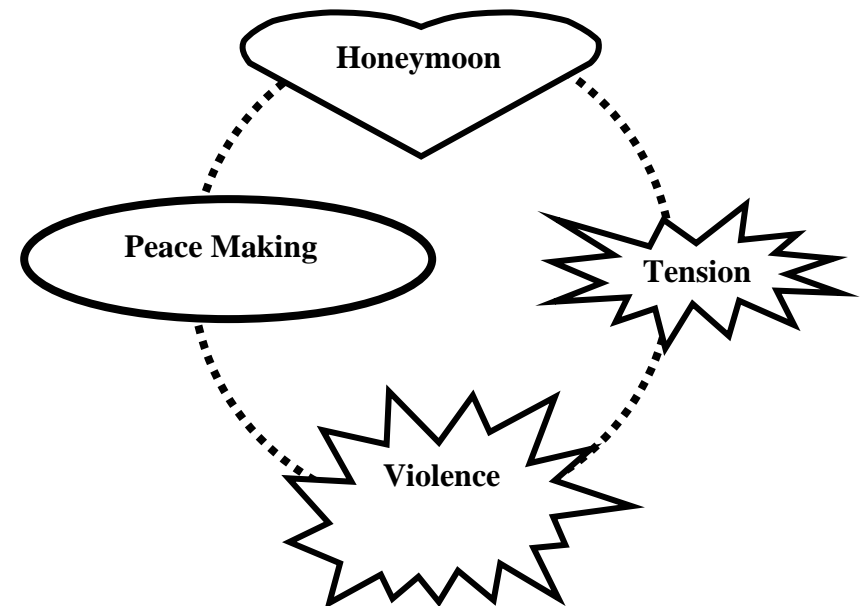
Have a backup plan.

Cycle of Abuse

Abuse often follows a cycle that includes:

1. **Honeymoon Stage:** Abuser does nice things (sometimes very brief)
2. **Tension Stage:** Abuser is moody and makes you feel nervous. You cannot please him. Arguments begin
3. **Violence Stage:** Abuser goes into a rage. Abuser destroys things, makes threats, and may attack you
4. **Peacemaking Stage:** Abuser promises to never do it again.

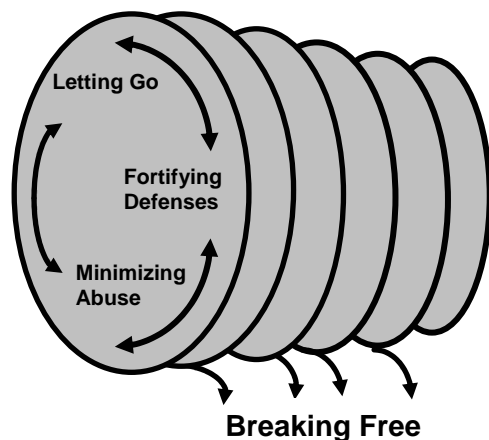
This cycle may vary over time and between couples.



The Leaving Process

Leaving is not a single act. It is a process of *reclaiming self* that takes place over many years. Most women gain and lose ground as they work to save their relationship, keep their children safe, and sort out their options. No two women leave the same way, but there are common stages to leaving.

Stage 1: Counteracting Abuse



Counteracting Abuse begins when the abuse starts and can continue for many years. Women protect themselves and resist abuse by:

Letting go – Women are worn down and give up on personally important things. They may let go of control of their own money, going to school, friends, or hopes for the future. *“I molded myself into the situation, instead of keeping my own self.”*

Minimizing Abuse – Women are on guard because of the unpredictable abuse. They search for ways to protect themselves, fight back, and make their partners understand. *“I hoped that I could change him and help him, but he wouldn’t let me.”*

Fortifying Defenses – Women find ways to lessen their pain and find space to think. They learn that relationships can be different. They build confidence in their abilities and make plans to leave.

Stage 2: Breaking Free

Women gradually cut ties with the abuser. They leave behind treasured belongings and the life they shared with the abuser. Women may leave and return many times. They learn that leaving can be more dangerous than staying.

Stage 3: Not Going Back

Women gradually create a life separate from the ex-partner and do not go back to the abusive relationship by:

Gaining Control – making the system work for them, setting limits *“leave me alone or I will press charges.”* and learning to live with new risks.

Getting Situated – salvaging belongings, organizing money, and settling children. Normal activities begin again.

Endless Justifying – explaining the situation by defending decisions and trying to measure up.

Stage 4: Moving On

Women face their past and take hold of their future by:

Figuring it out – searching for reasons for the abuse and why they stayed as long as they did.

Launching new relationships

Taking on a new image – “The woman who was abused is not who I am now.”

Putting the abuse in its rightful place – The abuse becomes history. Women hesitate to forgive and believe it is important to not forget.

RECLAIMING SELF

