

# PROUD TO BE ME II

Domestic Abuse  
Survival Guide



The Lantern Project  
supporting victims of abuse  
[www.lanternproject.org.uk](http://www.lanternproject.org.uk)  
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I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY NO



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*Hindsight is a wonderful thing but by its very nature it arrives after the time when you need it most.*

## PROUD TO BE ME II

### INTRODUCTION

My name is Nicol Hick, I lived with aggressive behaviour from childhood. When I left home at sixteen, I thought I had left it all behind me. All I had done was left one situation and moved on to create my own. The legacy of my experiences had remained with me. This influenced the relationships I chose, my expectations of others and how I felt about myself. I did not live my life; I simply existed from one crisis to another. For many years I used to feel like I walked round with 'doormat' stamped on my forehead; manipulated by those who I thought were my friends, and abused within my personal relationships.

Throughout all this I desperately wanted a different life for both myself and my children. I simply could not accept my life the way it was; there had to be something better for us than merely existing. Finally, armed with the knowledge I had gained from my mistakes, I relocated and started again from scratch. Looking back I met many good people along my journey, but none of them could help me until I had learnt how to help myself. I am the mother of three children, and although the legacy of our experiences still lives on for us, its influence diminishes, day by day.

Much of what is contained within these pages would have served to make my journey from the abuse I suffered much shorter. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but by its very nature it arrives after the time when you need it most. I have written this survival guide in the hope that its content will now arrive in time to help you.

My past will always be a part of me, but it no longer dictates my future.



**Nicol Hick**  
Proud to be me.



*Whatever the relationship which exists between the victim and their abuser, abuse has direct and indirect long term consequences for the victim.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Domestic abuse - Familiaral aggression

Many myths surround the understanding of oppressive relationships and what exactly it is that constitutes domestic abuse. The difference between domestic abuse and stranger attacks is that domestic abuse is aggression in its many forms from someone the victim is familiar with.

Within this guide domestic abuse will be understood as having only one defining factor. This is that the abuser is personally known to the victim. Therefore the abusive relationships referred in these pages include amongst them; carers, siblings, partners, parents or friends with the victims being either male or female, of all age groups and of any background.

In an ideal world, relationships between individuals would be based fairly on a 'give and take' basis. Unfortunately this is not always so and the power held within relationships can be unequal. Aggressive tactics are then also used in some relationships to further reinforce this inequality. The methods used to maintain power in these oppressive relationships can be wide-ranging. It is important to recognise that violence and aggression does not have to be physical and comes in many other forms. Whatever the tactics used to make someone feel inferior and powerless, they all have a damaging effect on the victims.

Due to the frequent portrayal of victims of abuse with physical injuries it can feel that society almost has this level of abuse, which you have to reach before it is 'formally' recognisable that you have a situation. I have many difficulties describing what happened to me as domestic abuse in its common understanding. My ordeal started long before I was ever physically assaulted.

There are four kinds of domestic abuse you should be aware of: **psychological**, **economic**, **social** and **physical**. They can be present individually or together in any combination. Each one originates from the perpetrator's desire for power and control and all these forms of abuse can be equally harmful.

## This list will help you recognise an oppressive relationship.

The more behaviours you recognise from the list, the more dangerous a relationship is. It is important to understand that physical violence is rarely an isolated event. Oppressive relationships can lead to physical injury, and ultimately even death. Therefore being able to recognise the warning signs can be helpful in understanding the risk posed by continuing with damaging relationships.

How many of these do you recognise?

**1. Verbal abuse and criticism:** Calling you names; mocking you; accusations; being blamed; yelling; swearing; making humiliating remarks or gestures about you, or to you.

"Who else would want you?"

"I realised one day that I couldn't remember the last time she had said anything nice about me....

It was all just constant picking at me in one way or another"

"Apparently I didn't have a sense of humour because I couldn't see the funny side of all the jokes he was always making about me"

YES  NO

**2. Pressure tactics:** Rushing you to make decisions through 'guilt tripping' and other forms of intimidation; sulking; threatening to withhold money; manipulating the children, family and or friends; telling you what to do all the time.

"The children will never forgive you"

YES  NO

**3. Abusing authority:** Always claiming to be right and insisting that what they say is the truth; telling you what to do and making big decisions using 'their' logic.

"There isn't anything you can tell me that I don't already know"

"I don't have to explain myself to you...who do you think you are?"

"This is how it's going to be whether you like it or not"

"I'm the one with custody so you will see them when and if I say so"

YES  NO

**4. Disrespect:** Interrupting and changing the subject; not listening or ignoring you; twisting your words; undermining you in front of the children; putting you down in front of other people; saying bad things about your family or friends.

"Oh, ignore her, she doesn't know what she's talking about"

"She would twist everything I said round so much that it got to the point where I just stopped saying anything at all"

"Mummy's a silly cow isn't she?"

YES  NO

**5. Abusing trust:** Lying to you or withholding information; cheating on you; being overly jealous.

"Where were you? I don't believe you - you're lying to me."

"I forgot to tell you"

"I didn't think you would be interested"

YES  NO

**6. Breaking promises:** Not keeping to agreements; not taking responsibility; refusing to help with childcare or housework.

"You promised to give me some money to live on... I haven't got any food in for the kids."

"I've changed my mind so your not having the children this weekend,"

"I'm not looking after the kids...I've been at work all week so the weekend is my time off"

YES  NO

**7. Emotional withholding:** Not expressing feelings; not giving support; attention or praise; not respecting your feelings, rights or opinions.

"You always want to know what I'm thinking."

"You know I'm not like that - I don't talk about my feelings."

"You take everything too seriously"

YES  NO

**8. Minimising, denying and blaming:** Making light of behaviour and not taking your concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse has not happened; shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour; saying you caused it or that you must be mad.

"You're making a big deal out of it and it's all in your head"

"You're just highly strung you are - go take a chill pill."

"You know what I'm like; I wouldn't have done it, if you hadn't of done that."

YES  NO

**9. Economic control:** Interfering with your work; not letting you work or making you give up work; refusing to give you money or taking your money; taking your car keys or preventing you from using the car; making you take loans in your name; forcing you to apply for benefits to which you are not entitled; threatening to report you to social services, CSA or benefits agencies.

"When I got out of hospital, I found he had spent all of the next two weeks income support... I had nothing to live on."

"If you don't like it then get out...it's my name on the house"

YES  NO

**10. Self-destructive behaviour:** Threatening suicide or other forms of self harmful behaviour if you do not do what they want; abusing drugs or alcohol; deliberately saying or doing things which will have negative consequences for them; making you feel guilty and responsible for their well-being.

"You are the only thing I have left. If you leave me I'll have nothing left to live for"

"I'm not eating because you upset me all the time so much"

"He went into work, caused so much trouble that they fired him and then he blamed it all on me"

YES  NO

**11. Isolation:** preventing or making it difficult for you to see friends or relatives; monitoring or not allowing you to use the phone; telling you where you can or cannot go.

"I should be the most important person in your life." "Your always round there...You don't need them, you've got me."

"Who's on the phone?... let me listen"

YES  NO

**12. Harassment:** Making uninvited and unexpected visits or calls; following you; checking up on you; embarrassing you in public; refusing to leave when asked.

"Having to unplug the phone because she wouldn't listen when I said I didn't want to speak to her anymore"

"Being spat on in the street was one of the worst things I have ever experienced"

"It didn't feel like harassment at first, just very intense, but then when I told him I needed some space he actually got worse....he always had a reason for being around."

YES  NO

**13. Intimidation:** Making angry or threatening gestures; use of physical size to intimidate; standing in doorways during arguments; preventing you from leaving the room during arguments; out-shouting you; driving recklessly to frighten you; throwing or slamming objects to startle you.

"Just what do you think you're going to do about it?" / "Go on then- make me."

"He was that good at intimidation it was almost like he never had to actually hit me... all he had to do was hint at what I knew he could do...."

YES  NO

**14. Destruction:** Destroying your possessions; punching walls and/or breaking things; damaging objects which belong to you.

"I got home late one day and my cd's had been put in the microwave"

"In the space of a few months I had my windows put through, the bin set fire to, the staircase was smashed to pieces and there were punch holes in all the doors."

YES  NO

**15. Threats:** Making threats to hurt you or others you care about including children, relatives, friends and pets.

"Have you seen your cat recently?"

"Bet Social Services would love to know what a crap parent you are."

"If you think things were bad before, just you wait and see what happens now."

YES  NO

**16. Sexual violence:** Using force or coercion (of any kind) to obtain sex or perform sexual acts; degrading treatment based on your sex or sexual orientation.

"You know you want to really."

"After all I've put up with from you, the least you can do is make me feel wanted."

"I felt as though I mightn't as well have been there... it used to make me feel ill, he didn't care if I really wanted to or not"

YES  NO

**17. Physical violence:** Being violent to you, your children, household pets or others; slapping; punching; grabbing; kicking; choking; shoving; biting; burning; etc

"Wearing green eye shadow on my left eye, to make my right eye look less obviously bruised."

"Feeling my teeth grind against each other, after being punched, then spitting out the broken pieces."

YES  NO

**18. Weapons:** Use of weapons; keeping weapons around which frighten you; displaying weapons; threatening or attempting to kill you or those you love.

"If I can't have you no one else will"

"If you leave me you will never see the children again"

"Watch your back because I'll get you"

YES  NO

## CHAPTER TWO

Common myths and misunderstandings: All of these myths are wrong, and stem from common misunderstandings and stereotypes which are portrayed and reinforced in our society through the media, our history, and cultural expectations.

### 1. “Aggression is physical violence”

**False** - Physical violence is rarely an isolated event or occurs ‘out of the blue’ (even if at the time you could not recognise the warning signs yourself). There are four forms of abuse: psychological (emotional damage), economic (financial control), social (isolated from friends/family) and physical (the threat of and/or actual bodily harm including sexual). All these originate from the perpetrator’s desire for power and control and can be equally harmful. Whether they occur individually or together in any combination, they leave a lasting impact on their victims.

### 2. “Victims are always female”

**False** - With the obvious lack of powerful female role models, we live in a society where culturally, there already exists an unequal balance of power between the genders and many victims are indeed female, but not all. You do not have to be female to become a victim of abusive behaviour. Victims can be male, female, of any age or background.

### 3. “Men can’t suffer from domestic abuse”

**False** - Both men and women can become the victims of aggressive and abusive behaviour within their personal relationships. Whether the victim is male or female, if one individual does not have the same rights and liberties as another, and/or they are subjected to manipulative behaviours, then it is an oppressive relationship.

### 4. “I can give as good as I get.”

**False** - The common portrayal of victims of abuse as being passive and weak can cause difficulties for individuals who do not see themselves in this way. Those who see themselves as strong, intelligent and assertive may not recognise oppressive relationships if they are maintaining a status quo by ‘giving as good as they get’. The issue here is what happens if you were to stop playing these games? An abusive relationship is still an abusive relationship even if you have to use some of their behaviours to maintain what may feel to you like equality. Personal relationships should be based on trust, safety, security and friendship not ‘second guessing’, ‘getting even’ or having to ‘give as good as you get’. In these relationships you are putting your safety at risk and the longer you stay in the situation the more serious the risk to your safety becomes.

#### 5. "If it was that bad, they would just leave".

**False** - People do not ask to be abused; it is done to them because they are, or feel like they are, powerless to stop it. Imagine it through the victims eyes; if you are doing everything to 'keep the peace' already and still being abused then try to imagine what would happen when you upset them by leaving. Most abuse is a gradual process of control, manipulation and damage to the victims self esteem and confidence. This means that by the time victims recognise they are unhappy enough to want to leave they can be so worn down and entrenched in the relationship it is difficult to know what to do next. The harsh reality is also that in many cases the levels of intimidation, fear and harassment increase when a partner leaves an abusive relationship. Sometimes it can feel easier (no matter how illogical it may seem to the outside world) to stay put and make the best of the present situation rather than take on the additional trauma that breaking free may bring.

#### 6. "They will change if I help them."

**False** - Whilst suffering the consequences of their behaviour you are not in any position to help them deal with the causes of their aggression and their need for control. Sadly all you are doing by your continued participation in the situation is reinforcing the benefits of their behaviour. You are not in control of your own life if you are unhappy and suffering abuse - your abuser is and if they truly mean to change themselves then this is not helpful to them. The reality is that as a victim of their actions, you are a part of their abusing behaviour. This means you cannot provide the advice and support that they will need to start the process of addressing and changing their behaviour. In the same way Alcoholics can not give up alcohol if they continue to drink; abusive individuals within a relationship where they can still abuse you; cannot stop their behaviour either.

#### 7. "Once a victim - always a victim".

**False** -It is possible to survive abuse, learn and gain strength and knowledge from your experiences. Learning is a life long process and everyone will progress at their own individual speed dependant upon the experiences they encounter and support they receive. Learning is not a race. Making the journey from being a victim to becoming a survivor is a long one and it is not easy, but nor is it impossible. I know from my own experience that we all have within us somewhere the strength to make that journey. The hardest part is knowing where and how to begin.

#### 8. "Boys who grow up with domestic abuse will be violent men". "Girls who grow up with domestic abuse will become victims".

**False** - We are each responsible for our own behaviour and as adults we choose how we behave. Just because a child has grown up with aggression or violence does not mean they will necessarily go on to behave in that way or become a victim of it. There are no hard or fast rules for how exposure to domestic abuse affects children and the aforementioned assumptions can do more damage than harm. Believing your daughters are more at risk may cause parents to become overprotective. This denies children of the opportunity to develop naturally which they will have an additional need for after their experiences. It is not always what happens to an individual which has the most effect, it can be how that event is dealt with too and the support they receive to recover from their experience.

Children of either gender can observe and learn manipulative, coercive behaviours. It is also the case that both genders can become so conditioned to the damaging behaviours associated with abuse such as the sound of raised voices and criticism that they become unable to recognise the warning signs associated with oppressive and potentially abusive relationships.

"Even now after so many years I am amazed by how much they remember"  
"Knowing my mum had been hit was bad but it was the lies that hurt the most"  
"I understood why she stayed with him... it wasn't her fault for wanting things to work out and my sister to still have her father around.... I just wish she had not pushed me out..... She acted like I couldn't see what was going on"

#### 9. "If I quit this relationship now, I will have wasted all that time."

**False** - The logic behind this statement should be questioned as what is done and gone is gone, it's history. The future is where you should be looking as it's the only part of your life that it is still possible to change and improve. Another similar statement is that; "it seemed better to stay in the relationship, because, if I just stuck at it for long enough, then surely it had to get better". It may feel like a lot of wasted energy if you press 'quit' but just how much more are you prepared to invest in a relationship which gives you back so little? The longer you spend in abusive relationships, the more time you will waste and the more difficult it can become to walk away. If there are children involved then it is important to realise that they are also being affected.

Yesterday is history -  
tomorrow is unknown  
and today is a gift....  
That's why we call it the present.

#### 10. "What happens behind closed doors should stay behind closed doors."

**False** - It is not acceptable to 'turn a blind eye'. Abuse is abuse whether it happens in front of you or behind 'closed doors'. If you are aware that someone is being abused and his or her safety is at risk then you have an obligation to report it to someone who can help them. It can also be too easy to think 'oh well someone else will do it', but what if that 'someone else' also thinks the same as you? Regrets last a lifetime but one phone call is all it takes to know that you did something to help.

Wife battering is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 to 44 years, accounting for more injuries than car accidents, muggings and 'stranger rapes' combined together. (Source - Robert E Emily - University of Virginia)

'More than 3,000 Wirral pensioners are victims of elder abuse.....it is estimated that as many as one million older people in Britain are ill treated on a daily basis.....it is believed that many put up with situations which make them unhappy because they do not realise they are being abused or do not know what to do' (Source Wirral Globe June 2007)

#### 11. "I must have asked for it".

**False** - Abusive individuals make conscious choices to behave the way they do. When you were little did you think when I grow up I want to be miserable? - No? - Well that's not surprising because no one else did either. No one wants to be emotionally, physically or economically hurt and no one asks to be treated this way. If you think you did something which means you encouraged or were partly responsible for receiving this treatment then your life experiences or abuser have caused you to think in this way. These victim beliefs and behaviours mean you will, take responsibility for other people's feelings and actions and then give them more importance than your own. This way of thinking in victims suits their abusers as it means you will blame yourself either partly or totally for what it is that happens to you. Your abuser does not have to admit they are responsible because you have been conditioned to feel you did something to 'ask for it'.

Understanding how you came to be in an abusive situation **does not mean you are responsible for your abusers actions**. For more of an explanation about victim beliefs and behaviours then further on in this chapter you will find information which may be helpful to you.

#### 12. "I'm so stupid for getting into this mess".

**False** - Everyone makes mistakes and some people will naturally make more than others. You can think of these mistakes as either stupidity or, more productively, lessons in life which you can learn from. Experiencing abuse has no bearing on intelligence whatsoever. Abusive and manipulative individuals are very skilled at what they do and people from all walks of life are affected by their behaviour. You are not the first person to go through them and you will not be the last either.

#### 13. "No one will believe me"

**False** - You may feel alienated, scared or isolated but you are definitely not alone and you will be believed. There are many others who have gone through the same experiences as you, recovered and now even offer support to those who have or are still experiencing abuse. It is also understood that some individuals may need and feel more comfortable speaking with specialist support groups who have more of an understanding of the circumstances surrounding their abuse. These groups now exist to provide support to a wide range of individuals including same sex relationships, elder abuse, male victims of domestic violence and ethnic minorities. Whatever your circumstances, there are people who have been through the same, will believe you, and give you the support you need and deserve.

# Nonsensical beliefs and victim behaviours.

**“I used to feel like I walked around with ‘doormat ‘ stamped on my forehead, manipulated by those I thought were my ‘friends’ and abused within my personal relationships....always trying to understand where I went wrong...”**

These beliefs and behaviours are shared by many who have or currently are suffering abuse. They contribute to these victimised individuals taking responsibility for other peoples feelings and actions and then giving them more importance than their own. This way of thinking in victims suits abusers as it means the victim will either partly or totally blame themselves and feel responsible for what it is that happens to them. The abuser does not have to admit they are responsible because the victim has been conditioned to feel they did something to ‘ask for it’.

How many of these can you relate to?

## 1. "I must be loved, or at least liked, by everyone."

"When we are so insecure and ultimately feel worthless we look to everyone else for reassurance that we are worth something. We seek their approval and will even go out of our way to make sure we please other people at the expense of our own needs."

YES  NO

We live in a world full of individuals, all with different backgrounds and experiences. As we are all unique and different, it is therefore impossible that you will like or be liked by everyone. Politeness and civility is simply the most you can expect from some people you will meet. This is also the standard you should expect from all you choose to continue spending time with.

## 2. "I must be perfect in all I try to do."

"Keeping up the pretence of everything being fine and feeling that I should be good at everything I do."

YES  NO

We can only ever do our best in what we attempt to achieve and having goals such as 'being perfect in all you try to do', is an impossible and unachievable aim in life. You are essentially setting yourself up to fail and abusive individuals will see your vulnerability as an opportunity to manipulate you. As human beings, a natural part of learning is by the process of trial and error. This inevitably means we will make mistakes which if we are allowed to, we will learn from. No one is perfect, especially not in all they do, and accepting this can be difficult if you have or are living with constant criticism.

## 3. When things do not go the way I want them to, it is horrible and unbearable.

YES  NO

Many victims have low self esteem. This can result in our interpretation of these situations which do not go the way we want them to as personal failures or as evidence of how 'useless' we feel we are. This is how we end up feeling when we are desperately trying to hold the fragments of our life together in the knowledge that if one more thing goes wrong our fragile lives could come crashing down.

## 4. We can have very little control over what happens to us.

"When it feels like 'what is the point? it will still happen anyway' regardless of what you think."

YES  NO

This is only true when other people are controlling our lives for us and/or we are too exhausted from bearing responsibility for other people without adequate support.

## 5. It is normal to live in fear or anxiety about events that are uncertain or possibly dangerous.

"When every day feels like a roller coaster ride and you can't find the brakes."

YES  NO

When living with high amounts of stress and anxiety you can become so accustomed to feeling permanently anxious and uncertain that it almost feels normal to continue in this way. Despite this feeling it is not normal or healthy to live and feel like this and is damaging to your long term physical and mental health.

**6. It is easier to avoid life's difficulties than to face them.**

YES  NO

"When everything in life feels like a challenge that you just don't have time for at the moment." This may feel like the easiest option short term but the longer you leave issues which need to be addressed then the more they just mount up. The bigger the problem becomes and more entrenched you become in the situation.

**7. We are products of our upbringing, and can do little to change who we are.**

YES  NO

"It all happening to me because of how I grew up."

Simply; your past will always be a part of you but it does not have to dictate your future.

**8. The world should be different, and it is horrible and unbearable that it is not.**

YES  NO

You are powerless to change the world and worrying about issues outside of your own life can also be an excuse to avoid facing your own problems. If your own life is not functioning at a level which is productive to you personally, then you do not have the time or energy to spend worrying about the world and other problems. Using your energy on such issues, when in your present situation there is nothing you can do about them, will also leave you feeling upset and depressed. This is not productive in your own life and as such does not place you in a position to be of benefit to others in the world either. Feeling you are carrying the worlds problems on your shoulders can also be a symptom of depression. For more information see chapter three which maybe helpful.

**9. You will be happiest by doing nothing.**

YES  NO

"It is easier not to do anything. I prefer the quiet life." If you have become used to having your life controlled for you then you may be unfamiliar with having choices and making decisions for yourself. It is never too late to start and there are people who will support you doing so.

**10. People are very fragile, and we should keep our thoughts to ourselves in order not to hurt them.**

YES  NO

"My views are not worth upsetting people with."

Once again this is about taking other peoples thoughts and feelings as more important than your own. You do have the right to speak your mind and you should expect your views to be respected. This can be a difficult if you are or have been criticised for voicing your opinions or if speaking your mind actually put you at risk of harm. In reality if the people you choose to spend time with object and find your views upsetting then perhaps it is time to find new acquaintances, friends or personal relationships. You should be able to speak freely with people you choose to socialise with and if they are truly friends then they will be able to accept your opinions whether they agree with them or not. A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future and accepts you today the way you are.

**11. Anger is always bad and destructive, and should be curbed.**

YES  NO

Anger can be a reaction to not having things go your way as is often the case in abusive and manipulative individuals who like to constantly be in control. Anger can also be a justified and healthy reaction to being badly treated. These feelings can be productive and spur you on in being unable to accept further ill treatment, and give you the motivation to change your situation.

**12. It is better to give than to receive.**

YES  NO

"I always feel selfish if I receive or ask for support; time, favours etc from other people."

Relationships between individuals should be based fairly on a 'give and take' basis. We are not limitless 'pots' of energy/resources and unless we take back equal to what we give out then just what will you eventually have left to give?. A certain amount of selfishness is a healthy part of being human and once again is called self preservation.

**13. We should always try to please others at the expense of our own needs.**

"Other people are more important than me."

YES  NO

This is an impossibility – You are a valid human being with needs, wants and desires and if you are not able to respect this then who else will? If you appear not to be aware of them yourself and give them no priority, how are others expected to recognise your needs and know what they are to respect them? Fair and decent relationships are not entirely based on trying to please the other person at the expense of our own needs. Fair and decent people would not be happy with this arrangement and would not accept it.

**14. We can only be happy with other people.**

"I am nothing on my own."

YES  NO

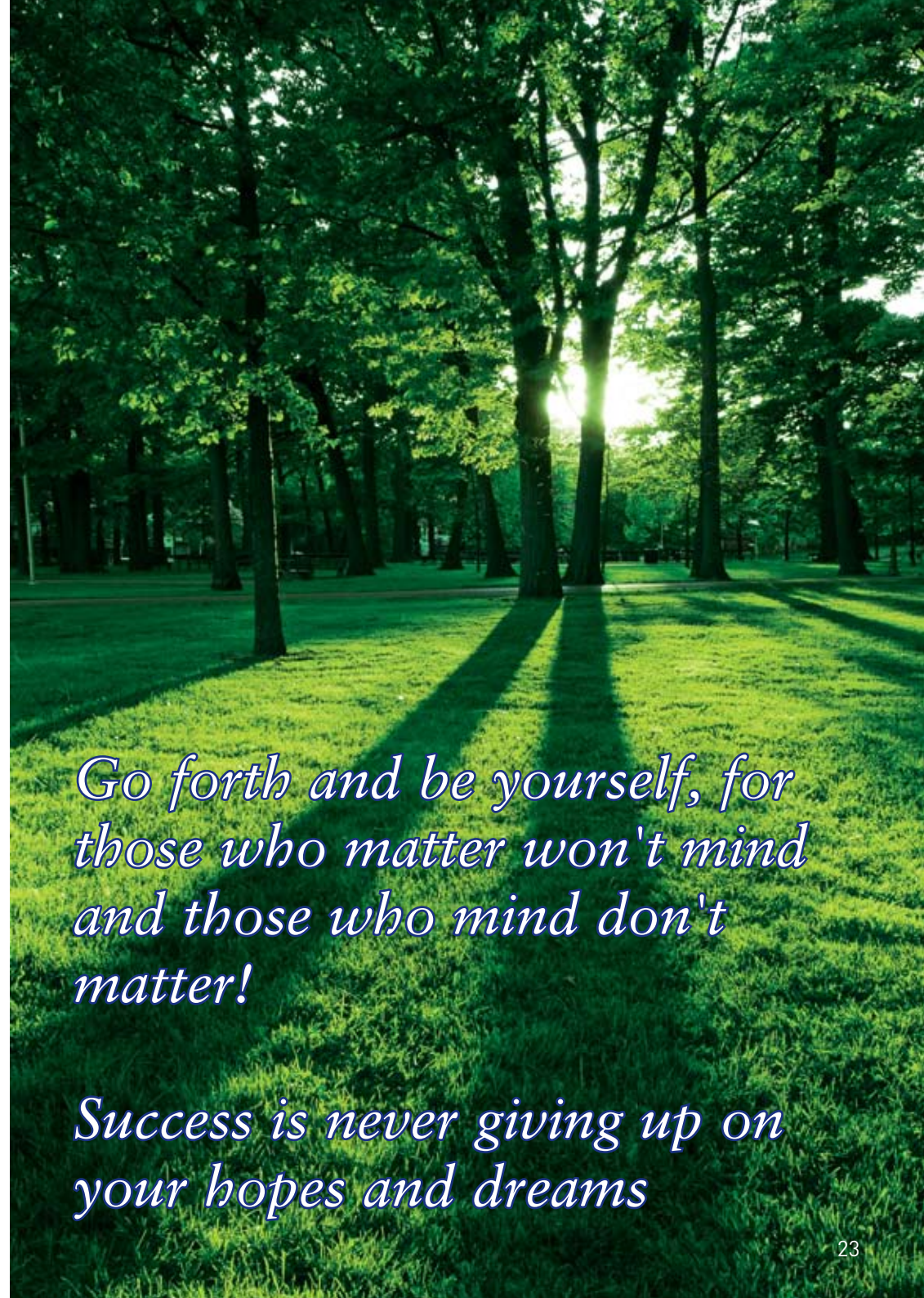
Quality time spent with yourself can be just as fulfilling as time spent socialising in the company of others. Often when we possess a low opinion of who we are as an individual, we can think we are nothing without the acceptance of other people. Trying to be part of the 'gang or crowd' can give us a sense of self and identity if our own is weak, damaged or simply was not allowed to develop fully. This can also mean, through our need to be accepted by others and be a part of the crowd, we surround ourselves with people or form personal relationships with those who may not actually be a positive influence upon our lives.

**15. There is always a perfect solution to everything - if only we look hard enough.**

YES  NO

"I would spend night after night with everything going round my head, trying to work out what I should do"

There is simply not always a solution to everything. The only answer to some situations or dilemmas is to 'press quit' on them and give up trying. Sometimes certain situations are just not worth any more time or energy being invested in them. At other times the only thing that can be agreed on is that individuals agree to disagree or a compromise can be sought which suits both parties.



*Go forth and be yourself, for those who matter won't mind and those who mind don't matter!*

*Success is never giving up on your hopes and dreams*

# CHAPTER THREE

## Mental Health - The hidden impact of Domestic abuse.

There are many costs associated with abuse and not all are visible immediately in the way that physical injuries are. These include damage, to your self-esteem and confidence, and the risk of developing depression and anxiety. If you find these apply to you then it is important to realise that these symptoms do not mean you are weak or 'mad' but that you are having a natural reaction to an unnatural way of life. There are many treatments available including medication, counselling and therapy, and these can be accessed through support organisations or your GP. The most effective step, which will make the most difference to how you feel, is to change the circumstances under which you have to live your life.

### 1. Low Self esteem

What is low self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the term used to describe how you feel about yourself as an individual.

People with low self-esteem find it hard to answer 'yes' to these questions.

- \* Do I like myself?
- \* Do I think I'm a good human being?
- \* Am I someone who deserves love? (This is different to wanting love)
- \* Do I deserve happiness?
- \* Do I really feel - both in my mind and deep in my guts - that I'm an OK person?

Experiences that lead to low self-esteem include

- \* Being harshly criticised
- \* Not receiving praise, support or love from those you care about.
- \* Being yelled at, or beaten
- \* Being ignored, ridiculed or teased
- \* Being expected to be "perfect" all the time
- \* Experiencing failures in sports or school

People with low self-esteem have often been given messages that failed experiences (losing a game, getting a poor grade, not getting a job etc.) were failures of their whole self.

Low self-esteem can have devastating consequences.

- \* It can create anxiety, stress, loneliness and increased likelihood for depression.
- \* It can cause problems with friendships and relationships.
- \* It can seriously impair academic and job performance.
- \* It can lead to underachievement and increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse.
- \* Low self-esteem is also closely related to depression.

These consequences themselves reinforce your negative self-image and can take you into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem. This vicious circle then leads to increasingly non-productive or even actively self-destructive behaviour.

"For so many years I felt worthless, stupid and hated the sight of myself in the mirror."

## 2. Depression

### What is depression?

The word depressed is a common everyday word. People might say “I’m depressed” when in fact they mean “I’m fed up because I’ve had a row, or failed an exam, or lost my job” etc. These ups and downs of life are common and normal. Most people recover quite quickly. With true depression, you have a persistent low mood and other symptoms daily for at least two weeks. Living with these symptoms can become severe enough to interfere with day-to-day activities. Depression can be a way of coping with stressful situations or an unhappy way of living your life.

“When things got really bad and my head just couldn’t take any more it was like it would shut down on me. I felt tired, sluggish and couldn’t find the energy to do anything. Thing was though, that while I was sleeping all the time it meant I wasn’t having to think about all that was wrong with my life.”

### Who gets depression?

About 2 in 3 adults have depression at some time in their life. Sometimes it is mild or lasts just a few weeks. However, an episode of depression serious enough to require treatment occurs in about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men at some point in their lives. Some people have two or more episodes of depression at various times in their life.

### What are the symptoms of depression?

Many people know when they are depressed. However, some people do not realise that they are depressed. They may know that they are not right and are not functioning well, but don’t know why. Some people think that they have a physical illness, for example, if they lose weight. The following is a list of common symptoms of depression. It is unusual to have them all, but several usually develop if you have depression.

- \* Low mood for most of the day, nearly every day. Things always seem ‘black’.
- \* Loss of enjoyment and interest in life, even for activities that you normally enjoy.
- \* Abnormal sadness, often with weepiness.
- \* Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or uselessness.
- \* Poor motivation. Even simple tasks seem difficult.
- \* Poor concentration. It may be difficult to read, work, etc.
- \* Sleeping problems:
  - \* Difficulty in getting off to sleep.
  - \* Waking early and unable to get back to sleep.
  - \* Sleeping too much.
  - \* Lacking in energy always tired.
  - \* Difficulty with affection, including going off sex.
  - \* Poor appetite and weight loss.
  - \* Comfort eating and weight gain.
  - \* Irritability, agitation, or restlessness.
  - \* Symptoms often seem worse first thing each day.
- \* Physical symptoms such as headaches, palpitations, chest pains, and general aches.
- \* Recurrent thoughts of death.

This is not usually a fear of death, more a preoccupation with death and dying. Some people get suicidal ideas such as ...“life’s not worth living”.

The severity of the symptoms can vary from mild to severe. As a rule, the more symptoms from the list above that you have, the more severe the depression is likely to be.

“Believe me, it is possible to recover and feel happy again.”

### 3. Anxiety

What is anxiety? Anxiety occurs when you feel fearful and tense. In addition you may also have one or more unpleasant physical symptoms.

- \* A fast heart rate.
- \* Palpitations.
- \* Feeling sick.
- \* Shaking (tremor).
- \* Sweating, dry mouth.
- \* Chest pain.
- \* Headaches.
- \* A 'knot in the stomach'.
- \* Fast breathing.
- \* Nightmares.

Anxiety is normal in stressful situations, and can even be helpful. For example, most people will become anxious when threatened by an aggressive person, or before an important race or event. This makes the heart, lungs, and other parts of the body 'work faster' and be ready to take appropriate action. The burst of adrenaline and nerve impulses, which we have in response to stressful situations, is part of the human 'fight or flight' response. As individuals we are all different and some people are more prone to 'normal' anxieties. For example, some people are more anxious before exams than others.

Although anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful situations and primes you to take action, the affect of the chemicals (adrenaline) released in this reaction can become damaging. When you are constantly anxious and unable to take any action (which would 'use up' these chemicals) then they build up within your body. This constant heightened state of alertness is what causes the symptoms listed above and can also lead to depression, reduced immunity to infection, panic attacks and other forms of mental illness.

Anxiety is 'abnormal' if:

- \* You constantly feel tense and/or fearful.
- \* Persists when a stressful situation has gone, or the stress is minor.
- \* Appears for no apparent reason when there is no stressful situation.

If you can relate to any of these symptoms then help is available from your GP or support organisations.

**"You are not 'mad', you are just having a natural reaction to an unnatural way of life."**

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Those Difficult Questions

### 1. "Is it right to deprive the children of a parent, or split up the family?"

Two happy separate parents can be of more benefit to children than two unhappy parents staying together. Eventually a choice has to be made about which will benefit a child more or cause the least distress. If there is no issue with safety then separating does not mean that children have to lose contact with a parent. If one parent is behaving abusively then it is in the child's best interests to have that person removed from the household. In these circumstances then it is not a question of one parent depriving the child of their other parent or splitting up the family. The abuser is responsible for the consequences of their own actions.

"For years I wished my parents would divorce"

"Even now as an adult, my mother still throws the statement at me that she stayed with my father for years to make sure I had two parents at home.... I wish she hadn't... they were so miserable"

### 2. "If I leave, my partner will turn the children against me"

Parental alienation is a term now used to describe this situation and there are organisations campaigning for this situation to be formally recognised in the courts. The question you must ask yourself is which is more productive for your children; seeing you being victimised or seeing you as someone who was not able to accept such treatment and teaching them that this behaviour was not acceptable? Both have their disadvantages and advantages and there is no perfect solution no matter how hard you look for one. It's a question of which has the most advantages, or offers you the least disadvantages. What you must remember is the longer your children remain in an abusive situation the more damage they incur by watching a parent being victimised.

### 3. "What do you do when you understand why your partner is abusive?"

It is all very well understanding that an individual has issues which may be contributing to their behaviour but there is a limit to the extent you are able to help them. Whilst suffering the consequences of their behaviour you are not in any position to help them deal with the causes of their aggression and their need for control. All you are doing by your continued participation in the situation is reinforcing the benefits of their behaviour. You are not in control of your own life if you are unhappy and suffering abuse - your abuser is and if they truly mean to change themselves then this is not helpful to them either. The sad reality is that as a victim of their actions, you are a part of their abusing behaviour. This means you cannot provide the advice and support that they will need to start the process of addressing and changing their behaviour. In the same way Alcoholics can not give up alcohol whilst still drinking; abusive individuals within a relationship where they are abusing you; cannot stop their behaviour; it is simply too easy for them to continue. You will do them more of a favour by showing them what the consequences of their behaviour are, by standing firm and refusing to accept it.

### 4. "He is not safe to have contact with the children on his own."

"If I am around the children and my partner still behaved abusively then what will they be like when they see the children on their own, and I am not there?"

Contact centres exist for this very purpose, to ensure children are safe. If you bring your concerns to the attention of the courts when arranging contact then these concerns will be taken into consideration when arranging appropriate contact. Indirect contact can be ordered where there is a risk of harm to children; this involves contact by letters, sometimes gifts and/or phone calls but does not involve visitation rights. This way parents can ensure contact is maintained with the absent parent but that this contact does not pose a risk to the children. 'No contact' can also be ordered where there is no contact allowed with the abusive parent.

### 5. "Who else is ever going to want me?"

People of all sizes, shapes, ages; with a whole range of abilities and different life histories have experienced abuse. They go on to find friends, companions and positive relationships which will benefit and compliment their lives. You are no different. How you feel and see yourself maybe very different though to how others view you. If you are recovering from abuse then it is very likely you will have experienced criticism and your self esteem will have suffered damage. This can contribute to you feeling worthless, one of life's failures and as if you will never find anyone else again who will 'want you'. People who truly care about you will accept you for who you are and see you for what you could be. These are the sort of people who you need to have in your life.

## 6. "I find partners boring if they do not possess that 'bad guy' element of danger."

The 'I'm attracted to bad guys' phenomena. You need to question what it is you find so exciting; is it really them as a person or an inbuilt expectation of the 'roller coaster ride' of highs and lows which come with these damaging relationships? When you become so used to relationships which feel like this and you embark on one in which this element of danger is not present it can lead to a feeling of edginess; a constant feeling of waiting for something to happen. When this does not happen it can feel like the relationship is boring. This is due to an inability to relax and trust. If relaxing and dropping your guard has meant you became vulnerable in your previous relationships then this inability to relax and heightened alertness would have served to keep you safe.

In damaging relationships this would have served you well and been a healthy reaction to keep you safe. Unfortunately it can also cause problems when it comes to enjoying the simple joys of what positive supportive relationships can offer. Comfort, trust and safety are all elements of healthy relationships but when you lack experience of these feelings they can become so alien to you that you become uncomfortable with how they make you feel. If every time you have lowered your guard and it has resulted in you being hurt then you may naturally start to view them with suspicion and mistrust. Sadly this can end up with it almost being easier to stick with 'what you know your getting' and the 'Better the devil you know.' situation where you feel partners are boring if they do not possess the 'element of danger' that you have become so used to.

## 7. "I have a friend - I can see what's happening, but I don't know what to do... she won't admit that there is any problem, and makes excuses for him."

There are two possible scenarios, which may be the cause of your friend's refusal to acknowledge her situation. Therefore I will deal with this question in two parts: 1. **She simply does not see that there is a problem.** Many victims of abuse have problems with confidence and low self-esteem. If they have become so used to other people controlling their lives and making decisions for them they may not see any harm in their abusers behaviour and may even see their actions as supportive in that it takes away the responsibility of having to make any decisions for themselves. They may also feel responsible in some way for what it is that happens to them within the relationship, which means they will not just make excuses for their abuser's behaviour but actually believe what they are saying to you. While ever they cannot see how they are being manipulated you will appear to be harsh and unable to understand their situation when you criticise their decisions and the reasoning behind their actions.

2. **She is not ready to admit it to you yet.** Admitting you are being abused can be almost as humiliating as the abuse itself. Disclosing it also means that once it is out in the open it is more difficult to ignore the problems that they have. The difficulty is that abusers work through manipulation and control. Despite any problems, which exist in the relationship, your friend may feel dependent on her abuser and unable to cope without them. Once the issue is out in the open then the victim can feel they have an additional pressure to deal with it. This may seem simple enough from the outside to address, but when you are living in it, it is not so straightforward. It can actually feel easier to lose friends who can see what is happening to you and keep on pushing for you to take action than to address the situation you are in. This is especially so if the individual does not understand why it keeps happening to them in the first place.

It is a difficult position to be in where you can see what is happening to someone you care about and are powerless to stop it. The best thing you can do is simply to be there for them and support them when they need you. You cannot sort out their problems for them and if you do take over then you are merely replacing their abuser in controlling their lives for them. Your friend needs to feel supported and empowered enough to be able to tackle the situation themselves. Sadly the reality is that if you were able to take over and rescue your friend from their situation, then there is every chance they would repeat their mistakes again, at a later date, because they had not made the conscious decisions to end the relationship for themselves. This does not mean however you should turn a 'blind eye' if their physical safety is of concern and this should be reported for their own benefit if they are obviously at risk of harm and you know they have been or are at risk of being assaulted.

The sad situation is that no matter how much you care, your advice can be misconstrued as another person interfering in their lives. You must also bear in mind that with an abusive partner in the background, they could try to alienate your friend from her social circle and any support she may be able to access. You will need to tread carefully to maintain contact as you will pose a risk to your friend's abuser through your knowledge of what you can see is happening to them. This process can be a tiring experience for you and can feel at times like your support makes no difference to what they choose to do. Ultimately though they will eventually know you are there for them, without judgement or criticism because you only care about their best interests and want them to be safe and happy in their life.

# CHAPTER FIVE

Everyone has the right to live their life free from harassment and/or fear. Where your health or physical safety is at risk then these rights are also protected by the law.

## Survivor's Bill of Rights

I have the right to be treated with due respect

I have the right not to have to take responsibility for anyone else's problems or bad behaviour

I have the right to get angry

I have the right to say no

I have the right to make mistakes

I have the right to have my own feelings, opinions and convictions

I have the right to change my mind or to decide on a different course of action

I have the right to ask others for emotional support or help

I have the right to negotiate for change for the better

I have the right to protest against unfair treatment or criticism

## I have the right not to feel guilty

# Understanding your legal rights

## Legal options

Whatever you decide to do about your situation, you have the right to be protected under the law, and there are a number of legal options open to you, under both the criminal law and the civil law. The two systems are separate and are administered by separate courts:

**The civil law courts** are primarily aimed at protection (or in some cases compensation). A survivor of domestic abuse can make an application for an injunction (a court order) either to the Family Proceedings Court or the County Court (usually through her solicitor). Other family proceedings (such as child contact or divorce) also take place in the County Court.

**Getting an injunction:** You could try to gain some protection from your abuser by applying for a civil injunction or protection order. An injunction is a court order that requires someone to do or not to do something. There are two main types of injunctions available under Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996: A non-molestation order and an occupation order.

**A non-molestation order** is aimed at preventing your partner or ex-partner from using or threatening violence against you or your child, or intimidating, harassing or pestering you in order to ensure the health, safety and well being of yourself and your children.

**An occupation order** regulates who can live in the family home, and can also restrict your abuser from entering the surrounding area. If you do not feel safe continuing to live with your partner, or if you have left home because of violence, but want to return and exclude your abuser, you may want to apply for an occupation order.

Under forthcoming legislation, a breach of a non-molestation order will become a criminal offence; however, you should still be able to take your abuser back to the civil court for breaking the order, if you prefer this. Currently, in most circumstances, a power of arrest will be attached to an injunction, and this comes into effect if your abuser breaks the order.

## Contact orders

A Contact Order requires the person with whom the child lives to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, or for that person and the child otherwise to have contact with each other. It is typically required if the parents (or other relatives) cannot agree what contact the children should have. A Contact Order can define arrangements in great detail. Contact not only means visiting and staying in contact but also covers contact by letter or telephone ('indirect contact').

**The criminal law courts** are primarily aimed at punishing the offender. The police together with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) initiate the process. Criminal cases are heard in either the Magistrates' Court or the Crown Court depending on the severity of the charge.

## Assault

An assault involves:

1. An intentional, unlawful threat or "offer" to cause bodily injury to another by force;
2. Under circumstances which create in the other person a well-founded fear of imminent peril;
3. Where there exists the apparent present ability to carry out the act if not prevented.

Note that an assault can be completed even if there is no actual contact with the plaintiff, and even if the defendant had no actual ability to carry out the apparent threat. For example, a defendant who points a realistic toy gun at the plaintiff may be liable for assault, even though the defendant was fifty feet away from the plaintiff and had no actual ability to inflict harm from that distance.

## Battery

A battery is the wilful or intentional touching of a person against that person's will by another person, or by an object or substance put in motion by that other person. Please note that offensive touching can constitute a battery even if it does not cause injury, and could not reasonably be expected to cause injury. A defendant who emphatically pokes the plaintiff in the chest with his index finger to emphasize a point may be culpable for battery (although the damages award that results may well be nominal). A defendant, who spits on a plaintiff, even though there is little chance that the spitting will cause any injury other than to the plaintiff's dignity, has committed a battery.

## Criminal damage

Destroying or damaging property. The law in England and Wales defines Criminal Damage as follows: A person who without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property belonging to another intending to destroy or damage any such property or being reckless as to whether any such property would be destroyed or damaged shall be guilty of an offence. It goes on to say: A person who without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property, whether belonging to himself or another a) intending to destroy or damage any property or being reckless as to whether any property would be destroyed or damaged; and b) intending by the destruction or damage to endanger the life of another or being reckless as to whether the life of another would be thereby endangered; shall be guilty of an offence.

**Legal support and assistance; - see helpful contact details on page 48**

**Always ring 999 if you feel your safety is at risk.**

# CHAPTER SIX

## What to do next

### **I am being abused, what can I do about it?**

No one asks for or deserves to be abused, and you should not feel you have to put up with it. There are a number of things you can do if you are experiencing abuse and/or violence from a partner, ex-partner, carer or family member. However no support organisation can provide you with a complete or immediate end to the abuse without your active engagement and determination. Getting free from abuse can be a long process: it is not unusual for many individuals to seek help from a number of sources, and also leave and return several times before they are able to make the final break. In taking control of your life it is important to understand the journey to becoming a survivor will be challenging and at times difficult but ultimately brings you the reward of being free to live your life without fear and misery.

One question that is often asked by those who do not understand your situation is "Why didn't you leave earlier?" or alternatively "Why did you put up with it for so long?" If they haven't been in this situation themselves then leaving may seem the obvious and simple answer to them. Survivors and professionals working with victims of abuse do understand that there are all sorts of reasons why individuals may stay with their abusers.

Many individuals stay with their abusers because they still love them, are dependant on them or are simply terrified of the consequences should they try to leave. With abusers threatening to harm or even kill their partners, the children or cause difficulties with trying to exist without them in your life it can seem easier to stay in the situation which already exists than take on the additional trauma of breaking free. If you are a parent you may worry about losing your children, or feel that it is best for the children if you stay and try to make the relationship work. Abuse victims often have to also worry about practical issues: Where can they go? Will they make themselves homeless? What will they live on?

They may be worried about loneliness, particularly if they have become isolated from friends and family. Confidence can be undermined so badly that they believe they are worthless and one of 'life's failures' who simply wouldn't be able to cope on their own. Therefore they may feel you lack the confidence to address and/or leave your situation.

Perhaps you can identify with some of these issues and feel they apply to you. Therefore the following sections may help you deal with the practical issues you could face.

### **1. Making a safety plan**

A personal safety plan is a way of helping you to protect yourself and your children. It helps you plan in advance for the possibility of future abuse and/or violence. It also helps you to think about how you can increase your safety either within the relationship, or if you decide to leave. You cannot stop your partner's violence and abuse - only they can do that. But there are things you can do to increase your own and your children's safety:

- \* Make a note of and then try to keep with you any important and emergency telephone contact numbers. These may include; your local Women's Aid refuge organisation or other domestic violence/abuse service; the police domestic violence unit; your GP; your social worker, if you have one; your children's school; your solicitor; friends numbers or family.
- \* Teach your children how to call 999 in an emergency, and what they would need to say (for example, their full name, address and telephone number).
- \* Tell someone what is happening to you, having someone on the outside of your abuse who is supportive and non critical can help you feel stronger when you decide what you want to do about your situation
- \* Are there neighbours you could trust? If so, tell them what is going on, and ask them to call the police if they hear sounds of a violent attack. This could also be a place of safety you could get to quickly if you have to flee your home in an emergency.

**2. Choosing to stay in your home.** If you stay in your home from the outset or return after you have made your partner leave, then you will probably have an occupation order and/or a non-molestation protection order (also known as an injunction). If the injunction has powers of arrest attached, then do make sure that your local police station has a copy, and that the police know they need to respond quickly in an emergency. In some areas, there are special schemes to ensure a rapid response by the police (for example, the Community Alarm scheme in the London Borough of Haringey); and in other areas there may be projects (such as Staying Put in Bradford, and the Sanctuary Projects in Barnet and Bromley) that provide advice and additional security measures to make your home safe. Your local police station, victim support centre and support organisation will be able to give you more information on what is available in your area. However, it is important to know that you do not have to stay at home, with or without an injunction, if you do not feel safe there. You could also consider doing the following:

- \* Changing the locks on all the doors.
- \* Putting locks on all windows if you don't have them already.
- \* Installing smoke detectors on each floor, and providing fire extinguishers.
- \* Installing outside security lights (back and front) which come on automatically when someone approaches.
- \* Informing the neighbours that your partner no longer lives there, and asking them to tell you - or call the police - if they see him nearby.
- \* Changing your telephone number and making it ex-directory.
- \* Using an answering machine to screen your calls.
- \* Keeping copies of all court orders together with dates and times of previous incidents and call-outs for reference if you need to call the police again.
- \* If your ex-partner continues to harass, threaten or abuse you, make sure you keep a diary of detailed records about each incident, including the date and time it occurred, what was said or done.
- \* If possible take photographs of damage to your property or injuries to yourself or others.
- \* If your partner or ex-partner injures you, see your GP or go to hospital for treatment and ask them to document your visit.
- \* If you have an injunction with a power of arrest, or there is a restraining order in place, you should ask the police to enforce this.
- \* If your ex-partner is in breach of any court order, you should also tell your solicitor.

In an emergency, always call the police on 999.

**3. Choosing to leave your home - Rehearse an escape plan, so in an emergency you and the children can get away safely.**

If you have decided to leave your partner, it is best if you can plan this carefully. Sometimes abusers will increase their violence if they suspect you are thinking of leaving, so this can be a particularly dangerous time for you.

- \* Plan to leave at a time you know your partner will not be around.
- \* Try to take everything you will need with you, including any important documents relating to yourself and your children, as you may not be able to return later.
- \* Take your children with you, otherwise it may be difficult or impossible to have them living with you in future. If they are at school, make sure that the head and all your children's teachers know what the situation is, and who will be collecting the children in future.
- \* If at all possible, try to set aside a small amount of money each week, or even open a separate bank account.
- \* Try to keep a small amount of money on you at all times - including change for the phone and for bus fares.
- \* Know where the nearest phone is, and if you have a mobile phone, try to keep it with you.
- \* If you suspect that your partner is about to attack you, try to go to a lower risk area of the house - for example where there is a way out and/or access to a telephone. Avoid the kitchen or garage where there are likely to be with knives or other weapons; and avoid rooms where you might be trapped, such as the bathroom, or where you might be shut into a cupboard or other small space.
- \* Be prepared to leave the house in an emergency.

Thinking about leaving and making the decision to leave can be a long process. Planning it doesn't mean you have to carry it through immediately - or at all. But it may help to be able to consider all the options and think about how you could overcome the difficulties involved.

#### 4. Pack an emergency bag for yourself and your children and hide this somewhere safe (for example, at a neighbour's or friend's house).

Try to avoid mutual friends or family where there could be a question of loyalty if they know you are planning on leaving. Ideally, you need to take all the following items with you if you leave. Some of these items you can try to keep with you at all times; others you may be able to pack.

- \* Some form of identification.
- \* Birth certificates for you and your children.
- \* Passports (including passports for all your children), visas and work permits.
- \* Money, bankbooks, cheque book and credit and debit cards.
- \* Keys for house, car, and place of work. (You could get an extra set of keys cut, and put them in your emergency bag).
- \* Cards for payment of Child Benefit and any other welfare benefits you are entitled to.
- \* Driving licence (if you have one) and car registration documents, if applicable.
- \* Prescribed medication.
- \* Copies of documents relating to your housing tenure (for example, mortgage details or lease and rental agreements).
- \* Insurance documents, including national insurance number.
- \* Address book.
- \* Family photographs, your diary, jewellery, small items of sentimental value.
- \* Clothing and toiletries for you and your children.
- \* Your children's favourite small toys.
- \* You should also take any documentation relating to the abuse - e.g. police reports, court orders such as injunctions and restraining orders, and copies of medical records if you have them.

#### 5. Staying safe/protecting yourself after you have left

If you leave your partner because of abuse, you may not want people to know the reason you left. It is your decision whether or not you tell people that you have suffered domestic violence; but if you believe you may still be at risk, it might increase your safety if you tell your family and friends, your children's school, and your employer or college what is happening, so that they do not inadvertently give out any information to your ex-partner. They will also be more prepared and better able to help you in an emergency.

If you have left home, but are staying in the same town or area, these are some of the ways in which you might be able to increase your safety:

- \* Try not to place yourself in a vulnerable position or isolate yourself.
- \* Try to avoid any places, such as shops, banks, cafes, that you used to use when you were together.
- \* Try to alter your routines as much as you can.
- \* If you have any regular appointments that your partner knows about (for example, with a counsellor or health practitioner) try to change your appointment time and/or the location of the appointment.
- \* Try to choose a safe route, or alter the route you take or the form of transport you use, when approaching or leaving places you cannot avoid - such as your place of work, the children's school, or your GP's surgery.
- \* Tell your children's school, nursery or childminder what has happened, and let them know who will pick them up. Make sure they do not release the children to anyone else, or give your new address or telephone number to anyone. (You may want to establish a password with them, and give them copies of any court orders, if you have them.)

## 6. Keeping your location secure.

Consider telling your employer or others at your place of work - particularly if you think your partner may try to contact you there.

If you have moved away from your area, and don't want your abuser to know where you are, then you need to take particular care with anything that may indicate your location; for example:

- \* Your mobile phone could be 'tracked'; this is only supposed to happen if you have given your permission, but if your partner has had access to your mobile phone, he could have sent a consenting message purporting to come from you. If you think this could be the case, you should contact the company providing the tracking facility and withdraw your permission; or if you are in any doubt, change your phone.
- \* Try to avoid using shared credit or debit cards or joint bank accounts: if the statement is sent to your ex-partner, he will see the transactions you have made.
- \* Make sure that your address does not appear on any court papers. Solicitors, refuges, the courts and support organisations will be able to advise you on this.
- \* If you need to phone your abuser (or anyone with whom he is in contact), make sure your telephone number is untraceable by dialling 141 before ringing.
- \* Talk to your children about the need to keep your address and location confidential.

*In taking control of your life it is important to understand the journey to becoming a survivor will be challenging and at times difficult but ultimately brings you the reward of being free to live your life without fear and misery.*



## Epilogue

### The journey from victim to survivor

My life today is very different from the one I once led. From the people I associate with to how I feel and understand myself has totally changed. This did not happen overnight and has been a difficult journey for both myself and my children. I have no regrets. I am in control of my life and I do not live in fear or with uncertainty anymore, constantly wondering what is going to happen to me next. It was a long time before I stopped feeling guilty about what my children had been through as a consequence of my experiences and the 'choices' I had made.

This guilt was crippling for many years and caused difficulties with my relationships with the children and their discipline. I would be constantly trying to compensate for the traumas they had been through and I found it difficult to challenge or chastise them. My guilt made me feel depressed and tearful and this was not beneficial when trying to raise three children as a single parent. I eventually came to understand that as well as not being responsible for my abuser's behaviour, I was also not responsible for the consequences of my 'mistakes' when I did not know any better. "But you should have known better" is something I have been told by those who do not understand, but the reality is that I didn't. So how could I have been capable of making any wiser choices? I was simply not able to use knowledge which I did not possess. Much of what I have learnt has been from 'learning the hard way' and I am still proud to be me. Without this guilt I am able to see and think clearly. This means the process of repairing the damage that occurred to my children, is much clearer without this crippling and tearful pain getting in the way. **"I do not feel guilty for that which I did not know. I did the best that I could and knew how to at the time."**

One of the most positive changes I have instigated in my life is the people I now choose to associate with. Surrounding myself with positive people who appreciate my company and respect me for who I am is a constant source of light in my life. Through the support of these people, who could see my potential and gave me their encouragement, I have learnt how to trust again.

Life is a constant journey full of lessons to learn and people, whether they have suffered abuse or not, will all look back sometimes and think 'I could have done that differently'. Some of us wish the past could have been different much more than others and to anyone reading the content of these pages; I wish you well in your journey.

**I hope your future brings you the happiness you deserve.**

**Nicol Hick.**



*Without this guilt  
I am able to see and  
think clearly*

# HELPFUL CONTACT DETAILS

## Helpful contacts

### **Women's Aid** [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Women's Aid is the key national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. We support a network of over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK.

0808 2000 247 - Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge)

### **Refuge** [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

Refuge provides emergency accommodation for women and children when they are most in need.

0808 2000 247 - Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge)

### **Victim Support** [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Victim Support is the independent charity which helps people cope with the effects of crime. We provide free and confidential support and information to help you deal with your experiences.

0845 30 30 900 - phone line open 9am-9pm Mondays to Fridays, 9am-7pm weekends, 9am-5pm bank holidays

### **Childline** [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

ChildLine is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call us to talk about any problem – our counsellors are always here to help you sort it out.

0800 1111 - Freephone 24-hour

### **NSPCC** [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

If you're worried about a child's safety or welfare or if you need help or advice, ring our helpline. 0808 800 5000 - Freephone 24-hour

### **The Hideout** [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

The Hideout website provides help, information and support for children and young people – whether you're currently living with violence, you've experienced violence in the past or if you know someone else going through it and you're looking for help and information. The website includes lots of information to explain what domestic violence is, how it affects you and where you can go for more help.

### **Men's Advice Line** [www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)

The Men's Advice Line helpline provides a range of services aimed primarily at men experiencing domestic abuse from their partner.

0808 801 0327 Freephone Helpline 0808 801 0327

### **Broken Rainbow** [www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)

Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experiencing domestic violence.

08452 60 44 60 - Mondays to Fridays 9am-1pm and 2pm-5pm. Staffed by LGBT people.

### **The Lantern Project** [www.lanternproject.org.uk](http://www.lanternproject.org.uk)

Support and information for victims of child abuse, domestic abuse, racial abuse and bullying. Contact us through our web site, or by e-mail [lanternproject@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lanternproject@yahoo.co.uk)

