

Charmed & Dangerous



A Woman's Guide
to Reclaiming a
Healthy Relationship



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Introduction

This book “Charmed and Dangerous: A Woman’s Guide to Reclaiming a Healthy Relationship” has been developed for women by women. Tweed Valley Women’s Service has been actively supporting women and children experiencing domestic and family violence since 1985. Our aim in developing this booklet is to share information and resources that 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.

Domestic & Family violence is not just about the family; it is a social concern. As a result of inherent cultural and social beliefs millions of women globally from all socio-economic groups are abused and treated violently by men everyday. 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 book 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 at the Tweed Valley Women’s Service are working locally and nationally to increase 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 into 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 book, 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 book right now, if not put it aside in a safe place. You will know when you are ready to take this journey.

Tracy Asby
Executive Officer
Tweed Valley Women’s Service



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
- Shamed 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

CHARMED AND DANGEROUS:

- Thoughts of self harm or suicide
- 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 & comments to undermine your sense of self and destroy your self confidence / worth.

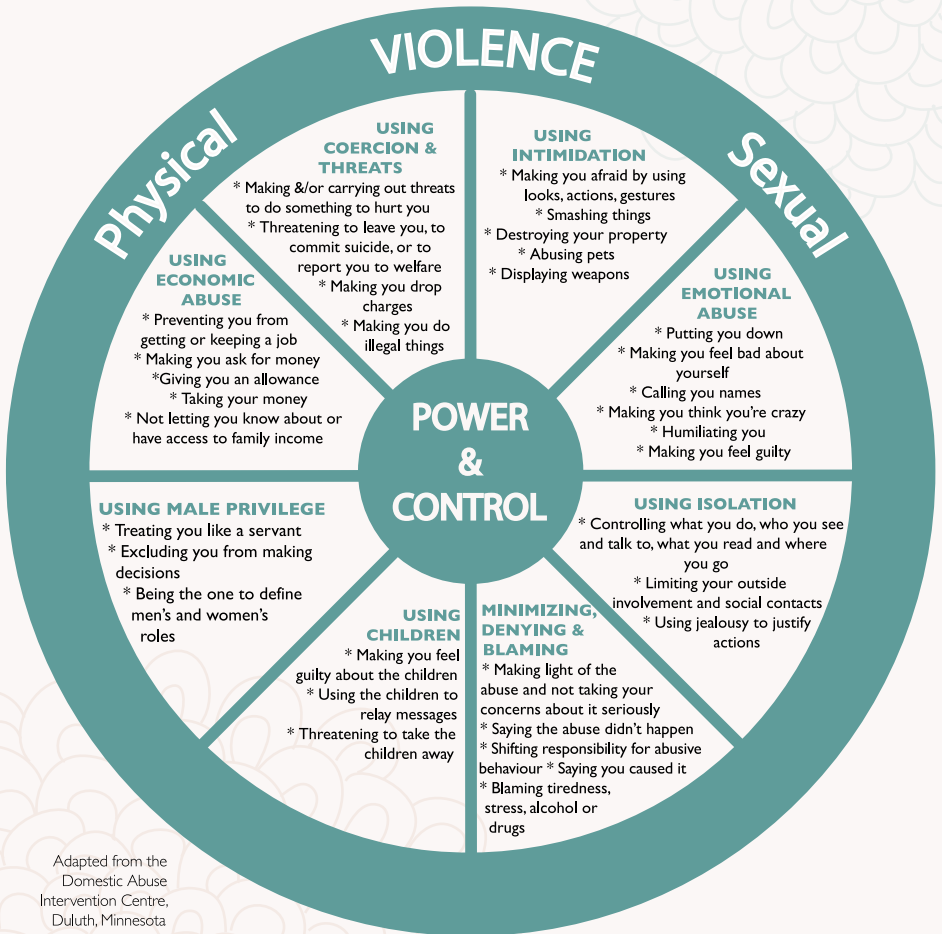
Spiritual Abuse includes ridiculing your spiritual beliefs and / or excluding you from taking part in cultural or spiritual activities.

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 phone or other forms of information and digital technology to harass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate you.



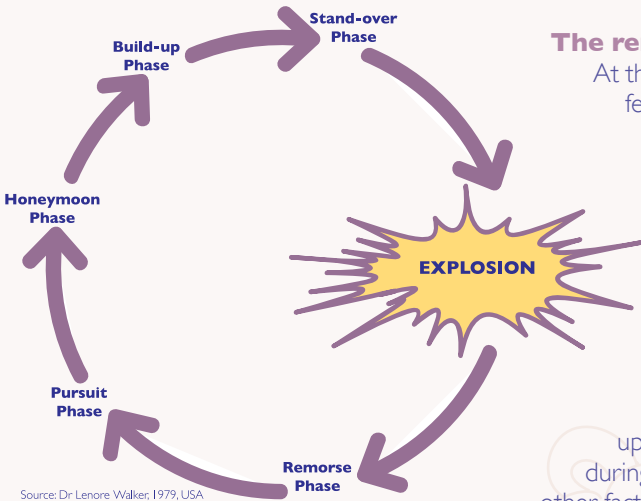
Cycle of Violence

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.

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 being victims themselves. Children who witness abuse or live in a violent household experience the same fear, intimidation and threat to safety that you experience.

Healthy and well adjusted children need a safe and supportive environment to develop their emotional, social, intellectual and physical wellbeing. 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.

This has negative consequences for children that can affect their wellbeing into adulthood. The impacts are considered so serious that child protection services may become involved. Exposure to domestic violence can sometimes lead to children being removed from the abuse.



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.



Adapted from the
Domestic Abuse
Intervention Centre,
Duluth, Minnesota

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.

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.

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. Abusers 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, 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 abusers 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

It may be difficult for women to recognise the signs of abuse in a lesbian relationship, as partners who are abusive can be loving at times. Some abusive behaviours can also be perceived as 'ordinary relationship problems'.

It is especially difficult for a woman who is experiencing her first same-sex relationship, because the abuser may insist that "this is what lesbians do" or "all women in same-sex relationships behave or respond like this".

In general, any behaviour adopted by a woman to control a partner, causing physical sexual or psychological harm, or causing her to live in fear, can be called abusive.

Pushing, biting, hitting, punching and using a weapon are forms of violence.

Threatening to use a weapon, forcing a partner to participate in sex or pornography, threatening to harm her pets or livestock, and/or damaging her property and belongings are also forms of abuse. Stalking, intimidation and harassment, including technological intimidation, are forms of abuse.

Threatening to 'out' a partner to employers, her family members, her children's schools or friends, and/or heterosexual friends are particular forms of intimidation used by abusive lesbians.

Some abusive women use, or threaten to use social media, Facebook or Twitter for example, to spread false information about partners or ex-partners.

Many lesbians also experience these abusive behaviours from ex-partners, particularly if they have formed new relationships after separation.

Getting assistance

Women experiencing same-sex domestic violence may feel reluctant to seek assistance from services because of the pressure to reveal their sexual orientation, disclose the nature of their relationship, and/or expect to deal with heterosexual and homophobic responses from service providers.

Some women may be concerned about the confidentiality of organisations they approach for assistance, particularly in rural areas. If the abusive partner or expartner has had strong connections with the gay and lesbian community, Bundjalung communities, or with women's services, a woman experiencing same-sex domestic violence may not feel she can trust the confidentiality of appropriate agencies.

Whilst these concerns are valid, most services and agencies (including police) are well-trained in responding professionally and confidentially to women in same-sex relationships.

Domestic Violence counsellors, and counsellors at ACON and NSW Health, can assist women to identify the risk or harm of abuse in same-sex relationships, and to develop safety strategies and plans.

These counsellors can also make referrals to 'lesbian-friendly' support groups, health or legal professionals, and court services. NSW Police have specialist Gay and

Lesbian Liaison officers, and specialist DV Liaison officers, who can provide information about women's rights to protection from abuse and entitlement to ADVOs.

Please contact one of these services if you are concerned about your safety or the

safety of a friend.

The statewide organisation ACON can help you if you want to speak to a specific LGBTIQ counsellor.

Freecall: 1800 633 637



Where to From Here

Women living with domestic violence commonly report experiencing a loss of their sense of self as well as their ability to take control of their lives. Women report that they feel as though they are on an emotional roller coaster; that they are exhausted and are no longer able to see a way out of their situation. If you are feeling this way it would be a good idea to get some support to assist you to move forward.

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

Support and Education groups

Support groups offer you an opportunity to identify, learn and receive support for you and your family.

1800 Respect - 1800 737 732

National counselling service providing a 24/7 telephone and online crisis and trauma counselling service to anyone whose life has been impacted by domestic violence or sexual assault.

Doctor

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

Lifeline & Kids Helpline

National 24/7 crisis telephone counselling, information and referral services are available to provide and immediate and confidential opportunity to discuss a problem or emergency.

Lifeline: 131 114

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 80

Police & Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLO)

It is the legal responsibility of the Police to apply for an Apprehended Violence Order for you and your children when a domestic violence offence has been committed; is imminent or likely to be committed. DVLO's are trained police officers who respond to domestic and family violence.

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. 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 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 that can be safe for you.

Your Legal Rights

Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVO)

All women and children have the right to live in a safe home free from violence and emotional abuse. If you are feeling unsafe tell the police. The police can make an application for an ADVO to protect you from future violence.

An ADVO is an order made by the court to restrict the behaviour of the abuser. The purpose of the ADVO is to protect you from future violence, harassment or intimidation.

An ADVO is flexible and can be made to suit your particular situation. For example it is possible to get an ADVO that prevents your abuser from being violent or intimidating you but allows you to maintain contact if this is what you want.

It is also possible to vary (change) your ADVO if your circumstances change. You can add or remove conditions.

In some circumstances the attending police officer can apply for a Provisional Order which is an ADVO that starts immediately. If you are concerned about your immediate safety discuss this option with the attending police officer.

An Exclusion Order may be issued by a Magistrate to exclude the violent person from the home when requested on the ADVO application. If you feel that it is unsafe for the abuser to remain living at home with you and the children discuss this option with the attending police officer.

Breach AVO

Agreeing to an ADVO will not give your abuser a criminal record. However if your abuser breaches (breaks) any of the

conditions of your ADVO they may be charged with a criminal offence. For this to occur you must report all breaches to police as soon as you can. Dates, times, details of what happened, what was said and any witnesses are all useful things to record. Additionally it is good to keep a diary record of what has happened for yourself.

Domestic Violence Criminal Charges

If you have been assaulted, stalked, intimidated or had your property intentionally damaged by the abuser the police may charge them with a criminal offence. If your abuser is convicted of these crimes they will be recorded as domestic violence offences. If the police charge the abuser with a domestic violence crime they will usually take out an ADVO for your protection at the same time.

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS)

For support at Court refer to the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS): **1800 888 529**

Court advocacy is offered in a safe and private support room at the court house by a female WDVCAS staff member. Staff explain what happens in court, court procedures, give personal and emotional support to women attending court. They provide information and referral to other services that can assist with counselling, accommodation and support.

LawAccess

LawAccess is free legal advice line, giving advice in Family Law & ADVO's
Phone: 1300 888 529

Law Assist

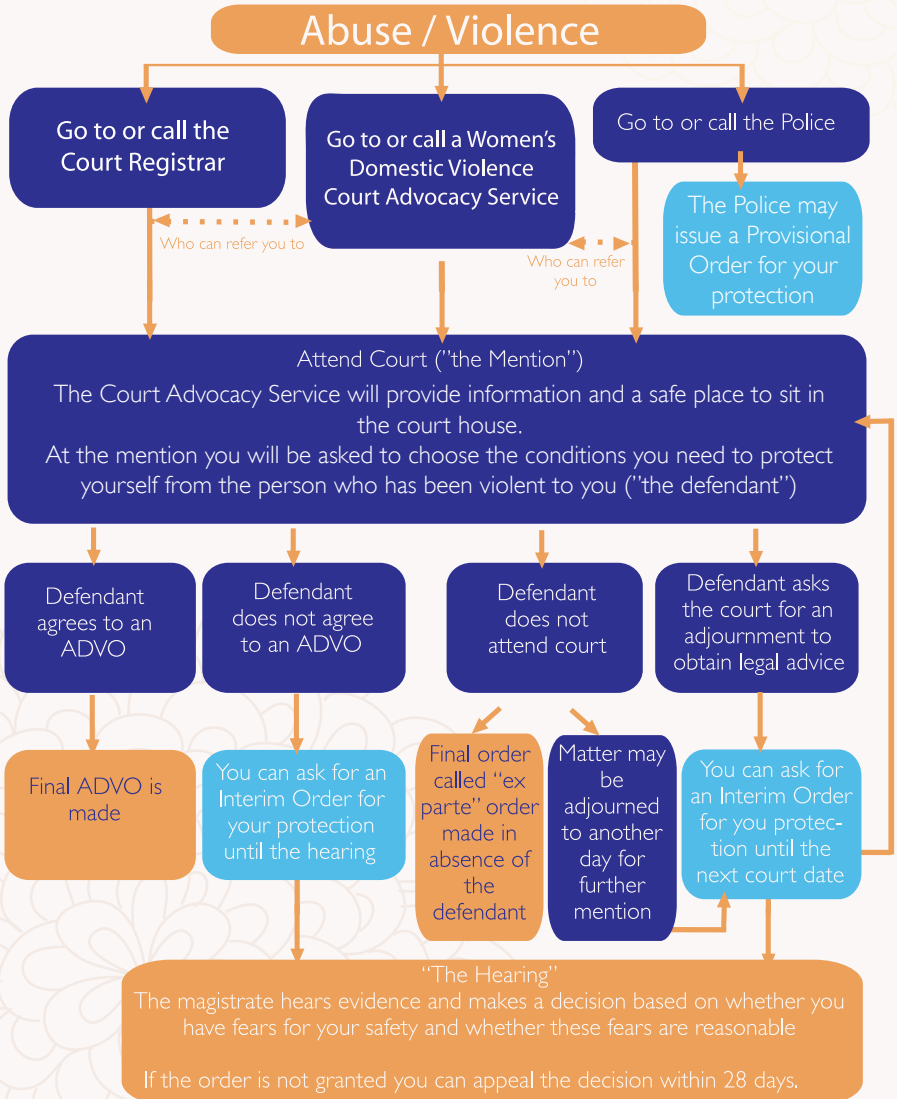
Law Assist is an online resource which is a good first port for clients wanting to understand ADVO's. It explains legal procedures and forms for Local Court cases.

www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au/lawassist

Women's Legal Service NSW

Domestic violence legal advice line provides free confidential legal information, advice and referrals from women in NSW with a focus on domestic violence and Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

Phone: 1800 810 784



DON'T FORGET TO ASK ABOUT VICTIM'S COMPENSATION

Safety Planning

Think of ideas that will help keep you safe and put them in to 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; 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

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 services / contacts and support services 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 services / 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 on the electoral role
- 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 safe 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, 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 others.

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:

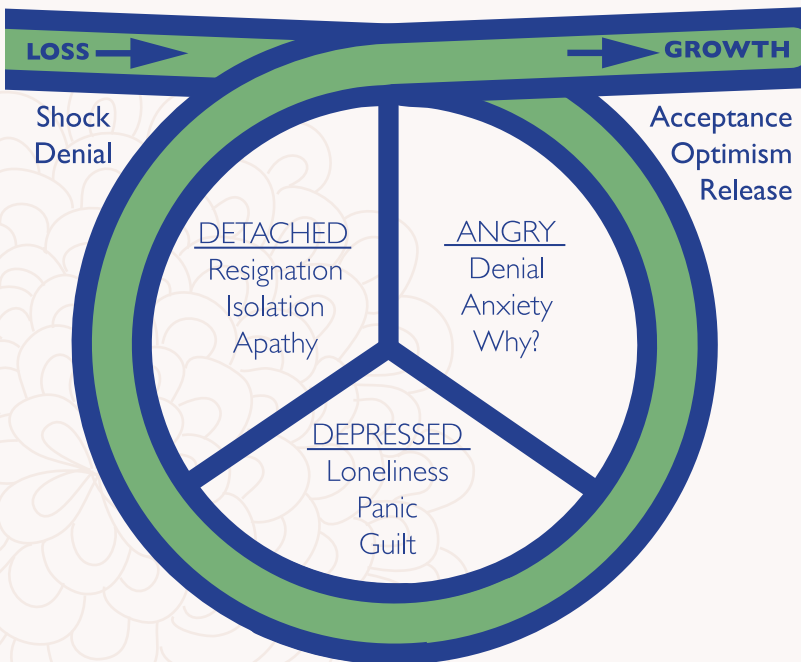
- Purchase of gifts with promises of continued generosity and a better future.
- Promises of change – saying they are sorry and that the abuse will never happen again
- Use of emotional blackmail - attempts to make you feel guilty, or unable to survive without them

- 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.



5 Stages of Grief and Loss

CHARMED AND DANGEROUS:

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 helping 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 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; diarrhoea 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 book.
- **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.



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre, Duluth, Minnesota.

Reference Numbers

Aboriginal Contact Line	1800 019 123
ACON	1800 063 060
1800 Respect	1800 737 732
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Centrelink:	
Employment Services	132 850
Family Assistance Office	136 150
Multilingual Phone Access	131 202
Child Support Enquiry Line	131 272
DV Hotline NSW	1800 656 463
FACS Helpline	132 111
Family Relationship Advice	1800 050 321
Indigenous Call Centre	1800 136 380
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800 (24 hrs/7 days)
Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line	1800 639 784
Law Access NSW	1300 888 529
Lifeline	131 114
Link2Home	1800 152 152
Mensline	1300 789 978
Mental Health Access Line	1800 011 511
Northern Sydney DV Court Advocacy Service	(02) 8425 8707
NSW Victims of Crime	1800 069 054
Parentline	132 055
Police Complaints	1800 622 571
Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia	1800 424 017
Translating & Interpreter Service	131 450
Victims Access Line	1800 633 063
Women's Legal Service Contact Line	1800 801 501
DV Legal Advice Line	1800 810 784

Weblinks

1800 Respect Online

Ask Lois

Department of Community Services Helpline

Domestic Violence: it can happen to anyone

Domestic Violence Resource Centre

Family Law Information for parents and Children

Information for same-sex domestic Violence

Information for young people about Domestic violence

Interrelate Family Centre

LawAccess NSW

Tenants Advice & Advocacy Service

NSW legal Aid

Rape & DV Services Australia

Victims Access Line

Women's Legal Services

Safe Beds for Pets Program

Lower North Shore DV Network

www.1800respect.org.au

www.asklois.org.au

www.community.nsw.gov.au

www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au

www.dvrcv.org.au

www.bestforkids.org.au

www.anothercloset.com.au

www.burstingbubble.com

www.interrelate.org.au

www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

www.tentants.org.au

www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

www.rape-dvservices.org.au

www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs

www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au

www.rspcansw.org.au/our-work/

[programs-community-services/](http://www.rspcansw.org.au/our-work/programs-community-services/safe-beds-for-pets)

[safe-beds-for-pets](http://www.rspcansw.org.au/our-work/programs-community-services/safe-beds-for-pets)

[www.northshoredomestic](http://www.northshoredomesticviolence.org)

[violence.org](http://www.northshoredomesticviolence.org)



A Community Resource Booklet
Sponsored by Willoughby Council

Printed November 2014

