

NO MORE

CRAP

**MOVING ON AFTER
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**



**REMEMBER RECOVERY
IS NOT A ONE DAY'S JOB.**

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a topic that cannot be discussed enough. It cuts across all age, race, profession, class, gender, cities, countries, religion, or sexual orientation. Everybody has heard about domestic violence, and we know it is terrible, but how many people actually seek to talk to the victims of abuse and help them? How many people are willing to help them find their feet again after being taken, of course by the ones who were supposed to love them? How many people know what to do?

Domestic or Intimate partner violence is predominantly known as a crime against women. Women account for about 85% of the victims of intimate partner violence and men account for 15% of the victims. Women are at a higher risk of being abused by an intimate partner due to gender roles that have cemented the idea that women are less superior compared to men and should be treated as such. Some religions also make it seem like the sole purpose of the existence of women was to support men in any method used to keep them in check.

Historically, domestic violence has moved on from something that used to be rampantly accepted by the general community to something that is being frowned upon, and it is my wish that with time, we will be able to completely get rid of it by the proper sensitization and empowerment of women against domestic violence.

From statistics that are being released year in, year out, it is evident that a vast majority of the world's population are dealing with scars

from their battle with domestic violence. Education on how to deal with those scars and overcome whatever hang-ups they may have, after the experience will not be remiss.

Truthfully, there is not a lot of material out there, to help people who have been in abusive relationships move past it; to help others assist their loved ones in finding purpose and a cause after. I hope that this book will be able to address all that and provide the necessary guidance for survivors of domestic abuse to live a wholesome life again.

This book seeks to thoroughly and exhaustively address every aspect of domestic violence. From educating readers about the causes, signs and how to get out of abusive relationships, to laws that have been put in place, to protecting them, and to helping them find their feet again after the carpet has been pulled out from underneath them.

Healing from the emotional, psychological and physical trauma of abusive relationships can be a difficult journey to embark on, especially if you're doing it solo. You have to work to rebuild relationships that have been destroyed, regain opportunities that have been lost, and to rebuild self-confidence that has been shattered. This book will be your companion through every step of the journey till you find yourself again.

From my years of experience working with survivors, I have noticed that the impacts of abuse can be very deep-seated and would require a lot of time, dedication, sacrifice and commitment before they stop feeling like a shell of their old self.

Most survivors, after spending so long being deprived of their power of autonomy and control, do not know what to do with all that freedom. Most of them drift through life, searching for a purpose, while others do not have the means to rebuild their lives after.

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With this book at your fingertips, you would be able to rediscover yourself and build yourself into the woman you want to be; make yourself into the woman you desire to be and celebrate the beauty of the new and wholesome life you will discover.

Here's to celebrating your abundant, amazing next chapter.

Have a great read!

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SECTION 1:

UNDERSTANDING THE SCOURGE

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” – Kofi Annan.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS

Consider the alarming domestic violence statistics below:

- Every 9 seconds, a woman is beaten or assaulted.
- 20 people are abused every minute by an intimate partner, making up to 10 million people each year.
- 1 in every 3 pregnant women is battered.
- 1 out of every 3 women and 1 out of every 4 men have been in abusive relationships; 1 out of every 5 women and 1 out of every 7 men have experienced severe physical violence.
- Domestic violence makes up 10% of all violent crimes.
- A weapon is involved in 19% of domestic violence cases.
- The presence of a gun in situations of domestic violence, increases the chances of a homicide by 500%.
- 1 out of every 5 women and 1 out of every 71 men in the United States has been raped in their lifetime; 46.7% of female and 44.9% of male rape victims were raped by an acquaintance, of these 45.4% of female and 29% of male rape victims were raped by an intimate partner.
- An intimate partner is involved in 72% of all murder-suicides and 94% of those victims are female.

- 60% of all female homicide victims were intimate acquaintances or wives of their killers. This is 12 times more than those killed by male strangers.
- 50% of all the women who are murdered in the United States are killed by either a boyfriend or husband.
- In the United States, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape.
- Women that fall within the age range of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner.
- 25% of women in college have been the victim of rape or attempted rape. 84% of these victims were acquainted with their assailant.
- 54% of sexual assaults occur on dates. The majority of victims are aged 16-24.
- Nationwide, more than 200,000 phone calls are placed to domestic violence hotlines every year.
- Domestic violence crimes account for almost 40% of calls to police.
- Only 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries.
- Domestic abuse is linked with a higher rate of depression and suicidal behavior.
- A University of New Hampshire survey shows that violence is experienced in 28% of teen relationships.
- Violent behavior in a relationship is almost certain to be repeated again and again, unless there is intervention. An abuser will hit their partner an average of 35 times, before police are notified for the first time.

- Children raised in a chaotic, abusive environment are seven times more likely to grow up and repeat the same behavior as adults.
- 1 out of every 15 children are exposed to intimate partner violence each year, and 90% of these children are usually eyewitnesses to this violence.
- Domestic violence can be attributed to 50% of the homeless cases among women and children.
- Victims of intimate partner violence lose a total of 8.0 million days of paid work each year; the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs.
- Between 21-60% of victims of intimate partner violence lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse.
- Nearly 33% of women killed in their workplaces were killed by a current or former intimate partner.
- Nearly 1 in 4 large private industry establishments reported at least one incidence of domestic violence, including threats and assaults.
- A survey of American employees found that 44% of full-time employed adults personally experienced domestic violence's effect in their workplaces, and 21% identified themselves as victims of intimate partner violence.
- 64% of domestic violence victims indicated that their ability to work was affected by the violence. 57% of domestic violence victims said they were distracted, 45% feared getting discovered, and 2 in 5 were afraid of their intimate partner's unexpected visit (either by phone or in person).

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- Nearly 2 in 3 corporate executives say that domestic violence is a major problem in our society and 55% cite its harmful impact on productivity in their companies.
- More than 70% of United States workplaces do not have a formal program or policy that addresses workplace violence.
- 96% of domestic violence victims who are employed experience problems at work due to abuse.
- 19.3 million Women and 5.1 million men in the United States have been stalked in their lifetime. 60.8% of female stalking victims and 43.5% men reported being stalked by a current or former intimate partner.

FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Abuse Is Widespread

A few years back, victims of abuse used to be so terrified of coming forward; scared of being victim blamed or considered weak, they would silently endure their pain and suffering. Thankfully, the emergence and growth of women's movement and the raising of awareness by millions of advocates around the world, there has been a massive crackdown on perpetrators of domestic violence and people have been sensitized to its prevalence and warning signs.

Sociologists argue that a culture of aggression, gender roles, and an obsession with control has allowed domestic violence to be deeply ingrained in everyday life.

Victim Blaming Is Rampant

It is no secret that victims of domestic violence are faced with a culture of blame. This does not just apply to male survivors of domestic violence, who have their stories and struggles dismissed. Several myths about domestic violence abound, especially among those with a higher likelihood of being abusers. For example, people who say it is okay to respond with violence if your partner badly behaves. These thoughts are deeply rooted in the culture of victim blaming and abuse. There is no degree of bad behavior that should

make someone react violently to their partner; not if they are unkind, not if they're unreasonable and definitely, not if they cheat. Victims of abuse are not the cause of their abuse. There are several avenues to conflict resolution that does not involve laying hands on people, so anyone that takes that route is a violent abuser. Violence, of any sort, should not be normalized in a relationship. The only time it is acceptable to respond with violence, is in circumstances where your life feels threatened, and self-defense is required.

No Gender Is Exempted From Domestic Abuse

Victims of domestic violence are not limited to women, men also get abused, although, several outreach campaigns to create awareness about domestic violence usually focus only on women. According to a study, about 40% of domestic violence victims are men. This picture is not as black and white as it seems, as a lot of people use it in arguments that women are equally as violent as men. Most of the experiences of men in violent relationships, have been due to low-level violence such as slaps. Men are more likely to use extreme violence and weapons on their partners.

This is why a lot of focus is on women in abusive relationships, because of the high risk of death. While there is, undeniably, domestic violence against men, women are still the primary victims. This is a double edged sword, as men in abusive relationships often find themselves being mocked and ridiculed for not physically protecting themselves. You should believe anyone who says they have been victims of domestic violence as no gender is safe and no degree of emotional or physical strength can guarantee your safety from abuse.

It Is Not As Easy To Leave As It Seems

“Why don’t you just leave if he treats you bad?” I’m sure that is a question that resonates with a lot of domestic abuse victims and

survivors because that is the first question a lot of well-meaning folks ask. The truth is, as toxic as an abusive relationship is, they still offer the victims something. Be it emotional security, financial security, or even a relationship with the one they love; it is not easy to completely uproot yourself from what you are used to, to face the unknown. This is why a lot of outreach designed to help domestic violence victims, leave need to consider these concerns and look for means to address them.

Let us not even forget the fact that leaving an abusive relationship can be very dangerous to the survivor. Studies have shown that because for some, it is an issue of control, abusers are more inclined to kill their victims within two weeks of their departure than any other time. When you consider this along with the other uncertainties, it is not that difficult to understand why so many victims hesitate to leave their abusive partners.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), relationship abuse or domestic abuse. When people talk about domestic abuse, it is often always limited to the use of physical force by one partner against the other, but domestic abuse is so much more than that. It is a series of behaviors, exhibited in an intimate relationship by one partner over the other to control and dominate them. Domestic abuse has one purpose alone; to take and maintain absolute control and power over you. An abuser will use whatever means necessary to ensure you remain under their thumb and prevent you from doing things you want or force you to do things you do not wish to. Be it fear, guilt, intimidation, shame, financial deprivation or emotional blackmail; being fair is not in the playbook of an abuser. The extreme instances involves the abuser, threatening to hurt you or others around you that you love, physical harm, and sexual violence. So many of these different forms of abuse may be happening at one time within the same relationship.

Domestic violence is non-discriminatory. It could happen to anyone of any sexual orientation, race, gender, age, or religion. Anyone can also be a perpetrator of domestic violence. It cuts across people of all education and exposure levels and socio-economic backgrounds. It could happen to married people or single people, who are just dating and living together or separately.

Even with how common domestic abuse is and how it cuts across several different demographics, the problem is still grossly

overlooked, denied or excused – particularly in cases where the abuse is still psychological or emotional and hasn't transcended to being physical yet.

The bottom line is that abusive behavior is not acceptable, irrespective of where it is coming from, man, woman, teenager, older adult, or a boss. You deserve autonomy. You deserve to feel safe, respected, valued and loved.

Recognizing the signs that you are in an abusive relationship

Knowing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship, is usually the first step to getting out of it.

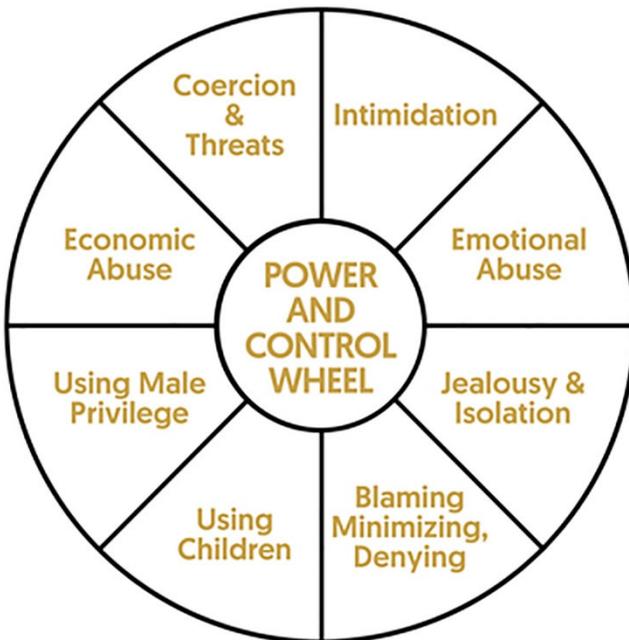


Fig 1: The Power and Control Wheel.

The Power and Control Wheel is used to represent all the tactics that an abusive partner would apply to keep their victims in check. The inner part of the wheel contains all the subtle, usually unrecognizable acts of abuse like using male privilege and minimizing experience. The outer part of the wheel shows the more overt and noticeable acts. These forceful acts are a reinforcement of the regular use of the subtler, covert forms of abuse. Many of these acts occur at the same time in the abusive relationship.

Domestic abuse usually escalates from inside the Power and Control Wheel to the outer parts, that is, from threats, verbal and, emotional abuse to physical and sexual violence. While the most noticeable damage may be the physical injuries, the psychological and, emotional trauma caused by domestic abuse are also severe. Emotional abusive relationship drains you and can destroy your self-worth. It also leads to depression, anxiety, feelings of helplessness and loneliness.

Some of the signs an abusive partner displays include:

- Constantly insulting you and trying to put you down.
- Displays jealousy of the amount of time you spend with family and friends and seeks to control it or destroy your relationship with them.
- Controls the purse strings of the house and tells you how you should spend your “allowance”.
- Absolves you of all control of your own finances.
- Controls what you wear, eat, who you see, where you go, and what you do.
- Prevents you from attending school or working.

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- Pressures you to have sex or perform sexual acts that you are against.
- Uses your insecurities and fears against you.
- Threatens to take away your children.
- Uses intimidating or scare tactics against you.
- Destroys your property in anger.

PATTERN OF ABUSE

It is not an easy feat to tell if your relationship will become abusive from the beginning. In fact, so many abusive relationships start out perfect. Your partner seems interested in everything you do; he pays attention to every little thing you do, he seems caring and the perfect man for you. The controlling behaviors don't start out immediately, they grow progressively and begin to intensify as the relationship develops. Sometimes, you may get warning flags, but since these things are so subtle and abusers have perfected the art of making it seem like any problem you notice is in your head, they are often overlooked.

No two relationships work the same way, and as a result, domestic violence does not appear the same in all abusive relationships. Instead, they follow a particular pattern that is displayed individually, depending on who the abuser is and their core behaviors. These patterns are what all abusive relationships have in common, the acts in itself may be different.

Domestic violence is much more than experiencing one or many isolated bursts of violence. There's always an interrelated pattern that cuts across a wide range of abusive behaviors and this increases in occurrence and intensifies over time.

Physical Abuse

One of the patterns of an abusive partner is physical abuse or violence. It might not even be by hitting you. Once you notice that your partner takes out his anger or frustration on inanimate objects, there is a possibility that when you are in close proximity to him than any of those inanimate objects, you will be on the receiving end of those blows. Some signs are:

- Hair pulling.
- Slapping, kicking, choking, biting or punching you.
- Harming your children.
- Driving dangerously when you are in the car with them.
- Using weapons to hurt you.
- Depriving you of food and sleep.
- Abandoning you in unfamiliar places.
- Forcing alcohol and drugs on you, especially if you have had a substance abuse problem before.
- Trapping you in a room or preventing you from leaving the house.
- Damaging your property when they're angry.

Emotional Abuse

Abusive partners can also use words and emotions to make you easily malleable. It also involves the use of emotional blackmail and threats to control you and make you lower in submission for fear of punishment. Some signs of emotional abuse include:

- Isolating you from friends and family.

- Name calling and constant criticisms or insults.
- Threatening to hurt you with weapons.
- Withholding affection as a punitive measure.
- Continually monitoring your every move and calls.
- Acting jealously and possessively.
- Humiliation.
- Gas lighting.
- Victim blaming.
- Cheating as a punitive means.
- Constantly denigrating your worth; saying no one else will love you and you can't find someone else to accept you.
- Threatening to hurt your pets, children, and family.
- Constant body shaming.

Sexual Abuse or Coercion

Sexual abuse or coercion are forms of sexually aggressive behavior; coercion is often of the milder type. It varies from being persuaded using underhanded means, to being forced to have sexual contact with your partner. It can be verbal or emotional by using statements meant to guilt-trip you, make you feel pressured or shamed, and even make you feel threatened. It can also be physical by forcing you through subtle actions or very aggressive ones. Some of the signs that your partner is sexually abusing or coercing you include:

- Making you dress in a sexual manner.
- Using sexual insults on you, like whore, slut.
- Forcing you to perform sexual acts against your will.

- Tying or holding you down during sex without consent.
- Using weapons to hurt you during sex.
- Involving other people in your sexual acts against your will.
- Deliberately trying to transfer an STI to you.
- Giving you alcohol or drugs to loosen you up.
- Making you feel like you owe them sex because you are in a relationship with them, because they have spent money on you or because you have had sex before.
- Forcing you to watch pornography.
- Continuing to pressure you after you've said no.
- Emotional blackmail to get sex, like threatening to leave, saying things like "if you love me, sex is the only way to prove it to me," "If I don't get sex from you, I'll get it outside".
- Demanding for sex when you're indisposed or after hurting you.
- Reacting with anger or resentment if you refuse to perform a sexual act.
- Making you afraid of what could happen if you refused something.

Even if you aren't being forced by your partner to perform sexual acts against your will, making you feel obligated to perform them is coercion in itself. You should have complete autonomy over your body and decide when you want to have sex and how you want to have the sex without someone else imposing their needs on you. You do not owe your partner any sexual intimacy of any kind.

Reproductive Coercion

Reproductive coercion is a way for abusers to exert control and power over the reproductive system of their victims by intercepting with contraceptive use or pregnancy. This pattern of abuse is often overlooked because other patterns are usually co-occurring. The following are signs that your partner is exercising reproductive coercion over you:

- Blatant refusal to use a condom or any other contraceptive.
- Lying about being on birth control, e.g. lying about having a vasectomy or being on the pill.
- Removing or tampering with condoms during sexual intercourse.
- Refusing to pull out, if the withdrawal was the agreed method of birth control.
- Withholding funds needed to buy birth control.
- Sabotaging birth control pills.
- Removing IUDs and contraceptive patches.
- Monitoring your menstrual cycle, usually without your approval.
- Forcing or preventing you from getting an abortion.
- Not considering your decision to have or not to have children.
- Acting violent or threatening you if you don't comply with their wish to keep or terminate a pregnancy.

Reproductive coercion can also be an abusive partner, guilt-tripping, pressuring, and shaming you into having children, against your will. For example, if your partner keeps trying to make you feel guilty for not wanting to have children, especially if you have kids from someone else already.

Financial or economic abuse

Financial or economic abuse is when an abusive partner takes over your finances as a means to exert power and control over you. They use the avenue to monitor your spending, control your behavior due to the threats of getting your funds cut off, and ensure complete submission and dependence on them and their “goodwill.” Some signs of a financially or economically abusive partner include:

- Preventing you from having access to bank accounts.
- Stealing money from you, your friends or your family.
- Limiting your hours of work or forbidding you from working.
- Taking your paycheck and depositing it into their accounts to deny your access to it.
- Giving you stipends and carefully monitoring what you purchase.
- Refusing to contribute financially to the running of the house and using your check to fund your living.
- Withholding funds required for basic necessities like food, clothing, medicine, and transportation.
- Using funds from your joint account or from the children’s savings account, without your consent.
- Taking your tax returns without permission or seizing joint tax returns.
- Maxing out your credit cards or ruining your credit score.

Digital Abuse

This is the use of technologies such as social media to harass, stalk, bully or intimidate an intimate partner. This is the perpetuation of

emotional and verbal abuse over the internet. Some signs of digital abuse include:

- Using social media sites to keep tabs on you and your activity.
- Stealing or demanding the passwords to all your profiles.
- Impersonating you online to warn off other friends and family members.
- Decides who you can add as friends to your social media pages.
- Sends you threatening and insulting emails or messages online.
- Pressures you to send explicit pictures and photos online.
- Threatens to expose compromising messages and images of you to control you.
- Tags you on unkind posts that will further fuel your insecurities.
- Uses spyware or GPS to monitor your activities.
- Constantly looks through your phone and checks your call log and messages.
- Uses subliminal means to put you down in their statuses and comments.

Reflections: The signs of an abusive relationship are so numerous that you may have difficulties keeping up with all of them. The most important thing to remember is fear. If you have to regularly walk on eggshells around your partner for fear of harm or any other punitive actions, then you are most likely in a toxic and unhealthy relationship.

Exercise: To determine if your relationship is abusive, answer the following questions. The more 'yes' you have, the higher the likelihood of you being in one.

- *Do you feel afraid of your partner most of the time?*
- *Do you avoid some specific topics around your partner out of fear of making them angry?*
- *Do you feel you can't do anything right by your partner?*
- *Do you wonder if you are indeed the crazy one; seeing and hearing things you shouldn't?*
- *Do you believe that you deserve to be mistreated or hurt?*
- *Do you feel helpless and lonely?*
- *Does your partner constantly berate or criticize you?*
- *Does your partner ignore your accomplishments and opinions or make them appear inconsequential?*
- *Does your partner blame you for their own abusive behavior?*
- *Does your partner constantly humiliate you both in public and in private?*
- *Does your partner treat you so badly, you are ashamed to let your family and friends see?*
- *Does your partner have an unpredictable temper?*
- *Does your partner see you as an object or a property to be owned?*
- *Does your partner threaten to commit suicide if you leave?*
- *Does your partner threaten to take away your children or harm them?*
- *Does your partner destroy your belongings in a fit of rage?*

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- *Does your partner threaten to harm you or your loved ones?*
- *Does your partner force you to perform sexual acts?*
- *Does your partner control where you go, who you go with and, what you do?*
- *Does your partner act excessively possessive or jealous?*
- *Does your partner prevent you from seeing your family and friends?*
- *Does your partner control your access to the phone and money?*
- *Does your partner crowd you by continually checking up on you?*

CYCLE OF ABUSE

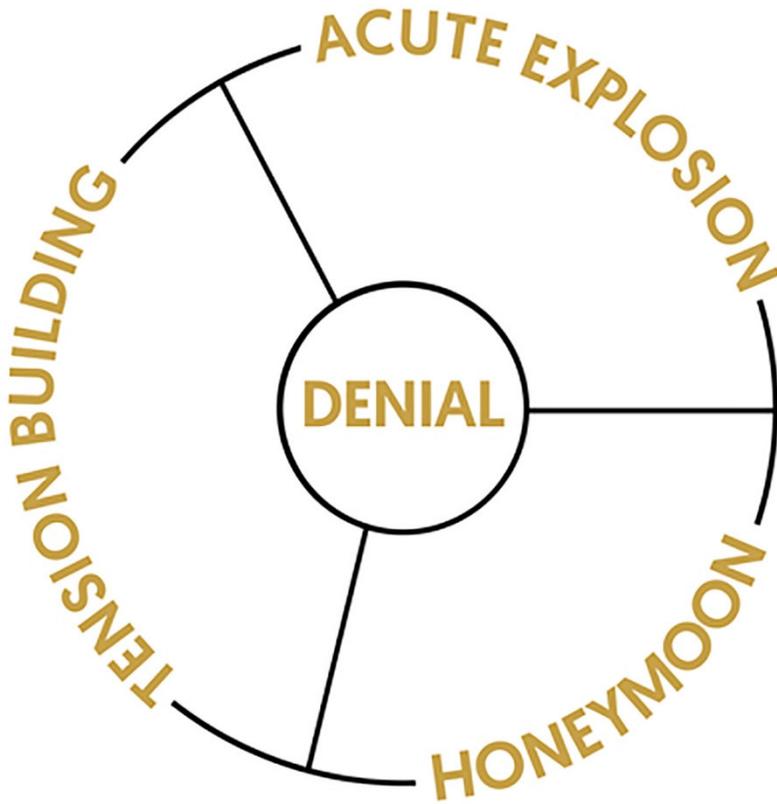


Fig 2: The Cycle of violence in abusive relationships

There are three stages in the cycle of violence in abusive relationships which are:

Stage 1: Tension building

Build up: Under the tension building stage, we have the gradual build up tension between the two partners in the relationship. Verbal, emotional, financial and, every other form of mental abuse begins here.

Stand-over: The victims of abuse begin to feel frightened because they know that any “misstep” can escalate into daunting consequences. The behavior of the abuser intensifies to a point where the release of that tension becomes palpable.

Fantasy and planning: The abuser begins to fantasize about unleashing the tension on you. He spends time ruminating on what you have done wrong, how you deserve to pay for those wrongdoings, and what means he will use to make you pay. Then he creates a plan to turn the fantasy into reality.

Set-up: The abuser sets you up for abuse. He puts his plan to unleash that tension on you into motion by creating a scenario where he can justify the reason for abuse.

Stage 2: Acute explosion

This is the peak of the cycle as this is the point where the physical abuse occurs. The abuser releases the tension that has been building up, and this behavior may become a habit.

Abuse: The abusive partner lashes out aggressively to show you who the boss is. He displays extreme violent and belittling behaviors.

Stage 3: Honeymoon/Manipulation

Guilt: After the abuse, the abuser begins to feel guilt. Not over what he has done but over the possibility of being caught and facing the consequences of his action or of the possibility of you leaving.

Excuses: The abuser tries to justify the reasons for their actions to you and himself. He tries to rationalize what he has done and shift the blame to you or others; anything to avoid accountability. For example, he may say, “Why did you do that? You know it makes me angry when you do that. I don’t want to have to do this, but you force my hand.”

Pursuit: The abuser begins to make promises never to be abusive again. They become attentive and try to buy their way into the hearts of their victims with treats and expensive gifts, getaways and helping out around the house. It begins to look like he has changed and the victim starts to feel confused but relieved at the promise of change.

Denial: Both partners in the abusive relationship begin to live in denial of the severity of the violence and abuse. She starts to think it was a one-off experience and since he has apologized and promised, it won’t happen again. He starts to feel that since she easily forgave him, it wasn’t all that in the first place. They are both happy living in denial and want to continue the relationship, so they don’t consider the big elephant in the room – that it happened once means it will definitely happen again.

Over time, this honeymoon or manipulative phase passes and the cycle may begin again. The constant apologies, manipulations, loving gestures and seeming contriteness of the abuser in between incidents of abuse, makes it difficult for the abused to leave. Either because she believes there is still hope for change and she is the only one that can bring about that change; that things will be different this time around and that he really loves her but is a flawed human being or because

she is worried about her safety and staying and complying is her safest bet.

The cycle is not set in stone as a lot of survivors have reported that the tension building stage was skipped altogether and their abusers alternated between random fits of violence and the honeymoon/manipulating stage.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS THAT SOMEONE ELSE IS IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

You cannot know for sure what happens behind closed doors in your friends' or families' relationships, and an abused person usually will not come out clean when asked, so it is left to you to recognize the signs that your loved one is in a toxic relationship and needs help.

- When they are almost never seen in public without their partners.
- When they eventually do, they are always checking in to report their location and activities.
- When they always defer to whatever their partner says.
- When they always talk about how jealous or possessive their partner gets and try to pass it off as being cute.
- When they receive frequent calls from their partner harassing them, especially in the company of friends and family.
- When they suddenly become so “clumsy,” they are always prone to accidents. Especially when they were never like that before getting with their partner.
- When they begin to dress for the wrong occasion to hide some of their “accidents.” For example, wearing thick scarves and

long sleeves during the summer or wearing sunglasses indoors.

- When they suddenly stop showing up to friends and family functions, school and work without explanation.
- When they never have money of their own even though they should be able to or limited access to the family car or credit cards.
- When they undergo sudden personality changes. For example, a highly spirited and outgoing person, suddenly becomes withdrawn and quiet.
- When they show signs of anxiety, depression and suicidal tendencies.
- When they suddenly develop self-esteem issues; if they used to be confident or if it worsens.

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Causes

With how prevalent domestic violence is, one often wonders what could have caused it to be the norm? Is the trait genetic? Is it psychological? Or is it linked to environmental factors? If it is something that we can get to the root of, wouldn't it be easier to eradicate the problem altogether?

Abuse is a learned behavior. Some abusers have become programmed to seeing emotional and physical violence as the only way to resolve domestic disputes in their homes, from watching their fathers vent out their anger and frustration with basically anything on them on their mothers. They learned to see it as a way to deal with their inbuilt anger, their inadequacies, insecurities, and their internal fears.

On the flipside, what arguments would we have to defend those who did not grow up in abusive homes and ended up becoming abusive? What excuse would we give for them choosing to treat a person so horribly?

Two siblings, one an alcoholic and the other a teetotaler, were asked the reason why they became the way they were. The summary of both their responses was that they grew up with an alcoholic father. The two of them were raised in the same environment, exposed to the

same conditions but still ended up on two very different extremes of the spectrum based on that upbringing. One noticed the hardship, the suffering, and pain of being an alcoholic brought to their lives and swore off alcohol. The other noticed these same things and decided to embrace the lifestyle.

In the end, the only important factor to consider when looking at the causes of domestic violence is choice. They choose to exert complete control and power over their victims. You can live in a very toxic environment and choose not to be a product of that environment.

Their choice to be abusive is further reinforced by:

- Their establishment of unchecked amounts of control over others, probably also through abusive means.
- Not being reported to the authorities by those that have been affected by their behaviors.
- Using violence and abuse to solve their problems in the past effectively.
- A belief that they can get away with their actions.
- A sense of entitlement.
- An inflated sense of self and belief, that they should be of priority.
- Gender roles that glorify aggression, dominance and violence as “normal masculine behavior”.
- Objectification of women, glorification of violence and violent, and non-consensual sex by the media.
- Peer pressure to devalue women, which is the core definition of masculinity.

- Praise of aggression and dominance in sports, leading to unaccountability of sportsmen for sexist or abusive behavior.
- Encouragement from family to exert power and make the decisions in their house or relationship as the “head of the home”.
- Acceptance of a lot of factors as excuses for being abusive.

People will like to excuse the behaviors of abusive people on a number of factors, and while those factors may increase the possibilities of the occurrence of domestic violence, they are not the cause of domestic violence

Some factors that do not cause domestic violence include:

- **Alcohol and drugs:** Domestic abuse cannot be blamed on alcohol and drug usage. So many abusers are abusive towards their victims even while sober. Also, put into consideration that even while drunk or high, an abusive person does not generally abuse everyone. They always reserve that treatment for their immediate family members or partners. However, domestic abuse is prevalent in homes where there is substance abuse, and it is not uncommon for victims of abuse to revert to alcohol and drug misuse as a form of escape from the abuse they are experiencing.
- **Growing up in an abusive home:** As mentioned before, abusive homes do not always produce abusive children, and along those same lines, a lot of abusive people do not come from homes with a history of abuse. Behavioral patterns are not formed only by the family, so blaming the abuse on the childhood experience of the abuser is an excuse to avoid accountability, and it also neglects the experiences of the several people who grew up in an abusive home and survived the abuse without becoming abusive themselves.

- **Lack of control:** Most abusive people know how to control and comport themselves in the public eye. Even when provoked by their victims in public, they usually save their “punishments” for when they are alone. Plus, some of them target only places that are not obvious to the eyes for these punishments. It suggests that abusive people are in complete control of all their faculties. They are so in control that they are calculating and manipulative. Their behavior is not due to an uncontrollable burst of emotion; meticulous planning goes into domestic abuse, before its execution – a series of systematic patterns that range from emotional manipulation, to controlling their victims financially, to controlling when they are allowed to move and where they are allowed to go and with whom.
- **Stress:** Stress, like alcohol and drug misuse, does not lead to domestic abuse. No matter how stressed domestic abusers get, they are still always able to ensure the abuse is limited to their intended victim. If stress were to be an inducer of abuse, it will be perpetrated generally by the abuser and not reserved for a selected few. Remember, so many people are incredibly stressed and do not resort to abuse for relief, and, there are so many abusers that are not even stressed in the slightest!
- **Mental health:** Domestic abuse is more likely to lead to mental health problems than the other way around; remember that abusers are in complete control of their faculties and know what they are doing is widely unacceptable, so they take measures to ensure it stays hidden. People with mental illnesses are more likely to be targets of abusers, than the other way around. While some mental illnesses may lead to violent behavior, it is wildly untargeted, erratic, and unpredictable, which is not the usual modus operandi of domestic abusers; these behaviors are still not acceptable, and the victims of

violence as a result of mental illness also deserve to be protected.

- **Provocation:** Provocation and the reaction of the victims of domestic abuse do not push their abusers towards abuse. One of the responsibilities of being an adult is conflict resolution without violence. If people provoke you or misbehave towards you, there are other acceptable and preferable means to resolve those problems without involving your fists. It is not your fault as the victim if your partner chooses to abuse you because he felt provoked. Placing the blame of abuse on provocation, is victim blaming and this is a culture we are trying to get rid of. All the responsibilities for being abusive lies solely on the abuser's end for choosing to be a menace.
- **Testosterone:** Recent research has disproven the link between testosterone and aggression. High testosterone levels will not push a man to being an abuser. Blaming this behavior on biological causes, runs a risk of it being legitimized because it is a "natural" process and nothing can be done about it.
- **Genetic factors:** The DNA does not carry abuse, so always making uninformed statements like, "Violence runs in the family, it is unavoidable," excuses the behavior of abusers and makes it seem acceptable; makes it appear like it is part of their genetic makeup and you cannot overcome genetics, no matter how hard you try. Abusers, 100% choose to become that way. No unique gene carries the trait for being abusive from parent to offspring.
- **Anger:** Abusers do not lash out in a burning feat of rage. They have a solid lid on their anger and only unleash it in the privacy of their homes and usually at places where no one else will see.

- **Communication problems:** Not being able to communicate with your partner to tell them what your frustrations with them are, will not push anyone to be an abuser. As a matter of fact, abusers are master communicators.
- **Poverty:** While domestic violence is very prevalent in low-income households, it is still not a cause. Abusers seek to exert control over everything and in a poor home, there's not a lot to do that on. They don't control the job market; they don't control minimum wage, cost of housing and food, but what they can place within their immediate control are their partner and family. Are you beginning to see the pattern here? Choice! An abuser chooses to put people they consider vulnerable under their control to make up for their inadequacies.

A lot of people experience these factors and don't end up becoming abusive. So using them as a means to understand where an abuser is coming from, only gives them excuses to justify their behavior while encouraging potential abusers in the process. Anybody that blames everything and everyone besides the abuser for their own choice to become abusive, is not holding them accountable for their actions.

Risk Factors

Against women, these are further influenced by the history of structural power imbalances between women and men that occur in all communities around the world in varying amounts.

The prevalence of violence against women can be linked directly to their lack of control and power, as a result of societal norms that prescribe gender roles and condone abuse. Gender inequality can be noticeable in different spheres of life, whether private or public, and also cuts across political, cultural, economic, and social rights. It is also manifested in the limitations and restrictions placed on women's choices, opportunities, and freedoms.

These inequalities in treatments and choices increase the risks of abuse and violence against women, exploitation due to financial dependency and low income-earning options, and discrimination.

According to the UN General Assembly, gender inequality does not only lead to violence against women, but it also reinforces the low-status women we have in the society, and the several disparities present between men and women.

There are a number of factors that increase the risks of domestic violence for women at the societal, individual, relationship and community levels.

These factors include:

- Low education levels for women affected by domestic violence.
- Growing up in an abusive home or experiencing abuse as a child can make you see being a victim of domestic violence as normal.
- The presence of women in marginalized or excluded groups.
- Educational, financial, and employment disparities between the two partners of an intimate relationship.
- Limited economic opportunities for women puts them at a risk of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, and forced marriage.
- Impunity for perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Tension and conflict within an intimate relationship.
- Male control over assets and decision-making.
- Fragile access to control over land rights and properties by women.

- Practices that reinforce the subordination and oppression of women, while tolerating male violence.
- The normalized usage of violence for conflict resolution in the society.
- Limited policies and legislative framework to prevent and handle domestic violence.
- Unawareness or low levels of awareness displayed by security and law enforcement.
- social, and medical services providers and the judiciary to domestic violence.
- Limited numbers of safe spaces and support groups for women to communicate and seek advice from mentors in a supportive environment.
- Poor mental health relating to low self-esteem, emotional insecurity or dependence, and depression.

Theories of Violence

Women have been on the receiving end of systematic oppression and devaluation throughout the course of history. Even with how progressive the United States is, laws that made domestic violence illegal, were only passed in the twentieth century; it wasn't until 1993, that marital rape became a crime in the United States. A uniform understanding of the causes of domestic violence will help society to help victims and deal with perpetrators effectively. This prevents conflicting ideologies that could be damaging to efforts being put in place to hold abusers accountable and protect victims.

Feminist Theory

The feminist theory views domestic violence by men against women as a product of a heavily structured patriarchal society.

According to Richard Gelles in his book *Intimate Violence in Families*, “*Patriarchal means of control are often subtle and deeply entrenched, with the most violent forms not emerging until patriarchal control is threatened—as when individual women leave or threaten to leave relationships or groups of women assert their rights.*” This is particularly true as when feminists began their women’s rights movements in the 60s, domestic violence movements also began. As women began to demand for more autonomy, their partners became increasingly aggressive and violent and tried to assert control and dominance by beating them up.

The feminist theory of domestic violence purports that the control men have over women, spans a variety of areas that range from economic life to intimate relationships. They believe that although most men are not domestic abusers, any man can be a perpetrator of domestic violence. Along the same lines, any woman can be a victim of domestic violence as the only common trait that makes a woman more likely to be abused is being female.

Exchange/Choice Theory

This expands on the feminist theory of violence, stating that men choose to become abusive to their partners because it gives them control and power over them and because they are confident that they can get away with it. In other words, men abuse their partners because they can.

Survivor Theory

Survivor theory of violence proposes that the behavior of women in abusive relationships is due to coping mechanisms. Her limited resources and options make it difficult to leave the violent relationship, and when she eventually does seek help, it is usually inadequate. So all her attempts to leave fails and she ends up returning to her abuser, who might escalate the abuse to subdue her further.

HISTORICAL THEORIES OF VIOLENCE

These theories were suggested to explain the causes of domestic violence and for better understanding of gender based violence, but may not be considered accurate any longer.

Codependency Theory

This theory supported that victims of abuse eventually became dependent on their abusers, sort of the Stockholm syndrome of abuse. This theory on gender-based violence fails to recognize the power difference between men and women and pathologizes victims of domestic violence.

Social Learning Theory

This theory stated that men become abusive because they grew up in abusive homes and women gravitate towards abusive men because they saw their mothers being abused. This theory is controversial because a lot of siblings and children of abusive men do not become abusive themselves, and women who did not witness abuse growing up are equally likely to end up in an abusive relationship as women who did.

Due to how widespread abuse is, it is entirely possible for a woman in her lifetime to be abused by different sources. This does not mean that she actively seeks out and gravitates toward abuse. She does not

have control over that because in the end, the choice to become abusive falls on the abusive partner.

Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness theory proposed that victims of abuse choose to remain in abusive relationships because prolonged abuse takes away their will to call it a quit and leave the relationship. This theory is controversial as in reality, women who are abused domestically take measures to protect themselves continuously and based on the high rate of retaliation and low possibilities of getting effective help, they are forced to stay because it is the safest bet.

Cycle of Violence Theory

Cycle of violence theory suggests that abusive relationships generally consist of three stages: a tension building stage, where the abuser becomes irritable, potentially verbally abusive and controlling, while the victim walks on eggshells around him; an acute explosion stage, where violence occurs; and a honeymoon phase, where the abuser wins back the woman with flowers and insincere apologies. This theory has been modified because it is not consistent with the victim's experiences. Many victims report that there was no tension building, only sporadic, unpredictable bouts of violence. Others also claimed that their honeymoon phase was really a manipulative phase to keep them in check and under control.

Systems Theory

Systems theory suggests that abuse is simply due to relationship dysfunction. This theory proposes that both parties contribute to the escalation of anger to violent levels. This theory is controversial because it does not account for the power imbalance in abusive relationships and it also implies that the victim is culpable in the

abuse. Arguments, fits of anger, disagreements are very common within relationships, and they end up being resolved without coming to blows or being verbally abusive. This theory may be utilized in other common relationship problems to apportion blame but it is not appropriate for cases of abuse, as abuse is a choice.

SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A SOCIETY

It is not enough to just discuss the problems of domestic violence, as lasting solutions also have to be put in place to protect women. Domestic violence is not just a family issue, it is a crime, and as such, the society at large has to work in tandem to completely stamp it out and punish the perpetrators. The causes and reinforcements of domestic violence also have to be addressed to curtail this menace completely. After identifying the various ways that we as a society participate in communizing and accepting domestic violence, we need to accept our role in this and take the right steps to end domestic violence.

Several researchers think that the best way to solve the problem of domestic abuse is to prevent people from becoming abusers in the first instance. They even created a number of strategies to prove that it is possible to prevent people from becoming abusers.

The spread of extensive cultural messages from role models in sports arenas, television and the media usually makes a difference in shaping the ideologies of the youth and not just what is witnessed within the immediate family and neighborhood.

Furthermore, several researchers also think that children can potentially be trained to shun domestic violence in their schools or by their parents directly. These researchers estimate that if children are taught the proper ways to work through their emotions and express

them or how men should treat women, it will reduce the number of people that eventually end up being abusers. Boys should be raised to realize that crying or showing some form of emotion besides anger will not make them weak and that anger is not the only emotion that is acceptable for them to express.

They also found that making the penalties for domestic violence steep, firm, and consistent, altering the way that family courts rule over cases of domestic violence, assisting women to be financially dependent, and amplifying funding for social and support services will go a long way in providing a permanent solution to the problem of domestic violence.

Other ways by which the society can help solve the problem of domestic abuse include:

- **Sensitization and awareness about the ills and dangers of domestic violence:** It is the responsibility of those of us who know to teach those who do not know about the prevalence of domestic violence, about how destructive it is, how to read red flags, and how to get out if you find yourself a victim of domestic violence. The society needs to know that abuse is not tolerated, by the law or by the people. There should also be an awareness of the several women's shelters and programs that have been put in place to help women who need them. Information and enlightenment is the most significant tool that women need, to destroy the status quo. Sensitization will go a long way to reducing domestic violence as women will learn to stop protecting and making excuses for their abusers and they will get the proper punishment they deserve; this will also serve as a deterrent to other abusers and potential abusers.
- **Eliminating the preconceived notions about divorce and divorcees:** Even with how liberal and accepting the world has

become, many people still view divorcees with contempt, especially folks from the religious circle. Many believe that marriage should be a “till death do us part” affair and are awfully judgmental to people who have decided to leave their marriages for one reason or the other. They believe that they have committed a sin and usually ostracize them or are quick to shame them with what they consider their failures. Most people would instead, remain in an abusive and unhappy marriage to avoid public scorn and disgrace. This is rather unfortunate because in the long run, if the abuse goes on unchecked, death will eventually do them part. So, completely eradicating the preconceived notions about divorce will not be a bad step.

- **Stop victim blaming:** Constantly trying to pin the blame of domestic abuse on the victim erroneously gives the abuser the confidence that he is right and his behavior is acceptable by the society, which is far from the truth. Strict laws have been put in place to punish people found guilty of being abusive. Victim blaming also shames the victim into silence because it makes them feel responsible and deserving of the abuse they get. It prevents them from speaking out and seeking help for fear of being ridiculed and so they stay, enduring the abuse until one person reaches the breaking point which is not right! I cannot say this enough, the responsibility for being an abusive person falls solely on the abuser. It is not your fault that you were abused. The only person to blame is the person that willingly took your love and trust and weaponized it into something to control your every being. It is not your fault!
- **Destruction of social norms that promote gender inequality:** Gender inequality is at the core of domestic violence; so many women experience violence of all sorts just because they are women — social norms, attitudes, and beliefs

that promote gender inequality act as obstacles towards eliminating domestic violence. The deeply rooted belief that women are inferior to men and should be treated that way is a significant cause of violence against women. A lack of will to address gender inequality will lead to perpetrators of violence against women getting away with it, while ensuring there is equality and justice for women will lead to these practices being challenged.

- **Encouraging women's economic autonomy, skills acquisition, and employment through empowerment programs:** Domestic abuse also involves economic or financial abuse where the abuser controls the purse strings and ensures complete dependence of the victim to them. Most women remain in abusive homes because of the uncertainty of finances; at least with their abuser, they have the hope of getting some, no matter how little. Encouraging women to get autonomy of their finances through employment and skill acquisition will give them the confidence to leave their abuser because they have something to fall back on.
- **Quality response services from the judicial, security, social, and medical workers:** Workers in these sectors need to be knowledgeable and trained in the handling of domestic violence issues as they play a very crucial role in addressing domestic violence. Their decisions can affect the lives of the victim of abuse, the abuser, and their families. If they perform these services well, they can help protect the victims and ensure that their abusers are held accountable. Bad services from these ends can frustrate the process of seeking justice and protection for the victims and also act as a deterrent for other victims of abuse from coming forward.
- **Emotional support:** The society can provide emotional support to victims of domestic violence. This can be done by

providing assertive training to victims of abuse, helping the victims overcome their self-esteem issues, and build back their self-confidence. Also, developing courses on parenting skills and organizing meetings, teach young people how to manage issues of domestic violence, and what to do when those issues arise around them.

- **Spread the word:** You can lend a hand in stopping domestic violence in your community by providing your services in assisting local shelters, or domestic violence groups raise awareness about domestic violence in your community. Or use your personal influence to start a campaign from the grassroots against domestic violence. Organize talks at your workplace, church groups, and HOA meetings.
- **Put your money where your mouth is:** Talk is cheap, use your power as a consumer to refuse to support domestic abuse culture being maintained through music, movies, television, the media and games that glorify violence, predominantly against women.
- **Provision of additional support services:** The provision of safe housings and childcare will make it easier for victims of abuse to have access to the things, should they decide to leave their abusers.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION TIPS

Know the signs: Become familiar with the signs that an individual is being abused at home. The signs may vary depending on the pattern of abuse the abuser uses. Sometimes, the signs don't come with physical evidence because domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence alone. For situations like this where the abuse is not immediately visible to the eye, the behaviors of the person should be observed for any irregularities or changes. Nobody should be exempted as domestic violence is no respecter of class and cuts across different demographics; even people who don't fit into the classic stereotype of abuse victims, as no one is exempted.

Educate your community: The best way to completely eradicate domestic violence is by sensitizing the community about it, its impact towards the community as a whole and the means to safely intervene in cases of domestic violence. Educate as many people as possible, so it becomes a collective effort to look out for victims and identify abusers. You can do this by collaborating with domestic violence shelters or police community outreach officers, to work with the community, local companies, and schools to organize sensitization talks, town hall meetings, and other group sessions to discuss domestic violence.

Organize your community: When intervening in domestic abuse, there is power and safety in numbers. Just the way communities

organize a neighborhood watch to end crime. You can set up a network of people to intervene in domestic abuse situations, help victims safely leave their abusers and provide support for survivors in the community.

Use technology to boost your community support network: There are safety apps for women, some of which have been designed to alert your community support network in cases of danger immediately. If you all have smartphones, consider getting these apps to notify you when someone is in danger, and if the victim does not, the community can get her one with the app installed.

Ring the bell: If anyone in the community is a domestic abuse victim, take the time to ring the bell once you hear any suspicious sounds coming from the house. You could use the excuse of borrowing salt or sugar to explain your presence. It may not be much, but it could defuse the situation until a lasting solution can be reached.

Take backup: Domestic violence situations could escalate quickly, especially when weapons or drugs are involved. So when intervening, ensure you bring back up in the form of a representative from the local shelter, the police or even another neighbor. You could also be the backup when your neighbor or friend goes to intervene. Remember, there is safety in numbers.

Make the call: If the domestic violence situation escalates beyond the control of standard intervention, for example, the abuser is brandishing a weapon, call the emergency service or police immediately to intervene. Do not intervene personally in this situation, as you don't have the training to and it could prove potentially dangerous to everyone involved. Provide necessary details like the address, the people involved, and their contact number.

Listen: If a domestic abuse victim reaches out to you for help, listen without judgment. It is crucial that you make her feel safe while confiding in you, as these abusers isolate victims. This could help her gather the courage to tell you what exactly is going on. This tip is particularly useful for nurses, hairdressers, bartenders, HR, or anyone whose job involves them listening to clients and co-workers.

Be on standby: If you suspect that anyone around you is being abused, offer to be on standby in case of emergencies. Always keep your phone on, charged and on you, always. If you have a car, ensure the tank is never empty so you can drive out in a moment's notice to get the victim, if need be.

Create an intervention plan: Create a plan to spur your intervention into action. You should have the number for the national domestic violence helpline in your country, the local domestic violence shelters close to the victim's location, the local police where the victim is located. Contact all of these agencies when you receive a call for help from the victim or if you notice that the domestic violence is about to begin or escalate.

Provide some relief to them: If you know any victim that is being kept at home without relief, perform a random act of kindness and offer relief. Offer to pick up her groceries on your own grocery shopping; offer to babysit her children when the abuser is out so she can rest for a while. No matter how little the gesture is, it will be appreciated. It may even build the victim's confidence in you till she eventually opens up to your help.

Check in regularly: Call or text at random times during the day, preferably with code words to check if she's alright. If she is your neighbor, keep your eyes and ears peeled for any signs of disturbance.

Be a resource: Be resourceful by finding the assistance she needs, be it legal information about domestic abuse, local domestic abuse programs or even finding her a secure domestic violence women's shelter. Having this knowledge beforehand, may come in handy but assisting her to make the calls to these places will help speed up the process of her leaving.

Document any domestic violence incidents you witness: Your ongoing documentation may prove useful to the victim when it is time to take legal actions against her abuser to improve her credibility and bolster her confidence. So take note of the dates the incidents occur, the time, the place, injuries sustained and any other useful observations you may have.

GETTING HELP

You need to realize that you are not responsible for your abuse, neither is it your responsibility to change your abuser or even tolerate them. If you are in an abusive relationship, you really need to seek help and leave for your own safety and the safety of others involved, like your children. Nobody deserves to endure being treated as less than human being.

The most important step in surviving domestic violence is actually admitting it to yourself that you are being abused – no more living in denial and pretending that everything will be okay. Abuse is a cycle that never ends, until one partner checks out of the relationship – either in a body bag or with your bag of clothes. Recognizing your situation and validating that your life is at risk the longer you remain is very important, even when you aren't sure of when and how you will leave your abuser.

As a victim of domestic abuse, it is important to open up to your family and friends about the abuse you experience. Calling a domestic violence hotline or researching a shelter close to you for information, support and referrals is equally as helpful.

Your safety is of ultimate importance, so if you are a victim of domestic abuse, think SAFETY.

S – Make a list of all the safe places and people you know and trust.

A – Ask for help. There are resources and people available for support, do not try to do it alone. Reach out first.

F – Family. Think about the family that you need to protect, your children are also affected. Put them in your plans.

E – Have an escape plan before leaving.

T – Don't turn back. Remember the cycle of abuse, do not be deceived by apologies and manipulations – if it happened before, it will happen again.

Y – Your life is invaluable and irreplaceable. Only you can get that control back from your abuser. Seek safety today.

Have a Safety Plan

When in an abusive relationship, it is important to develop a contingency plan for when an emergency occurs. Beforehand, think of safe places you can go to with no traces and people who you completely trust to come to your aid and that of your children.

Your plans should include how you would quickly and safely get out of your home if violence begins or escalates; little details like where you would put an extra stash of cash, clothes and the keys for a quick getaway should not be overlooked.

Teach your children the emergency numbers to call the police and fire department. Also teach them how to use a phone, as they may one day be the only hope you have for safety. You may even go as far as creating code words or secret languages for your children or friends so they know when to call the authorities for help.

Here's a sample safety plan you can tailor to your own specifications.

During a violent situation: As a victim, you cannot always avoid violent situations, so it is important that you take extra steps to ensure your safety. Know the warning signs that your abuser may attack and plan what to do if it happens. So what do you do when you are having an argument with your partner that could escalate into violence?

First, avoid arguments in rooms where it is easy to reach a woman or where the likelihood of injuries increase, such as the kitchen, bathroom, or the stairs. Also, avoid arguments in rooms that don't have an easy access to the outside.

If I have to discuss with my partner and I suspect that it may become an argument, I will do so in a room that has the lowest risks like the _____.

My secret or code word with my children, friends, or family is _____, so they know when they need to call for help should the situation become volatile.

I will inform the following people of my situation at home and permit them to call the police if they hear suspicious sounds, like yelling, coming from my home

_____,

_____,

_____,

_____.

I will leave my stash of cash, purse and keys _____, so that I can grab them easily when I need to leave quickly.

In the likelihood that I need to leave quickly, I would use the _____ (Kitchen door, window, screen porch, emergency stairs, or elevator).

When I leave the house, I will go _____.

When preparing to go: When you are preparing to leave your abuser, it is important that a plan is put in place to ensure your safety and quick getaway. Get your own cell phone or even a burner phone; using the house phone increases the chance of being overhead by your abuser or being tracked. You can also use a collect call or use a phone card. Also, use the computer outside your house and a secret email as your abuser can track your activities on the internet and your emails. Use a computer at the library or a trusted friend's house to avoid this and change your passwords frequently.

Watch out for hidden surveillance devices like cameras installed around the house to monitor your every move, GPS installed in your car to track your whereabouts or bugs on your phone. Don't tamper with them, so as not to alert your abuser that you are on to him. Just take note of their presence and apply appropriate measures to avoid them. Most importantly, be careful who you tell about your plans. Loose lips sink ships; it is important that your abuser has no clue about any of your plans.

So what do you do when you have finally made the decision to leave to ensure your safety?

The following contacts are important people that I trust and are accessible to my children and myself,

Name

Number

_____.

_____.

N O M O R E C R A P

_____.
_____.
_____.

I will inform _____ and _____ of my intention to stay with them during an emergency and see if they agree.

I will leave copies of all my documents, keys, extra clothes and cash with _____ in case I have to leave quickly and can't grab the ones at home.

I will call my local domestic abuse program to seek shelter at _____.

Things to take when I leave:

- *My identification*
- *Birth certificates for myself and children*
- *Vaccination and school records*
- *Social security cards*
- *Medical records*
- *Medication*
- *Passports/green cards/work permits*
- *Money/ATM cards*
- *House/car keys*
- *Divorce/custody papers*
- *Medication*

- *Lease/rental agreement*
- *Others _____.*

When in my home: If you don't live together with an abuser, you still need to take steps to ensure that you and your children are safe in your own home. So what plans should you make to ensure your safety in your home?

I will install a security system.

I will install outside lighting that lights up once a person approaches my home.

I will change the locks on the following doors;

_____ ,

_____ ,

I will teach my kids not to answer the door when I'm not at home.

I will change my phone number to an unlisted one.

I will inform my neighbors that my partner no longer lives with me and the police should be called if he is seen near my home.

Seek Medical Treatment

In an abusive relationship, it is almost impossible not to have injuries. Injuries gotten from sexual and physical abuse requires medical attention. You should see a physician for complete evaluation, and a detailed report of your injuries as this may be useful when you decide to take legal actions against your abuser. Colored photographs of the injuries should also be taken when possible and kept for posterity.

Call for Help

A time will come when it will be necessary for you, your family or your friends to call the police for help. Don't shy away when it arrives. Do not be afraid to ask for help; remember domestic violence is also a crime. Alerting the authorities to your abuse will provide you immediate protection from the abuse, sometimes it is enough to discourage your abuser from physically or sexually abusing you completely. They may also arrest your abuser and investigate the abuse and provide you with information for domestic violence programs within your locality.

Seek For Help in Your Community

There are so many domestic abuse violence services and programs available in your community. They provide counseling, referrals and emergency shelters for victims of abuse. You may also seek for support in within your church community and domestic violence agencies. The number of listings of the local and state domestic abuse agencies is available in the "Organizations and Resources" section of the phonebook.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S TIME TO LEAVE AN ABUSER?

The transition from being a battered woman to being a survivor will not be complete if you do not take that step to leave your abusive partner. So how do you know that you are ready for that step?

More often than not, your subconscious already knows when it's time for you to get the hell out of the Dodge. Sometimes you ignore the signs because you hope that somehow, no matter how unlikely it seems, there is hope for salvation for your partner and your relationship. Eventually, even this hope will wear out when it dawns on you that the person you love, and who is supposed to love and cherish you, constantly abuses you. When the pain of remaining in the relationship far outweighs your hope for redemption, you begin to see the signs that your subconscious has been nudging towards you. A lot of domestic violence survivors talk about how they checked out of their abusive relationships, mentally and unconsciously before they finally decided to leave consciously.

Leaving can be a tough decision to make, you are at war with your subconscious, and you begin to doubt yourself and feel uncertain about your decisions. Not only that, women that have been in abusive relationships also struggle with self-esteem and self-image issues. So here is a list of signs you may begin to get that tells you- it's time to pack up and leave.

- **You begin to take better care of yourself:** Some abuse victims let themselves go from all the emotional and physical stress of being in a draining and abusive relationship. They either pick up unhealthy habits like comfort feeding, alcohol or drugs, or they stop putting in efforts to look good to avoid stirring the ire and jealousy of their partner.

You know you have begun to check out of the relationship when you start taking efforts to look good and take good care of your body. You begin to reclaim your beauty without paying attention to what he says again from little steps like shedding the excess weight from binge eating to wearing makeup again to wearing fashionable clothes. The power of self-love is underestimated.

Once you begin to love yourself and acting loving towards your body, it builds your confidence and washes away every derogatory comment your abusive partner has said to destroy your confidence and keep you under his hold. It builds strength in you to realize that you are so much more without the influence of your abusive partner in your life.

- **You don't see the person in any future plans you make:** Being a target of abuse and being controlled by your partner, you stop dreaming or making plans for your future, especially if it is something you know he will be against.

When your subconscious begins to give you signs that its time, you start having dreams again and making plans for your future. Plans that don't have your partner. For example, you want kids, but your abusive partner doesn't, he flares up each time you mention it, then places you on birth control and monitors you. So you stop talking about having kids, so it doesn't spark his ire and begin to tell yourself that kids are not interesting.

All of a sudden, you start having dreams of a loving, stable home with kids and he is not even in the picture! Seeing visions of your future without your abusive partner affirms that you can live without him and there are better and healthier options for you if you would just leave.

Pay attention to those dreams, invest positive energy in them, let them breathe and take note of when your abuser starts appearing less in them. It will improve your self-confidence in your ability to move on from them and put the reality of all he has taken from you into perspective.

- **When you begin to realize that your abuser isn't helpless towards abuse:** Nobody, least of all the people who end up in an abusive relationship, pray to end up with an abusive partner. Nobody ever envisions that they will end up in a relationship with a manipulative, controlling and abusive person. When you hear stories about other survivors or victims, you keep telling yourself “that could never be me, I will never stay in an abusive relationship.” But love will not permit you to walk away from the relationship, especially if he has bought your understanding with deflections and excuses of how helpless he is at being abusive – probably because he was hurt and abused too as a child. So he buys your sympathy, and you feel that it's your responsibility to help him overcome it because he is “helpless” and he promised to change.

Once you begin to imagine life without your partner, the smoke and mirrors automatically clears out, and you begin to see him for exactly what he is; a manipulator, an abuser, a criminal. Once you take out the rose-colored glasses, you begin to realize that it wasn't that he couldn't help himself from being abused as a result of his abusive upbringing or substance abuse, but because he **CHOSE** to be.

- **Protecting your partner even over your own emotional well-being, no longer becomes a priority:** You know you have gotten to the point where you need to consciously make the decision to leave when you began to disengage from your abuser. You start to notice that you don't care that much for him and his excuses anymore. You begin to speak out and defend yourself from his abuse. You find yourself saying things like, "I don't appreciate you treating me this way" because you are exhausted, and you are worth being treated like a valuable, lovable woman.

You start seeing him differently. You no longer feel the need to defend his actions and protect him from the backlash. You no longer accept his treatment of you and take steps to ensure your safety, like documenting records of his abuse as proof to use in a legal battle against him. It is your right as a human being to feel safe and if protecting him is endangering those rights, turn him in and leave. You don't have to feel guilty about exercising those rights; protecting your partner is not your responsibility but staying safe, sure is.

- **You stop pretending that everything is fine:** At this point, you start admitting it to yourself and others that this is not just a rough patch that you will overcome. You become courageous enough to open up to people about what you have been experiencing in your relationships and how you have been covering up for him. If the idea of leaving was shaky at best before, having those thoughts being reinforced by well-wishers will build your confidence in your decision and spur you into action. They will also provide you with emotional support and helpful contacts to make the entire process of leaving easier.
- **You detest being around your abuser:** After the log has been pulled from your eyes, the very sight of your abuser

begins to repulse you. You begin to rue every moment you have to spend with him and his friends. If it ensures your safety, you still do these things, but instead of cowering in fear, these actions further incense you and intensifies your need to leave.

- **You let him stop taking the credit for all your achievements and hard work:** Because abusers love their power dynamics so much, they will stop at nothing to receive accolades for your achievements. If someone compliments you or your work, they somehow find a way to credit themselves for those achievements.

When you begin to check yourself out of an abusive relationship mentally, you find yourself refusing to allow him to take credit for your sweat and you start to call him out for his lies. You no longer become complicit in his power scheme and stop caring that your achievements may hurt his ego.

- **You start making new male friends:** Abusers will isolate you from your friends and find reasons to get upset when men interact with you. Even a simple smile from a stranger is enough to set him off. To maintain peace, keeping male friends becomes difficult – even your gay friends, because, heaven forbid that you finally develop powers to turn gay men straight.

At this point, you stop caring about what conclusions he may get from those relationships. You start becoming part of the world again and hanging out with platonic male friends. You may even start developing crushes and fantasizing about relationships with people that are not your abusive partner.

- **Your freedom is worth all of the baggage tied with breaking up:** The prospect of starting over and telling people why you had to up and leave your relationship isn't as scary

anymore. You don't care anymore about what people will think. The uncertainty of the future does not seem as daunting as before because you can almost taste the things that freedom from your abuser stands to offer you.

- **You do something to speed up the breakup process:** A lot of people in abusive relationships want to leave but are too scared to initiate it, so they do something to force their abuser's hand to end the relationship. Since it is an ego trip for them, they will chump at the bait to make it look like they initiated the breakup. They would rather be the one dishing out the "heartbreak" than receiving it. This is obvious in how a lot of abusers lie about the reasons for the termination of their previous relationships.

You should be careful with how to try to catalyze the breakup because this is where you are most at the risk of danger, as your abuser may be spiteful and seek retribution. Make sure your escape plan is in place before you begin, for your own safety.

How do you leave an abusive partner?

Leaving a meaningful relationship is not an easy choice to make. It is especially harder for battered women as there is the added fear and pressure of not getting it right. The thoughts and uncertainty of what could happen to them and their children when they try to leave, make the process extra frightening. On the one hand, you are afraid that you are going to get caught by your abuser and there will be punishment or even worse treatment for daring to think you could walk away from them and the relationship. On the other hand, you are scared that while you may successfully get away from them, you might never be free from their clutches. There have, after all, been stories of abusers stalking their victims after leaving for retribution.

However, no matter how much the fear and uncertainty for the future weighs on you, do not let it cripple you till the point where you decide to remain in the abusive relationship. Leaving is a gamble, so is staying, but with leaving, there are higher odds of you making it out alive and whole. Your abuser will not stop abusing you without intervention; even with an intervention, there is still no assurance that the abuse will end. You cannot help your abuser; you can't make them stop, and you most definitely cannot appeal to their better judgment.

If you still need convincing that you need to leave, think about the effect that such a toxic environment will have on your children. It is your responsibility to protect and shelter your children from abuse and violence. When you choose to leave an abusive relationship, you will be providing a safer and healthier environment for your children to grow.

To better put things into perspective, Dr. Jonathan Marshall, a psychologist, created an experiment. He says to imagine the choice of leaving your abusive partner as being offered the choice of the red or blue pill in *The Matrix*. If you pick the blue pill, it signifies that you will wake up with your life being the same, but if you take the red one, you will wake up already separated from your abuser, without all the mess and drama of a breakup.

His inference from this little experiment is that people who choose the blue pill clearly don't want to leave and want to keep working on their relationship. They aren't there because they are afraid of what the pain, complications or uncertainty of breaking up may lead to. People who choose the red pill, however, are not in a relationship with their partner because they love them but because they are afraid of what could come after the break-up.

If you are still unsure of whether you want to leave, perform that little experiment on yourself but have it at the back of your mind that the

human brain amplifies anxiety and fear in uncertain situations. The complications involved with leaving an abusive relationship can be messy, but with meticulous planning to cover every eventuality, leaving is very doable.

This knowledge combined with the enlightenment you receive from your subconscious will build a new confidence in you and supply you with renewed strength. Your abuser will undoubtedly begin to notice that new light you will emanate, and it will dawn on him that you are not going to be easy to beat down into compliance again. He may step up efforts to keep you shackled under his control and dim that light that you have found, after all, how dare you be so impetuous to dare to shine or even have the audacity to speak back to him without his permission. But as long as you remain standing firm in the knowledge that you are so much more – so much bigger than any ploys he can create to control you, you will overcome anything he throws at you.

In fact, his relentless effort to dim your light should serve as a reinforcement of how strong and how much better you are; he wouldn't bother to continue trying to subdue you if he thought you weren't worth the effort or if he didn't feel threatened by your new self-discovery.

When you do decide to leave, do not forget to follow the safety plan outline already discussed. Consider both long and short-term measures. The short-term measures involve the domestic abuse programs that protect you from an abusive partner. They are essential during that critical period where you just leave your abuser as they provide you with shelter, food, and guidance. This is the period where you are most vulnerable to returning to your abuser as a result of hopelessness; also where you are most at risk of your abuser seeking retribution. Long-term measures will empower you and help you re-establish your life.

As a battered woman, you need to constantly remind yourself that:

- You didn't make your abuser hurt you. The abuse is not your fault, so no amount of adjustments or changes you make is going to be enough to make it stop.
- Abuse is not acceptable, no matter how your abuser tries to frame it. Abuse is a crime that is committed consciously, and you don't have to make excuses and cover for your abuser.
- You are not alone. People care about you and will be willing to do anything to see you and your children safe from abuse, if only you would tell them just what you are passing through.
- You deserve to be loved and treated with the utmost respect and care. No matter what your abuser has told you, you are very deserving of these things, and people who know your worth will jump over themselves to prove it to you.
- Your children deserve to see their mother happy, and they deserve to grow in a healthy and loving home, complete with safety and happiness.

Where can you turn to for help?

In cases of emergency, you can always call the emergency helpline in your country or your local law enforcement agency. But if you are not in immediate danger, you can call your national domestic violence hotline; they provide crisis intervention, legal options and can give referrals for in-state and out-of-state domestic violence resources and programs, like women's shelters where you and your children can stay anonymously and be taken care of while you leave your abuser.

Any response provided should have an interrelationship between the legal, health, and social sectors, so that you are not always referred to another agency. There are family crisis centers and victim advocates

that have been set up as links between these sectors. They also help you find jobs and other needed items.

What do you do if you find out someone you know is being abused?

If you noticed the signs that someone you know is being abused, speak up. If you hesitate to talk about it because it's a private relationship and you feel like it's not your business, you might be enabling the abuser. Often, they may want to talk to you but can't find the right words to say it or are too ashamed of their situation to speak up. So broaching the subject first, even if they do not open up to you right there and then informs them that you are aware and whenever they feel it's time to talk to someone, they can approach you without fear of judgment.

Approach the person in private, let them know about your suspicions and concerns. Don't take it to heart if they react defensively and try to push you away. Remember that abusers are not only physically violent toward their victims, they have also mastered the art of manipulating them emotionally. People who have been abused deal with isolation, anger, depression, fear, shame, low self-esteem, and self-worth because of this, they can lash out in shame and defensively but don't give up on them. 9 out of 10 times, they need help getting out of the relationship.

Reassure them that you will keep whatever is said to you in confidence and most importantly, try not to blame or judge them for their choices or actions. Let them know that you will provide help in any way that you can and take steps to learn how actually to provide that help.

- **Be supportive:** It is difficult enough having to talk about their abuse, at any signs that you aren't supportive, they will clam

up and go back to their abuser, and all efforts at intervention will be lost because it will be difficult to get them to trust you enough again to open up. Be supportive when they talk, let them know that you are available to help whenever they need it. Believe them and listen to them, that's what they need the most from you. When they finally do open up to you, acknowledge the strength it took to make that decision.

- **Don't be judgmental:** It might be difficult for you to understand their decisions and actions, especially if they decide to remain in an abusive relationship. Don't criticize them or try to guilt trip them into making the decisions that you would prefer; trying to force their hand or being too harsh on them won't make you any different from the abuser you want them to leave. Ultimately, you cannot force them to leave – it is not a rescue mission. Don't tell them to leave the relationship if they're not ready to. As difficult as it may be watching someone you know go through all that abuse, the final decision to leave has to be made by them.
- **Be helpful:** You can help them develop a safety plan, find local domestic violence services that will provide counseling or support groups for them. Go with them to talk to their other friends and family; if they need to go to the hospital, police, or lawyer, go along with them for moral support.
- **Be encouraging:** Encourage them to talk to people who can provide guidance and counseling. Continue to encourage them even if they have left the relationship; they may occasionally feel sad at the turn of events. They may even mourn the end of the relationship. Encourage them to participate in activities with friends and family to rebuild old bonds and develop new ones. Encourage them to express their feelings and allow them to make their own decisions.

- **Reassure them:** Acknowledge that they are in a challenging and scary situation. Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault. Let them understand that they are not alone and you are there to provide help and support.
- **Report:** If they give you the go-ahead to, help them report the abuse to the appropriate authorities. Also, be ready to provide information about the authorities that could provide help for them when they ask for it.

Some do's and don'ts when someone around you is being abused:

Do's

Ask if they are okay or happy in their relation ship

Express your concerns about their situation

Listen and reassure them

Offer to help them with what they decide

Allow them make their own decisions

Support their decisions

Be patient with them

Don'ts

Wait for them to approach you first because you feel it's not your business

Blame or judge them

Pressure them to talk or make decisions

Hand out advice; most times it looks like you're passing judgement

Get mad if the decision is not one you'd prefer

Place conditions on that support

Push them to do things they don't want to

BATTERED WOMAN SYNDROME

The concept of battered woman syndrome was developed by Lenore Walker, a psychotherapist and founder of the Domestic Violence Institute, in the late 70s to describe a distinctive pattern of emotions and behaviors displayed by abuse victims.

The term battered woman syndrome applies to any woman who has lived through at least two cycles of abuse from her partner. Any woman in an abusive relationship who has lived through, at least, two cycles of abuse may have the battered woman syndrome.

Long-term exposure to severe domestic abuse leads to the victim developing a mental disorder called battered woman syndrome, also called battered wife syndrome. Experts suggest that battered woman syndrome is a subtype of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychological disorder that is the consequence of living through or witnessing a terrifying event. The battered woman becomes so traumatized by her abuse that she may believe she is still in danger, even when she's safe.

It occurs when a domestic abuse victim develops new behavior in a bid to survive an abusive relationship, for example, learned helplessness or psychological paralysis that makes her become defeated, depressed and so passive that she begins to believe she is the cause of her abuse and is very deserving of her treatment. She also believes that she cannot get away from the abuse because the problem

is fundamentally from her. This is why a lot of battered women will not report their abuser to their friends, family or even the police, and will choose to remain in the abusive relationship rather than leave.

Battered woman syndrome is a severe condition and can sometimes, also be referred to as criminal behaviors exhibited by women in abusive relationships. In some rare cases, women with battered woman syndrome kill their abusers because they see no other means of escaping the abuse. Which is why in homicide cases, battered woman syndrome is taken into consideration. The traditional models of self-defense do not apply to victims of abuse in the law because they may kill their abusers even at moments of momentary calm, when they are not being harmed. Citing battered woman syndrome as a defense in a homicide, case may change the verdict or the severity of the punishment. The court may consider that a woman suffering from battered woman syndrome felt that she was in reasonable fear of impending danger due to her previous experiences with the abuser and her condition and may be justified in attacking her abuser.

There are several support systems that are available to victims of domestic violence and battered woman syndrome, so if you or someone you know is scared of speaking to authorities about an abusive situation, there may be ways to avoid punishment.

How Does It Develop?

Battered woman syndrome develops as a result of exposure to severe and frequent domestic abuse. Typically, domestic abuse follows the cycle of violence. The abuser wins over the victim in the onset of the relationship by showering them with thoughtful gifts, grand romantic gestures, and the use of flowery words to sway them into committing early. They will be the classic definition of the perfect gentleman.

Once the relationship begins, he begins to tear down the defenses of his victim – to make her susceptible to manipulation and control. It starts from the little things, like trying to control what you wear, what you eat, and then escalates into emotional and physical abuse. Often, the physical violence also begins with little actions, like punching the wall beside her head, a slap to the face. The abuser usually feels “guilty” and “contrite” after those actions and swears, it was a one-time thing and won’t happen again.

After a while, it seems like he’s keeping his promise because he’s back to his perfect, gentlemanly behavior. He lures his victim into a false sense of security and calm till out of the blues, another violent situation occurs, and the cycle of abuse starts again.

As the cycle continues, she begins to feel that the abuse is her fault; that she has somehow done something to deserve it. As she begins to take responsibility for her abuse, she develops learned helplessness. She cannot begin to understand why the abuse continues to occur, even though she has accepted full responsibility. She becomes convinced that she is helpless and cannot escape the abuse bar drastic measures.

A battered woman may become trapped in a cycle of abuse for a number of reasons:

- Denial or disbelief that her “perfect” partner is actually abusive.
- The need to maintain a complete and “happy” family unit for her children or just to maintain a public image.
- Financial dependence on her abuser orchestrated by the said abuser.
- The belief that their love and persistence will change the behavior of their abuser.

- Low self-esteem and depression that makes her think she is the reason she is being abused and she deserves the treatment; that her abuser cares enough to try to help her correct her problem and she won't find any other person who will care enough for her like that.
- Fear of leaving.

The longer she remains in the cycle of abuse, the more the likelihood she develops battered woman syndrome and vice versa. Once this sets in, it becomes difficult for her to break out of the control of her abuser and regain autonomy. The fear of her abuser is so grippingly real to the victim that she holds out on hope that her abuser will one day change and decide to stop hurting her, but till then, she remains in the abusive relationship.

Stages of Battered Woman Syndrome

Battered woman syndrome is exhibited in 4 stages:

- **Denial:** The battered woman refuses to admit, even to herself, that there is a problem in her relationship. She finds it difficult to process that her partner is actually abusing her, so instead of accepting it, she keeps making excuses and denying the abuse. Justifying it as “that one time” or “it was an accident.” She convinces herself that the abuse won't happen again.
- **Guilt:** By the time she has processed and accepted that she is being abused, she begins to accept responsibility for the abuse. She believes that she has some sort of defect in her character and isn't living up to her partner's expectations. She believes that she deserves to be beaten because she is a disappointment. She begins to justify the abuse by thinking, “I provoked him, so I deserved it.”

- **Enlightenment:** She hits the stage of enlightenment when she realizes that human beings can resolve disputes without resorting to violence and no matter how significant her actions are, she doesn't deserve the abuse. She acknowledges the fact that her partner is an abusive person and all the responsibility for being abusive should rest solely on his shoulders. Although, most times she still remains in the relationship to try and work things out.
- **Responsibility:** She finally accepts that her partner may never stop being abusive and the only person responsible for her safety, is her. This is when, in a lot of abusive relationships, she finally decides that she has had enough, she will no longer submit herself to being abused and calls it quits, with the relationship.

A lot of women in abusive relationships don't make it past the first two stages as the results from domestic violence can often be fatal.

Signs of Battered Woman Syndrome

Women with battered woman syndrome typically show observable symptoms, some of which are akin to that of PTSD and they may persist even after they leave the abusive relationship. These signs can be used to identify women with battered woman syndrome. Some of which are:

- Intense feelings of fright.
- Insomnia or difficulty sleeping.
- Nightmares.
- Feelings of worthlessness, anger, hopelessness, and sadness.
- Panic attacks.
- Sudden invasive feelings about the abuse or flashbacks.

- Silence on the issue of abuse.
- Learned helplessness.
- Refusal to leave the abusive relationship.
- Romanticizing the abuser, even after abuse.
- Taking responsibility for the abuse and refusing to blame the abuser for anything.
- Thinking she deserves the abuse.
- The belief that the abuser is all-knowing and can see everything she does.
- Irrational belief that the abuser is all-powerful.
- Keeping the abuse away from family and friends.
- Fear for her safety and that of her children.
- Depression.
- Sudden substance abuse.

Like other categories of PTSD, symptoms of battered woman syndrome may stop manifesting once the woman is out of the abusive relationship and believes she is safe. In most cases, however, psychotherapy is required by the battered woman to help her regain control of her life and move on after the abuse.

Symptoms of battered woman syndrome may re-emerge even after complete recovery, when the battered woman experiences a new trauma or stress. For example, drawn legal battle with the abuser. For some women, taking the legal route to serve their abuser a restraining order or even arresting them is enough to empower them to overcome battered woman syndrome, while for others the opposite occurs. Lawsuits, especially drawn out child custody battles, may increase their stress levels and cause them to relapse.

Luckily, a lot of battered women with battered woman syndrome are able to heal, build new relationships, raise their children and live productive lives after leaving the influence of their abusers' control and power. Mental health professionals are also there to assist them to get through the stressful period of cutting off ties with their abusers and helping them make sure that there is no risk of them getting abused again.

Side Effects of Battered Woman Syndrome

Battered woman syndrome has both long and short-term effects on the psyche and general wellbeing of a woman suffering from domestic abuse, including broken bones, lost teeth, and organ damage.

Some of the short term effect of battered woman syndrome include:

- Depression.
- Broken relationship with family and friends.
- Tarnished self-image or low self-esteem.
- Feelings of helplessness.
- Severe anxiety.
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.

Battered woman syndrome can also cause long-term damaging consequences to the health. Some of those long-term effects include:

- Health issues stemming from stress. E.g. high blood pressure and other associated cardiac issues.
- Health issues stemming from physical abuse. E.g. permanently damaged bones and joints or arthritis.
- Headaches.

- Chronic back ache.
- PTSD.

Getting Help for Battered Woman Syndrome Victims

Battered women can get help; they can learn to not live in constant fear and that they are not to be blamed for the abuse.

Women with battered woman syndrome should contact the law enforcement agencies within their locality, as with any case of domestic violence. The police will make an arrest and based on evidence, go ahead to take the case to court.

Battered women may attempt to recant their statements made during the arrest – probably due to fear that the violence will escalate to new heights if the case doesn't fall through and he is eventually let go or because she feels sorry for her abuser and the problems the arrest may cause him.

Even though recanting statements may attract criminal charges to the battered woman for lying to the authorities, a large number of battered women still recant their statements with no consideration to the legal repercussions. Luckily, recanting does not always have an effect on the outcome of the case; recanting is useless to the case, if the authorities have arrested the abuser and the case moved forward.

Battered women may also be worried about the implications of testifying openly in court against their abuser. Battered women usually have a deathly fear of their abuser, and since domestic violence cases typically require the victim to testify in open court against her abuser, this may be a problem. Support options have however been made for instances like this, for example, people known as victim's aides stand in court and provide moral and physical support for domestic violence victims as they testify.

Asides from the legal options for providing help to battered women, there are also programs and organizations that have been created to provide emotional and psychological support for these women. This is important as the legal battle may be a confusing and challenging process to handle, especially in addition to the effects of battered woman syndrome that she may be dealing with. Psychotherapists are essential to help them deal with the stress from the entire situation, help them provide evidence that their attorney will need to drive their case and to help them understand what is required of them and what they need to do.

The Federal Violence against Women Act (US Congress, 2005) gives provision for several legal remedies; including proclaiming abuse as a violation of a woman's fundamental human rights with ensuing opportunity for a federal lawsuit under the civil rights acts.

Lawsuits commonly involve child custody battles. Each state has its own laws pertaining to parental responsibility but the similarity between them all is that, they have an underlying presumption that it would be in the children's best interest to have equal access to both parents. However, the family court judge usually awards greater access to the children to the parent who is most likely to expedite a more cordial relationship to the other parent. Unfortunately, abusers know how to use the children as ammunition to further control their victims after they have left the abusive relationship. It becomes difficult, unsafe, and almost impossible to raise the kids with joint custody.

Mothers who try to protect their children from bad parenting or generally abusive situations by seeking to take them away from their abusive fathers are usually judged as practicing hostile and aggressive parenting or suffering from parental alienation syndrome or psychological Munchausen by proxy or any other similar disorders.

They typically end up losing custody of their kids and sometimes, may even have all access to their kids revoked.

Mothers who have lost access to their children through this means end up becoming depressed – in addition to the symptoms of the abuse trauma they are dealing with, and do not have the energy or even the finances to fight the legal system. The children may also end up being trapped in the bitter cycle of abuse by their father as he may take his anger out on them, especially if they disobey him and regardless of whether he won the custody battle.

In very rare cases, battered women will kill their abusers because they believe only death will save them from the abusive relationship and they would much rather it be their abuser than them.

Understanding the symptoms of battered woman syndrome will help the jury understand that the battered woman killed in self-defense; it fulfills the legal constraint that a battered woman may kill in self-defense when she has a thorough insight of pending danger. Understanding the symptoms is useful to explain how desperation and fear may be triggered upon the perception that a fresh abuse is about to occur. In this light, it is particularly helpful if forensic mental health evaluators possess copies of prior therapy statements where comments about the battered woman's fear of her abuser and the effect the abuse has on her have been recorded.

The most dangerous time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when she has to discuss separation with her partner – even when she no longer lives with the man, she might still be very unsafe. When the abuser has any reason to believe that the relationship may as well be over, he often threatens to kill her rather than let her go. He cannot imagine her regaining her freedom, moving out from his control and possibly finding a better person to build a relationship with.

Treatment for Battered Woman Syndrome

The first step in providing treatment for a battered woman is to get her away safely from her abuser. Whatever treatment she gets will not be effective if she remains in the environment that caused her the condition in the first place.

The next step to being treated for battered woman syndrome is therapy. A therapist with known experience in dealing with trauma and PTSD would be preferable. The therapist will make her understand the abuse is not her fault and help her work through the psychological and emotional baggage she carried out the relationship through validation.

Validation, while she describes the abuse, is essential, as most battered women have been repeatedly told their shortcomings and blamed by their abuser. Laying emphasis on the positive things she did to protect herself and her children will do a lot in repairing her self-image. She should be constantly reassured that she didn't deserve the abuse, no matter what she may have done or said. As a friend or family to a battered woman, it is crucial that you take care to not ask questions that infer that she may have provoked the abuse, as these questions do not promote empowerment, neither do they help to create a safe environment for her to express herself.

It is crucial for her to feel safer by making it clear that she is in a place where no one will take advantage of her and her vulnerability. Boundaries can be set up between therapist and patient by asking for permission to touch her, write down notes or to talk over areas of privilege or confidentiality.

Diagnosing her as a battered woman with battered woman syndrome may help her accept some of the actions that she took during the period of the abuse and prove to her that she isn't crazy, despite how many times her abuser may have openly said it or hinted.

The therapist will help the battered woman deal with her depression, insomnia, anxiety and other effects that the battered woman syndrome may make her suffer through a combination of therapy, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications.

Education about the effects that abuse may have on her mental and physical wellbeing is also very important, as is performing a risk assessment during the mental status examination; some victims of domestic abuse may have other underlying disorders besides battered woman syndrome and PTSD. The risk assessment is used to determine the risks of further abuse. Some questions will be asked to tell the level of risk and lethality she may face, like the first incident of abuse she remembers, the worst incident and the last abuse before therapy.

It is also important to assess her resilience, along with the number of times she re-experiences the abuse, her avoidance behaviors, and her hyper vigilance. Women who have experienced abuse numerous times, have little resilience to deal with fresh abuse.

According to a research conducted on a group of battered women, when asked about the factors that made leaving the abusive relationship difficult, mental illness and previous abuse were not mentioned by the women but drug abuse and learned helplessness were recurring factors that deterred them from leaving the violent relationship.

If she exhibits signs of the battered woman syndrome and is still in the abusive relationship, they can begin the process of getting her away from her partner safely by speaking with her in the absence of her partner and formulating a safety plan together. This may be difficult to achieve because abusers tend always to want to be present and have knowledge about every aspect of their victim's lives, including therapy hours. It is not uncommon for the meeting between

the therapist and patient to feel as if the abuse were in the room – even when he isn't.

For this reasons, individual or group therapy would be preferable than couples' therapy, at least initially.

Options for Therapy

In some cases, interpersonal (group) therapy may be recommended to help strengthen her relationship with her support system. These relationships that are very vital to her healing and growth may have been broken due to isolation during the course of abuse. Engaging in several different types of activities with other people will help her break shackle of isolation that the control and power her partner wielded over her placed on her.

Cognitive behavioral therapy will also help her deal with the emotional hang-ups she may get as a result of the abuse. Experts say battered women respond better to cognitive techniques of therapy rather than affective techniques at the beginning of the treatment, although both areas are necessary for complete treatment. As she begins to develop cognitive clarity, her attention, memory, and concentration increases.

The Survivor Therapy Empowerment Program (STEP) has also proved useful in helping women with battered woman syndrome. The treatment of battered woman syndrome involves a combination of trauma and feminist therapies.

The feminist therapy recognizes that psychotherapy is a bond between the therapist and the patient and the formal power with both of them. Situational factors that may lead to domestic violence, such as gender inequality, are beyond the battered woman's control and

acknowledging this, will make her accept it and focus her energy on attempting to correct the factors that are within her control.

Taking legal action against her abuser may also contribute to her empowerment – especially if she can get a protective or restraining order on him. Filing for divorce and suing him for personal injury when he has the financial means to pay can also be empowering. Although the amount of time and attention required to win these cases can be discouraging, it is worth it.

Trauma therapy helps the woman understand that she is not alone – several people are dealing with the psychological effects that exposure to trauma may lead to. It will make her realize that she is not crazy. Without therapy that is directed towards trauma, she may never be able to move past the psychological barriers that make dealing with her situation difficult.

As a result, the focus should be on external factors that may trigger the trauma rather than her own internal problems. External trauma triggers that may cause battered woman syndrome and PTSD symptoms need to be identified and tackled through the use of behavioral techniques. Some behavioral techniques that may be used in trauma healing include guided imagery, relaxation training. These cognitive and behavioral based techniques for trauma therapy will subsequently develop cognitive clarity in women suffering from battered woman syndrome.

Characteristic trauma triggers include particular words the abuser uses to debase or humiliate her, the memory of his face before the beginning of each abuse, the curse words he uses, his perfume or cologne, even the smell of his aftershave.

Hyper vigilance to violent cues and startle responses are the final symptoms of battered woman syndrome to be tackled. In a lot of

women, the triggers or cues to trauma never completely go away. The sensitivity to trauma triggers may be disruptive to new relationships. The new partner should be helped to develop understanding and patience in order to keep the relationship working – so long as it is non-abusive. Despite the generally peddled myth that survivors of abuse usually end up in other abusive relationships, this is rarely the truth – less than 10% of survivors of previous domestic violence end up in abusive relationships.

The Survivor Therapy Empowerment Program (STEP) applies both the feminist and trauma therapy to help women who have been abused heal. The program has been authenticated using jail and clinic populations and is useful for women dealing with domestic violence issues, as well as substance abuse issues.

N O M O R E C R A P

SECTION 2: DEAR SURVIVOR

“Remember how far you've come, not just how far you have to go. You may not be where you want to be, but neither are you where you used to be.” – Rick Warren.

HOW TO GO FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Making it out of an abusive relationship gives you the opportunity to move from a surviving mode to a thriving mode. During this transition, there are daily challenges you face that may make the process of rebuilding yourself seem more difficult, but if you have a clear understanding of what to expect, it will help you create a course of action that will allow you grow, flourish and prosper despite these challenges.

This evolution from surviving to thriving is comparable to that of a potted plant that has been placed in a spot that does not support its growth. After a while dwelling in that toxic environment, the leaves begin to lose color and become limp, and it looks like that may be the end of it but if the plant is moved to a better spot that will support its growth, watered daily and cared for with love attention, the plants suddenly regains its former glory.

You can place yourself in a spot that aligns with your desires from life and supports your growth in that direction – perhaps you want a fulfilling career, or you just want to focus more on your own growth after making it out of the abusive relationship, whichever one it is, you can achieve those things once you have created the right circumstances that will allow those things happen.

Here are four tips to help you thrive in four vital areas of your life:

- **Goals:** Having a knowledge of what you want your future to look like and understanding the reason you want it to look that way is an excellent way to know what goals you need to set and why you need to set them. Explore every little detail of that future, don't leave anything out. Then, to make those appear more real, you can write them down and post them in places where you can see easily and reaffirm those goals. Also remember that on some days, you will achieve more progress than on others. Don't beat yourself up about it, that's just how life is.
- **Career:** Sometimes there is confusion about the type of work you would like to do because in most cases, you are essentially having a do-over at life. Consider your options. Is there any type of work that you absolutely love doing and wouldn't mind doing for free? This could be an excellent choice for a career path. Do something that you are passionate about; something you are doing because it is your choice and is not influenced by external factors like people's opinion, and pay range. If you require additional training to get the job, then consider attending classes and workshops during your free time. Career building takes a lot of time and effort, so do not be pressured into wanting quick results or accomplish much too quickly.
- **Parenting:** Taking care of yourself is important especially if you also have kids to consider. Your kids have already been through the trauma of having an abusive father, and they need reassurance from their mother and friends. So if you find that the cumulative of everything you are facing is too much for you alone to handle, ask others for help. You have a support system of family members and friends, on the days that you feel like you need to take a break for healing or to chase

personal or career options, there is no shame in asking them for help.

- **Self-Esteem:** Being at peace with who you are and what you have to offer the world, accepting and genuinely loving the person that you have become is a sign of a healthy self-esteem. Rebuilding your self-esteem involves a process that will take time to achieve, be patient. Some ways to build your self-esteem include:
 - Thinking positively about yourself.
 - Challenging any negative thoughts you have about yourself.
 - Doing more things that you actually enjoy doing.
 - Getting enough sleep.
 - Focusing on your personal hygiene and feeling good about your looks.
 - Managing your stress levels.
 - Doing something that you have been putting off for a long time.
 - Avoiding people and places that treat you poorly and never have positive things to say about you.
 - Doing something nice for others.
 - Setting a realistic challenge for yourself and achieving it.

Exercise: Make a list of your achievements, your strengths and what you admire about yourself. Reaffirm them to yourself daily.

MAKING SPACE AND TIME FOR RECOVERY

There's a lot of trauma to process after you have survived an abusive relationship; both physical and psychological. Most people stay in abusive relationships for decades before they finally leave – can you imagine how much abuse they must have endured throughout that time and the effect on their psyche? Surviving that much abuse will definitely make an impact on your self-esteem if nothing else at all.

Abuse puts a strain on your mind and spirit, probably because your abuser intended to break your spirit. If you have successfully gotten out of an abusive relationship, you deserve a pat on the back for undertaking a journey that so many people find difficult to begin. However, if you're still stuck in one, don't beat yourself up about it. I have stressed how difficult it is to just up and leave; it is my hope that you will find the strength to make that decision and finalize it soon though – that you will be able to heal from the pain of abuse.

Now that you have embarked on the first step of the journey to recovery, that is leaving the relationship; it is now time to consider the second leg – actively working on your recovery.

After a traumatic event, it is usually common to hear people give out well-meaning words of encouragement. You are more likely to hear that time heals all wounds – in several different variations. It's almost as if these well-meaning people are telling you to sit back and allow

time work its magic; that with time, you will no longer feel the intense sadness, guilt, anxiety, fear, and anger that you feel now. Which is a rather interesting notion because this advice is only given to people who have experienced intense pain, loss, grief or trauma and does not apply to every other area of our lives. After all, have you ever heard someone advice a person looking for a job or trying to get admission into a school to sit back and allow time to provide these things? If you are looking for a job or admission into a school, you have to actually take steps to ensure that these happen by either applying or by studying to improve your chances of being picked.

You actually have to apply yourself to get what you want and not just wait for time to do its thing. Even when you want to win the lottery, which is predominantly a game of luck, you still have to apply yourself by buying a lottery ticket. These things don't come without putting in some sort of effort.

This is not so different from trying to recover from the trauma of abuse. You don't have to just wait for time to heal your wounds; you have to take the initiative and apply yourself toward your recovery. You have to take significant steps geared towards healing you from the trauma of abuse. Time alone is not enough to cause the changes that you seek. Let me give you a practical example.

I had the opportunity to meet a young lady a few years ago who had got out of an abusive relationship four years before. She told me she was working two jobs, one of which was managing the store she just opened. She said when she first got out of the abusive relationship, she couldn't handle seeing other people being all loved up without getting triggers about her abuse. Her way of coping with this trauma was to bury herself in work. She kept herself constantly busy, accepting tasks that no one else would and traveling around the world to keep herself frantically busy. On her rest days, she spent hours keeping her apartment spick and span, even when not needed, that her

apartment began to look like a photo off, a magazine. She did anything she could to distract herself, including selling off her TV after accidentally coming across a romantic movie. She was running away from acknowledging her trauma after abuse and thought getting rid of the reminders or being constantly busy would be enough till it wore off.

It finally hit her that she had to do something and make changes when she entered her new relationship with insecurities from the abuse. She said she could feel that her boyfriend was almost at the end of his teeters and she had to do something. Her first attempt to rectify her situation was to attend a domestic abuse support group. She, as she told me, became embarrassed that she was in the same headspace as those who were fresh out of an abusive relationship. Four years after and not a single change or growth recorded; it was as if her recovery from the abuse had gone no further than how it was when she left the relationship four years before. Time did not erase the experience, neither did it help her heal from the experience; time did nothing for her.

Time does not heal all wounds; it is whatever you do during that time that causes healing. Waiting for time alone to dull your pain is a fruitless endeavor. Like every other part of life, healing and recovery is an active process, not a passive one. So take that initiative today, make time to invest yourself into your recovery actively.

Recovery begins when you can remember who you really are; when you stop defining yourself according to the standards of your abuser. Being in an abusive relationship make you lose sight of your true self. You spend so much time hearing your abuser define you in a specific manner and it does a number on your self-esteem. Against your better judgment, you begin to question your worth till one day you cave and start to see yourself under the smoke of deception your abuser has created.

This can be torturous to come to terms with after the abuse, but it is vital that you remember that whatever your abuser made you see yourself as that's not you. It is a reflection of the horrible person who tried to redefine your worth to keep you under control and also a testament to what you have survived.

It is now time to remember who you really are, now that you have left the relationship. It is time to free yourself from the remaining shackles of your abusive ex-partner. It is time to remember how to do the things you love and be the person you love. It is time to remember what makes you excited about life – the things you look forward to at every crack of dawn.

Now that you've left the relationship, it's time to remember who you are. You're free of the ties to that abusive individual. Think about what you love about you. Remember what it was like before you got into this relationship. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do in your spare time? What makes you excited about life?

You don't have to run away from the triggers of your past relationship when they come; it is imperative that you address them when they do – you can work on those triggers in therapy. Running away from those triggers will only end up making you feel worse. Honestly addressing your pain and working through it will help you work through your trauma and pain in a healthy way.

Remember that it is normal to feel broken or lost; it is completely understandable after the experience you have gone through. But it is very possible for you to find and recover the person that you are inside. Be patient with yourself, don't shy away from accepting help from others. You don't have to be alone anymore. People will want to help you share your burden and grow, allow them.

There are a number of ways that you can actively cope with your experience and begin the process of recovery, some of which are:

- Accepting that you have been through a very distressing experience and that you are bound to have a reaction towards it. Trauma can make you experience every kind of surprising emotions like anger and guilt. Accepting these feelings and allowing yourself to feel what you feel, is necessary for healing.
- There's no wrong or right way to react. These emotions, whichever way they are expressed – anger, guilt, shame, pain, are all normal reactions in the wake of abuse. We are all different, so don't tell yourself that you're supposed to react in a particular manner.
- Recognize that you may not feel like your old self for a long time, but it will eventually also pass as you make your recovery.
- Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain. It won't make sense to leave an abusive relationship only to end up in another abusive relationship with these substances.
- Remind yourself daily that you are growing; try not to get too frustrated with your progress or when you cannot jump right into doing things that you normally would before the abuse.
- Avoid making any significant changes that will upset your balance till you begin to feel marginally better.
- Create a daily routine and try as much as possible to stick to it. There is comfort in doing things you are familiar with.
- Don't bottle up your emotions, work through it as they come and if you need to, talk to someone that understands and supports you.

- Confront what has happened to you but in doses that you can manage, so it doesn't send you off the deep end.
- Avoid obsessively reliving the abuse.
- Don't allow the trauma to dictate your life. Don't go out of your way to avoid activities or people that remind you of your experience.
- Make time to exercise regularly. Exercise may be the very last thing you feel like doing after a traumatic experience, but exercising can help you burn off adrenaline and boost your mood by the release of feel-good endorphins. Deliberate physical activity can also stir your system from being stuck in a phase and help you move on from the trauma – basically, it decongests your mind and refreshes your body.
- Take a break and rest adequately when you feel exhausted.
- Meditate.
- Tell your friends and family what you need so they can help you. It is normal to feel sometimes smothered by their care, so if you need a little space, don't be afraid to tell them.
- Keep your past memories of the trauma separate from the new ones you're about to make. Don't let it sour the new life you're trying to build for yourself.

Challenge your sense of helplessness. Take positive actions to help you overcome the feelings of helplessness, fear, and hopelessness – even the smallest act can make a huge difference.

- Volunteer your time. Donate to a charity, give blood, or volunteer your services to comfort others. Sometimes, knowing that you played a part in helping someone or just giving them hope is enough to boost your self-esteem, conquer

hopelessness and give you a sense of direction after the trauma. If volunteering formally is too much work for you, simply being helpful to others in your community can brighten up your day. Simple things like helping an elderly person crossing the busy road, holding the door open for a stranger or even helping your neighbor carry their groceries will add spark and break you away from the dreariness of your thoughts, especially if you are appreciated for the effort after.

- Connect with other survivors of abuse and participate in events and other public activities, like awareness outreach for domestic violence. Feeling connected to others and knowing that you are playing a part in helping other victims of abuse will overcome the sense of helplessness and give you purpose.
- Don't withdraw from your friends and social gatherings. The simple act of reaching out to them, connecting face-to-face with people is fundamental to the process of recovery. Social interactions trigger hormones that can release the strain from trauma. You don't necessarily have to divulge details of your abuse, especially if you're not ready. Just do and talk about normal things, hang out, go for drinks, go to the movies, catch laughs. Your life does not have to revolve around the abuse. You can get comfort from the feeling that you have other people in your corner and that you are still able to maintain a relationship with the people that matter the most to you.
- Make it your priority to reduce stress levels. While a certain level of stress is normal, too much of it, especially in the wake of such a traumatic experience, will hinder your recovery.
- Maintain a healthy eating habit. The kind of food you eat plays a role in your moods and how you effectively cope with trauma. A diet full with processed or fast food, sugar, and refined carbohydrates will worsen your symptoms of trauma

while a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, healthy fats (especially omega-3 fatty acids), and high-quality protein will improve your ability to better cope with the downsides and upsides of recovery from the trauma of abuse. Experimenting with different diets that boost mental agility and health will help you create a diet plan that will not only help you reduce and contain the stress from trauma, but also boost your energy levels and improve your general look and sense of well-being.

THE ABC OF 'RECOVERY' AFTER SURVIVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Reclaiming deeds that had been prohibited by your abuser.

Embodying. Being physically active and eating a proper diet will help you feel better and improve your vitality.

Connecting with friend, family, and supportive professionals. Abusers deliberately destroy your relationships with others, wouldn't it be growth to be able to repair the things your abuser destroyed?

Organizing personal space and time will make your life feel less cluttered and overwhelmed.

Verbally sharing the truth about your relationship can be empowering when done in the right way and with the right people. Keep a diary or share with trusted friends and family members or even your mental health professional.

Express yourself creatively – dancing, singing, drawing, sewing, and sculpting. Abuse messes with your creative juices. One of the ways to recover from it is to get your creative juices flowing again.

Remembering the things that you experienced daily in the hands of your abusive partner will show you how much growth and progress you have achieved since leaving him. Remembering helps you appreciate what you have been through and makes you realize your own strength.

You need to learn how to put your own self in the center of your life. After spending so much time putting your abuser first, it is essential to learn how to do things for you and because you want to.

It is natural for survivors to feel fear and regret from time to time. Looking ahead to what the future holds for you will give you hope. Distancing yourself from your abusive ex-partner and any of his contacts as much as possible is also essential for your recovery as they may use those contacts to monitor and control you if they cannot do it in person. Recovery will not happen overnight but with time, it eventually will.

Tips for Recovery

- Give yourself time to heal from the abuse you have experienced.
- Don't force the healing process, just flow with it.
- Be patient with the pace at which you recover.
- Allow yourself feel whatever emotion without guilt or judgment.
- Always be prepared for volatile emotions, so you don't end up being blindsided.
- Learn to work through uncomfortable emotions without being overwhelmed.
- Try mindful exercises – exercises that require you to focus on your body and the feelings you get with each movement like martial art. Notice the rhythm of your breath or the sensation of the wind as it brushes against your skin or even the sounds and vibrations that your feet make when it hits the ground. It builds self-awareness and increases your consciousness of your environment, so you're not just alive, but you are also living.

If you find that you lack the energy or motivation to do things, play your favorite music and move around to the music or

even dance. Your energy and motivation levels build up the more you get into the act.

- Try rhythmic exercises that engage both your legs and arms like walking, dancing, swimming, and running.
- Short bursts of exercises are equally as effective as one longer session. Exercise for at least 30 minutes each day; you can break it down into three sessions of 10 minutes each if that's easier.
- Expand your social network. After the abuse, you may need to pick up your social life that your abusive partner has shred to tatters, and that includes reaching out to others and making new friends. Take advantage of your church meetings, community organizations, sports club, and support groups to expand your social circle and meet new people who share the same interests as you.
- Relieve stress as it comes, don't let it build up. To quickly relieve yourself from stress, simply take 60 calming breaths and focus your attention on each exhale. Or engage one or more of your five senses in sensory input. For example, if you find listening to classical music calming, play the song and distress. Or does listening to birds chirp do it for you? Or standing under pouring water? Or smelling book pages? Or even petting an animal? Sensory input works differently for everyone so keep experimenting to find what keeps you calm and centered.
- Practice relaxation techniques, like deep breathing exercises, tai chi, yoga, and meditation to ease stress, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve your sleep.
- Make time to engage in your favorite hobbies, so you're not devoting all your attention to the abuse. For example, reading

a book, cooking, playing a sport, visiting a friend, or even watching your favorite TV shows.

- Use your free time for relaxation. Take a nap, take a bath, read a book, or enjoy an uplifting movie.
- Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep places a considerable amount of strain on your body and mind, making it quite difficult to maintain your emotional stability. The recommended hours of sleep to wake up refreshed daily is at least 8 hours of sleep each night. To ensure you get the most out of your sleep hours, establish a relaxing and fixed bedtime ritual, avoid looking at screens (laptop or phone) one hour before sleep, make your bedroom as dark and quiet as possible – don't forget comfortable too.
- Ground yourself in times of stress. You can keep yourself grounded when you are under an intense amount of stress by sitting on a chair with your feet flat on the ground and your back supported by the chair. Look around and pick six objects that have either red or blue in them; this should make you feel more anchored to the present and more grounded in your body. Focus on your breathing till it gets deeper and calmer. Or, you can go outside and find a peaceful spot to sit on the grass and feel supported by the ground.

There is comfort in the familiarity of a structured life, so reestablish a routine to minimize your stress levels. Even if your work routine is disrupted, structure your day with regular times for eating, exercising, sleep, and socializing with friends and family.

WHEN TO SEEK TREATMENT FOR THE TRAUMA OF ABUSE

When you actively work towards recovering your life after the abuse, the feelings of numbness, guilt, anxiety, confusion, and despair should begin to fade over a period. However, if after doing these things and there is still no change, your traumatic stress reaction is still as intense as ever and is getting in the way of your ability to function properly, it may be time for you to seek help from a trained mental health professional – preferably someone that works with PTSD patients.

Some of the red flags you need to consider are:

- Having difficulty functioning at work, at home or if your ability to perform basic tasks becomes so impaired, you cannot function.
- Experiencing nightmares, flashbacks or really terrifying memories if the abuse.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult for you to connect and relate with others, no matter how hard you try.
- You have suicidal thoughts or feelings.
- You keep avoiding things that could remind you of the abuse till you create a safe space in your head and cocoon yourself in it.

- Post-trauma fears keep interfering with your ability to return to certain places that remind you of your ex-partner and his abuse.

It is essential to understand that there is no set time to how long your recovery process will be. For some, they may bounce back to their old selves within months and for others, they might find themselves still struggling to find some semblance of structure in their lives even after years. You cannot predict how long it will take before you shake off the effects of the abuse, so don't be surprised if these reactions to the abuse continue to last longer than what you expected. The reactions will lessen over time unless you are not actively healing. Also, it is perfectly normal for your trauma reactions to reappear for a while during recovery after experiencing a new set of traumatic events.

At any time during the process of recovery, you may find it useful to ask a mental health professional or counselor for professional help, besides those listed above.

Reflections: Do you have continued memories or thoughts of the abuse? Do these memories cripple you? Do you subconsciously find yourself avoiding places, conversations, people, activities or even objects that remind you of the abuse? Is finding your feet right after the abuse difficult for you to go alone? Do you blame yourself for the abuse? Do these feelings make it difficult for you to accept help from people around you? What would you consider your ideal lifestyle to be like without the trauma of abuse? How far off are you from achieving that goal? Would you consider therapy?

Exercise: Pen down the list of at least five people around that you can go to for mental strength and support. Write notes about your daily progress – it could be the little things like walking around your house and not jumping at every little sound.

EXERCISE AND ITS BENEFITS

Physical activity and exercise may be related but they are slightly different, and understanding that difference is very important. Physical activity is any movement of the body muscles and tendons that burns calories, like climbing the stairs, housework, or even gardening, while exercise is a physical activity that is planned with the aim of improving physical endurance, strengthening muscles, or getting other additional benefits that moving the body provides. In summary, exercises are physical activities, but not all physical activities are exercises.

Exercise may be classified generally as light, moderate, and intense. These classifications are based off the elevations in the heart and breathing rates to determine how hard the body is working and is relative, depending on the fitness levels or the general health of the person when they begin that specific routine. Newbies to the world of exercising may find that beginner's yoga class could be intense for them, while someone that has been a trained athlete for years will find that jogging for one hour could be a light exercise for them.

There's a lot of benefits that exercise offers to the process of recovery, and I want to use a few minutes to discuss how you can incorporate it into your recovery process.

- **Exercise does not have to be complicated:** Working out can be in several forms, from something as basic and low impact as walking to training for a marathon to taking up competitive

lifting. Low impact, in this case, does not necessarily mean low effect. Extensive studies show that walking for even 30 minutes a day, several times a week can give a lot of benefits.

- **Exercise can give your day structure:** Having a set workout plan can give your day some sort of structure. This can take several forms like signing up for classes like the spinning or yoga classes at your local gym. Having a set workout plan gives you something to look forward to for your day and helps you plan your activities around it.
- **Commitment to a regular workout regime or any other form of exercise takes up time:** Staying committed to a workout plan fills up the free time you would typically spend obsessing over your abuser and your experience. Even time to attend one yoga class per week plus a couple of workouts you do on your own will take up several hours, including the time required to get ready for the workout and to get cleaned up after the workout.
- **Exercise can provide you with a positive feeling:** Exercise releases some feel-good endorphins which is essential to release a lot of stress that has been piling up for you after leaving your abusive partner. As you begin to work out more, it becomes more enjoyable till you can't imagine starting out your day without your daily dose of rejuvenating juice. It might be difficult for you to get into a routine at first because your body after so much neglect will feel reluctant to work. In the meantime, begin by picking activities that you will enjoy from the start, like hiking. After a while, when your body recovers from the neglect, it becomes easier.
- **Exercise heals your body and brain:** Studies have shown that exercise helps your body and brain, whether it is in the process of recovery from trauma or not. Exercise gives

improved long-term fitness and helps to deal with cardiovascular health and diabetes, lowers the risk of some cancer diseases, stimulate the nervous system and even help to ease symptoms of depression. It has also been proven that as the body and mind snap back into the normal state, exercise will help restore the body into a regular sleep schedule.

You may begin to bemoan the fact that you are out of shape, have an old physical injury that will not let you exercise, or that you even lack the time to, but there is some form of activity that you can do as an exercise that will not hamper you. You just need to figure out what those are and what you can do to get started on your exercises. I am aware that starting something new can be difficult, but over time, it will become part of your daily routine and relatively more comfortable to deal with.

The bottom line is that exercise still remains a valuable part of your transition from surviving abuse to thriving after it for a number of reasons and you don't have to turn into a fitness nut before you begin to reap those benefits. Just take the first step and let your body do the rest.

Physical Benefits of Exercise

- Weight loss and management.
- Increased energy.
- Better sleep.
- Improved circulation.
- Psychological improvements.
- Improved self-image and mood.
- Reduced depression and anxiety.

- Sharper mental alertness.
- Cardio-respiratory endurance that improves heart and lung health.
- Increased muscular strength.
- Increased muscular endurance.
- Flexibility.

Finding the Motivation

Exercise is not that enjoyable to everyone, especially when you just start out, so you can take comfort in the realization that you're not the only one struggling to get into a workout routine that they like and can stick to. But, as unenjoyable as exercises seem to be, you cannot deny its relevance as a tool to help you build or rebuild a healthy lifestyle. It is unavoidable if you want to make the most out of this second chance at life that you have been given.

- **Reward yourself:** The motivation for some to exercise might be vague goals, something like better health or weight loss or fitness but if you find that doing all that is not enough to keep you motivated, reward yourself for each exercise. It might be as little as making yourself your favorite after workout drink or even watching your favorite show but treat yourself. It keeps the brain focused on the goal because there's an immediate reward after.
- **Sign a commitment contract with yourself:** It is sort of like the use of swear jars to discourage your kids from using bad words. You make a commitment to remit a certain amount when you miss your workout hours. Research has shown that you are more likely to actually do these things when you make the pledge in front of friends. So get a friend, sign a contract

with them that you will pay a certain amount if you skip your workout. The thought of losing your money or face among your friends will serve as a mighty good motivator for you to get up and workout.

- **Positive thoughts only:** People with positive thoughts have proven that visualizing the benefits of performing a particular task will serve as a great motivational strategy. For example, you need to get out of bed in the morning to run but you're feeling reluctant, it helps to imagine the cool breeze or the way the sun feels on your skin as you run through your local park.
- **Find your own fitness tribe:** This is your community of friends with a similar goal in mind – fitness, so you know how and when to give each other motivational boosts when you need it. The laughs and the words of encouragement will build a bond that money cannot buy. Surround yourself with people who make you feel good and help to build your confidence as well as your strength.

Different Exercises, Different Effects in the Body

Different exercises have different effects on the body and mind. You may find that one exercise may be more suiting to your needs than the other, so experimenting to find that option may be ideal. You may even discover a combination of several different exercises that just do it for you.

- **Walking or hiking:** Exercises in the outdoors has been shown to increase levels of dopamine in the body and reduce cravings. Hiking, gardening, and other outdoor activities have also been known to improve the mood through exposure to sunlight. Sunlight also regulates the serotonin levels in the body and boosts the natural production of vitamin D in the body. So if you battle with impulsive eating as a means to

handle your trauma, this might just be the best exercise for you to partake in.

- Yoga and tai chi: Yoga is a less intense form of exercise and has the ability to get you into a state of meditation. Yoga is being closely studied as a form of complementary treatment in mental health and substance abuse programs, because the combination of stretching, strengthening, and meditation is linked with significantly improved mood, the ability to manage stress, reduced negative thoughts, and improved physical health. Tai chi offers like benefits, as well as other low-impact martial arts like aikido. So if you are looking for a means to reduce your anxiety and stress, this might just be the best exercise for you.
- Strength training: Lifting weights help to improve your sleep cycles over time. Improving muscle tone through lifting weights have also been found to reduce symptoms of depression in 45 stroke survivors who participated in a program for ten weeks. So if you battle with insomnia or you want a more relaxing, better quality sleep, you might consider adding strength training to the list of exercises that you can do.
- Team sports: Playing team sports does a whole lot more than provide you with a good workout. It also builds relationships and helps integrate you into your community through the friendly camaraderie and friendly banter, the competitiveness involved is also an added bonus as it serves as a motivating factor to keep pushing yourself.

MEDITATION

Meditation is a spontaneous state of consciousness; you have an avenue to understand your own life, and the world that opens up new vistas, so many possibilities, and unexplored depth. It is possible to grasp this amazing, natural ability without the need to study it for years, or joining a special group or engaging in several difficult practices.

Meditation reconnects you with the overall and core essence of your existence. It is a means to uncover and discover who you truly are, and in a way that far transcends the restricted definitions that you give yourself about who you are.

In your own confusion and lack of knowledge, there is often a depth to the beauty of life that is missed. Several visionaries of notable qualities have stressed the need to adopt and maximize this tool to understand our very basic nature.

Zen described the experience as seeing your core nature. Abraham Maslow called meditation the peak experience for an extraordinary, self-actualized transpersonal, joyful moment. Yogis call it the non-dualistic awareness of self. All of these delightful and glorious states point back to our basic nature of being – the possibilities of what you could be and remain if you don't identify yourself with limiting concepts about yourself, especially not those that have been fed to you by your ex-partner.

Meditation has the capability to reduce the physiological harm associated with anxiety, stress, or depression and understanding the connections between your body and mind will help you understand the importance of such activities to improving your outward appearance and outlook to life.

There are two broad classifications of meditation – active and passive meditation.

- Active meditation is simply meditation in motion. It transmits to having an inner calmness when participating in your everyday tasks. Yoga is a perfect example of active meditation, as is hiking, walking, or even simple tasks such as doing the dishes or laundry. They can all become active forms of meditation if approached consciously.
- Passive meditation: Passive meditation involves taking the time out to be seated, relaxed and focus on your breathing. It is called passive meditation because it doesn't involve any physical activity except retreating into calmness and stillness. The objective of passive meditation is to leave every distraction behind and calm the mind.

Real Benefits of Meditation

There are so many benefits of meditation, both physiological and psychological, if done on a daily basis.

The various physiological benefits are:

- Decreased heart rate.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Reduced cholesterol levels.
- Muscle relaxation.

- Deeper, slower breathing.
- Reduction in pain intensity.
- Increase in alpha rhythms - brain waves that correlate with relaxation and increased awareness.
- Stronger focus and concentration.

The psychological benefits are:

- Less emotional reactivity - fewer mood swings and intense negative emotions.
- More happiness and peace of mind.
- Enhanced creativity and self-actualization.
- Reduction in anxiety/stress/tension.
- Heightened perceptual clarity and sensitivity.
- Feeling of relaxation and calmness – being on control.
- Awareness of the present moment.
- A feeling of being more balanced, grounded or centered.
- A deeper connection with yourself and others.
- Relaxing the body and calming the mind.

Once mastered, the skill of meditation is yours to own. It is the most reliable way to achieve real stress reduction. The more you meditate, the greater the improvements become until the day the stress levels automatically become regulated.

One thing you will notice is that all the extra energy that stress would usually suck up will be left free for you to utilize throughout the day as you please and leave you feeling rejuvenated. The reduction in stress will benefit your health in over a thousand other ways as well, here are just a few of them.

- Your immune system will work better; this means fewer infections fewer days in bed and of course fewer antibiotics.
- Your ability to heal and recover improves, which is essential to thrive in good health after the trauma of abuse.
- Your body maintenance also improves, this means the effects of aging are actually slowed, blood pressure drops, blood clotting and blood sugar levels also drop. All of these decrease your heart disease and stroke risks, sleep becomes easier, learning becomes, and your memory improves, and the list goes on.
- Another impressive benefit is habit change. A reduction in your stress levels helps you cut out the bad habits that you had to develop as a coping mechanism because you don't need them anymore.

Relaxation Tips

The following eight simple relaxation techniques should help you induce the meditation reaction and help reduce stress.

- **Breathe focus:** Also known as deep breathing, belly breathing or abdominal breathing. In this simple but powerful technique of meditation, you take slow, long, and deep breaths. You sit up straight, close your eyes, and place one hand on your abdomen. Then, slowly inhale through your nose, and feel the breath as it starts in your abdomen and works its way up to the top of your head. Repeat the process as you exhale the breath through your mouth. As you do this, you are gently disengaging your mind from disruptive thoughts and sensations. Deep breathing can be beneficial for people that have eating disorders to help them focus more positively on their bodies. This technique, however, may not be fitting for

people with health issues that make breathing difficult, such as heart failure or respiratory diseases. Psychologists say deep breathing counteracts the effects of stress by slowing down the heart rate and lowering blood pressure.

- **Body scan:** This technique of meditation fuses breath focus with continuous muscle relaxation. Mentally do a scan of your body to get a feel of how stress upsets it each day. Then, sit with your feet firmly on the floor or lie back on the floor. Starting at your toes, take note of how your body feels and work your way up to the top of your head. After a few minutes of belly breathing, you let go of any physical tension you feel as you scan and focus on one part of your body at a time. A full body scan will help you enhance your awareness of the connection between your mind and body.
- **Music:** Listening to music is a wonderful way to relieve stress and encourage relaxation for yourself, your family and your friends. Music therapy is a fast-growing field and can be used for effective relaxation and meditation also.
- **Exercise:** It may look like exercise is the antithesis for relaxation, but for a number of reasons, a good exercise can actually make you feel a little more relaxed after. First, exercising is an excellent way to blow off steam and release stress. Second, in the course of a good workout, the endorphins released can improve relaxation significantly. Finally, continually exercising can transcend you into a state where it's difficult to remain stressed. Look for ways to incorporate exercise into your busy schedule.
- **Guided imagery:** For this relaxation technique, you think up scenarios, experiences or places that you find soothing in your mind to help you relax and find focus. You can download apps to help you through the calming scenes—just ensure the

imagery you choose is one you find calming and is of great personal significance. Guided imagery will also help you emphasize a positive version of yourself.

- **Mindfulness meditation:** This relaxation practice involves comfortably sitting while focusing on your breathing and taking the attention of your mind to the current moment, without it drifting off into worries about the future or the past. Mindful meditation has gained traction and enjoyed growing popularity over the years. Research has shown that it is beneficial to people living with anxiety, pain, and depression.
- **Yoga, qigong and tai chi:** These are three very ancient arts that fuse rhythmic breathing together with a sequence of postures or movements. The physical parts of these relaxation techniques provide a mental focus that helps in distracting you from errant thoughts. They also improve your balance and flexibility. These techniques may be a little difficult to do if you usually are not active or have health problems. Seek consent from your doctor before engaging.
- **Repetitive prayer:** In this meditation technique, you repeat a short prayer silently while practicing deep breathing. If you are a deeply spiritual or religious person, this technique may appeal to you.

I recommend that you sample each one of these techniques to choose the one that works best for you before settling into it. Remember, one of the promises of meditation is comfort and ease. It wouldn't serve to choose a technique that you would find challenging to keep up with. Also, practice for a minimum of 20 minutes each day. The longer and more often you engage in these techniques, the more the benefits you stand to gain.

Also, remember that the purpose of meditation is not to push stress aside or forestall negative thoughts about your abuse and your life

after that, but it is instead a way to take note of these thoughts and emotions while understanding that it is not necessary to act on them.

Meditation also helps to brace the brain for stressful circumstances. For instance, meditating for a few minutes before an appointment with your lawyer or before your court case can help move the body and the brain from the stress response to a state of complete calm.

8 Steps to Help You Develop Your Own Daily Meditation Practice for Recovery

- Allow yourself to get better by understanding that meditation can help provide that healing and relief.
- Seek out a mentor or a guide for your meditation. Meditation is like exploring in an unfamiliar territory – it is best to have a guide.
- Commit to it regularly. Research has shown that at least 20 minutes of meditation twice a day is optimal.
- Carve a niche in your house that is your safe space for meditation each day. Unplug your phone(s) and put your silenced cell phone where your eyes cannot see it. Remember for meditation to be effective, there has to be no distraction from any external factor.
- It is imperative that you get your meditation checked regularly by your guide.
- If you have a valid reason to miss a meditation session, don't be too hard on yourself. You can always renegotiate with yourself and recommit to it after you pick up from where you left off.

N O M O R E C R A P

- Check in on your progress with dealing with your trauma, pain, and stress after two months. Do you feel that you have grown relatively from the place you were before?
- Congratulate yourself for sticking with it! You're on your way to complete recovery.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD DIET

The manual for surviving and thriving is not complete without stressing the need for a good, balanced and healthy diet because you are literally what you consume.

Unhealthy foods and eating habits may lead to inflammation, which in turn causes oxidative stress – an imbalance between the production of free radicals and the ability of the body to get rid of them and neutralize their harmful effects, thus, making you look older and feel sicker.

Good food is also vital in wound healing, especially the significant wounds your abuser may have inflicted on you. Protein-energy malnutrition can alter the body's stress response to injury, thereby impeding the body's ability to heal from injuries and may lead to severe morbidity.

Loss of lean body mass is a source of concern as this is what is responsible for the synthesis of the proteins responsible for healing wounds. So not eating right will leave your body incapable of repairing the worn out tissues and injuries you may have sustained during the course of abuse.

Proper diet is also essential when dealing with psychological trauma. Eating a balanced diet grossly reduces the effects that stress places on your body over time. A healthy, suitable diet builds a more solid and

lasting foundation for your body by reducing inflammation, oxidation, and by helping you control your weight.

Stress affects your blood flow and blood pressure negatively. Over time, a direct correlation between your stress levels and the fluctuations in your blood flow and blood pressure levels begin to form. With proper nutrients from eating a healthy diet, these stress levels can be managed to improve blood flow and regulate your blood pressure. Some of these foods are rich in omega-3 (EPA and DHA), vitamin E, and polyphenols (found in blueberries, dark chocolate, and red wine).

The body requires oxygen and nutrients to fully function and injuries, or exposure to high levels of stress marginally increases the demands beyond the basal rate, so as to maintain normal bodily functions and repair injured tissues. Vitamins A, B, C, and D, as well as minerals like calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc, and manganese, are essential nutrients that are required by the body in small quantities to function properly. They act as catalysts that bind to enzymes to promote the enzymatic actions in the body.

Foods that you definitely need to add to your diet to improve your quality of life include; papaya and other fruits that contain Vitamin C (pineapples oranges, cantaloupes, kiwi), and leafy greens. You can also stick to a diet of whole, unprocessed grains.

The foods to avoid to ensure maximum vitality of your body includes, alcohol which inhibits muscle protein production, simple carbs like sweets and candy which stop the body from healing, and lead to immune dysfunction, and caffeine.

REBUILDING CONFIDENCE

“I feel like I have lost myself so much, I don’t know where to begin.”

For some survivors, this is their daily mantra – all that consumes their waking thoughts; how to differentiate between the empty husks of their old self that their abuser created and the person they are trying to be. After spending so much time listening to someone describe you with such vitriol and offensive words, your self-confidence is bound to take a hit. It becomes difficult for you to see yourself in a different light, even after leaving the abusive relationship. Every action and words you make, you find yourself second-guessing your abilities and your motives – nothing seems sure anymore.

Well, it is time to get reacquainted with the real you; it is time for you to channel your alter ego to the forefront.

The good news is that the process of rebuilding your confidence can be quite pleasant, it is like bumping into a dear old friend and getting reacquainted – all the works, trips down the old lane when you get to remember how things used to be, excepted that this time, you will know your friend on a much more precise, deeper, and personal level than before.

Before I jump right into describing the ways to build your self-confidence, there are some basic things that you need to understand about yourself that will help you in your self-image, solidify the kind

of person that you are and get rid of the things that have been impressed on you by your abuser.

Understand your temperament: Your temperament is a curious mix of genetic traits. It may be, in part, due to your body metabolism – the energy your body creates. Your temperament could be considered your emotional heat map – that is what it feels like to be you. Every person is born with a distinct temperament, for example, you may be either shy or social, fearful or fearless, amiable or aggressive.

Key things to consider about your temperament are your sensory threshold (are you easily bored or over-stimulated?), average energy levels (how easily can you muster mental and physical resources to perform tasks?), and your average level of arousal (how excitable do you get?).

These questions are essential in rediscovering the person that you are, although, like all physiological classifications, they tell so little about your individuality. For example, you may share the same temperament with any of your siblings but does that mean that you are one and the same?

Adaptation: The different ways that you adapt to the qualities of your temperament make up for a lot of the differences in personalities you exhibit. It is literally impossible to change your temperament that is a shy child will always remain a shy adult, but you can adapt to the way you express those temperaments in a number of ways. For instance, adults who were painfully shy as children can learn to manage their shyness, so it does not hinder them from socializing and networking. If the adaptations to your temperaments are healthy, then you can enjoy the benefits of those temperaments without being hampered by their limitations.

For example, as a shy person, it may be impossible for you to be the life of the party but you can learn to enjoy events without choosing to blend in with the wall décor or curtains. You can learn to contribute to the enjoyment of others through attention and focus, so long as you don't keep beating yourself up for being shy.

If you have low energy metabolism, it may be impossible for you to become a world-class athlete, but you can learn to build resistance and improve your energy levels by doing light exercises on a regular basis.

In the same vein, you can improve your confidence levels with proper attention and diligence, but you first have to give yourself permission to make mistakes and learn from them. No human being is perfect, so don't beat yourself up for being clumsy just because your abusive ex did.

Steps To Rebuild Your Confidence

- **Include positive affirmations into your daily routine:** Affirmations are positive statements that you can repeat to yourself constantly or place around your home in visible places as reminders of your worth. You can put them on your refrigerator, the wall above your bed, or on your bathroom mirror. Some examples of positive affirmations include: "I am lovable," "I deserve to be respected," and "I am beautiful."
- **Love yourself:** Loving yourself will build your confidence in yourself. Self-love includes getting adequate rest and sleep, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy diet, and seeking preventative medical attention. Indulge yourself in comfortable, safe, and enjoyable activities, such as reading, soaking in scented baths or evening drinking a glass of rich, red wine. Loving yourself also requires that you set stable and

unyielding personal boundaries with others – it helps to think about actions or words that you would under no circumstances condole from others and how you might respond should those boundaries be violated. This may be difficult at first if you struggle with self-esteem as others easily sway you. Boundary setting is a skill that can be honed with practice over time. When you have successfully learned the habit of asserting yourself, it comes with a sense of accomplishment and pride that further boosts your self-confidence.

- **Get support:** Your abusive partner may have succeeded in isolating you from your friends, family or anyone else that may have offered you spiritual and emotional strength to get you to depend on only him. Now that you are no longer in the relationship, it only makes sense that you build back your support system. Reach out to your old friends and family members with whom you have lost contact, reconnect with your religious community or support group, or work with a therapist with experience in these matters to help you deal with the process.
- **Learn the warning signs:** To prepare you better and improve your confidence in your relationships, learn the red flags that suggest that a person may be potentially abusive in the future. Some of those signs include pressuring you to move quickly into a serious relationship when you're not ready, constant phone calls to check your every move, and excessive jealousy. Having this knowledge will make you feel confident and comfortable about dating again.

Reflection: How do you consider yourself? Do you have positive thoughts about yourself? Or are you more focused on your inadequacies and shortcomings? If there was one thing you could change about yourself, what would it be?

Setting Goals for the Future

Setting unrealistic goals for your future will only lead to confusion and disappointment when you end up failing to achieve them. Before you set those goals for your new future that will be achievable, ask yourself the following questions.

- **What do you want the most:** The first secret to setting goals that you can actually achieve is to think about what you consider your top priority. When you think about it, it's usually the first idea that floats into your head, although there are exceptions. Don't overthink it, write the first thing that pops into your head – no matter how silly or simple it may sound. It could be something as specific as “buy a house” or something broader like, “find spiritual growth.”
- **Is it achievable?:** It is one thing to choose the thing you want the most as a goal, but it is another thing actually to achieve said goal. Your goals have to be as realistic as possible. The thing you want the most might be to go on a trip but if the longest distance your travel budget can carry you is only two states over, and you are deathly scared of the wild, that goal will be impossible to achieve.
- **What does that goal look like:** So your goal is to achieve spiritual growth, what does spiritual growth look like? You have to be able to envision what the end result of that set goal will look like so you can use actionable words to achieve them. You just separated from your abusive partner; your goal might be to recover from the abuse. Recovery would look like practicing meditation two times a week, exercising every morning, attending your support group meetings every Saturday, having ladies' night out every Friday, or even writing down your thoughts and observations every night

before bed. These are actionable words that can make achieving your goal more manageable.

- **How can you measure it:** Over time, the enthusiasm with which you set the goal will wear out, so how do you keep going from there? A neat trick is to break the goal into smaller pieces. Creating a to-do-list of those smaller pieces will allow you to tick off the smaller goals that you have achieved towards reaching, the larger, ultimate goal.

So how do you measure your progress? If the larger goal is being physically fit, you can do a monthly check on the smaller goals you have set to see how far you are progressing. In the first month, your goal could be to work out 12 times and control your diet by calorie deficit using an app. The second month, your goal could be to lose 10kg. The third month, your goal could be to sign up for a spinning class and attend all classes. The fourth month could be to jog for an hour every day. These are so specific that they are measurable. It will allow you to track your progress and give you fresh motivation towards achieving the larger goal – being physically fit.

- **How will you reward yourself?** Prepare a reward system to treat yourself after you have checked off a goal from your list. This serves as motivation to keep working on those goals till you've executed them all. The more attractive the incentive, the higher the motivation. If you complete your goal for the first month, you could treat yourself to a massage session and so on.

There should also be a reward for near wins, so it doesn't discourage you and put you off trying to achieve further goals. Also, celebrate the small accomplishments you have as you would the larger ones and forgive yourself when you fail to reach a goal

N O M O R E C R A P

Exercise: Each day, on a small piece of paper, write down something good that happened to you, or something you feel grateful for. Fold it up and place it in a jar. At the end of each year, you can take out the papers the jar and see how far you have come along.

SURVIVOR PLAYLIST

- F**kin' Perfect – P!nk
- Facedown – The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus
- Fight Song – Rachel Platten
- Firework – Katy Perry
- Good Enough – Jussie Smollett
- Goodbye Earl – Dixie Chicks
- Gunpowder and Lead – Miranda Lambert
- Human – Christina Perri
- I Am the Fire – Halestorm
- I Believe – Elvis Presley
- I Will Survive – Gloria Gaynor
- Independence Day – Martina McBride
- Mean – Taylor Swift
- No Man's Woman – Sinead O'Connor
- No More – Kuzie James
- Not as We – Alanis Morissette
- Respect – Aretha Franklin
- Rise Up – Andra Day

- Rise – Katy Perry
- Shining Star – Earth, Wind and Fire
- Skyscraper – Demi Lovato
- Spectrum – Florence and the Machine
- Stronger – Kelly Clarkson
- Survivor – Destiny’s Child
- The Door – J.J. Essen
- The Reckoning – Halestorm
- The Sun is Rising – Britt Nicole
- Till It Happens to You – Lady Gaga
- Warrior – Patti Smyth
- Wide Awake – Katy Perry

LETTER TO READERS

Being a victim of abuse is not the end of the road for you. There is still so much that you can look forward to, from the day you will finally leave your abusive partner (if you are still in an abusive relationship), to the growth and exploration that waits for you on the other side after surviving the abuse. It is possible to live a wholesome life again, one relatively without the pain and trauma from abuse with your friends and family.

For those that are still toying with the idea of leaving, I hope that with this book, you have received insights on how to go about it safely and how to ensure that you make use of the services at your disposal to the maximum. I hope that one day we will hear a celebratory tale from you of how you, against all the odds, went from being a victim of abuse to being a survivor.

For those that have already left the abusive relationship but still find themselves drifting through life without an anchor, I hope that this book will help keep you grounded as you navigate the bumpy terrain to complete recovery and growth.

To both, there will be a few stumbling blocks, a few close calls, a few near wins, you might even skid off the road a few times but don't be discouraged. Keep at it – there is definitely light at the end of this tunnel. One day, your story will be a source of inspiration to other women, and you will be the anchor that will secure them till they find their own footing again.