

## Why Doesn't She Just Leave?!!

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You've done everything possible to help a victim choose another life, free from abuse. She seems "uncooperative," or you believe she's the problem. You have shoveled services, money, time and effort at her, hoping she will leave, or at least acknowledge the abuse. Instead, she goes back—or denies there's anything wrong. **WHY???** Here's a **sampling** of some barriers that she may be facing, but is unwilling to tell you...

### The Abuser Lures & Grooms (see "Many Faces of Abuse")

- Apologizes, and claims to love partner
- Swears the abuse won't happen again
- Threatens to commit suicide if partner leaves
- Threatens partner's/children's lives if they leave
- Offers gifts or empty promises to gain control
- Manipulates/charms others who might intervene

### Addiction/Substance Use

- Victim self-medicates the pain of abuse away
- Abuser ensures or encourages partner's use of substances, or forces her to use (is her "pusher")
- Shelters won't take people who are actively using
- Abuser tells intervenors that partner's substance use is the reason for abuse (whether or not she uses)
- Victim's substance use has "burned bridges" with family, friends or other supports
- Abuser gives children access to substances or paraphernalia if partner is not there to intervene
- Victim feels responsible to help abuser overcome substance use

### Trauma

- The trauma victim has suffered leaves her feeling incapacitated, overwhelmed or hopeless
- Abuser uses knowledge of her past physical or sexual abuse against her, especially with intervenors
- Victim's "fight, flight or freeze" response kicks in with unsafe intervenors, making cooperation difficult
- Past traumatic experiences color the victim's ideas of what is "normal" in relationships
- Victim feels responsible to help abuser overcome his PTSD from childhood/military experiences

### Disability/Medical

- Victim or children have a disability that requires abuser's financial and/or caretaking assistance
- Abuser has a disability that requires partner's assistance
- Community programs are not sufficiently equipped to assist the victim's or children's particular disability
- Shelter rules do not allow access for supportive services
- Victim does not have access to medical insurance, or medical insurance is through the abuser

### Vehicle/Transportation

- Victim doesn't have a driver's license and/or vehicle
- Abuser sidelines the victim's vehicle, or takes her keys
- Victim's vehicle is registered under/insured by the abuser
- Public transportation is limited, or too expensive for victim

### Housing/Shelter

- Victim can't afford own place, or home is in abuser's name
- Abuser shuts or cuts off utilities in retaliation
- Victim doesn't have friends/family to stay with, or abuser has threatened to hurt anyone who shelters victim
- Bad/no credit limits the victim's housing options
- Local shelter is full, and other shelters are too distant to accommodate victim's work/children's school
- Section 8 waiting list is years long; there is limited housing assistance or available low-income housing
- Courts may give child to abuser if victim goes into shelter

### Education

- Victim's limited education means menial/underpaid jobs
- Recertifying or licensing is too expensive or too difficult
- Victim can't afford student loan debt and living alone
- Victim does not have financial or childcare resources to go back to school

### Job/Economics

- Victim is a homemaker, and/or has no recent work history
- Abuser has limited the victim's access to money/assets; victim has no financial resources independent of abuser
- Couple's assets controlled by the abuser disqualify the victim from receiving public assistance
- Victim can't provide for the children on her own
- Abuser has promised to NEVER pay child support, or has threatened to seek custody if victim asks for support
- Victim is afraid abuser will lose job if she gets restraining order or presses criminal charges

### Social Supports

- Abuser has successfully manipulated the community
- Abuser has isolated victim from friends/family/community
- Victim's connections urge her to "forgive and forget," or refuse to see abuser as anything but upstanding citizen
- Mutual friends/family act as spies on abuser's behalf

### Sexuality, Gender and Expression

- Victim would miss the intimacy of a sexual relationship
- Abuser has raped victim when he senses loss of control
- Abuser threatens to "out" the closeted LGBTQQ victim
- Victim is male or LGBTQQ, and community programs are not sufficiently equipped to meet their particular needs
- Community responders minimize the impact of abuser for male or LGBTQQ victims
- Victim doesn't want to "out" partner, or "air dirty laundry" of the LGBTQQ community

### Immigrant Status

- Abuser threatens to report victim to immigration/police
- Abuser is delaying immigration process to keep control, or has confiscated her green card/documentation
- Victim has limited or no English-speaking skills
- Community programs are not sufficiently equipped to assist the victim's language or cultural needs
- Institutional racism makes getting help difficult/scary
- Victim can't access public assistance without a SSN
- Abuser uses superior knowledge of language/institutions/laws to gain advantage over immigrant victim

## Criminal Record

- Victim has arrest record/conviction for a crime that limits her job or housing opportunities, or service eligibility
- Victim's arrest/conviction for domestic assault lead to institutions mislabeling her as "mutually abusive"
- Victim is concerned that a criminal conviction will limit her partner's job/volunteer/leisure opportunities
- Courts view women with criminal history as "bad mothers"

## Values

- It's a private matter
- A shelter is no place for children to live
- A woman's place is in the home, to be submissive
- Two-parent homes are best for children, or children shouldn't come from a "broken home"
- All relationships have "ups and downs"; this is "normal"
- "It's us against the world"... "Til death do us part"
- "If I was a better partner"... "it's all my fault"... "I just need to try harder"

## Fear

- Poverty, homelessness, deportation, being alone
- Retaliation by the abuser or his allies
- The children's anger or distress at separation
- Her family's or community's disapproval or abandonment
- Systems/institutions victimizing her more than abuser does
- Fear of the unknown is greater than the fear of the known
- Life doesn't get better than this
- Having no options, or having to return when options run out
- The abuser's very real threats, and the few carried through
- The restraining order "won't stop a bullet"
- No way to "gauge" abuser's reaction if she leaves
- Leaving does not mean safety

## Feelings

- Love for partner
- Loss of the relationship the victim wanted/believed in
- Guilt for leaving/breaking up the family
- Desire for the abuse to end, not the relationship
- Hope the abuser will change

## Children

- Love their other parent/figure, and want to be with him
- Beg to go back home to their friends and familiar setting
- Resent losing their belongings, activities and connections
- Feel shame over the abuse/parents' relationship
- Are more difficult to manage alone; act like the abuser
- Blame victim for "breaking up the family"
- Have special needs or IEP that make relocating difficult
- Abuser threatens to hurt/molest children if victim leaves
- Limited or no childcare if abuser is out of the home

## Pets

- Abuser has abused/neglected family pets, and victim fears what will happen to them if they are left behind
- Abuser threatens to hurt/kill pets if victim leaves
- Local shelter programs do not allow pets
- Victim cannot afford to care for the pets



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## Family Dynamics

The victim's personal experiences and family history actively shapes her sense of self, her meaning of "family" and "values," and her perception of the safety of the world in which she lives—which an abuser knows, and uses to his advantage. Victims typically use their knowledge of their partners' family history to excuse or explain the abuser's behavior; abusers typically use knowledge of their victims' histories to discredit them or isolate them from help.

- Family Secrets (ie--pornography addiction, abortion, addiction, etc.)
- Family Violence (ie—child or elder abuse, incest, molestation, foster care, etc.)
- Mental Illness or Generational Trauma
- Criminal Activity or Substance Abuse
- Generational Poverty or Homelessness
- Divorce/Blended Families
- Systemic/Cultural Violence (ie—lynching, genocide, exploitation, etc.)

## Social Ties

Like a spider weaving a web, perpetrators of intimate partner violence weave a network of allies that—either willingly and knowingly, or unwittingly—help keep tabs on their victims. Connections are carefully groomed to give abusers maximum information and "social equity," with minimum effort. Each time a victim connects with a link in their mutual social web, she risks having information flow back to her abuser. This is the key reason why domestic violence crisis services, especially CONFIDENTIALITY, is critical to victim safety.

- \*CHILDREN, Parents and Pets
- Extended Family and Friends
- Clubs, Groups and Teams
- Congregations and Support Groups
- Classmates, Teachers, Childcare
- Neighbors, Co-workers
- Sponsors and Mentors

**\*Note:** The original Power & Control Wheel lists "Using Children" as a separate control tactic. Abusers commonly use the same coercive/controlling/abusive tactics on the children as they do their adult victims. This is usually done with the intent of maintaining control over their partner, but it is often done simply because **this is how abusers parent children**. It is therefore RARELY in a child's best interests to be raised by—or have regular contact with—an abuser.