

53 Reasons Why Victims Don't Leave

1. **Lack of an advocate.** When the survivor doesn't have an advocate, they may feel intimidated, discouraged, and ultimately hopeless about being able to navigate the complex legal and social service systems (among others) they may need to escape.
2. **Abuser's influence.** If the abuser is wealthy, a politician, famous, a popular athlete or otherwise a powerful player in their community, they can generally afford to hire private counsel and pressure the decision-makers to view the case with more leniency. Some wealthy abusers hire private detectives to stalk, terrorize, and frivolously sue their partners. If they are a person of influence in the community, others may show their support for the abuser and be unlikely to believe the victim.
3. **Threats.** The survivor's life and the life of their children are often threatened by the abuser if the survivor attempts to leave. Statistics show survivors are more likely to be killed when attempting to leave an abusive partner than at any other time. It's dangerous to advise a survivor to simply leave without thinking through a safety plan. Abusers often make a number of threats about what they will do if their partner leaves including; killing themselves, sharing private information, "ruining their life", taking the children, etc.
4. **Children's best interest.** Some survivors feel (and others likely have guilted them into feeling) it is in the children's best interest to have both parents in the home, particularly if the abuser does not physically assault the children. Others may reinforce this by telling the victim that having both parents in the home is best for kids.
5. **Pressure from children.** Children putting pressure on the abused parent can be quite compelling, especially with those abusers who manipulate the children into begging the survivor to "just let daddy come home." Children are often torn, wanting the violence to stop but also wanting the family to stay together.
6. **Cultural and racial defenses.** Cultural defenses may be used by both offenders and survivors to justify abuse. Victims whose identity is that of a marginalized/oppressed group may feel pressure to stay with the abuser to avoid perpetuating negative assumptions about that group.
7. **Denial.** Abusers deny their behaviors and manipulate victims into believing that if the victim could be a better partner, then the abuse would stop. Abusers often minimize the abuse, convincing the survivor that the behavior did meet the requirements for abuse, that it could be worse, or that they are overreacting. Perhaps there is no physical violence. Or when there is physical violence, afterwards they feel like they are no longer in danger or not severely enough injured for it to be considered abuse. The victim may have retaliated with physical violence, making them feel as though they are equally responsible.
8. **Disabilities.** Survivors who have a disability may face greater obstacles, not only in gaining access to advocacy services, but also to basic information about existing resources as they are more likely to be more isolated from these options. They may be dependent on their abuser for care.
9. **Elderly.** Senior survivors may hold traditional beliefs about marriage, such as that they must stay married, even in the face of abuse. Others are dependent on the abuser for care and finances and may be more afraid of being placed in a nursing home or having no one to assist them than remaining with an abuser.
10. **Abuser's excuses.** Abusers make excuses to justify the violence (often blaming things job stress, substance abuse, etc.) in part because the survivor sees no one holding the abuser responsible for their crimes. Domestic violence is *not caused by* stress, or alcohol/

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substance abuse although these things can exacerbate the problem. Most individuals, when under stress or the influence of alcohol or drugs, *do not* abuse their partners.

11. **Pressure from family members.** Family may put pressure on the victim to stay because they either believe that there is no excuse for leaving a marriage or have been duped into denial by the abuser's charismatic behavior.
12. **Fear the abuser will retaliate.** Survivors are often scared their abuser will retaliate, either toward them or their children, when they leave. Since the abuser has already carried out threats of abuse in the past, a survivor will have reason to take any new threats seriously.
13. **Fear of losing child custody.** This fear can immobilize a survivor. Abusers know that nothing will devastate the survivor more than seeing their children endangered, so using the threat of custody becomes yet another weapon for the abuser, heightening their power and control tactics to further terrify the victim.
14. **Financial abuse.** This can take many forms, depending on the couple's socioeconomic status, but the abuser may control anything from access to all financial records, credit cards and bank accounts to convincing survivors they are incapable of making any financial decisions. Survivors are sometimes forced to sign false tax returns or take part in other unlawful financial transactions as well, at which point, the abuser tells them they will face prison terms for their part in perpetuating a fraud if they tell someone. Abusers sometimes ruin their victim's credit deliberately.
15. **Financial despair.** A consequence of the above, many survivors who experience financial abuse may realize they are dependent on the abuser for all financial needs. The survivor may be unable to provide for their children and may be more likely to return to the abuser who promises financial security.
16. **Gratitude.** Survivors may feel a sense of gratitude toward the abuser because they helped support and raise their children from a previous relationship. Or, the survivor may have a serious health problem through which the abuser has supported them. "You are so lucky I put up with you; certainly, nobody else would" is a common message abusers use to convince their victims that no one else would want them.
17. **Guilt.** This is a common feeling among survivors whose abusers have convinced them that it is because of the survivor's "incompetent" behavior that the abuse occurs. The abuser may also have an illness, injury, or disability which they use as a way to make the victim feel guilty about wanting to leave the relationship and/or not taking care of them.
18. **Homelessness.** Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness among families. Homeless survivors face increased danger as they struggle to meet basic survival needs while simultaneously attempting to elude their abusers.
19. **Hope that the violence will end.** A survivor's hope of peace at home is often fueled by the abuser's promises to change, pleas from children, some clergy member's urgings to "just pray more," a family's pressure to save the relationship and other well-intentioned, but dangerously misguided counsel. Many survivors want so desperately to believe that their abuser will change.
20. **Isolation.** Over time, abusers often cut off a survivor from communicating with their family, friends, and colleagues. It's a manipulation tactic that increases the likelihood a survivor will stay with the abuser. Without safety plans or reality checks, it's more difficult for a survivor to assess their level of danger. Living in a rural community can also be

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isolating for a survivor. When victims don't have other people in their life to love and care for them, they have no where to go when/if they need help, and they may feel lucky to have the relationship that they do.

21. **Wanting to keep the family together.** Survivors with children often believe it is in the best interest of their children to have the other partner in their life full-time. They may own a family business or be a prominent family in the community.
22. **Illiteracy.** 45 million U.S. adults are functionally illiterate and read below a 5th grade level, according to the Literacy Project Foundation. Without the ability to read job applications, apartment leases, court documents, and other important correspondence, illiterate survivors may be dependent on their abuser for survival.
23. **Incarcerated or newly released survivors.** These victims often have few, if any support systems to assist them with reentry to the community. Parole officers may require they return home after incarceration and may not be aware that their abuser is still there. Some incarcerated survivors have taken the fall for their abuser. When they return home, they may be forced by their abuser to perform illegal activities again in order to avoid further abuse or to prevent themselves from being killed.
24. **The abuser is in law enforcement.** If the abuser is a police officer, the survivor may have fears that other officers will not help. They may also fear that reporting the abuse will cause the abuser to lose their job in law enforcement, which can be especially worrisome if that is the only income and if the couple will face poverty as a result.
25. **LGBTQ survivors.** Lesbian, gay, bi, transgender and questioning survivors may feel trapped if they're afraid to reveal their sexual orientation, which may be necessary in order to receive help, like when filing for a protection order. They may fear disclosing this information or fear their abuser may reveal this information to those who may not know they are "out," and thus lose relationships with family and friends or their job as a result. They may have also experienced previous discrimination from law enforcement or the court system. LGBTQ survivors may not want to report abuse as a way to protect the image of their marginalized community. There is a likelihood that the person is in the same social circles as their abuser, therefore their access to their LGBT community (or chosen family) may be compromised if they out their abuser. Lots of LGBT people are rejected by their families, making this community a source of vital social support. They might have to choose between keeping this network and getting out of the relationship.
26. **Low self-worth.** Abusers intentionally erode their partner's self-worth. The victim may believe they don't deserve any better than the abuse, especially if they have grown up in families where abuse was present. The abuser likely created feelings of inadequacy or validated existing feelings of low self-worth as a tactic of abuse. Low self-esteem is both a way to abuse and a way to prevent the victim from reaching out for help.
27. **Love.** The victim fell in love with the abuser and likely just wants the violence to stop. Abusers are often very charismatic and charming during the courtship stage. Wanting the "good times" to come back, a survivor may believe they need to try harder to please the abuser, or they may rationalize that the abuse is only one aspect of an otherwise good relationship.
28. **Mediation.** In matters of family law, such as a report to law enforcement of domestic violence, mediation is still required in some jurisdictions. This puts the survivor in a dangerous position of having imbalanced power, not to mention the abuser will rarely

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show their true self in court. Survivors are left feeling that the abuser has controlled another facet of the court system through which the survivor may lose everything, from custody of the children to marital assets. For similar reasons, “couples counseling” is also not recommended.

29. **Health issues.** Medical problems, for either the survivor or their children, could mean that a survivor must remain with the abuser in order to continue receiving proper medical care.
30. **Mental illness.** Approximately 1 in 5 adults in both the U.S. and Canada experience mental illness in a given year. For those with mental illnesses who are also being abused by their intimate partner, the challenges are often compounded. These survivors may be discriminated against or disbelieved, especially if their abuser convinces others that the victim is “crazy.” Abusers further keep victims trapped by convincing them that no one will believe them if they reveal the abuse and that they are indeed “crazy.”
31. **Mentally disabled.** If the survivor has a mental or developmental disability they are particularly vulnerable to the abuser’s manipulation and more likely to be dependent on them for survival.
32. **Military.** If the survivor or the abuser is in the military, an effective intervention is largely dependent on the commander’s response. A commander may believe that it is more important to salvage the soldier’s military career than to ensure a survivor’s safety.
33. **No place to go.** Housing is expensive, shelters are often at capacity and survivors can fear putting friends and family at risk if they stay with them when escaping an abuser.
34. **No job skills.** Survivors with no job experience usually have no choice but to work for a job that pays minimum wage with few, if any, medical benefits and little flexibility. If any emergency should arrive, such as a medically related emergency or one related to childcare, the survivor may feel like they have no other option but to return to their abuser.
35. **No knowledge of options.** Survivors without awareness of their options in their communities, especially those in rural communities or survivors without access to the internet, may assume no help is available.
36. **Past criminal record.** Survivors with a previous criminal record, especially those still on probation, are vulnerable to an abuser’s threats to comply with his or her demands or be sent back to prison. A criminal record could also prevent a survivor from getting an order of protection.
37. **Previous abuse.** Sometimes, previous abuse can make a survivor believe they are to blame for this repeated treatment. If the victim was abused as a child or in a previous relationship, the abuse may seem normal, or like it’s not that big of a deal.
38. **Negative experiences with the court system.** Survivors who have not found the legal system to be supportive or easy to navigate may have no reason to believe they will find safety there again, which can prevent them from filing for an order of protection, making a report, or negotiating a parenting plan.
39. **Promises of change.** An abuser may sound sincere in their promises to change, swearing they will never drink, yell, or hit the survivor again. Not wanting the marriage or relationship to fail, the survivor wants to believe things will get better, so will give the abuser more chances to change.
40. **Religious beliefs and misguided teachings.** Such beliefs can lead survivors to think they have to tolerate the abuse to show their adherence to their faith. Furthermore, if the

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abuser is a priest, rabbi, minister or other high-level member of the faith community, the survivor can feel intimidated by their status and fear the congregation will support the abuser above all else.

41. **Rural victims.** Survivors who live in rural areas face isolation and limited access to services due to a lack of transportation. In smaller communities, survivors also face the obstacle of the everybody-knows-everybody conundrum and may be reluctant to reveal abuse because the heightened scrutiny may cause them more embarrassment among family and friends.
42. **Safer to stay.** It may sound unbelievable, but sometimes, it's safer for a survivor to stay. Particularly if the abuser has previously engaged in stalking or death threats, a victim may assess that. By keeping an eye on the abuser, they can sense when they are about to become violent and, as much as possible, take action to stay safe.
43. **Being a student.** Students in high school, college, or graduate university studies may fear that school officials will not take their reports of abuse seriously or make proper accommodations. If their abuser is also a student, the survivor may be afraid of being called out for "snitching" by disclosing abuse. The abuser might also be part of social groups in school or on campus with a lot of power and influence and the victim might be scared of retaliation. If the abuser is someone like a faculty member, teacher, or otherwise position of power, the survivor may fear they won't be believed or that the abuser will try to hurt their grades or career prospects. Generally students have less money to seek help.
44. **Shame and embarrassment.** Many survivors feel shame or embarrassment about the abuse, which can prevent them from disclosing it to anyone, or may cause them to deny abuse when questioned by loved ones.
45. **Substance or alcohol abuse.** If either the survivor or the abuser, or both, are abusing alcohol or other substances, it may inhibit the survivor from seeking help. They might fear that their children they share could be removed from the home or that a shelter will not accept them if they are struggling with addiction. They might worry that people won't believe them about the abuse or blame them for it because of their substance abuse.
46. **Teens.** The legal system or community resources likely require the involvement of an adult or parent. They may not have transportation. Young people may be afraid to ask adults for help as their abuser likely made them previously lie to adults or engage in behaviors that they would be in trouble for. They might worry that their freedom might be even more limited by their parents if they tell them about the abuse they experienced. Teens, especially those who are pregnant or who are already parents, are at greater risk for abuse in their relationship than any other age group, yet are the least likely to report or seek adult intervention. Some teens are fleeing homes where they were abused, or witnessed abuse between adults, and are more vulnerable to dating abusive partners as a result.
47. **Transportation.** Without a car to access a job or childcare, many survivors feel hopeless about the prospect of leaving and avoiding poverty or further harm.
48. **Unaware that abuse is a criminal offense.** Some survivors are unaware that the abuse they're enduring is a criminal offense, often because someone in their life has minimized the crime.
49. **Undocumented survivors.** Undocumented victims fear they will face complex immigration problems if they leave. Their abuser has told them that they can get them

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deported. The survivor may fear losing custody of their children if reported as undocumented.

50. **Promise to their abuser.** Abusers sometimes make their victims promise to never involve other people, including the police. The survivor may feel like keeping this promise is an act of loyalty, even if it endangers their safety.
51. **Confusion between love and abuse.** Along with having toxic ideas about what love means, people are often taught either subtly or explicitly, that abuse is a sign of love. That abuse can emerge as unrestrained love, love that is too powerful to be contained, love that is too grand to be healthy. We are taught to confuse conflict with passion, buying into the narrative that a love worth having is never easy and worth fighting for (even with your life). Across the media and in conversations with others, the survivor might have learned that controlling and abusive behavior can be a sign of love. Jealousy is often portrayed as a positive indication that the abuser "truly loves you."
52. **Pressure to be in a relationship.** Throughout all stages in life, women are taught that much of their value comes from receiving attention from men and boys. We are often asked, "do you have a boyfriend?" at family gatherings. Therefore, having a boyfriend/husband/partner can be a sort of social status that is sought after and seen as worth protecting. Women and girls may want to portray their relationship as perfect as another way of securing this sort of social status among friends. Friends may tease girls or women who cannot "keep a man" or those who engage in sex outside of a relationship. Our culture portrays ending a relationship as a "failure."
53. **Strong adherence to gender norms.** Women may feel it is acceptable or expected that an abuser control their lives because this is the messaging we are taught about gender norms. Men are expected to be dominant and controlling in a relationship and women are expected to serve their needs.