

BARRIERS TO LEAVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

How many times have you heard, "why doesn't she just leave?" Leaving a relationship is a difficult action even under the best of circumstances. Violent relationships are complex and women in these relationships are faced with many barriers to leaving.

Economic dependence: few choices and support for living independently.

Fear for her survival: fear that the abuser will find her and kill/harm her or the children.

Parenting: wanting another parent for her children.

Love: she loves her partner and at times her partner is affectionate.

Religious and/or cultural pressure: to keep the family together.

Lack of support: pressure from family and friends to stay.

Fear of being alone: having to cope with her life and children alone.

Loyalty: she committed to stay with her partner.

Misplaced pity for the abuser: women are socialized to put others needs before their own.

Rescue complex: if she stays, she can save him.

Fear of partner's suicidal threats: her partner threatens to commit suicide if she leaves.

Denial: "it is not really so bad."

Guilt: her partner convinces her that the abuse is her fault; she is to blame.

Shame, embarrassment, and humiliation: no one must know.

Wish for security: belief in the myth of living "happily ever after."

Sex role socialization: if her abuser is a male, "this is just the way men are."

Identity: many women feel they need a relationship in order to be complete.

Hope: "things will get better."

Low self-esteem: she believes that she deserves the abuse and will never find anyone better.

Male privilege: if her partner is male, he may convey that the man is head of the household and that she is forbidden to leave without his permission.

Coercion: her partner threatens to take the children away if she leaves.

Chemical dependency: if she uses alcohol or drugs as a means of coping with the abuse, she may be less clear and strong about needing to leave the relationship.

Source: Sanctuary for Families Staff