

What keeps Us in Abusive Relationships?

Adapted from: Robert, C. Denver Commission on Community Relations. Reprinted for therapeutic use only.

Every reason that keeps us in an abusive relationship is valid. We won't all fit into every reason listed below, but if you identify with a reason, circle it and take notes about your own experiences.

1. We love our partners.

2. We fear our partners, and almost believe they are invincible. They threaten us if we think about leaving or taking action.



3. The police may offer little or no real protection. They may even side with our partners, arrest us, or make us feel at fault for the abuse.

4. Abusive partners who are arrested are usually released in a matter of hours (on bond), and may take revenge on us.

5. Even if it is the neighbors who report, our partners' responses will be directed toward us. When the police do come, we are afraid to admit to our partners' assaults.

6. Our partners may have made us economically dependent on them, and we see no real alternative. They might have made it impossible for us to get or keep a job, sold or sabotaged our cars, or denied us access to the family accounts.

7. Society, religious and cultural beliefs demand, suggest or expect that we maintain the facade of a good marriage or relationship. Our culture also has an underlying message that women are to be used and kept in our place. This lets our partners know on a daily basis in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways that what they are doing is ok, and even expected.

8. Our partners become our only support system as they systematically destroy all of our other relationships.

9. We stay for the sake of the children: We might believe that a 2-parent abusive home is better for the children than a single-parent home, or that the children are not directly affected because they never witness physical abuse. Our partners may have made threats to take or injure the children if we leave.

10. Some of us may have been abused our whole lives and so we learned early on that we were helpless.

11. Law enforcement and judicial authorities often do not take domestic assault seriously; hence our partners are often not held accountable or removed. Any attempts we make to consult authorities are seen as a threat, and our partners may abuse us more for those attempts.

12. Often our partners are respected and mild mannered in public, so our concerns are not taken seriously. Their singular abusive treatment may lead us to believe that there is something wrong with us, and that we deserve it. Our partners may say things about us that aren't true, and so our family might side with our partners when we need help.

13. Our partners' reasoning is so believable that it fools police, therapists, judges, attorneys, and social workers. Naturally, we begin to believe it too.

14. We might not be aware of the services that are available to help, or we might have no way to get there. We feel trapped.

15. Some abusive incidents happen very fast. Afterwards, our partners might be quiet, gentle and loving and promise to never hit us again. They might cry. Many of us describe our partners as charming and loving, most of the time. Some partners will deny that the incident ever happened, or simply not acknowledge it, so we start to question our reality and feel crazy.

16. We might be convinced that each time they abuse us, it will be the last.

17. Many of us grew up in a home where there was violence or abuse, and so we learned to accept violence or abuse as natural behavior in an intimate relationship.

18. We become motivated to stay in the relationship by pity and compassion. We are convinced that we can help our partners “get better”. We think they are just “sick”, and that our love can “save” them.

19. We believe that if only *we* would improve (e.g. stop making mistakes, live up to their expectations), the abuse will stop. We believe that we can control the abuse through our own behavior so we try to change. We stay because we feel at fault.

20. We are optimists; we believe that things will change for the better eventually.

21. We may be ambivalent about our situation and not confident enough in our own abilities to make quick decisions. Police, lawyers, doctors, or mental health workers may need a decision quicker than we are able to make. Filing a police report or obtaining a Personal Protection Order (PPO) are major decisions, and we might decide against them if asked to make a fast decision.

22. We have become used to the turbulent lifestyle and are accustomed to the intensity and chaos of the abusive relationship.

23. We are afraid, maybe even terrified, of being alone.

24. Our society has many stereotypes and myths about abuse. Our friends and family may not understand the factors that have kept us in our relationships, and they may even look down on people in abusive relationships. We can sense this, and so we are ashamed to acknowledge what is going on.

25. Relatives are tired of helping us out, time after time, giving us a place to stay, etc. Our partner may also threaten our families when they try to help us. As a result, the family often ceases to be a resource upon which we can rely,

26. We do not identify ourselves as "abused". We realize that we have problems, but we assume that because other abuse is more severe, that our situation really isn't domestic violence. In most

cases our partners have caught us up in mind games and we are unable to clearly see the problem for what it is.

27. For some women, they may have been raised to believe that it is their responsibility, not their partners', to maintain a good relationship. We may believe that we are to do so at all costs.

28. We do not know that we have the right to a healthy relationship, one that is free of violence and abuse. We might not even know what a healthy relationship consists of, because we have never been exposed to one.

29. We are afraid that if we report the crime our partners will lose their jobs, especially when our partner has the family's only source of income.

30. We believe that outsiders should not be involved in the affairs of the family or our relationship. In some cultures, it is taboo to ask for help; we are to take care of our own problems quietly and quickly.

31. We are afraid of some kind of retaliation by the extended family if we leave our partners or report them to the authorities.

32. Some of us do not want any change in the relationship except for our partners to stop abusing us.

Reflections:

What stood out to you? What are your reasons?
