

***Why Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence Stay with Their Batterers***

People who don't know a lot about the dynamics of partner abuse may ask, "Why would someone stay in a violent relationship?" Some victims may ask themselves that same question. Here are some examples of things victims see as barriers to leaving their relationships. Though this list does not cover all victims' experiences, it provides a framework to better understand some dynamics of abusive relationships.

Victims may stay in abusive relationships because:

1. They feel safer with their batterers because they know what they are up to.
2. They're scared of their abusers. Victims believe that if they leave the relationship, their abusers will act on threats they've made in the past. Batterers often tell their victims they will hurt or kill them, or people close to them, report them for welfare fraud or to Children Services, call the police on them for domestic violence, or "out" them to their family, friends, or coworkers.
3. Batterers often don't get serious consequences for their abusive behavior.
4. Involving the police can make the violence worse because batterers feel threatened. If arrested, batterers can be let out of jail in a few hours and go after their victims for reporting the abuse.
5. Even if another person calls about the abuse or the state picks up charges against them, batterers often blame their victims. Victims know this and often deny the abuse to avoid being abused further.
6. Community resources for victims may not be well known or easy to use. Victims may not know about their options.
7. They may not receive help from the community because their abusers are well known or respected. Abusers are good at changing their personalities to hide abusive behavior in public.
8. They may be used to focusing on the needs of their abusers and feel unsure about making decisions about their own safety and futures. When victims reach out for help, professionals often ask them to quickly decide their futures. Victims may feel uncomfortable with quick decision-making or big changes because they live in an environment where violent consequences discourage this.

9. Victims often do not have the money to survive away from their abusers. Victims who leave with no money face homelessness.
10. They may be afraid that if they report the violence, their batterers will lose their jobs or reputations which can have a negative impact on the family's economic stability.
11. Societal values cause victims to feel ashamed or embarrassed about the abuse.
12. Victims may believe that outsiders shouldn't be involved in family matters.
13. Gender roles, cultural and religious beliefs may make victims feel like they must pretend nothing is wrong at home. Victims may also define their self-worth by their relationships.
14. They may believe their children are better off in a two-parent household. Batterers also focus on kids to keep victims from leaving by threatening to take them away from them or hurt them if they leave.
15. Isolation from their family and friends decreases options for leaving relationships. Batterers are sometimes the only people victims can go to for support. Because abusers feel threatened by their victims' relationships, they stop them from becoming close with others.
16. Victims may only get limited support from their family and friends. Victims of partner abuse try to leave an average of four to six times before they succeed. People close to them may not understand that leaving an abusive relationship is a long process and think victims fail when they go back with their abusers. They may also tell victims that their abusers are good people, that the abuse is not as bad as they say, or to go back and try harder to make things work.
17. They may believe their batterers' messages that the abuse is their fault, that it happens because of alcohol or drug use, that they just can't control their anger, or that no one else will ever want the victims. These messages attack victims' self-esteem and make them doubt the way they feel about the violence.
18. Incidents of physical violence may occur in relatively short bursts. Afterward, their batterers may be gentle and loving, and promise to change, acts that are as manipulative as the physical violence. This is confusing to victims who may see their batterers as good, loving, people most of the time. Their batterers may convince them that they will change, and their relationships will get better. Victims may not want the relationship to end, just the violence.
19. They may have seen fighting in their homes while growing up and accept that violence in relationships is OK. Abusers also learn how to be violent from their families of origin. Growing up in violent homes may create a bond of common experience between abusers and victims.
20. They may feel like their abusers need them and they can help them change.

21. Victims may feel that if only they would change and stop making mistakes, then their abusers would stop hurting them.
22. Victims may fear being alone or miss their abusers when they are separated. Victims may love their abusive partners and need the space to grieve the loss of their relationships.
23. Victims may have a hard time knowing what abuse is. They may know their relationships are bad, but not see the abuse as the reason for this. Victims may feel that their batterers' substance abuse, money problems, or stress outside the relationships cause the turmoil, not their abusers' violence.
24. Victims may not know that they have the right to be safe and live free from violence.