



But He'll Change

End the Thinking That Keeps You
in an Abusive Relationship

Joanna V. Hunter

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Ending the Thinking
That Keeps You in Abusive Relationships

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Editor's note

While the stories and lives shared in this book are true, names and other identifying information have been changed to provide anonymity.

This publication is not intended as a substitute for the advice of health care professionals.

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*To my husband,
who by word and action
reminds me every day
that I am loved and cherished.*

*And to those who surrounded me and
supported me as I healed.*

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Interviews with domestic abuse experts Darald Hanusa, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., Jennifer Parker, M.S.S.W., L.C.S.W., Eve Lipchik, M.S.W., Robert D. Enright, Ph.D., and Ann Brickson, M.S.S.W., L.I.C.S.W., are available online. To access this document, visit the Hazelden Bookstore Web site at www.hazelden.org/bookstore. In the search box, insert “But He’ll Change,” which should bring up the product page for this book. You will be able to download a PDF of the interviews from this page.

PREFACE



Growing up, my mother told me, “It is never okay for a man to hit a woman—*never*.” Years later I was faced with that reality—I found myself in an abusive relationship.

The fear and pain I lived with forced me to leave the relationship. It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do. Healing took time, but I finally moved on to create a new life for myself. I thought my experience with abuse was over.

Then one day, I opened the newspaper and read the results of a survey about high school students and sex. The majority of the students in the survey believed that if a man forces his wife to have sex, it isn’t rape. Almost half the teens said that if a guy buys a girl dinner, she has to provide sex, and if a girl agrees to have sex and then changes her mind and the guy forces her, it isn’t rape. *Someone needs to talk sense into these kids!* I thought. I could do that, but would teenagers listen to a grandmother?

I contacted a school social worker. He suggested I volunteer through the local women’s shelter. I went cold inside. Could I get that close to the pain of abuse again without dredging up my own dark memories? It had been well over a decade since I broke free. I toed the dirt for a while, mulling over the idea, then made the call.

I’m glad I did. I discovered that I could use my experience to benefit other women. My long-term relationship with an abuser and the process of healing had taught me much about intimate partner violence. The training I received at the service agency connected to the local women’s shelter gave me a solid foundation in the dynamics of domestic abuse. I drew on all these sources of knowledge to develop an interactive program on teen dating violence and healthy relationships. Over the course of seven

years, I spoke to over seven thousand students in high school and middle school health classrooms. The students accepted me. They asked challenging questions. They wrote comments on my evaluations that said, “I didn’t realize what I was doing to my girlfriend. I’m going to stop it.” “Now I know why my mother won’t leave her boyfriend.” “I was going to get back with my boyfriend, but after hearing you, I changed my mind.”

I also spoke to adults through community clubs and at the local college, teaching students in the medical field how to screen patients for domestic abuse and what to do next.

About this same time, my work life changed. I left my career to write the “great American novel” I’d always planned. As I worked on it, thoughts of domestic abuse victims continually interrupted my character development and plots—even my sleep. In particular, I kept thinking about the statements that victims use to respond to the internal voice that is screaming, “This is not right. Get out!” I began jotting down these statements in a spiral notebook. Before long, I had two full pages of statements starting with “Yes, but I love him” and “Yes, but he can be really wonderful,” and ending with “If I could just love him enough, he’ll change.” I thought, *Someone should write a book that pushes women to think beyond these ideas. . . . Why not me?* I know the thinking and self-talk that women in abusive relationships internalize from their abusers—statements that allow women to tolerate the abuse, and resist the urge to leave. And I also know how to counter those thoughts. I know why such thinking is false and how it works to keep women trapped in unhealthy, dangerous situations. Most important, I know what healthy relationships look like and I want to give other women the words to counter their negative thinking, until they can recover their own voices of strength.

As I started to put *But He’ll Change* together, I lamented to one of my mentoring therapists, “No one will publish my book. I don’t have a degree in therapy.” He assured me a publisher would recognize that I had the most important kind of education—personal experience. He was right. I knew what it took to heal after domestic violence.

I have written the book that I needed while recovering—one that

- ~ talks straight
- ~ tells the truth

- ~ explains how healthy thinking sounds
- ~ gives permission to care for and stand up for yourself
- ~ is flexible, allowing you to work on issues as they surface

It's been nine years since I jotted "Yes, but I love him" on the first line of my notebook. May the pages of this book help you identify and change your harmful self-talk, regain your self-trust, shed labels, transcend the past, and walk into a better life—a life filled with peace and joy.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book will focus on abuse that occurs between a man and a woman, with the man being the abuser, since this was my experience. However, I invite anyone experiencing domestic abuse to use this book and to substitute the proper pronouns where needed. The components of abuse are alike in any relationship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



I am grateful to those who supported and encouraged me as I worked on this project: my husband and family; the therapists, pastors, and staff of my local women's shelter, who answered endless questions; Leigh and Maureen, who read and reread the manuscript; Cathy, my gifted editor; and Sid, along with Hazelden's staff, who gave me an opportunity to speak. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION



Perhaps you're holding this book in your hand because your therapist suggested it. Or maybe you were wandering around the bookstore and the title caught your attention. Perhaps it's because someone bought the book and thrust it into your hands, telling you, "You must read this book." (As annoying as they may sometimes be, our friends mean well.) Regardless of why you picked it up, this book can help if you

- ~ repeatedly find yourself in difficult relationships
- ~ are struggling to stay away from a partner who causes you pain
- ~ realize that your current relationship isn't working out and you've had enough
- ~ want to model healthy self-care for your children
- ~ want to change what leads you into poor relationships, or are at least willing to look at other options
- ~ have a friend who's living in the darkness of abuse

It's difficult to admit you're currently in or once were in an abusive relationship. It is humiliating and embarrassing, I know—I lived in one for nearly twenty years. I remember how agonizing life can be. I'm here to tell you that there is another way to live, a way that doesn't include walking on eggshells, stifling your feelings, and holding back your words for fear that your partner will get angry.

If there is any question in your mind whether your partner is abusive, turn to Profile of an Abuser on pages 199–202. If you check even a few items on the list, you are on a dangerous road. The shortest test to determine if

your relationship is healthy is to ask yourself, “Am I afraid to tell him how I really feel?” Can you talk openly to your partner without being afraid that he will ridicule you, discount your opinion or feelings, or lash out at you? A partner in a healthy, mature relationship will respect your opinion even if it differs from his. Healthy relationships do not include fear.

If you have already left an abusive relationship, this book will teach you the dynamics of abuse, how abusers etch self-debasing thinking on victims’ spirits, and help you examine your false beliefs. It will hold your hand during the long, dark days when the urge to return to the relationship claws at your psyche. It will teach you how healthy thinking sounds and point out warning signs to help you avoid falling prey to another abusive partner. *But He’ll Change* will reinforce what you know to be true: you deserve love and respect.

If you are currently in an abusive relationship, you may have given up hope that your partner will change. You may have resigned yourself to the situation as it is. Even if you feel stuck and completely powerless, I want you to know that change is possible and that you do have power. It may seem inconceivable, but changing your thinking gives you the power to change yourself. You can make a difference in your own life, even if you choose to stay with your partner. This book will help you get started.

NOTE: If you are in immediate danger, call the police. If you are living in an increasingly violent relationship, don’t wait any longer. Call your local women’s shelter or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) for guidance or just to talk with a compassionate person.

DOMESTIC ABUSE 101

What Is Domestic Abuse?

The term *domestic abuse*, also called intimate partner violence (IPV), is the systematic suffocation of another person’s spirit. It’s about power and control—one person holds all the power and uses it to control the other

person, the victim. Domestic abuse includes physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse.

When we think of domestic abuse, the first thing we usually visualize is hitting, punching, kicking—physical attacks. But abuse also includes having someone do the following:

- ~ Call you names
- ~ Berate you
- ~ Consistently ignore your feelings
- ~ Throw things at you
- ~ Humiliate you in front of others
- ~ Insist on making decisions for you
- ~ Prevent you from practicing your faith
- ~ Set rigid rules
- ~ Judge you harshly
- ~ Force you to have sex
- ~ Make demeaning comments about your gender
- ~ Withhold affection (See *What Is Abuse?* on pages 195–197 for more examples of abuse.)

While there are several behaviors that are present in almost all abusive relationships, there are as many variations on the style and severity of abuse as there are perpetrators. Some people think abuse is about anger run amuck. Yet anger is only one of the tools used by an abuser to establish fear in the victim, making her compliant. Abuse is a choice. Anyone who can choose to hit can choose not to hit. Anyone who can choose to berate another can choose to speak kindly.

Other people think a mental health disorder or problems with alcohol or other drug use causes abuse. Although mental health disorders may be a factor in some cases, most research shows a low rate of mental health disorders in even the most violent abusers.¹ When it comes to alcohol and drugs, they only serve to make it easier for the abuser to act on his impulses.²

Physical violence is easy to identify as abuse because it leaves bruises on the body. We see the black eyes, the broken bones, the stitches, the blood. But emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse are every bit as destructive—and

all types of abuse leave emotional scars on your spirit. A broken arm or leg can heal in six to eight weeks. Wounds on the spirit can last a lifetime and affect every future relationship you have. It often takes a therapist to help heal them.

Who Is a Victim?

Domestic violence is a general term that refers to any abuse that occurs within a familial-type relationship; victims include romantic partners, children, or elderly people. In romantic relationships, the partners may be married, living together, or dating. Both heterosexual and homosexual relationships can become abusive, and abusers can be either male or female.

Women from the early teen years through later life can be victims of domestic abuse. About one in three high school girls dates a boy who slaps, punches, kicks, or strangles her. Females who are twenty to twenty-four years old are at the greatest risk for nonfatal intimate partner violence.³ Thirty-seven percent of women in the United States live in emotionally abusive relationships.⁴ The number of females murdered by their intimate partner has remained at about 30 percent of all female murders between 1976 and 2005.⁵ Between 1976 and 2005, 5 percent of all murders by intimate partners were girls (ages twelve to seventeen) killed by their boyfriends. The group of women ages thirty-five to thirty-nine had the highest percentage of murder victims by intimates, 43 percent. Women sixty years old or more (a group less likely to report domestic violence) made up 21 percent of all murder victims by intimates.⁶

What Do Healthy Relationships Look Like?

Many women in abusive relationships have never known what it's like to be treated a different way by a man. Let's explore how healthy relationships differ from those that have turned abusive.

The beginnings of most relationships are the same. They're like striking a match: they catch fire, bursting into flame. It's called the *honeymoon period* or *limerence*. It's electric. You have butterflies in your stomach just thinking about your sweetheart. His voice is the first one you want to hear in the morning and the last in the evening. If you're a teen, you hold hands in the halls and sneak kisses behind the teacher's back. You doodle his last name with your first name all over your papers and books. I admit, some

of us adult women have doodled our sweetheart's name with ours too. During this period, you want to spend all your time alone with him, getting to know each other, often neglecting your family and friends. Limerence is exciting and wonderful.

After the initial flare-up, like the match, the relationship settles into a nice, even flame. This is love. It's when you don't need to be together twenty-four hours a day to feel loved and cherished. You've built a relationship on trust, respect, and communication. If your sweetheart, God forbid, is sent on an extended business trip or a semester in France, you know you won't shrivel up, die, and blow away in the wind. You rest in the trust you've established.

From there the relationship continues to grow. You learn to negotiate solutions to problems. One person doesn't always have to acquiesce to the other's needs and wants. A healthy relationship gives you time

- ~ on your own
- ~ with your partner
- ~ with your friends
- ~ with your partner and friends

Your partner becomes your greatest cheerleader. He encourages you to find your passion in life. He wants you to develop and use your gifts and skills to become fully you. He will support your dreams as you support his. Growth and change will not threaten the relationship but keep it fresh and alive. In his book *Loving Each Other*, Leo Buscaglia says, "The very measure of a good relationship is in how much it encourages optimal intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth."⁷

Let's go back to the match image. Sometimes when you strike a match, it flares up and then goes out right away. This happens in relationships too. You experience this fabulous time of limerence. Then, one day, you look at one another and say, "What did we ever see in each other?" You break up and move on. The worst-case scenario is when you think your sweetheart is the greatest, but suddenly he announces, "It's over." Whether or not you initiated the breakup, when a love relationship ends, you go through a grieving period. In short-term relationships, the pain usually lasts 3 to 4 weeks. For women it's about 2 or 3 gallons of ice cream, a big spoon, and 16 sappy chick

flicks to cry through. For men, who often work out their pain with physical activity, it can be 200 games of racquetball, 150 games of basketball, or 250 of football. For long-term relationships, the pain after a breakup can last longer. I suggest those experiencing overwhelming grief seek some counseling to help the healing process. The point is, after a period of grieving, the hurt eases and you are ready to move on.

The Cycle of Abuse

Abusive relationships start with the limerence, or honeymoon, period just as healthy relationships do, but instead of growing and moving forward, they veer off into a cycle that becomes repetitive. After spending so much time alone with your new partner, you begin to open your life to the relationships you've neglected while in the limerence stage. You're ready to spend some time with your friends or family without your partner. This causes great panic for the controlling man. He moves to *isolate* you.

This may be the first time you realize that something isn't right. You're noticing a *red flag*—that little voice inside you that says, "Something is wrong here."

In abusive relationships, there are many red flags. One of the first to appear is often *jealousy*. What makes jealousy dangerous is that it can masquerade as love. When you are dating a guy and he says he's going out with friends without you, you may feel somewhat jealous or left out. These are normal feelings. Jealousy steps over the line when your partner forbids you from going out with your friends or won't let you talk to persons of the opposite sex, especially if they were previous partners. You will hear comments such as, "Please don't audition for the musical. If you get a part, you will be at rehearsals all the time and we won't have any time together." "Don't go back to college. Between your job and studying you won't have any time for me." "Don't you love me? Don't you want to be with me?" "If you love me, you won't (insert activity or interest here)." All these appeals for your time may seem very romantic, but he is using your love to control you.

Receiving an unexpected call during the day from your sweetheart just to say he loves you sets your hearts aflutter—but how about twenty-three calls in one day, or in one hour? What about near-constant texting, asking what you're doing and who you are with? Such behaviors are other red flags that you are entering into dangerous territory. Cell phones have

opened the door to *stalking and maintaining control over a victim*. The line between healthy and unhealthy becomes blurred. Yes, you love him, yes, you want to hear from him, but suddenly you feel suffocated by his constant barrage of calls questioning your every move, every moment of every day. Those love calls or text messages become threatening and a way to control you.

All of these actions illustrate one of an abuser's core beliefs—that he's entitled to be the center of your world, and the only thing in your world. However, he has no intention of making you the center of his. He doesn't want you to find a career or cause that becomes your passion. He expects that caring for him will be your only passion in life. Socializing with others is out, because you might develop a support base that will counteract his work to control you. He may move you a great distance from your family to sever your support base so he has more control of you. Some abusers even feel threatened by their own children. Murder by an intimate partner is one of the leading causes of death for pregnant women.⁸

At this point, the relationship has moved from limerence into the tension segment. He becomes more controlling and frightening—*demeaning* you, *attacking your self-esteem*, *playing mind games* with you. If you try to call him on his behavior, he *denies*, *minimizes*, and *blames* you for the problems. During the tension period, the abuser may make grand and loving gestures designed to keep you off balance so you remember who he can be. It gives you hope and keeps you in the relationship. Underneath, he's seething that he "had" to do kind things for you. In his mind, you owe him. The tension escalates until, in an effort to maintain and hold control, he erupts. This is the incident where he may berate you, threaten you, brandish a weapon to terrorize you, or beat you. Any one of these actions is not acceptable, and you are in no way responsible for his behavior. As Lundy Bancroft points out in *Why Does He Do That?* "Abuse is a problem that lies entirely within the abuser."⁹

Often the abuser has made the decision to batter even before the victim enters the picture or does anything. I could tell by the sound of my partner's footsteps coming toward the door whether or not he was going to be violent that evening; if he was, there was nothing I could do or say to stop him. He would find something—dust on the top of the refrigerator, the wrong meal for dinner, how I looked—to justify his abuse.

After the abusive incident, your partner may become contrite and beg your forgiveness. He cries and brings you flowers or expensive gifts. He promises he'll never do it again. He reminds you that if you had answered your cell phone quicker when he called or hadn't talked to that old boyfriend, none of this would have happened. He seems so distraught and grief-stricken that your focus may switch from your pain to his—exactly what he wants. You may believe him, feel sorry for him, and take him back. Suddenly, you're in the honeymoon period again, where everything is wonderful and you're sure it won't happen again—but it does.

Although it's called the cycle of abuse, it's actually a spiral. The time between incidents grows shorter and shorter. The honeymoon and tension periods shrink. The incidents become more and more violent. The result of domestic abuse is often death. On average, more than three women in the United States die each day at the hands of the men who profess to love them.¹⁰ It's time to say, "Stop. No more."

Maya Angelou said, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." Not just the first time he hits you, but the first time he *puts you down* or *makes you feel less than who you are*. The first time he *runs over your boundaries*, or *discounts your feelings*. All of these are red flags warning you that you are in danger. (For more information, see the Cycle of Abuse on page 203.)

Destructive Thinking and Self-Talk

Abuse escalates so slowly that you may not realize where it's taking you. It starts with a derogatory comment here and a tight grip on your arm there. If you confront him, he tells you it's no big deal. He didn't mean it. You're too sensitive. As the abuse grows, he manipulates you to believe he's the one in pain and he needs you. No one else understands him. These are emotional hooks to make you feel sorry for him. You believe him and are sure that if you can just love him enough, he will change. Because you care about him, you adjust your thinking to allow you to stay in this impossible situation. Research shows that long-term exposure to emotional abuse causes chemical changes in the brain.¹¹ As a result, the victim's view of the severity of the abuse becomes skewed.

If you are thinking the way I did, you are clinging to the fantasy that one day he will wake up sorry for all he has put you through, that he will

transform into a prince. He will recognize that you made him who he now is and will be eternally grateful to you for saving him. We are kidding ourselves. As long as he refuses to admit what he is doing, and will not get help to stop this behavior, the abuse will continue and its severity will escalate.

The truth is—if he hits you once, he will hit you again. If he humiliates you once, he will do it again. People do what works for them. If controlling you through bullying or physical attacks gets him what he wants, why would he change?

Should I Stay? Should I Leave?

Of course, I want to tell you to run away from this guy. (Actually, I would like to tell you to have him thrown in jail if he has assaulted you and to prosecute him to the fullest extent of the law.) Having been there, I know it's more complicated than that. Yet to outside observers, the choice to stay in a relationship that has turned abusive seems absurd. *Why would anyone put up with that?* they wonder.

They don't understand that what happens to women in these relationships is the same thing that often happens to kidnapping victims. It's a survival mechanism called the Stockholm Syndrome.¹² After a period, those kidnapped begin to side with their captor.

When we put this dynamic within the context of what is supposed to be a loving relationship, you can more easily understand the myriad of shackles that hold you. You love him and have known him to be loving and caring in return. You wonder why the relationship that had been so wonderful before can't be that way again, permanently.

This person whom you love most in the world, and who at first said you were perfect, now constantly declares that you are a stupid, worthless woman. Soon, he doesn't have to tell you that anymore. He has repeated it often enough that you have a nonstop message in your head to remind you. He's battered your self-esteem into the ground. He's blamed you for everything that has gone wrong, "If you had only (insert action here), everything would have been okay." He's convinced you that no one else would want you. In addition, you may feel embarrassed and full of shame for allowing the abuse to continue. You may not have any money. He's kept you from working and/or he controls all the finances. He may have taken away your car keys, or actually locked you in the house when he went out. You are

exactly where he wants you to be. You are no longer a person; you're his possession. Pile on the fear that if you try to leave, he will find you and beat or kill you. How could you not feel trapped and confused?

By the time your relationship reaches the point of deciding whether to leave or stay, you are deeply entrenched and filled with fear.

The severity of your abuse may require you to break off the relationship—or it may not. Only you can decide that. This is a difficult decision and you must examine and weigh all the variables, what's in your best interest, your children's best interest, and what help is available to you. You can call the abuse hotline in your area or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) for information on available help or just to talk to a compassionate person.

Your partner may willingly (or grudgingly) seek professional help and make the needed changes. If your partner is willing to attend counseling, carefully consider what type of therapy would work best in your situation. Some mental health professionals believe that couples counseling is effective, but only if there is no physical abuse going on. Others hold that the best approach in situations of domestic abuse is always what they call "gender-specific domestic violence treatment." This means a male batterer attends private or group therapy with other males. A professional trained to work specifically with batterers leads the group. (See Darald Hanusa's interview online for more information. See page xiii in the front of this book for instructions on accessing the interview. Also see pages 215–216 for Web sites to help you find professional help.)

I stand with those respected professionals who say the controlling partner must enter treatment for batterers. There should be no couples counseling until he has completed the program. I think you will understand why if you ask yourself whether you will feel comfortable speaking openly in front of your partner about his abusive behavior. Couples counseling can give your partner more information about your vulnerabilities that he can use to manipulate you. In addition, if he is unhappy with what you tell the therapist, you could be in danger. If he completes batterer's treatment and you decide to do couples counseling, make sure you choose a therapist trained in domestic abuse counseling.

If your partner also has a substance use problem, most therapists suggest

he also complete a qualified treatment program before you consider joint counseling.

I have to be honest and say that even with treatment your partner may not change. Abusive behavior is a choice. You aren't responsible for his choice. You don't deserve any kind of abuse under any circumstance or for any reason—and you can't make him change.

If you request that he get help and he refuses, or plays games, pretending he's attending counseling but isn't, and you stay, or keep returning to him, he will feel justified in continuing the violence. You may have to get help and leave for the benefit of your children and your future. Yes, breaking up hurts. Yes, you are afraid. Please know that the pain of breaking up hurts only for a short time, then you can move on. Abusive relationships hurt 24-7-365. There were days when the pain was so bad, it took all my energy just to keep breathing.

Change can be a scary thing. It takes a lot of work. It can be painful and tough. Let me tell you that it's no more difficult than what you are, or were, doing each day to maintain the relationship.

Change is liberating! When I left my relationship, I felt, "It's too late, and I'm too old. No one will ever want me." I joined a group with others healing from broken relationships. Our ages ranged from twenty-six to sixty-five. Every woman who wanted to be in a loving relationship believed she was "too old" and it was "too late." The sixty-five-year-old was the first to meet someone special. Others of us followed. Read "No One Else Will Ever Love Me" and "It's Too Late to Start Over" in chapter 8. An old proverb tells us it's never too late to turn around when you are headed down the wrong path.

If you are staying because you are afraid that if you go into a shelter you will have to leave behind a beloved pet, that's not necessarily so. More and more humane organizations have foster homes for large or small animals, loving people who will care for your pet until you are in a stable situation.

Whether you choose to leave the relationship or not, you have the power to move toward healing and to recover. Even if your partner won't enter therapy, you can. (See the Jennifer Parker and Eve Lipchik interviews online for advice on finding a therapist. See page xiii in the front of this book for instructions on accessing the interviews.) If your partner refuses to

let you go into therapy, ask yourself, “Does my partner have my best interest at heart?”

Leaving is one of several options. The timing is up to you. For now, you can reduce your negative self-talk and stop blaming yourself for your partner’s behavior. Treat yourself with the grace and honor you would extend toward your best friend. Remember this is not your fault; you don’t have to and shouldn’t go through this alone. Reach out for the support that surrounds you. This is his shame, not yours. Start thinking of yourself as a survivor, not a victim. Make your choices in your own, and your children’s, best interest.

NOTE: Leaving a violent relationship can be dangerous. If you choose to leave, *you must work with people who can help and protect you.* Contact your local women’s shelter, go to www.ndvh.org, or again, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233), to learn about safe ways to leave. See Safety Planning on pages 207–211 for suggested ways to stay safe in the meantime.

If You Have Children . . .

I know as a parent, you are concerned about the safety of your children. Abuse focused on one person has a way of spilling over to other members of a family. Just hearing or witnessing violence changes a child. Statistics show that child abuse often follows spousal abuse. If your partner attacks your children, call 911. (In addition, see Ann Brickson’s interview online for information on ways to help your children. See page xiii for instructions on accessing the interview.)

If you are afraid he will harm your children, and you can safely leave, do so and go to your local shelter or other safe place. If you need help leaving, contact the National Coalition against Domestic Violence at www.ncadv.org for information on resources available to you and your children through your local domestic abuse service agency. The National Domestic Violence Hotline personnel can also help you with this. See pages 215–216 for a list of some of the national hotlines and Web sites.

YOUR ROAD TO HEALING

Where Do I Start?

To create a life of peace and joy, we must face the facts and acknowledge the truth of our situations. For me, it meant admitting that I was in an abusive relationship, identifying the network of lies my partner had created, and understanding the components of domestic abuse. I had to stop blaming myself for my partner's behavior and hold him responsible. I had to face the fact that there are people in this world who will use cruel tactics to manipulate someone who loves them to get what they want. I had to learn to trust my instincts again. As a parent, I had to learn to model better self-care and relationship skills. Over time, I transcended the past and cast off the labels of "victim" and "survivor." Now I am a woman who spent a small percentage of her life in an abusive relationship. This part of my past doesn't influence my future.

A NOTE ABOUT LABELS: Recognizing yourself as a victim is an important first step in recovering from domestic abuse. Then you move on to understanding you are a survivor, a person who has the power to survive in a horrid situation. These labels serve a purpose in the beginning of our healing journey, but we don't want to embrace the labels or let them define who we are. As we begin to heal, we will eventually see the abuse as one period in our lives, something that happened to us, but it is not who we are. So with time and work, labels fall away. Otherwise we spend the rest of our lives seeing ourselves as damaged. We are not damaged. We are strong and capable.

How do you begin seeing the truth of your own situation? Reading and working through this book is a good first step. It will help you recognize the negative thinking and self-talk that is keeping you stuck. If you want your situation to change, you have to take action. If this was your first experience with an abusive partner, and the relationship was short-term, this book can open your eyes to the abuser's intention and manipulating behavior. *But He'll Change* and your circle of family and friends could be

enough to help you avoid future relationships with dangerous partners. However, if abusive partners have been your steady diet or you have invested years of your life in a relationship with an abuser, I recommend therapy. Abusive relationships can leave you disheartened and devastated that the relationship did not work out as you had hoped. It helps to have a therapist explore these feelings with you.

This book *should not* take the place of a therapist. It should support, not replace, the work you do in therapy. Use it as an additional tool to reinforce what you learn in your sessions and to help you between visits—during those weak moments when the old life, where you knew the score, is tugging at you. Old habits make deep grooves in our lives. Filling in those grooves and making new ones takes time and effort.

Therapy—Group and Individual

If you decide to see a therapist, be sure he or she is trained in treating victims of domestic violence. The women's shelter in your area or your doctor can refer you to a group or individual that is a trained professional. If money is a problem, ask for a referral to someone who charges on a sliding scale, such as those at a social service organization. There may also be free peer-based support groups through the domestic abuse service agency. A facilitator, not a therapist, would lead this group. For more information on how to find the right therapist, see the online interviews with domestic abuse experts (see page xiii in the front of this book for instructions on accessing this document). I hope you will be open to trying whatever is available and affordable. Have the courage to walk away from any treatment that is not working. Don't be discouraged if it takes some time to find the right place to receive the help you need. You are worth the time and effort.

I found group therapy enormously helpful in my recovery. Hearing others' stories helped me to understand my own. The other group members brought up questions I didn't know to ask. Since we were all in different stages of healing, it helped to see how those who were beyond my stage navigated through the pain. I learned two important lessons in group therapy: to extend to myself the grace and tenderness that I felt toward the other women, and that I could trust my gut feelings.

I also spent time in individual therapy to address my specific issues. It was critical to my healing.

If you won't see a therapist because you are afraid that you will have to give up your partner, let me say again, you won't. A good therapist won't tell you what to do but rather will work with you in the framework of your choices without passing judgment on you.

A therapist's job is to flip on lights along your path so you can better see and understand the dynamics and patterns of your relationship. When you come to a fork in the road, a therapist shines a light in each direction to clarify what may lie ahead. He or she will help you examine your choices and options, and talk about how to deal with them. Then you decide what direction to take. He or she will help you explore the "bungee cords" that keep yanking you back into an unhappy relationship. If you decide to leave, your therapist will give you the tools to sever those cords so you can move on with your life. Only you can choose your life path. It is work, but the work is worth it . . . I know; I've done it.

I hope that the first therapist you see will be the right one for you, but just like any working relationship, you may have to try a few until you find the one that clicks with you.

There are some red flags about therapists. If you aren't feeling some relief within a few weeks, try a different therapist. Be cautious of those who are quick to offer medications. Often the same results can occur through talk therapy. If your therapist recommends having intimate contact or a sexual relationship with him or her to learn to trust again—run. Feeling attracted to your therapist isn't unusual, but a therapist with ethics will never participate in or suggest physical contact or a sexual encounter. Report any inappropriate behavior to your state medical society or licensing board.

The Work Ahead, and Healing, Takes Work

In a world of instant gratification, it may be overwhelming to look at long-term work. I remember wanting someone to take care of me. I didn't want to be responsible for providing a roof over the heads of my children and me. I wanted to ride on someone else's coattail. He would be the knight in shining armor, caring, providing for the family, and fighting my battles. I wanted a life of ease. That's not what life is about. Life—your life, just like my life—is long-term work. What your life becomes is totally up to you. You can put off the tough stuff, or you can plunge through it and onto the right track—the one that leads to healthy relationships.

Giving up what you have is frightening. You love him. When you picture yourself without him, you see a horrifying scene. Think about the special toy or blanket you had as a child, the one you carried everywhere. Remember how you couldn't sleep without it tucked under your arm? When it was lost, you felt the whole world was crumbling around you. Remember how anxious or hysterical you were and that horrid pain in your stomach from fear that your precious toy was gone forever? You cried until it was found. Where is that toy today? Chances are, it was discarded years ago or tucked away in a keepsake box. You grew out of it. You no longer need it because you've matured beyond that stage of your life. The same thing will happen with this painful relationship. You'll lay it aside and move on to a new and higher level of self-confidence.

It will take hard work to rebuild your life. You know what hard work is. Look at the effort you have put into your relationship. You are a victim, but you are also a survivor. You know what it takes to make it through each day. A therapist or your local women's shelter will help you develop a support and security system and guide you through the legal system, if necessary.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There is no right way or wrong way to use *But He'll Change*. Use it in whatever way it works for you.

I do suggest that you begin by looking over the chapter subheadings. If something clicks with you, you'll know where to begin. If you're feeling weak and are afraid you will cave in and return to an unhealthy relationship or be taken in again by your former partner, or a new abusive partner, look for the chapter subheading that matches most closely what you're telling yourself. Reading it will remind you why pursuing that relationship isn't in your best interest. Remind yourself that you deserve better. Also, consider what you are modeling to your children or the children around you.

I suggest you read the text aloud to engage your hearing. Read it to yourself in the mirror, over and over. Look deep into your eyes and tell yourself you deserve a happy life.

Relationships are complex and individualized. In my responses to the statements, I've included every circumstance I could think of. Some of the

paragraphs will not fit your situation. A bold highlighter can make the information that does speak to you stand out.

At the end of each statement section is a list of “Truths,” or affirmations. I suggest you read them aloud as often as needed, until you move the lessons from your brain to deep inside you, replacing the false beliefs. You may develop your own personal affirmations as well. During my healing, I wrote mine on the back of old business cards and carried them in my pocket. I took them out often and read them. In weak moments, just putting my hand on the small rubber-banded, well-worn packet gave me strength.

The affirmations are followed by “Issues to Explore.” These are suggested topics to talk about with your therapist or contemplate on your own.

Consider having a notebook or journal handy to

- ~ write answers to the exercises in the text and jot down any issues raised
- ~ add any additional statements, personal to your situation, and your responses
- ~ list questions or concerns you want to explore on your own or with your therapist
- ~ note the important points that you discover during therapy or group work

Journals are a safe place to express your feelings and clarify your thoughts. Later, you can measure your healing process by reviewing your journal. If you are still living with your controlling partner, keep your journal and this book well hidden or at a friend’s house.

At the end of this book, in the appendix, you will find information to help you better understand the many facets of abuse. Also included is a list of books and Web sites that I found helpful, and those suggested by therapists and friends. Transcending the past means healing all aspects of your life. It’s a lifetime process to become who you are meant to be; these books and sites can help.

In addition, excerpts from interviews I conducted with domestic abuse experts can be found in a PDF document online. These therapists discuss important issues, such as forgiveness, how living with abuse affects children, and how abusers can change. For instructions on how to access this

document see page xiii in the front of this book.

You are the only one who can change your life. Change begins with the first step. A little prayer for help can get you on your way too.

FINAL COMMENTS TO VICTIMS OF ABUSE

While you likely have said to yourself, “If only I’d done things differently,” “I was such an idiot,” or “Look what I’ve done to my children,” remember to be kind to yourself. I asked those I interviewed, “How do victims forgive themselves?” They all responded by saying: forgiving yourself means you’ve done something wrong. Abuse victims didn’t do anything wrong. They have nothing to forgive. Loving, trusting, and expecting the best from the person you love is the right thing to do. The one who betrays that trust is the one who has done wrong.

Let me add one last thing. If you and your partner are separated but still engaging in sex—stop it immediately. If you are separated but are still talking with him about anything other than the children’s welfare—stop it immediately. As long as you stay connected to this person, you are expelling your important energy into an empty hole. Put the energy into healing yourself. At least you have a willing participant.

IF YOU ARE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE OF A VICTIM OF ABUSE

I don’t have to tell you how painful it is to watch someone you love struggle in an abusive relationship. I know it breaks your heart and you feel helpless. On average, it takes seven attempts to leave before the victim can finally sever the cords and stay out of the relationship. It’s discouraging to watch someone you love return to an abuser. Do your best not to criticize her for going back. She has to do this in her own time. Let her know that though you may not understand what she is doing, you will respect her decisions and continue to care about her.

When I started volunteering with a domestic abuse agency, I thought shelter volunteers swooped in on their white horses, picked up the victim, and carried her away to a better life. I soon learned that abuse is about power and control. Victims need to take back the power over their lives. If you take control of the situation, you become the one who is holding the victim’s power.

So how can you help? First and foremost: *If you witness violence, immediately call the police.*

This is a painful and overwhelming process. You may not have the energy to walk with your friend through this darkness. That's okay because you can be the one who plants the first seed. Tell her you see what is happening to her and she doesn't deserve it. Tell her there is a way out when she is ready. Then provide her with the hotline number for the shelter in your area or the national hotline.

If you are willing to become more involved, there are some additional things you can do.

- ~ If she confides in you that her partner is abusive, tell her you believe her. Stay calm. If you start demonizing him, she will cling tighter to him. If you get angry and start ranting, you will be carrying her feelings. Let her experience her own anger. Just confirm what she says, and let her know that you are concerned.
- ~ Tell your friend that the violence is not her fault. In violent relationships, the abuser always blames the victim for everything that goes wrong. Remind her that she is not responsible for his behavior.
- ~ Tell her she deserves better. Don't tell her she's crazy for staying with him. That only confirms to her what she's been hearing all along—she's stupid. She won't believe she deserves better.
- ~ Remind her of all the wonderful things about her. She's only heard that she is worthless. She needs to remember her good traits.
- ~ Document her injuries. Take pictures of her bruises. Write the date on the back of the photos. Keep a calendar with notes of when you saw injuries and where they were located on her and what they looked like. You can keep the calendar even if she hasn't admitted what is happening. Your notes are admissible in a court of law to show that the abuse has been ongoing and is not just a one-time incident. One-time incidents are often dismissed.

Your documentation could be crucial to prove domestic violence.

- ~ Look over the safety planning information on pages 207–211. Tell her how you can help her. For example, keep a suitcase of her clothing, emergency documents, and funds, should she have to leave quickly. Have a signal that she needs help, a shade pulled, a plant placed in a window, a code word. Have her tell you where she is going and when she will return so if she doesn't show up when expected, you can notify the police.
- ~ Contact the shelter in your area for information regarding support services for your friend. Tell your friend that when she is ready to leave, you know where she can get help. Provide her with the shelter's phone number. If she is ready to talk to them, have her call from your house.

Caution: *Never put yourself in danger by confronting the batterer.*

Helping someone in this difficult situation can be draining for you. If you need support, your local shelter or a therapist (experienced in treating domestic violence) can support and direct you as you emotionally support your friend.

But He'll Change can help her if she is ready to read it. However, if she is still living with her partner, she can't take it home with her. You may have to keep it at your house.

On behalf of victims everywhere, I want to thank you for not ignoring what you see. You are a gift to those in pain and an important part of ending violence against women.

MY STORY



I met my partner in a bookstore. The moment our eyes met, it felt as if a bolt of lightning shot through me (just like in romantic fiction). He introduced himself and kissed my hand. For a young woman who had been a nobody in high school to have this attractive, intense guy focus on me was heady and wonderful. I was hooked.

Most people think that only those raised in violent homes go on to abusive relationships. That isn't true. I didn't come from a home where my parents beat up each other. Sure, Mom and Dad had arguments, but more often, Dad would chase Mom around the dining room table for a kiss—the two of them laughing like teenagers. My sisters and I would roll our eyes.

My parents raised me to have a kind heart. Along the way, wanting to be a “nice person,” I evolved into a people pleaser. Everyone else's needs and wants came before my own, even to my detriment.

When I met the bookstore guy, a guy who believed the only way he could keep a partner was by holding all the power and control in the relationship, our sicknesses melded perfectly. I gladly turned over control of my life to him because it made him happy. He gladly accepted it. We became a couple. His passion and desire for justice captivated me. I saw his anger focused on others. I never thought it would come around and land on me.

The first time he hit me was less than a year after we were married. He slapped me. I was stunned. Over the next few days, I convinced myself that it was a fluke and it wouldn't happen again. It did. During the fourth incident, he hit me so hard on the side of my head that he popped my eardrum.

This was back in the 1970s, when people didn't talk about this kind of thing. Ashamed, I didn't want to tell anyone, but my ears were ringing and I had trouble hearing. After three days, I knew I had to get medical help. I

didn't tell the doctor that my husband hit me. I said I got hit in the head with a ball but asked him to check both ears.

Today, medical personnel screen patients for abuse by asking, "Do you feel safe at home?" In the 1970s, medical personnel didn't get involved. The doctor simply told me to stuff cotton in my ear and keep it dry. It would heal in about three weeks. No questions asked.

After that incident, my mother's words came back to me: It is never okay for a man to hit a woman—*never*. On a calm evening, I sat beside my partner and said, "Look, I love you with all my heart. But if you continue to hit me, I will have to leave." He stood up and went into the bedroom, shutting the door. I could hear him crying. This was way out of character for him. He believed men don't cry. My people-pleasing heart said, "What have you done? You're a horrible person."

When he came out of the bedroom, he said, "I never thought you'd hurt me like this."

I remained silent, my heart aching.

He said, "I thought you loved me."

"I do love you."

"You said you would leave me."

"Yes. If you hit me, I will have to leave."

"Then you don't love me."

My people-pleasing heart was screaming, "Tell him you love him. Tell him you'll never leave—no matter what." My gut shouted, "Shut up. Don't retract the statement." I didn't take back the ultimatum. I set a boundary that day. I didn't know I set it until much later.

After that evening, he did abstain from hitting me; the physical violence in our relationship was limited to him shoving, grabbing, and pinning me up against the wall with his arm across my throat. He ratcheted up the emotional abuse. At that time I didn't recognize the red flags. I believed abuse only involved hitting and punching; now I know that abuse can also be verbal and psychological.

He used *constant criticism* and *name-calling*, telling me that I was a stupid, worthless woman who couldn't do anything right, repeatedly. Over time, the Stockholm Syndrome took over. My partner didn't have to tell me I was stupid or worthless. He had brainwashed me to the point where the message was constantly in my head to remind me.

Through *humiliation* and *ridicule* my partner taught me that to express my own feelings and needs was selfish. He made it clear that it was not safe for me to disagree with him.

If I said I wanted or needed something, he'd *withhold* it. He was generous with other things, but not with what I wanted most—he deliberately *withheld his love and acceptance*.

Ignoring my feelings was common. When a drunk at a party made advances to me, my partner ignored my gestures for help. A friend noticed my signals; he leaned toward my partner and said, “Your wife needs your help.” My partner said, “I know, but I’m not going to help her.” He was sending me a clear message that he held the power and control in our relationship and he would decide whether he would be there for me. My thoughts were: *If he won’t be there for me with a drunk at a party, how can I be sure he’ll be there for me if my life’s at stake? Will he help me or will he let me twist in the wind?* I couldn’t be sure.

Another red flag behavior in our relationships is called *messing with your mind*, or *crazy making*. If you’ve seen the classic 1944 movie *Gaslight* with Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, you know exactly what messing with your mind is. Boyer would move Bergman’s things around or hide them so Bergman thought she had misplaced them. He dimmed the gaslights and implied to her that she was imagining things. Systematically, he attempted to make her and those around her believe she was going crazy. His goal: put her in an asylum and control her wealth.

Though my partner’s motives were different (I didn’t have any wealth), he told me I had said and done things I hadn’t. He’d change his rules without telling me and expect me to know what he wanted. What was okay one day was not necessarily okay the next. He played many different mind games with me to destroy my self-trust and self-esteem.

Through ignoring my feelings and messing with my mind, he taught me that I couldn’t trust him. In addition, I couldn’t trust myself—I was going crazy. I felt helpless and trapped.

Those who know my story often ask why I stayed. First, I stayed because I truly loved him. Then, because I had sympathy for him; I knew he had pain in his life, and I wanted to save him. Also, we had children and I thought I was a stupid, worthless woman who couldn’t do anything right. How was I going to take care of my children on my own? Besides, he told

me if I tried to leave, he'd take the children from me and I'd never see them again. I was brainwashed to the point where I believed he could. Then I stayed because he had a .357 Magnum—a big gun. He never threatened me with it, but I knew it was there, loaded in his desk drawer.

Let's go back to that boundary I set so many years before. Toward the end of our relationship, my partner slammed me against the wall and put his arm across my throat, pressing in until spots swam in my tear-filled eyes. He said, "You gonna leave me now?" I had thought he refrained from hitting me because I hadn't made him angry enough. I believed it was only a matter of time until he'd step over that line. After all, he'd swaggered over my boundaries in all areas of my life. Pinned against the wall that day, I realized he hadn't hit me because he didn't want me to leave him. So if I said I'm leaving, what would keep him from beating me or pulling out that gun? I didn't know. I stayed because he had bound me with ropes of fear and I felt suffocated.

I can't begin to find words to explain how painful it was to live with this man. I used to wake up in the morning before the alarm clock rang. I'd lie there and pray, "Dear God, please don't let it be morning. Please give me just one more hour before I have to face my life today." Then I would roll over and look at the clock. Some days God granted that hour, others God didn't.

There are as many different "final straws" as there are victims. For me it was when he began to turn the violence on our children. Often women can do what seems the impossible when their children are at risk. He'd hacked off my love for him with each violent, disrespectful act toward me—and then the children.

It came to a head at a Fourth of July party. Our children were away visiting my parents, so it was just the two of us. We were staying with Robert and Jane in our old neighborhood. All our old friends from the block were there. I was sitting in the living room listening to one of Robert's great stories. My partner came to the kitchen door. He said, "Come out and sit with me while I play cards."

I said, "Okay. As soon as Robert is finished with his story, I'll be out."

"No. You'll come now."

As I turned to Robert to excuse myself, my partner charged across the room and grabbed me by my arms. He pulled me up into his face and began screaming at me. The stunned neighbors watched in silence as he

berated me. They knew nothing about his violent temper. He was the first one to help dig a neighbor's garden, shovel a driveway, or work on a car. He shoved me toward the bedroom and told me to pack—we were leaving. I did what he said. One of my friends followed me to the bedroom and asked, "What is he doing? Is he really like this?" Shame burned my face.

My partner had been drinking all day. I was afraid to get in our vehicle with him. I asked my friend to have Jane speak to him, believing that if anyone could calm him down, she could.

While packing, I could hear Jane talking with him in the kitchen. He was yelling; she kept her voice calm. When I went to the kitchen door, they were nose to nose. He was screaming in her face. I was afraid he would hit her. He snatched the suitcase from me and walked out to the car. I didn't move. He returned and said, "Let's go." Everything around me went black. I saw myself standing in a dark room. The door was open. There was light out there, but it didn't shine into the blackness. A voice said, "If you don't leave now, the door will close and you will live in this darkness forever." I looked at my partner. For the first time in our life together, I told him no.

"I'm not going with you," I said.

His eyes narrowed. The purple-blue veins in his neck stood out, crimson spider-webbed across his face. He started batting around the chairs and hitting the table, bellowing threats. The other men at the party gathered around him and walked him to the vehicle. I followed, pulled the suitcase from the back, opened it, drew out my clothing, and then quickly returned to the house. He left.

He called me from the gas station a block away. "Are you coming with me?" he demanded to know.

"No."

"If you don't come with me now, you can never come back."

"Okay," I said and hung up. I knew our relationship was over. I had committed the worst offense against him anyone could—I defied him. The reality of my leaving demolished the wall of protection. There was no longer a reason to restrain himself from harming me.

I waited up all night. I figured it was two hours to where we lived—ten minutes for him to get the gun—two hours back to kill me. I believed I'd be dead in less than five hours.

He didn't come back. The next day, I flew to my parents' home and contacted a lawyer. It was over. I was divorced within ninety days of filing. A couple months later, I realized I'd left him on Independence Day. God has a sense of humor.

When I left the relationship the mantra running through my head was, *Why couldn't he love me? What's so awful about me that he couldn't love me?* It took therapy to turn around that thinking and teach me that it wasn't me—it was him.

I was desperate to be well—to be able to trust myself again—to get my thinking right so I would never find myself in that position again. I had to stretch muscles I never knew I had. It was difficult and uncomfortable. Fierce determination drove me to pick myself up and move forward. I sought help from pastors, therapists (who charged on a sliding scale), and support groups. I examined, then clipped, the strings that held me in the relationship and kept putting one foot in front of the other. I took every challenge my therapist threw at me and filled my journal, writing my way through the anger I had stuffed for so long. When that didn't give me relief, I pounded on my bathtub with a towel, freeing the rage. (A wet towel makes a beautiful sound on porcelain.)

Over time, I climbed from the deep pit, stepping on boulders of, "I don't deserve this," "There is light at the end of the tunnel," "I must do it for my children's sake," and "I can do this." I filled small cards with Bible verses and affirmations, such as: "You are in control" and "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love."¹³ and carried them in my pocket. Touching them gave me strength. I read everything I could get my hands on and struggled to replace the negative thoughts that kept me stuck in the past with the truth of what I deserved and could have.

In weak moments when I was afraid I'd have to go back to him, I called a girlfriend who would come, sit and listen, then assure me there was no good reason to return to the abuser. There were times when I took a step or two backwards and faltered. I tried not to chastise myself for those moments, but continued to urge myself on. There was a goal in sight. I learned to take back my power without wielding it as a weapon or using it as a shield to protect me from pain, to express my needs, and to look at men not as the enemy, but as equals. I learned to be wise about protecting my children and me. I tasted the sweetness of a peaceful life and wanted more,

so I trudged through the agony of facing my abuser in court. As my self-respect grew, my abuser's power over me diminished.

Those aching muscles started to hurt less over time. My self-esteem began to grow. I rediscovered myself and found that I could provide for my children and myself. We made sacrifices and went without a lot. It wasn't easy. With the guidance of therapists, my children and I stumbled along, reconstructing our lives. We came out stronger and wiser. Our reward was living in a peaceful home that held no fear—one that allowed us to focus on our own lives instead of keeping one disgruntled member happy.

I never thought I could be happy living without a partner. I was. Ironically, then I met a man. I fell in love—not madly with unabandoned passion as in my youth—but with quiet dignity. Hopeful, but terrified, I allowed the bud of love to open at its own pace. I revealed to my partner who I was and learned that I did not have to change for him to love me. Five years later, we were married. My husband is my knight in shining armor, but he doesn't fight my battles for me; he knows that I am capable of dealing with problems on my own. He supports me, listens to me, and encourages me.

My prayer is that this book will help you rewrite your self-talk so that you remember the special and unique person you are. As Rabbi Harold S. Kushner says in his book *How Good Do We Have to Be?*, “One of the basic needs of every human being is the need to be loved, to have our wishes and feelings taken seriously, to be validated as people who matter.”

May it be so for you.

Chapter 1



SEEING HIM AS
ALL-POWERFUL
AND THE CENTER
OF MY WORLD

Love is one of our basic needs.

Both women and men have visions of what love is and what being loved looks like. Because we are all individuals, our interpretations vary somewhat.

A woman's vision may look something like this: She and her sweetheart will forge a partnership where the two are helpmates, create a home, share household responsibilities, encourage each other in their professions, plan for a family, and raise children. In the evening, they will curl together on the sofa and relax while they share their day, basking in each other's love and devotion. Yes, there may be arguments, but they will only serve to clear the air and be followed by great makeup sex. This is a healthy, reasonable vision and one that is often similar to what men envision.

When a woman receives attention from a seemingly intelligent, insightful, giving, and romantic gentleman, she may come to believe he is her perfect mate. However, if this man is controlling and abusive, the aforementioned behavior is a sham.

She thinks that he's asking questions about her because he finds her fascinating. However, whether deliberate or just a facet of his entitlement nature, he is actually collecting data (her vulnerabilities, fears, and hopes) that he can use later to control her. While she is thrilled that he listens to her point of view, he is actually learning how she thinks so he can bend her will to his. While she is excited that he thinks she's so wonderful and sexy he can't keep his hands off her, he's pressing her to become sexually involved to hook her emotionally.

She thinks she has fallen in love with someone who shares her vision. She hasn't. His plan is to draw her into his vision, a world where he is the center of the universe. He expects that she will recognize his intelligence and superiority and forsake all others (including herself, her dreams, and passions in life) to serve him.

A controlling man has a sense of entitlement. To him, a woman is inferior, put on this earth to meet his every need—be it a clean and well-cared-for home, cooking his favorite foods, or sex the way he wants it and when he wants it. Her needs and wants never enter his vision. To him they don't exist.

When he believes she has fallen for him, he begins to play mind games

with her, whittling away at her self-esteem, using the information he's acquired from her to keep her locked in the relationship. He deliberately creates chaos in her life to keep her confused and focused, not on what he is doing—setting up the privileged position for himself—but on how she can make the relationship better. Seeking to make sense of his erratic manner, she often tries to overlook his behavior and reinterpret it, accepting responsibility for the problems. He, on the other hand, believes he is taking his rightful position as master of his domain.

He may be a well-respected member of the community. Often people will remark how lucky she is to have such a great guy. But inside their relationship, the life they share is so different from the one he originally professed to want that she can't make sense of it. His constant accusations that it is all her fault causes her to question herself: *If everyone thinks he's wonderful, it must be my fault.*

For some abusers, children are either unwelcome—he makes sure there are none—or they can become tools to tie his partner to him. He may keep her barefoot and pregnant or hurt the children to get back at her.¹⁴

Over time, it's likely that he's brainwashed her to believe that he has the power to fool legal and psychological experts, so she better not attempt to leave him. He may have taken control of the money so she has none and convinced her she is so incompetent she could never care for the children on her own. If she tries to run away, he's confident that the courts would take his word over hers. He'll get custody of the children, and she'll never see them again. He assures her that no one can protect her from him. Wherever she tries to hide, he will find her, drag her back, and make her pay for the trouble he claims she has caused.

Over time, she comes to accept that he holds the power. Like a kidnapping victim, she falls prey to Stockholm Syndrome and begins to side with her "captor," internalizing his negative opinions of her.

yes, but . . .

I Love Him

.....

In my journal during a quiet moment, I will examine the following questions:

- ~ *What do I really love about my partner?*
- ~ *What would I change about him?*
- ~ *Do I really love him or do I love an image of how I think he could be, or how he has been for short snippets of time?*



People do what works for them. My partner is abusive toward me because it serves him well; it gets him what he wants. He seeks to gain complete power and control over our relationship. The only time he meets my needs is when he thinks he may lose me. At that point, he'll say and do whatever it takes to keep me in the relationship. Yet as soon as he feels secure, he returns to his old behavior. This is the cycle of abuse. (See page 203 for more information on the cycle of abuse.)

As time goes on, the good times—the honeymoon period (where he is Mr. Wonderful)—will shrink and incidents of abuse (verbal or physical battering) will quickly follow the tension period (where Mr. Wonderful becomes irritated, short-tempered, and dissatisfied). In abusive relationships, the severity of violence usually escalates over time. The result is often emotional or even physical death. Staying in this relationship could also jeopardize the lives of my children.

As wonderful as the honeymoon period is, I now recognize that the abuse will always follow. His past behavior predicts his future behavior. As long as I participate in this cycle, it will continue. If my partner refuses to work with me to stop this cycle, I must decide if I'm willing to continue this relationship and endure the likely consequences.



I want to feel loved and valued. My partner uses this need to manipulate me so that he holds all the power and control of our relationship. He dangles a carrot—the promise of what our relationship could be—before me, but never lets me reach it. I struggle to win his affection so that he will make me feel loved and valued. I must learn to love and value myself.



Showering him with love will not stop the abuse. I can't love him into changing. My being a doormat or martyr won't make him love me or treat me any better. He must choose to change. He tells me repeatedly that he wants to change. He hasn't. Since his past behavior predicts his future behavior, I know his promises are empty. If he truly wanted to change, he would do what it takes and get professional help.



Instead of telling myself things that keep me stuck, my self-talk will now build me up. Over time, I'll become stronger. I won't let my love for him tie me to him. When the time is right, I will leave. For now, I will continue to work toward healing.



Sometimes we must close our hearts to those who hurt us.



I'll learn to show myself honor, love, and respect. I must love myself before I can love anyone else. Despite what my partner says, taking care of myself is not selfish. Loving and respecting myself is not conceited.

I am worthy of love.

TRUTHS



- Sometimes we must close our hearts to people who hurt us.
- I love and value myself.
- Although I love him, that doesn't mean I have to stay with him.
- As wonderful as the honeymoon period is, abuse will follow.
- His past behavior predicts his future behavior.
- Without his cooperation, the only way to break the cycle is to leave.
- Taking care of myself is not selfish.
- Loving and respecting myself is not conceited.
- I am worth loving and worth treating right.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Why I feel I must make him love me
2. Why I fear taking control of my own life
3. How I can change my role in the cycle of abuse
4. How it would feel to be in a loving relationship
5. What a loving relationship would look like

yes, but . . .

*I Miss Him (or I Need Him) and
Can't Live without Him*

.....

I've focused all of my energy on him and our relationship. I'm not sure who I am by myself anymore. I've turned my power over to him partly because I was afraid I couldn't make it on my own; I didn't believe in myself. Also, I thought it would prove my love for him. Lacking in self-esteem, I tried to find fulfillment through his successes rather than working toward my potential and individual dreams. This isn't healthy.

It's time that I change my thinking and work on my self-esteem. I am a whole person. I may need to develop some sides of my character that have been lost or repressed. I am capable of this work.



Why do I think I can't live without him? What would I really miss about him? A partial list includes the following:

- ~ *Saying that I have a partner in life*
- ~ *A warm body next to me*
- ~ *Sex*
- ~ *Talking to someone*
- ~ *My dream relationship*
- ~ *His repairing things around the house*

In my journal, I will list other things I would miss.



What are some things I will not miss about my partner? Examples include being

- ~ berated
- ~ lied to
- ~ forced to live by his rules
- ~ ignored or neglected when I need him
- ~ called stupid, worthless, ugly, lazy, and incompetent
- ~ battered
- ~ forced to serve his needs and wants
- ~ in constant fear of what he will do next
- ~ forced to make up excuses to other people for his bad behavior
- ~ humiliated in public

In my journal, I will list other things I will not miss.



If I walked away now, I would miss the dream I had for this relationship, not the man. There is a good chance that I can one day have that dream relationship with someone else. First, I must heal myself.

When I am ready, I must let go of the past so I can move on with the future.

TRUTHS



- If I left, I would miss the dream I had for this relationship, not the man.
- My dream will never come true with this partner.
- If I let go of the past, I can move on to the future.
- After healing, I can build a happy relationship with someone else.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Facing the truth of this relationship
2. Developing a realistic dream
3. Rebuilding my self-esteem
4. Rebuilding my ability to trust my feelings and intuition
5. Envisioning what my life without him would feel like

yes, but . . .

He Is Everything to Me

.....

My partner is my whole world. Allowing him to remain the center of my world isolates me and puts an end to my dreams and goals. This will stop me from achieving my purpose in life—which is not to keep him happy. There is a greater one for me to discover. I'll work to recover the dreams and goals that I had to release and begin to focus on achieving them. I'll fight through the fear of failure. It will take work, but I can do it. I know what hard work is. I've put plenty of hard work into this relationship.



In a healthy relationship, partners encourage each other to explore their gifts and talents to the fullest. They are each other's biggest advocate.

TRUTHS



- I am a whole person. I don't need anyone else to complete me.
- I'll work to uncover the dreams and goals that I released and begin to focus on achieving them.
- In a healthy relationship, partners encourage each other to explore their gifts and talents.
- Someone who loves me will be my biggest advocate.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Fear of failure
2. How he became the center of my world and how to ease him out of that position
3. Rediscovering my dreams and goals

Suggested reading:

When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right by Ann Jones and Susan Schechter, Harper Perennial, New York, 1993

yes, but . . .

It Will Hurt to Leave Him

.....

Yes, it would be painful to leave, but how painful is it to be with him if he continues his current behavior? In my journal, I will answer the following questions:

- ~ *On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the most painful, where does my relationship fall?*
- ~ *Will I feel some relief to be free of this partner?*
- ~ *Am I more afraid that he will hurt me if I leave or that I will regret leaving him?*

I will carefully evaluate my situation and should I decide to leave, I will seek help from my therapist or the local women's shelter, or I will call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) for information on how to leave safely.



The hurt from leaving would be temporary. It will go away. If I stay in an abusive relationship, I'll suffer nearly every moment of my life.



He is not the only person I'll ever love. If I leave the relationship, rebuilding my life will be my top priority. This will take some time, but eventually I may choose to turn my attention to meeting someone new. I will have an opportunity to build a relationship that includes the following:

- ~ *Trust*
- ~ *Respect*
- ~ *Understanding*

- ~ *Patience*
- ~ *Communication*
- ~ *Humor*
- ~ *Companionship*
- ~ *Mutuality*
- ~ *Honesty*

TRUTHS



- Ending a painful relationship is not easy, but it is possible.
- Breaking up hurts for a short period.
- This is not the only person I'll ever love.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Safety planning with a therapist or women's shelter professional (see Safety Planning on pages 207–211)
2. Grieving this relationship
3. Taking care of myself
4. Dealing with my anger and fear

yes, but . . .

*I Have to Do What He Wants
or He Won't Love Me*

.....

To keep me from noticing that he has positioned himself as the center of my world, he creates confusion in my life. His game is to make me feel that I am lacking and must be better if he is to love me. However, no matter how loving and giving I am, he points out that it is not good enough. I now realize that he will continue to raise that bar so that I'm never able to win his approval. His power comes from denying me the goal I seek—to be in a mutual loving and nurturing relationship.



Someone who loves me would not threaten me or force me to do something I don't want to do or be someone I'm not. Love doesn't mean I must become a puppet or that I must meet his perceived need at the expense of my own.



Asking me to do what feels uncomfortable or putting me in a risky place shows his lack of love and respect. This includes sexual situations and the way he wants me to dress, drive, act, and so on.

If I have to change before he will love me, it's control not love. Someone who loves me will respect who I am and allow me to be myself even if he doesn't always agree with me. While it's important to be flexible and it's okay to acquiesce at times, I don't need to give up my comfort zone, beliefs, and feelings to make someone else happy.



Not everyone will agree with me or like me. That doesn't mean that I'm unlikable or a horrible person. It means that we have different ideas, opinions, and interests. Conflict can be healthy and lead to positive change as long as it is nonabusive.

TRUTHS



- Someone who loves me will respect who I am and what I think even if he doesn't agree with me.
- I don't need to give up my beliefs and feelings to make someone else happy.
- Not everyone needs to like me.
- I have a right to be who I am.
- Conflict can be healthy and lead to positive change as long as it is nonabusive.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. My need to have everyone like me
2. My need to earn my partner's love
3. What activities and behaviors are outside my comfort zone and are nonnegotiable for me

Suggested reading:

Do I Have to Give Up Me to Be Loved by You? by Jordan Paul and Margaret Paul, Hazelden, Center City, MN, 2002

yes, but . . .

*I Have to Do What He Wants
Sexually or He Won't Love Me
(or He'll Find Someone Else)*

.....

Great sex happens between two people who come freely and willingly to the encounter and are as concerned about their partner's pleasure as they are about their own. This means that each partner would not ask, expect, or force the other partner to engage in any activity against his or her will. (For more information on sexual abuse, see *What Is Abuse?* on page 197.)



Forcing a partner to engage in sexual activity is rape even if you are married.



People in healthy relationships build satisfying, pleasurable, and intimate sexual lives based on trust and respect.



Threatening to go outside the relationship for sexual satisfaction is how he intimidates and attempts to coerce me into doing things that are not in my pleasure range. This shows his selfishness and lack of concern for my feelings. Someone who loves me would never expect me to participate in sexual activities that hurt, embarrass, or threaten my life.

TRUTHS



- Great sex happens between two people who are as concerned about their partner's pleasure as they are about their own.
- Satisfying, pleasurable, and intimate sexual lives are based on trust and respect.
- I do not participate in a sexual activity that hurts me, embarrasses me, or threatens my life.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. What I am looking for in a sexual relationship
2. Building blocks for intimacy

yes, but . . .

*I Have to Tell Him Everywhere I Go
and What I Do So He Can Reach Me*

or

*He Shows Up Unexpectedly Because
He Loves Me*

.....

Early in a relationship, these behaviors may seem flattering and look like love and concern. They are not. These are power and control issues. I will maintain control of my life.

Trust is a foundational part of a relationship. Requiring me to report in, and to be available so he can check up on me, shows his lack of trust—and so do his unexpected appearances. These actions are disrespectful. People who love each other, trust each other. Though my partner may say he does this out of love, it's control, not love. Following me is a form of stalking.



If his former partner was disloyal, he should have dealt with that issue before he entered into a committed relationship with me. He can't deal with past hurts if he's too busy being paranoid about me. If he wants to get over it, he'll get professional help and work on healing. If he doesn't want to deal with it and expects me to live in his paranoia, he needs to know that I won't.



Often, the person doing the accusing is the one who is being untrustworthy. If my partner accuses me of being unfaithful, there's a good chance that he is

being unfaithful himself. Cheaters often throw guilt and blame on their partners as a way of justifying and camouflaging their own bad behavior.



If my ex-partner follows me or tries to contact me after I've told him to stop, I will contact the police and report his stalking and unwanted contact. I can obtain a court order to tell my ex-partner to stay away from me. I will also keep a record in a date book or on a calendar of any stalking or unwanted contact from him, including dates, locations, damage to property, and physical attacks. I will save (in a safe place) any unwelcome mail, e-mail, and voice-mail messages I receive from him. These are documents I can use in court to prove his violent intentions and inappropriate behavior.

TRUTHS



- Trust is the foundation of a healthy relationship.
- People who love each other trust each other.
- Often, the person doing the accusing is the one who is being untrustworthy.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Learning to trust my instincts
2. Looking at my history of trusting others
3. Components of real trust in relationships
4. Appropriate circumstances to keep a partner abreast of my activities
5. Finding a safe place to keep documents, pictures, and other material that show his violent behavior
6. When to go to the police and when to go to court for an order of protection

yes, but . . .

*If I Try to Leave, He Will Kill Me
or My Children*

.....

I take my partner's threats seriously.



The current situation has no chance of improving. If I stay, it will only grow worse and more violent. I could easily end up dead. He could also kill my children. I will document my injuries and any injuries to my children and keep this record in a safe place. Such documents may prove that my children and I need protection from him.

Leaving is dangerous. I will carefully weigh the safety issues for my children and me, then make my decision in our best interest. Should I leave, I'll take advantage of all available help. I'll seek help from my therapist and/or call the abuse hotline in my city or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) for help creating a safety plan. I'll work with the police, show them my documentation, and obtain an order of protection or restraining order. I will tell my friends and family the truth of my situation so that they can be on guard. I'll notify my place of work, my neighbors, and my children's teachers and school personnel.

Part of my partner's power comes from keeping the abuse a secret. Speaking the truth ends that hold on me. I will tell others what is happening.



People who care for me will lend a hand. They will watch for my former partner should he come near me after I have an order of protection. They'll be an extra pair of hands, helping me transition into a new and better life.



I will raise my children in a home filled with love and peace.

TRUTHS



- I'll surround myself with supportive people.
- I can work with the court system to protect my children and myself.
- I will tell the truth—no more secrets or pretending.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. How to protect myself
2. How to protect my children
3. How to create a safety plan and a plan to leave the relationship
4. What to expect and not expect from the court system

Suggested reading:

Breaking the Cycle of Abuse: How to Move Beyond Your Past to Create an Abuse-Free Future by Beverly Engel, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 2005

Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life by Ginny NiCarthy, Seal Press, Berkeley, CA, 2004

yes, but . . .

*If I Divorce Him He Will Take My
Children from Me or Will Have the
Children Alone for Visitation*

.....

Just because my partner says something does not make it possible or true.

He says he will take the children away. There is no proof that he can do that. If he shows a history of abuse through police reports and medical records, the judge is unlikely to give him custody of the children. If the children are teens, the judge will most likely consider their feelings. The court can appoint an attorney to protect my children's interest. I will ask my lawyer to suggest an attorney who knows about the effects of witnessing abuse on children. A court-appointed therapist, trained in domestic violence issues, can evaluate my children and advise the judge that my children are safer with me.



He says his friends will testify against me. Lying on the witness stand is perjury. His friends won't risk going to jail for him. He's bluffing to force me to stay.



Yes, it is possible that he could get visitation, but if my attorney has had experience in domestic violence litigation, he or she can work with the court-appointed psychiatrist to show that my partner is abusive. The judge may order supervised or limited visitations. If any harm comes to the children, I will report it to the police immediately.

TRUTHS



- Just because my partner says something does not make it possible or true.
- I can work with the court system to protect my children and myself.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. How to find an attorney who litigates domestic violence cases
2. Finding support people for my children within the court system

yes, but . . .

He Is a Good Provider

.....

While I may like the trappings that my partner's income gives me, I'm paying a huge price in my spirit if I trade my safety, peace, and happiness for this lifestyle. As much as I may fear losing the income my partner provides, I know that safety must come first. I can begin to gain new skills that will help me find a new or better job and build my own financial security.



I'd like my children to continue their varied activities, but what they are learning from my relationship is dangerous for their future. Their safety and well-being is at stake. A loving, safe home is more important than all the activities and things money can provide.

TRUTHS



- I will not trade my safety, peace, and happiness for a lifestyle.
- I can build a financially secure future for myself.
- A loving, safe home is more important than all the activities and things money can provide.

ISSUES TO EXPLORE



1. Creating a plan to learn a new or higher-level profession
2. Identifying needs and limiting wants

Chapter 2



DENYING AND
MINIMIZING HIS
BEHAVIOR

CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Children

The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics by Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2002

Childhood Experiences of Domestic Violence by Caroline McGee, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2009

Children Who See Too Much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project by Betsy McAlister Groves, Beacon Press, Boston, 2003

Learning to Listen, Learning to Help: Understanding Woman Abuse and Its Effects on Children by Linda Baker and Alison Cunningham, Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System, London Family Court Clinic, London, Ontario, 2005. Available as free download at www.lfcc.on.ca/learning.html.

Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as They Grow by Alison Cunningham and Linda Baker, Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System, London Family Court Clinic, London, Ontario, 2007. Available as free download at www.lfcc.on.ca/little_eyes_little_ears.html.

Teens

The Breakable Vow by Kathryn Ann Clarke, HarperCollins, New York, 2004. Fiction book, written for teens

But I Love Him: Protecting Your Teen Daughter from Controlling, Abusive Dating Relationships by Jill Murray, HarperCollins, New York, 2001

NOTES



1. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, “Cause and Theories of Domestic Violence,” Stop Violence Against Women: A Project by the Advocates for Human Rights, www.stopvaw.org/sites/3f6d15f4-c12d-4515-8544-26b7a3a5a41e/uploads/TheoriesDV.PDF

2. Larry W. Bennett, “Myths about Alcohol and Domestic Violence,” Stop Violence Against Women: A Project by the Advocates for Human Rights, www.stopvaw.org/Myths_About_Alcohol_and_Domestic_Violence.html.

3. “Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.,” U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2006, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/intimate/victims.htm.

4. A Safe Place: Lake County Crisis Center, “Statistics of Battered Women,” www.asafeplaceforhelp.org/batteredwomenstatistics.html.

5. “Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.: Victim Characteristics, 1976–2005,” U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/intimate/victims.htm.

6. “Homicide Trends in the U.S.: Intimate Homicide,” U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/intimates.htm.

7. Leo Buscaglia, *Loving Each Other: The Challenge of Human Relationships* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 15.

8. V. Frye, “Examining Homicide’s Contribution to Pregnancy-Associated Deaths,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285, no. 11 (2001).

9. Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), 19.

10. Callie Marie Rennison, “Intimate Partner Violence, 1993–2001,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief* (February 2003).

11. Bessel van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Post Traumatic Stress,” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 1, no. 5 (1994): 253–65.

12. The Stockholm Syndrome describes the behavior of kidnapping victims who, over time, become sympathetic to their captors. The name comes from a hostage incident in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1973. After six days of captivity in a bank, several kidnapping victims resisted rescue attempts and later refused to testify against their captors.

13. 2 Timothy 1:7.

14. See *Why Does He Do That?* or *The Batterer as a Parent* by Lundy Bancroft for a better understanding of this complicated topic.

15. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 188.

16. Bill Moyers Journal, *Beyond Our Differences*, DVD, directed by Peter Bisanz (Alexandria, VA: PBS Home Video, 2009).

17. “Toxic faith is a destructive and dangerous relationship with a religion that allows the religion, not the relationship with God, to control a person’s life.” Definition is from the following: Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 31.

18. The phrase *Emotional Bank Account* is from the following: Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Simon & Schuster/Free Press, 2004), 188.

19. TED: The Editor’s Desk, “Women’s Earnings as a Percentage of Men’s, 1979–2007, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 29, 2008, www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2008/oct/wk4/art03.htm.

HAZELDEN, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden offers a comprehensive approach to addiction that addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

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He loves me. He has a really sweet side. I am all he has.

If only his boss wouldn't put him under so much stress.

At least he doesn't hit me. He won't do it again.

I can't do anything right.

In this compassionate book, Joanna V. Hunter offers women who are coping with physical or emotional abuse the information and guidance that she needed when she was in an abusive relationship. Using expert advice complemented by her story and the stories of dozens of other women who have survived and turned away from domestic violence, Hunter helps you face, head on, the excuses you tell yourself that keep you in an abusive relationship. You will learn to

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- understand what healthy thinking sounds like
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- identify power and control plays
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Joanna V. Hunter is a popular speaker, volunteer, and trainer on domestic violence who works with victims and those who serve them. Her work is informed by her experience as a survivor of abuse.

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