

BARRIERS TO LEAVING

The question “Why do victims stay in abusive relationships?” shifts the responsibility of safety from the violence from the abuser to the victim. A better question is “What are the barriers to a victim leaving?” and, most importantly, “Why doesn’t the *abuser* stop?” Here are some of the barriers survivors experience.

1. **ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE:** Having to face the difficulties of trying to financially support herself and her children.
2. **PARENTING:** Needing (or being told that she needs) a partner to help parent. Fear she can’t cope with home and children by herself.
3. **RELIGION AND EXTENDED FAMILY:** Pressure to keep the family together.
4. **FEAR OF BEING ALONE**
5. **PITY:** Partner convinces victim to feel sorry for him/her.
6. **FEAR PARTNER WILL SUICIDE:** Fear that partner will follow through with threats to suicide if she leaves.
7. **DENIAL AND MINIMIZATION:** Believing that it’s not really that bad, or that other people have it worse.
8. **LOVE:** Often the partner is quite loving and lovable when not being abusive.
9. **DUTY:** Feeling bond by marriage/relationship commitment.
12. **GUILT:** The survivor believes --and her partner and other significant others are quick to agree-- that their problems are her fault.
13. **RESPONSIBILITY:** It is up to the victim to work things out and save the relationship. Women in particular have been socialized to believe that the emotional side of the relationship is the woman’s responsibility.
14. **SHAME AND HUMILIATION:** “I don’t want anyone to know.” The stigma of being “battered” keeps many women silent about abuse experienced in a relationship.
15. **ISOLATION:** The abuser isolates the victim from friends or family who may offer her support. She feels alone in the world.
16. **SECURITY:** Fear of being alone in the world; belief in the American dream of growing up and living happily ever after

17. IDENTITY: Women have been socialized to feel they need a partner -- even an abusive one -- in order to be complete.
18. UNFOUNDED OPTIMISM: Belief that things will get better, despite all evidence to the contrary. This is a way to “stay sane” in a terrorizing, traumatic environment.
19. INTERNALIZATION OF ABUSER’S BELIEFS/EXCUSES: “I deserve this treatment.” “If only I were a better wife/partner/mother this wouldn’t happen.”
20. SURVIVAL: Fears that the partner will follow her and kill her if she leaves; often based on real threats by the abuser.
21. BEGINS TO EXPECT FAILURE AND THE LACK OF SUPPORT OF OTHERS: Trying every possible method to change something, but with no success, the woman begins to expect failure. Her experience tells her that no one (her community, the police) takes her fear/concern seriously. She becomes more and more alone, unsupported and isolated.

