



Safety Planning Workbook: Processing After Violence

Women In Transition

Please copy and distribute, permission not required.

Contact Information:

Women In Transition

718 Arch Street, Suite 401N

Philadelphia, PA 19106

Business: (215) 564-5301

Telephone Counseling Lifeline: (215) 751-1111

www.helpwomen.org

I am a woman.

I am a daughter.

I am a mother.

I am a sister.

I am a woman of color.

I am a lesbian.

I am married.

I am disabled.

I am an immigrant.

I am single.

I am a senior.

I am a survivor.

Table of Contents

Grief and Domestic Violence.....	pg. 4
Isolation.....	pg. 6
What Does a Healthy Relationship Look Like?.....	pg. 8
Boundaries.....	pg. 11
How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship.....	pg. 14

Grief and Domestic Violence

Usually when society thinks of grief, it is thought of revolving around the death of a loved one. As we have come to experience so many other types of loss in our lives, society has begun to understand grief differently through the recognition of losses that are not death related.

Survivors of domestic violence are grieving for multiple losses, many of which still go unrecognized and unacknowledged.

Losses which are grieved:

- The parent you were supposed to be
- The person you expected them to be
- The life your children were supposed to have
- The relationship you deserved to have
- The future you expected to have
- The life you were supposed to lead
- The way it was
- The person that you were before
- The way you wish it had been
- The person you wish you had been
- The person you thought they were
- The loss of relationships
- The career or house you had

Some reactions to grief:

Emotional: Numbness, guilt, yearning, anger, relief, hopelessness, despair, disbelief and denial

Physical: Decrease in activity, neglect of self-care, weight and appetite changes, and changes in sleep patterns

Cognitive: Flashbacks, continuous/intrusive thoughts and memories, spiritual conflicts, dissociation, and changes in dream patterns

Behavioral: Crying, feeling preoccupied, detachment, isolation, inability to concentrate

Stages of grief: (Grief is not linear. There is no order of emotional reactions. There is no timeline.)

Denial and Isolation

- Shock, disbelief, disorientation
- Deflects questions
- Withdraws/isolates
- Lacks self-empathy
- Does not actively utilize support system

Anger

- Why me?
- Adrenaline/energy
- Displacement
- Grievances

Bargaining

- Negotiating with self
- Opportunities for change

Depression

- Sadness
- Secondary victimization

- When loss sinks in
- Anger turned inward

Acceptance

- Not “happiness”
- Acknowledgement, recognition
- Finding/integrating meaning

Other Stages

- Guilt (*remember, the violence was never your fault)
 - Blaming self, shame
- Relief
 - Peace, joy, respite, liberation

Grief Safety Planning: (safety planning is an ongoing process)

- The process of grieving is the reconstruction of meaning/self
- Specific steps that must be taken if a person is to be freed from the attachment to the loss
- The psychological process of adjustment
- Getting in touch with and expressing emotion
 - Counseling
 - Support Groups
 - One’s positive/supportive networks
 - Write a letter to future self/children
- Continue with other safety planning
 - Are you in danger right now? Is there any safer place for you to go?
 - Do you have a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA)?
 - Need more information about getting/serving/reporting violations of PFA?
 - Ways to increase/keep income
 - Talk with your children and connect with services for them
 - Connect with a Domestic Violence Counselor at Women In Transition—call our Lifeline at 215.751.1111

Isolation

One of the most common abusive and manipulative tactics is **isolation**—an abuser wanting to separate their partner from friends, family, communities, and even professional kinds of support such as medical appointments (*isolating* her from the outside world). The idea is that this survivor becomes entirely dependent upon her abusive partner which makes it harder for her to leave, and harder to break the silence around what’s happening. Manipulation to isolate a woman can happen in many ways:

- **Guilt trips and disapproval:** The abusive partner may start by discouraging their partner to spend time with others and making her feel guilty for leaving them, or show disapproval for a survivor’s family and friends: “I just don’t like your friends, and I don’t like the person you become when you’re with them.”
- **Paranoia and accusation:** The abuser may insist on their partner spending time only with them because time spent with other individuals makes them paranoid about cheating. It is a common misconception that this stems from the abuser’s own “insecurity”, when in reality this is a very common control tactic used by abusers whether or not they honestly believe their own accusations.
- **Messages of unworthiness:** Abusive partners strategically break down their partner’s self-image in an effort to convince her no one else would want her, and that she shouldn’t bother trying to connect with others. This may leave a woman’s self-esteem so broken down that she feels too hopeless to reach out to others.
- **Financial constraints:** An abuser might put measures in place to make sure that they are the sole breadwinner of the house so the survivor has no income, or they might steal from her or insist on managing all the money. These may limit her access to gas or transportation money to go to appointments or to socialize.
- **Burning the survivor’s bridges:** Sometimes the abusive partner deliberately creates drama between a survivor and her friends and family, whether it’s through lies or outright disrespect and creating chaos at family functions.
- **Threats, Coercion, Intimidation:** An abusive partner may demand the survivor not see anyone else without their supervision, or not see anyone at all. There may be threats for noncompliance, such as giving her “the silent treatment”, withholding of money or medication, or physical violence.

For many women, this isolation results in a real loss of connections and support networks. Once you are isolated, when an abusive partner is the only source of social feedback, it’s hard not to start to believe all the negative messages. This is part of the control they want; to be the only outside influence their partner has.

Human connection is very important, and sometimes healthy people in our lives can help us be more objective about our other relationships. Keeping some healthy relationships, even in the midst of the abuse, can help remind us that we have good qualities and are deserving of love and respect.

Even once out of the abusive relationship, it can feel hard to rebuild the network that was once there.

Breaking the Isolation:

Here are some suggestions about breaking that sense of isolation, to either try to keep some relationships you feel in danger of losing, or repairing/replacing ones that have been lost. **While reading this list always keep safety concerns in mind—for some women following some of these suggestions may put them in greater danger. Each situation is unique. For more support with this and all forms of safety planning talk with your counselor.**

- Make a list of the healthy people in your life who have been there for you, and reflect on whether your abuser has done anything to try to come between you. If comfortable, be open with them that your partner may be intentionally trying to create a wall between you.
- If possible, keep lines of communication open with the people who care about you, safety plan about when it might be best to be able to call them (while your abuser is at work, for instance).
- Connect with a counselor and support group to be able to talk about the abuse in a safe space with people who understand.

Once out of an abusive relationship:

- Connect with a counselor and support groups.
- Think about whether there were any relationships that got lost before the abuse that you may be interested in getting back.
- Volunteer! Look for organizations offering volunteering opportunities in a way you'd like to give back.
- Connect or reconnect with spiritual or faith based communities.
- Take classes in the community.
- Use websites like meetup.com, that allow you to search for new groups who meet based on a common shared interest (it's free to register!).
- Get involved with community centers or senior centers.

What Does a Healthy Relationship Look Like?

After being in an abusive relationship it can feel like finding a healthy relationship is impossible, but it is very possible to move on to happy and healthy relationships after being abused. This section of the workbook is dedicated not only to what a healthy relationship looks like with others, but also what a healthy relationship looks like with yourself. We're first going to look at the importance of a good relationship with yourself, because that is the foundation for you to build relationships with others.

Having a Healthy Relationship with Yourself

It can feel selfish to consider the importance of the relationship you have with yourself, but it's actually very much related to the relationship you have with others. Coming to value and honor yourself helps you to see yourself as worth protecting and worth being treated well. A healthy relationship with yourself can help with the following:

- **Self-awareness.** Spending a little time taking care of and being present with yourself can help you get clarity in many areas of your life. What does it mean to be present with yourself? Taking the time to check in with your thoughts, emotions, and body—how are you feeling today? Content? Unsettled? Is there tension in your shoulders? If you're feeling any discomfort, can you tell what it's from? Is there anything you've been able to do in the past that helps? These kinds of questions can help us investigate our current state, and can help us identify when something in our lives isn't going right and what might help. This can possibly save us from future difficulty.
- **Self-care.** Self-care is about taking time to maintain your needs and do things that nourish your body, mind and spirit, and replenish you from stressful life events (even positive ones). Self-care is different for everyone, and can include things that are "self-maintenance" like sleeping, eating well and making the time to see your doctor, or can include things that are pure entertainment, like playing a video game or spending time with friends. If it's something you do for yourself that allows you to "re-charge" and keep yourself going, it qualifies as self-care.

This awareness and honoring yourself can create a stronger ability to set boundaries and feel comfortable communicating your needs in relationships. When you take some time for check-ins with yourself, it's a time for reflection about what you do and do not want for yourself, and what things do and don't work for you. This is true in relationships too! A strong relationship with yourself can help you tune in to how another person makes you feel. Is this a person who makes you feel encouraged, respected, and valuable? Or do you usually leave feeling insecure, anxious, or afraid? If you know how you feel when something is going right, and feels healthy, then you're able to notice more quickly when something doesn't feel right, and think about what changes might need to happen.

Creating a strong relationship with *you* through awareness and self-care is hard! Try to be patient with yourself and know that it takes time, and lots of practice.

Relationships with Others

It can feel very challenging moving on to a new relationship after being abused, and while no relationship is perfect, it can be helpful to have a general idea of things to look for in a relationship. Keep in mind no relationship is perfect, even the healthiest relationships take equal work and commitment from both parties, and sometimes have setbacks. Mutual commitment is what continues to maintain and promote the health of the relationship. Here are some basic characteristics to expect in a good relationship:

- **Communication and boundaries:** In a healthy relationship both partners are able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, values and needs. They are able to set boundaries and express what they are and are not comfortable with. For more information on setting boundaries, see the boundaries section of this workbook.
 - An important part of communication and boundaries is the need for consent in relationships, whether in a sexual context or otherwise. One partner should not force or coerce (guilt, pressure, manipulate, etc.) the other into doing something, and just because you're in a relationship does not mean they can bypass receiving your consent.
- **Mutual respect:** Each partner should feel valued and respected in the relationship. Thoughts, feelings, needs, values, beliefs, likes, and dislikes should be heard with respect from both partners.
- **Compromise:** Having different needs and preferences can be okay if a comfortable compromise can be reached by both partners. In some instances this may mean one partner is compromising more than

the other, but in the relationship *overall* there should be a sense of balance and that both partners are getting their needs met in a way that feels fair.

- **Mutual support:** Partners should feel supported by each other and that they are valued by each other.
- **Trust:** Both partners should feel they can trust each other and that they are trusted by their partner.
- **Independence:** In healthy relationships both individuals still keep some independence and take time to do activities they enjoy on their own, for example spending time with friends and family. A healthy partner should understand that having some time to yourself will help your personal growth and in return contribute to the health of the relationship.
- **Respect of privacy:** In healthy relationships both individuals still maintain their independent lives and respect each other's right to privacy on some things. Being in a good relationship is not about having to share everything at all times, you have the right to deem somethings private, like passwords for bank accounts or social media accounts.

(list adapted from loveisrespect.org)

What happens if you can't agree?

What happens if there are lots of instances where you and your partner aren't able to come together, or the needs they're communicating to you would mean having to compromise your own needs that keep you feeling safe? While it's normal for healthy relationships to have some hiccups, if overall you're not feeling that the relationship is balanced it may be time to re-evaluate whether this is the right relationship for you.

Boundaries

This section of the workbook is dedicated to the importance of knowing and understanding boundaries. Boundaries are a way of knowing where we end and another person begins—what thoughts, feelings, values and expectations are yours versus another person’s. Boundaries are limits we set in relationships to help communicate to others what we are and are not comfortable with, and they can help you and your partner (or friend, family member or coworkers) to understand and respect each other better. There are many different kinds of boundaries—emotional, physical, financial, and digital to name a few.

Before continuing it’s important to remember: **There is never an excuse for abuse, and violence is always the fault of the abuser.** Communicating boundaries and needs is important, but healthy communication only works with healthy individuals. Domestic violence is not a matter of the survivor not stating her needs; the survivor has most likely already tried over and over again to respectfully communicate with her partner, and the fact that it did not work is never a failure on her part. Ignoring boundaries is a big part of the abuse.

Also keep safety concerns in mind before attempting to set boundaries with an abusive partner. If you feel like it might compromise your safety, honor that intuition.

Learning and Honoring Your Boundaries

Boundaries with others help you honor yourself and practice self-care. They help you set limitations with others and help them know how they can show respect and care toward you. At the same time, it can be challenging to know your own boundaries and what limitations others should have toward you. If you’re not sure, it’s okay because you’re not alone; know that learning your boundaries and teaching others to honor them takes time and practice! Try to be patient with yourself and others as they adjust to your new expectations.

Self-awareness is key in figuring out what your boundaries are. Start checking in with yourself in different situations—your thoughts, emotions, body, spirit, etc. Reflect on how you’ve felt in difficult situations in the past, what responses did your body have? How comfortable are you when a new person talks to you? How comfortable are you with physical contact from others? How did a friend’s way of handling a difficult incident make you feel? Slowing down and paying attention to how and why circumstances affect us can help us know what’s harmful to us, and what we do and don’t want.

- **Tip:** Some survivors find journaling a very helpful way to reflect on past and present situations, to identify and keep track of what their needs are

While it's important to know what things do and don't work for us, **it's equally important that we honor these things in ourselves and truly believe that we deserve having the things we need, and to nourish them once we know what they are.** This can be a really challenging part of empowerment, but know that your counselor is there to help you.

Establishment of and Redirection with Boundaries

Boundaries are a big part of healthy communication, and setting them is a part of any healthy relationship. They help to teach others how to treat you. It can be hard letting people know your boundaries, but it's important because others don't always automatically know what our needs are—the only way to be sure is to tell them. Sharing boundaries is a positive thing; letting someone know how you like to be treated is one of the best ways to show you're invested in the relationship and want things to grow.

To set a boundary, **identify** what it is you need or want in a situation, **name** the problem, **direct** what it is you'd like them to do in the future.

For example:

- **Identify your need:** I'd like my partner to stop calling so much while I'm at work.
- **Name it to the person:** "I like talking on the phone with you, but I feel uncomfortable when you call me a lot while I'm at work."
- **Direct it:** "In the future, let's wait until I'm off work to talk."

Even after telling someone a boundary, sometimes it can take a few times of reminding them of it, especially if it's changing a pattern of behavior. As long as they seem invested and you're comfortable with the amount of progress they're making, this can be okay. **Repeat** your boundaries when necessary.

For example:

- "Hey, I know you wanted to talk just now, but remember when I'm at work I don't want to talk on the phone."

(adapted from the Northwest Network)

If your boundaries are ignored: When boundaries are disrespected and ignored, even after reminders, relationships may become unhealthy. When you tell someone that a behavior makes you feel uncomfortable, and they knowingly ignore that boundary it may be a sign of some unhealthy tendencies or being outright abusive. If you find yourself in this situation it may be time to re-evaluate the relationship.

When Someone Else Communicates Boundaries

Just as it's important for you to be clear about your boundaries in relationships, it's important for others to be able to be clear about their boundaries with you. Sometimes it can feel painful and make us react defensively, and this reaction is normal. The fact that someone is taking the time to work on communicating with you means they're invested in creating a good relationship.

Having someone set boundaries with you may result in any combination of the following feelings:

- **Denial**—"I never did that"
- **Minimizing**—"They're overreacting"
- **Counter-attacking**—"So, they're saying they don't love me?" or "Well, they do bad things too!"
- **Denying the other's right to boundaries**—"Whatever, I'll do what I want"
- **Feeling devastated**—"I'm such a bad person"

It's often hard to accept you may have hurt someone you care about, but it's important to remember that **just because someone does not like a behavior does not mean they don't love you anymore, or that you are a bad person for unintentionally doing something that didn't work for them.**

How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship

Seeing someone else in an abusive relationship can be very difficult, especially a friend or loved one. It can be painful to see someone you care about being hurt and mistreated, and it can be very scary if you begin to have serious concerns about the break-down of their mental health or threats to their physical safety.

Reasons Why She Might Stay

Sometimes it can be hard to understand why she doesn't "just leave". But, there are many reasons people stay in relationships (think back to your past relationships, has there ever been a time you stayed in a relationship longer than you knew was best for you, even if things weren't abusive?). Some reasons she might stay could include:

- **Conflicting emotions.** Most relationships don't start out as abusive, they slowly become abusive over time, sometimes getting more dangerous as time goes on (we call this escalation of behavior). Often the survivor has already fallen in love with the person she thought her abuser was before knowing this side of them. Even once the abuse starts, part of the manipulation abusers use in domestic violence is to not always behave abusively, especially in the "**honeymoon period**" right after an abusive incident. It can be very confusing and hard to not still feel love for the abuser and keep hoping that they'll change or "get help". Abusive partners may also show remorse, make promises of it never happening again, or make promises of "getting help", never to follow through.
- **Thinking the abuse is normal, and this is just how relationships are.** Depending on her other life experience and the culture she was raised in, she may see abuse as normal and just something women "deal with".
- **Feeling mentally exhausted.** Her partner may have told her so many times that she's worthless and doesn't deserve better that she starts to feel like it's true. Also, change is scary—ending a relationship is a big change to make and takes energy that she may not have right now.
- **She's been isolated.** This workbook talks about the power of isolation as an abusive tactic; sometimes survivors feel very alone and like they can't reach out to anyone for help, for many it can be hard to talk about the abuse at all. Some survivors have feelings of embarrassment that they "got into the situation", when the reality is that **domestic violence can happen to anyone at any time.**

- **She may not have a lot of resources.** It can be very hard to leave with a lack of resources. Maybe the abuser has sabotaged all her attempts to get a job in the past few years, to keep her dependent on them for income. Maybe they insist on going everywhere with her, so she hardly even has time to make plans to get out of the relationship. Or maybe they have something she needs that they're able to exploit, like being a caretaker if she has disabilities.
- **Threats.** They may make threats to her physical safety, physical safety of loved ones, her pets, or her property. An abusive partner may threaten that if she ever calls the police, or tries to leave, that they will kill her or hurt her family. If the survivor is an illegal immigrant, the abusive partner may threaten to report her. If the survivor is a member of the LGBTQ community, there could be threats to out their identity to others.

What You Can Do

Having a basic understanding of some of the reasons why a woman may choose to stay in an abusive relationship is important, but there are still ways you can help:

- **Tell her you're concerned for her wellbeing**

Maybe you've noticed some changes in her behavior or overheard some things that made you concerned about her relationship. If she discloses to you that she's being abused, tell her that **the abuse is not her fault and there is no excuse for abuse.**

- **Listen nonjudgmentally**

Sometimes it's a huge step for survivors to even be able to talk about the abuse. Having someone there to listen nonjudgmentally to the situation can feel vital and break their feelings of being isolated. It may help them to feel comfortable reaching out to others.

- **Respect her decisions**

Try not to criticize, remember that change is a process, and she may leave and go back many times. This is common. Remember that she's already in a controlling relationship with someone who tells her what to do. If anyone else, even a well-meaning support person tries to tell her what to do, she may continue to

feel controlled instead of empowered. Ultimately she is the only one living her situation; respect that she knows her situation best.

- **Encourage her to seek support**

Perhaps in the form of counseling, or even anonymously calling the Lifeline, just to talk if that's helpful. Let her know that there are free services where she can get nonjudgmental support, whether she wants to leave the relationship or not. A counselor can help her look at all sides of her situation, and help her cope emotionally, as well as plan for the future.

- **Know your own boundaries and limitations**

Being a support person in this situation is challenging, there may be some ways you're able to lend support and others you aren't. It's important to take care of yourself before you attempt to help others. If you're struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to WIT's LifeLine to talk to a trained counselor—we're here for you too.

- **Do not confront the abuser. This could be dangerous for you, or for your loved one.**

If you know someone who has a pattern of behaving abusively in relationships and who is interested in getting help through counseling, Menenergy is a Philadelphia-based intervention program for abusive partners. They can be reached at (215) 242-2235.