

Crisis Connection

Stages of Leaving an Abusive Man



Lifting the Blanket on Domestic Violence
<http://www.women.tas.gov.au/spotlight/quilt/index.html>

There are stages that a victim of abuse generally experiences before making the final break from an abuser. The following explanations may help illustrate these stages:

Stage 1: Abuse

The abuse stage signifies the abuse is taking place, but the individual has not necessarily identified their self as abused. Consistent abuse may lead to the next stage of denial or loss of self. At this stage, the abuse has modified the individual's personality and view of self. *Friends and family will make comments that you don't seem like yourself, you're jumpy and possibly irritable.*

Stage 2: Denial/Loss of Self

Denial and/or loss of self explains the defense mechanism used toward the abuse occurring in the relationship. During this stage, many victims describe feeling as though they have lost control, have no identity, apologetic, quiet,

scared, and have low self-esteem. It is not uncommon for a victim in this stage not to have identified with being in an abusive relationship. *You are likely to be depressed, cry more often and sometimes close yourself off from others.*

Stage 3: Validation and Acknowledgment of Being Abused

Victims are likely to acknowledge being in a violent relationship when it is identified by an outside source (family, friends, and co-workers), experiencing severe physical, emotion and/or emotional trauma, or a combination of all. More specifically, an outside source recognized the abusive situation and the victim received reinforcement through an abusive episode. At this stage, female victims of partner abuse may begin to see themselves as "abused". *Someone confronts you about your abusive relationship and you know they are right.*

Stage 4: Emotional Response

Once an individual confronts the idea of being a victim of partner abuse, there is likely an emotional struggle to follow. The emotional response is different from person to person, but may resemble the grieving process for a lost loved one. It is unknown how long someone will remain in this stage, but it enables an individual to gain motivation toward leaving the abusive relationship. *One last time, you try to make the relationship right, but realize that you can't do this alone.*

Stage 5: Motivation

This stage represents an individual's need to regain control of their life. Other motivations may involve fear for their life, and available help. *You can't take the abuse anymore and nothing you do has made any difference; it only gets worse.*

Stage 6: Triggering Event

Once the victim is motivated to leave, there is most likely an event that takes place triggering the actual leaving of the relationship. This event is most likely to be a severe physical episode or fear of imminent severe harm. In some cases, the identification of being in an abusive relationship is motivation enough to leave. *No more! He really hurt you this time and there are no more excuses.*

Stage 7: Escape

Victims in this stage have removed themselves and their identity from the relationship. Safety becomes more important and victims leave their violent partner. *I am so out of here!*

Escaping an Abusive Relationship

As the above stages illustrate, until you realize and accept that you are in an abusive relationship, you will not be motivated to make any changes. However, when you realize that you are in trouble, you may already have been convinced that you have no options. The abuser has convinced you that you are deserving of the treatment you are receiving and that no one else will want you anyway; he is wrong. You have many options including leaving him.

It is common for an individual in an abusive relationship to suffer a loss of self-confidence and their sense of identity. Constant put-downs, insults, and name-calling will certainly do that to a person. Consider the following suggestions for healing from your abuse:

1. Understand that leaving the abuser will not magically solve all problems; it was the beginning of your journey, not the end.
2. As much as possible, focus on what you see and think rather than what you feel. Your feelings can be expected to swing wildly, and are not going to be reliable guides in every instance. It is very common after leaving an abusive relationship for feelings of love for your abuser and mourning of your relationship to make going back into that situation seem very attractive or even necessary. One of the most important things you can do is to be honest with yourself and look at the hard cold reality of where you are and work with what is, rather than what might have been.
3. Be prepared for your abuser to experience a "miraculous recovery". You may see tears. You may get presents; you may get wonderful sounding apologies—perhaps publicly and embarrassingly. You may hear all the things you've said you wanted but never heard before. However, beware because none of that matters if your abuser hasn't sought counseling on his own and stuck with the counseling for at least one year.
4. Give yourself some time before you consider starting a relationship with someone else. People, like water, seek their own level, and the sort of person you will attract and be attracted to early in your recovery is not the sort of person you will be attracted to (or even interested in) after healing.
5. Fill your time with friends and family who are supportive of your decision to escape the abusive relationship and with activities that you enjoyed before your life was overtaken by your abuser.
6. Begin or resume physical exercise, it is an excellent way to burn frustrations, depression and calories.
7. Read a book on recovering from emotional damage. Your local library or victim services agency can assist you in choosing appropriate titles.
8. Seek counseling from a reputable victim services agency or private mental health professional who is experienced in working with victims of abuse.
9. Spend quiet time with yourself to think, plan, dream and appreciate the unique person you are. You did not deserve to be abused, no one ever does.

Source: The Pyramid of Escape; Las Vegas Metro Police Department

You are not responsible for another's decision to be abusive. You cannot make someone hurt you—they choose to. Everyone makes their own decisions and they are responsible for those decisions. The only person you have responsibility for is you.

For additional information please return to our *Home Page* at www.crisisconnectioninc.org and see:

- **Why Does *He* Stay and Demand *She* Stay**
- **How Dangerous Is He?**
- **Tactics of Abusive Men**
- **What's it like to be partnered with an abusive man?**
- **What Are Your Options?**
- **Possible Consequences of Choosing to Remain in a Relationship with an Abusive Man**
- **Coping with Relationship Grief**
- **Crisis Connection Statistics**
- **Speakers Available**



Crisis Connection, Inc.
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www.crisisconnectioninc.org