

WHY DO WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS?

Victims could choose to stay or return to an abusive relationship for several reasons:

- **SURVIVAL:** Fear about her own and her children's safety if she leaves.
- **ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE:** Can she survive on one income? Will he help her financially if she leaves him?
- **FEAR:** Of being alone, fear that she cannot cope with home and children by herself, fear of losing custody of the children, fear of the legal system/process, fear of being deported (if her immigration status is linked to that of her partner's).
- **PARENTING:** Wanting a father for the children, staying for "the sake of the children"
- **RELIGIOUS/CULTURAL:** Pressure to keep the family together, a belief that divorce is never OK.
- **FAMILY:** Pressure from parents, siblings, and in-laws to keep the family together.
- **LOYALTY:** If he had cancer, she'd stick by him, so she should stick by him through this problem, too.
- **LACK OF SUPPORT:** She doesn't know how to go about leaving, who would help her, and lacks information about resources (e.g. shelters, food stamps, child care assistance)
- **RESCUE:** If she stays, she can "save" him and help him get better.
- **FEAR OF HIS SUICIDE:** He says he'll kill himself if she leaves.
- **DENIAL:** "It's really not so bad" and "He's really sorry, I think this time, he's going to change".
- **LOVE:** She loves him, and he is quite often loving and lovable when he's not being abusive.
- **IDENTITY:** Many women feel that they need a man in order to be complete.
- **SHAME, EMBARRASSMENT AND HUMILIATION:** She doesn't want anyone to know.
- **LOW SELF-ESTEEM:** After years of being criticized by her abuser, she believes that it must be her fault, she must deserve it, that no one else could love her, and that she will never find anyone better.
- **SEX ROLE STEREOTYPES:** "That's just the way men are." "He's just trying to be the man of the house."

Given the many reasons women might stay in an abusive relationship, it might be helpful to reframe the question about why they stay. Let's ask, instead, "Why do batterers feel they have the right to abuse and possess their partners?" and "How can I help her find the courage, the resources, and the support to leave?"