

Why People Stay

For someone in an abusive relationship, leaving is very difficult, and can even seem impossible. There are many factors that contribute to why people stay in abusive relationships. Some of these factors are described below.

Fear

A person will likely be afraid of the consequences if they decide to leave their relationship, either out of fear of their partner's actions or concern over their own ability to be independent.

Normalized abuse

If someone grew up in an environment where abuse was common, they may not know what healthy relationships look like. As a result, they may not recognize that their partner's behaviors are unhealthy or abusive.

Shame

It can be difficult for someone to admit that they've been or are being abused. They may feel that they've done something wrong, that they deserve the abuse, or that experiencing abuse is a sign of weakness. Remember that blame-shifting is a common tactic that their partner may use and can reinforce a sense of responsibility for their partner's abusive behaviors.

Intimidation

A survivor may be intimidated into staying in a relationship by verbal or physical threats, or threats to spread information, including secrets or confidential details (i.e. revenge porn etc). For LGBTQ+ people who haven't come out yet, threats to out someone may be an opportunity for abusive partners to exert control.

Low self-esteem

After experiencing verbal abuse or blame for physical abuse, it can be easy for survivors to believe those sentiments and believe that they're at fault for their partner's abusive behaviors.

Lack of resources

Survivors may be financially dependent on their abusive partner or have previously been denied opportunities to work, a place to sleep on their own, language assistance, or a network to turn to during moments of crisis. These factors can make it seem impossible for someone to leave an abusive situation.

Why People Stay

Disability

If someone depends on other people for physical support, they may feel that their well-being is directly tied to their relationship; a lack of visible alternatives for support can heavily influence someone's decision to stay in an abusive relationship if they have a disability.

Immigration status

People who are undocumented may fear that reporting abuse will affect their immigration status. If they have limited English proficiency, these concerns can be amplified by a confusing and convoluted legal system and an inability to express their circumstances to others.

Cultural context

Traditional customs or beliefs may influence someone's decision to stay in an abusive situation, whether held by the survivor or by their family and community.

Children

Many survivors may feel guilty or responsible for disrupting their familial unit. Keeping the family together may not only be something that a survivor may value, but may also be used as a tactic by their partner used to guilt a survivor into staying.

Love

Experiencing abuse and feeling genuine care for a partner who is causing harm are not mutually exclusive. Survivors often still have strong, intimate feelings for their abusive partner. They may have children together, want to maintain their family, or the person abusing them may simply be charming (especially at the beginning of a relationship) and the survivor may hope that their partner will return to being that person.

Adapted from [The Hotline: Why People Stay](#) by the PLU Center for Gender Equity 2021.



National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-7233

thehotline.org

PLU CGE Advocacy Services
253-538-6304

plu.edu/gender-equity/advocacy-services-2



PLU CENTER FOR
GENDER EQUITY