

Where to Turn When You're Under Attack

9 steps you can take right now to get out of an abusive relationship.

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by Dawn Weinberger, Contributor

When we think of abuse, most of us think of physical violence. But there are many different kinds of harm—and it's important to remember that abusive relationships are progressive. If you're in an abusive relationship, you might not realize it. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is your partner beating you, berating you, calling you names or constantly putting you down?
- Are you isolated from family and friends by a controlling, manipulative spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Does your spouse or partner deny you access to money or other financial resources?
- Are you forced to engage in unwanted sexual acts?



Freelance writer Dawn Weinberger lives in Portland, Ore., with her husband, Carl, and her cat, Lucy Liu. She covers health, fashion, pets and green living for several local and national publications.

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you are the victim of abuse. You need help, and help is available. We talked to three victims' advocates, who provided practical advice for people on the receiving end of domestic abuse. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, taking these steps in earnest is a good start.

1. Recognize and acknowledge that you are in an abusive situation, says Gabby Santos, program coordinator for underserved communities with the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Many victims, she explains, are in denial. If a victim can't admit to herself that her partner (and often, the father of her children) is an abuser, it is nearly impossible to get help. Once she can say "I am the victim of domestic abuse," she'll be better equipped to seek help.
2. Create a mental list of people and places you can go to for assistance (only put the list on paper if it can be kept in a safe place where the abuser will not find it). Possibilities include trusted family and friends (those you can confide in without risk of the conversation getting back to the abuser), clergy, law enforcement, crisis lines, shelters and local domestic-violence agencies.
3. Trust your instincts, says Kelly Miller, legal director for the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. "If you believe that you are not safe, you are probably not safe," she says.
4. Reach out. Tell someone about the abuse, and allow that person to help you get assistance. Miller suggests going directly to a trained domestic violence victims' advocate (i.e. someone who works for an agency such as the one Miller represents—all states have them), because this person is equipped to help victims create a safety plan. However, victims who don't know where to turn or are not comfortable going that route should reach out to someone on the mental list of trusted people they (hopefully) have already created.
5. Call 911. Are you or your children in immediate physical danger? If so, pick up the phone and call the police. This doesn't mean the abuse will stop, and it doesn't mean you won't need additional help in the very near future. But it will enable you to get away from whatever is happening right now.
6. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233). "Crisis lines are available to provide peer support and to [help the victim] explore options," says Santos. Conversations with hotline counselors are anonymous, confidential and nonjudgmental. Lines are open 24/7.
7. Create a safety kit, says Megan Kovacs, community outreach coordinator for the Raphael House, a shelter in Portland, Ore. "We [suggest] creating a kit that they can hide," Kovacs says, so that they have all their resources available to them." Ideally, the kit should contain things like birth certificates, social security cards, important phone numbers and money. However, Miller warns that kits can sometimes generate a false sense of security. So, keep in mind that the kit is simply an aide—its existence won't keep you from danger.

8. Cover your tracks. Abusers often keep very close tabs on their victims, so if you are seeking help or formulating a safety/escape plan, hide the evidence. For example, be careful about looking up crisis centers or shelter on a computer the abuser has access to (at the very least, learn how to clear your browsing history-but know that the history cannot ever be completely deleted) and don't leave things around the house that might draw suspicion.
9. Recognize that the abuse is not your fault—even if the abuser tells you otherwise. Abuse, Kovacs says, is about power and control, so victims are often manipulated into believing they deserve the abuse. They don't. And they deserve to get help.


Additional Resources:

- [Idaho Council on Domestic Violence and Victim Assistance](#)
- [Oregon Department of Human Services Domestic Violence Resource](#)
- [Utah's Department of Human Service's Violence LinkLine 1-800-897-LINK \(5465\)](#)
- [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Domestic Violence Department](#)

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FAQ
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