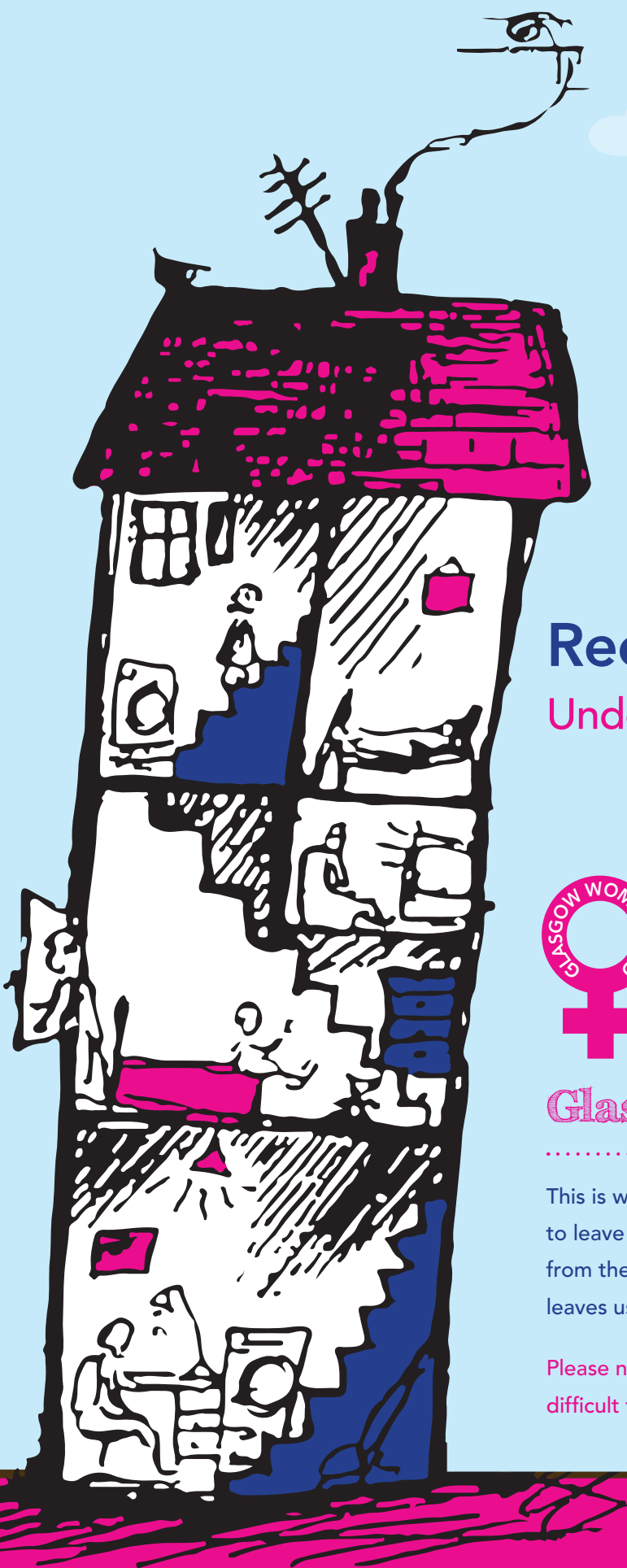


All forms of abuse are damaging, and can be equally dangerous. Whether we have

suffered mental abuse, sexual abuse or physical abuse our feelings will have been damaged and will take time to heal.



Recovery from abuse

Understanding our feelings



Glasgow Women's Aid

.....

This is written for all women who have had the strength to leave an abuser and who have the courage to recover from the effects of the emotional torture that abuse leaves us with.

Please note: The contents of this book can be emotionally difficult for some women.



Index

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Recovery from Abuse: Understanding our Feelings..... 4
 Understanding Abuse 5

Chapter 2 – Patterns of Abuse

1. Isolation 6
 2. Disempowering & Exhaustion 7
 3. Degradation/Put downs..... 8
 4. Threats 9
 5. Displays of Total Power 10
 6. Enforcing Trivia Demands 8
 7. Occasional Indulgences/Treats 11
 8. Distorted/Confused Reality 12

Chapter 3 – Recovery

1. Introduction..... 13
 2. How we feel..... 13
 3. Why? 19

Freedom 23

Further Information 24



Chapter 1: Introduction

Recovery from Abuse: Understanding our Feelings

Trying to understand our feelings when we are recovering from abuse is a difficult task. What each of us experience will be different and in some ways unique to us. The differences will depend on many things, for example: how long we were subjected to abuse, how much or how little support we have when we are in the process of recovering, the forms of abuse that we were subjected to, and who we are as individuals.

We know there are differences between us but in Women's Aid we believe that the similarities are much greater. All of us have been abused because someone has tried to exercise control over us. The effects of the lack of personal control are common to each of us. Recovering from abuse is a process and each of us actively struggle within the process.

Women have taught us that the process can begin at different points. Some women will start their recovery by emotionally removing themselves from the abuser long before they physically leave them. Others will have managed to physically leave but find that emotionally they have great difficulty in feeling free of the abuser.

It is important to accept our own feelings and to know that there is no "right" way to recover, just as there is no time limit to when we should feel better, or be over the fear of abuse. It is crucial for each of us to get to a position where we can trust our feelings and have an understanding of them.



This booklet is written in the hope that it helps us to understand our feelings and in turn to build up our confidence in ourselves.

All forms of abuse are damaging, and all can be equally dangerous. Whether we have suffered emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or physical abuse our feelings will have been damaged and will take time to heal.

All women who have survived abuse are strong. It takes great strength to both survive and recover from abuse. The longer we are subjected to abuse the weaker we feel, and believe ourselves to be. This is one of the many feelings which abuse leaves us with.

We have to come to understand, challenge ourselves and become free of all the confused feelings which result from being abused. Changing our feelings about ourselves is possible but it takes time, courage, support, and an understanding of why we feel the way we do.

Understanding Abuse

After many decades of Glasgow Women's Aid talking with women who have suffered abuse, we have learned that abusers use abuse to dominate and control us. We live in a world that values some people more than others. This can be true for many reasons such as religion, sexuality, sex and gender, social class, ethnicity or ability.

Abusers believe they have the right to control and to abuse women in order to make them feel weak. If abusers were asked why they abuse their answers would be very different:

- "She wasn't a good enough cook/cleaner"
- "She talked to/ignored some person"
- "She spoke too little/too much"
- "She was too smart/too stupid."

The list is endless but these are **excuses**, not **reasons**.

Glasgow Women's Aid also believes that we experience something known as brainwashing. This is a way of controlling a person's mind and damaging their sense of reality. We believe that what abusers do is brainwash us, whether they are aware of it or not.

The damage done to us as women causes what we call distortion. One example of this is when a woman says, "I'm weak." The distortion here is that we do not start out in life or in a relationship as a weak person but the effects of abuse make us think and feel that we are, and will always be, weak. Once we have had time to recover our feelings about ourselves can and will change. The same woman can feel very differently about herself at different stages in her life.

If we have suffered abuse as a child as well as an adult then we may not be able to look back and think of ourselves as strong at a previous stage in our lives. This is because the damage done to us was at an earlier age.



We can recover from abuse. Hundreds of thousands of women have recovered.

Understanding the process of brainwashing helps us to identify what our own particular thoughts and feelings are and what we need to do to recover from the effects of abuse.

We will now look at examples of physical, emotional, psychological, financial and sexual abuse as these are often difficult for us to identify and name as abuse. Whatever form of abuse you have suffered, whether it is financial, sexual, emotional, psychological or physical, it is important to remember that **you have survived this abuse**.

The following are only some of the examples that women have experienced. Your own experience will have similarities and differences.

It can help to write down your own experiences under each of the eight headings. If you do this it is important to know that one thing that has happened to you can be put under more than one heading, because it may have affected you in many ways.

Chapter 2: Patterns of Abuse



1. Isolation

We all feel isolated when we are being abused. This may be because of the things that the abuser is doing, for example:

- They make it so awkward for you to be in the company of other people you increasingly avoid social situations
- They take the car keys away when they go and you have no other access to transport.
- They lock you in when they go out
- You may have all the responsibility to care for children or other relatives.
- They take money so that you can't go out
- They insist that you live in an unfamiliar area

Some of our feelings add to this sense of isolation and may prevent us from telling other people what is happening to us. You may feel, for example:

- Fear of what they would do if you did tell
- Fear that no one would believe you because they behave very differently with other people, like Jekyll and Hyde
- Fear that the children would be taken from you if people were aware of just how stressed and/or depressed you are
- Fear of a loss of status within your community
- Embarrassed to speak of the degrading things they make you do e.g. watch pornography
- Ashamed to say that they will not allow you to do things other women take for granted, e.g. use contraception
- You may feel a sense of guilt or shame about what you are suffering and start to believe some of the things they say about you

When we are isolated we are denied the contact with other people who could offer us support, comfort and a different perspective to the one the abuser forces on us.



2. Disempowering and Exhaustion

Being abused disempowers and exhausts us and again, this is as a result of the things the abuser is doing, for example:

- Depriving you of sleep by verbally or sexually abusing you or because they are saying sorry for hours on end
- Listening to them ridiculing you because of your religion
- Being compared sexually to other women they have been with
- Being told that you are stupid, ugly, mad, bad, a whore, a rotten mother
- The abuser phoning you at work and harassing you
- Telling lies about you or your family
- Not letting you make decisions
- Their expectations or demands changing all the time; what they said was acceptable yesterday but not today

Some of the things that you are doing to cope with the abuse may make you even more exhausted and hopeless for example:

- You might try harder to please them and make extra efforts to give them more of your energy
- You might go to the doctor for help and end up even more vulnerable due to the side effects of taking medication
- You might stop eating to try and please their image of what you 'should' look like
- You might use alcohol or drugs to numb your feelings and become dependent on it
- You might pretend to friends or family that things are fine and cut off a source of support
- You might tell yourself that it is not that bad really and you'll have to accommodate more
- To survive the abuse you might suppress your feelings, deny that it is as bad as it is and use your energy in this negative way

The more hopeless and exhausted we feel, the harder it is to imagine that there is anything we can do to change the situation we are in.



3. Degradation/Put Downs

Suffering abuse is degrading to all women as we are not free to exercise control over our own lives. We can identify some of the things that abusers do to us, for example:

- They laugh at you when you are disciplining the children
- They leave you to deal with their debts, the money lenders, sheriff officers, family or friends.
- They publicly humiliate or insult you by the way they talk to you
- They threaten or try to get the family doctor have you committed to a psychiatric hospital
- They destroy your possessions, tear up precious photographs
- They make you eat off the floor
- They urinate on you or spit on you
- They insist that you ask their permission to do some simple task like going to the toilet
- They force you into wearing underwear that they find stimulating
- They force you to participate in degrading sexual acts for their pleasure
- They tell you to get out of their life, their way, their car, their house

Again, some of the things you do to cope with the situation, or to have a quiet life, may add to your feelings of degradation, for example:

- You agree with things they say or vote the way they say even though you disagree
- You sell your belongings or borrow money
- You tell someone what they have been doing to you (doctor, friend, family member)
- You call the police and they can't do anything to help you
- You call the police and the abuser accuses YOU of assault resulting in possibly facing charges
- You make excuses for them
- You put on the clothes they have said are sexually stimulating to them and are then ridiculed by them
- You ask them to forgive you for some mistakes they said you made, but within yourself you do not believe this was a mistake you made

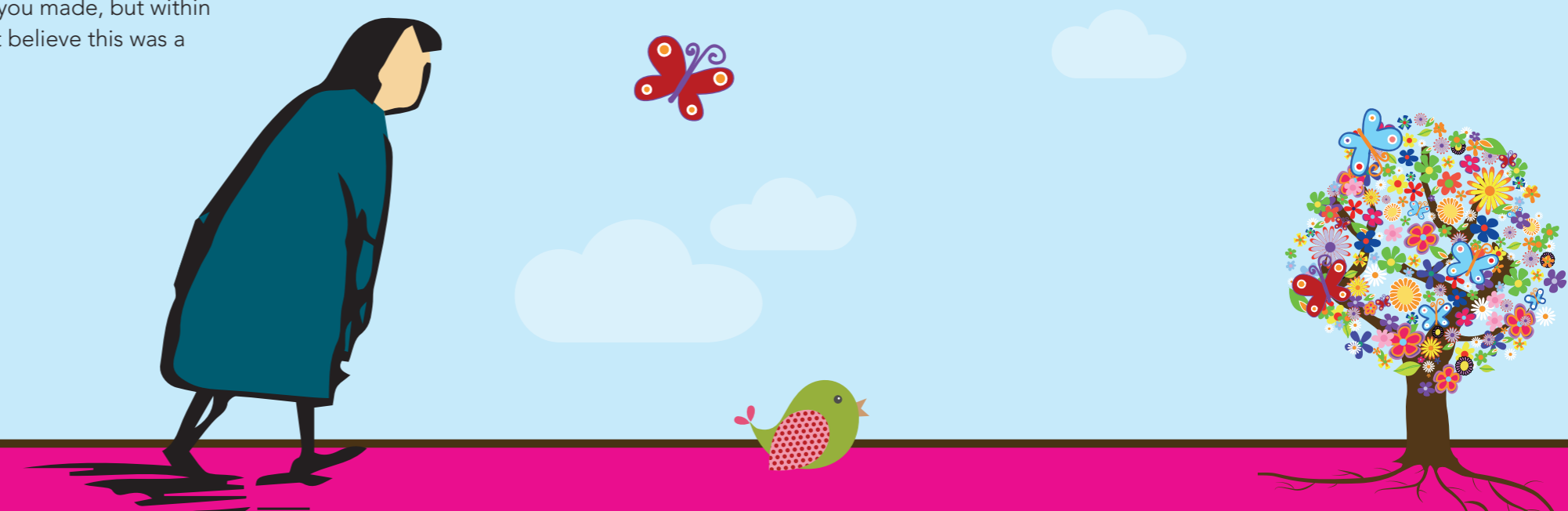
The more we are degraded, the more difficult it is to get in touch with our sense of worth.

4. Threats

Abusers use threats to increase their control over you. This can be when they think they are losing some control. Often they get a sense of power when they see the fear you feel as a result of their threats. There are many threats that an abuser can use to keep us in a state of fear, for example:

- No matter where you go they will find you
- If you tell anyone no one will ever believe you
- If you leave them they will kill you/the children/himself/the family pet/or anyone who helps you or takes you in
- If you tell anyone they will make sure you are put into a psychiatric hospital
- If you leave them no one will ever have you (in another relationship)
- They tell you that you could not manage without them
- That they have friends in high places who will make sure you do not get your rights if you leave them
- That they will scar you for life if you try to leave
- That you will always be with them because they need you
- You will never get peace to hold down a job because they will follow you and harass you
- They will get the children taken from you and get the courts to grant them custody
- They will go with other partners if you do not perform sexually as they demand
- That they will rape you
- That they will show or sell photos of you naked
- That they will get people to testify against you in court

You may cut yourself off from potential sources of support because you are afraid that they may carry out some of these threats if you do go for help.



5. Displays of Total Power

The only point at which an abuser really has total power is when they kill the woman. However when we are being abused we do feel as if the abuser has total power. Women who are subjected to abuse do try to gain some control even while feeling so acutely powerless. The following are some of the things which may make us feel very powerless:

- They lock you in or out of the house
- They rape you
- You know by the way they are looking at you that they are going to abuse you
- They threaten to sexually abuse the children or another family member
- They keep all the money
- They throw away your contraception
- They force you into selling sex
- They take away your passport
- They take the children out of the country
- They tell other people some secret part of your life from your past
- They tell you it's their house, their money, their car, and their children

Women struggle against abuse in their own ways. This active struggle can be what enables us to leave.

6. Enforcing Trivial Demands

In reality there is nothing trivial at all about any aspect of the abuse we suffer. However, while we are still living with an abuser there are things that they demand from us which seem less important than the more dangerous attacks on our mental and physical health, for example:

- They decide what, when, and how much you eat
- It's their choice of television programmes
- They decide when you go to bed
- They dictate that you have to do the housework
- They tell you what clothes you should wear
- They expect you to provide meals for them whenever they want them
- They expect you to keep the children quiet for them to have peace
- They play mind games by telling lies

Often we will try to please the abuser to avoid more extreme forms of abuse. However, the price we pay when we do this is to lose any control over even the smaller aspects of our lives.

7. Occasional Indulgences/Treats

No one who abuses is always abusive. There are times when they will behave more as they did when the relationship was more positive. These indulgences may happen when the abuser becomes afraid that they have gone too far with their controlling abuse or may be fearful that their partner is going to leave. Some examples of the things they might do are:

- Take you for a night out
- Let you go out and they babysit for you
- Bring you flowers
- Talk to you and listen to what you say
- Tell you that you are really the strong one
- Tell you that you are a good mother
- Accept that they have lots of problems themselves and promise to get help
- Take you on holiday
- Buy you gifts
- Tell you that they really do love you
- Tell you that they need you and couldn't live without you or the children
- Promise never to hurt you again
- Promise never to leave you

When we are being abused we may feel desperate for some love and affection. It seems really good when they stop being abusive. This reminds us of the past when times were better. Occasional indulgences are very powerful as they have the effect of emotionally confusing you and leading you into a false sense of security.



8. Distorted/Confused Reality

This is the result of having experienced some of the things listed under the other headings. We show the damage done to us by the way we think and feel. We end up with distorted or confused views about ourselves, our future and of the nature of relationships in general. Some abused women have said about their sense of reality:

- It's just that I'm a weak person
- It must be me
- It's only me who feels like this
- I can't cope
- It's not really that bad
- I'm not really abused
- They do love me really
- This is just what love is all about
- This is normal life in any relationship
- It's just that I wanted too much
- Nothing can ever change
- It would be the same no matter who I was with
- I need this person and I couldn't live without them
- If only I could give this person a bit more love everything would be all right
- I can never feel strong again, this person is the strong one
- I can never get away from them
- They are so powerful
- I am stupid
- It is my fault

Thousands of women each year have very similar distortions and are full of self-doubt and self-blame. These distortions are a direct result of the abuse we have suffered. We have not had control over our own lives yet have been held responsible for just about everything that happens. As human

beings we can only take responsibility for ourselves when we have the personal power, or control, over our own lives. The abuser has been in a position of power. They will have refused to take responsibility for their own actions. You will have been blamed by them and they will have attempted to keep you as powerless as they could. Remember that being controlled by them is a kind of brainwashing.



Chapter 3: Recovery

1. Introduction

Since 1973 Glasgow Women's Aid continues to say that **women are not to blame for abuse against them. We live in a society that accepts and expects that some people do hold more power. Society then denies the fact that abuse of power takes place within the home. We all have the right to live free from fear and abuse. We do not have to be perfect human beings to have these rights. No human being has the right to abuse another.**

Leaving an abusive situation has taken great strength, even if you felt that you left in a state of panic and felt weak from the effort. Even if you felt you had no choice but to leave, you have broken control over you by showing that you refuse to stay and be abused.

Whatever you feel about having left, you have exercised great strength. You have made a huge step towards getting back control over your own life, and your feelings.

Regaining control over your own life and your feelings will take time. We can heal the pain of abuse but it does take effort and it can be hard at times. We are all worth the effort it takes to heal from abuse.

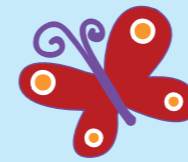
The support available for women having been subjected to abuse, mind games and brainwashing is not nearly enough. When

male prisoners of war are brainwashed huge amounts of support are given to help them recover from their distortions and confusions. But when women are brainwashed through abuse, we are expected to recover quickly. We have to cope with all the responsibilities and very little support.

Care and sensitivity should be available to all human beings who have been abused. It is to the credit of each of us that we recover from abuse, although recovery is slower and more painful when little support is available. Recovery requires rest, care and attention.

During the many decades that Glasgow Women's Aid has been in existence every year thousands of women have contacted Women's Aid in Scotland with requests for information, support, and safe refuge.





2. How we feel when recovering from abuse

We have many different and sometimes conflicting feelings when we are recovering from abuse. The following is a starting point towards identifying some of our feelings.

When we have suffered abuse we may have feelings of guilt, shame, denial, powerlessness, self-blame and numbness. These can also be feelings which are very similar to those we may

have after the death of someone close. These can be shock, a sense of loss, anger, confusion, pain, fear and the sense that we are only half alive ourselves.

At other points, and often mixed in with all of these difficult feelings there are feelings of joy, excitement, a new sense of freedom and hope for the future.

2.1 Guilt

We experience feelings of guilt because we have been made to feel responsible for the abuse. The abuser will have said and shown in many ways that, "It's your fault". Other people's attitudes can reinforce what they say e.g. "You've made your bed now lie on it."

As girls we are brought up to believe that marriage is the fairy tale, "Happily ever after". We come to believe that only when living with a partner will we be happy, cared for, given a social status and achieve fulfillment. It hasn't worked out this way for hundreds of thousands of women, who are abused, raped, suffer mental health problems, or killed by the partner they're living with.

We can feel guilty when our relationship does not match up to the ideal.

Women are seen as the mainstay of the family. We are held responsible when the family breaks down. Our guilt stems from the abuser telling us it's our fault, the images we get of the family in general and the role we are expected to play. If we are unable to prevent abuse and have not achieved the ideal good relationships or marriage, we feel as if it's our failure.

It can help to recognise that the "perfect relationship" is a myth. Relationships can be positive and fulfilling experiences when equality exists.

People who abuse fail to take responsibility for themselves or their actions, they make us feel guilty for them instead. No person has the right to abuse. We all have the right to disagree with our partners or choose not to continue being in a relationship, however, no one has the right to abuse another.

For those mothers who have suffered abuse, there is often a sense of guilt that the children have been deprived of a father. All children need to be loved and cared for.

One woman has said, "I used to say that I deprived my children of a father, but now I say that I deprived them of a selfish, immature, abusive father who would have given them the constant trauma of watching their mother in pain and fear. I couldn't have given them all the love and attention I can now if I hadn't deprived them of their abusive father. I wouldn't have had the energy for them or the freedom to be happy with them I'd have gone on using all my energy coping with his abuse."

2.2 Feelings & thoughts

It is easy to say, "no one has the right to abuse" but it can feel harder to really believe this when we are still feeling guilty. In your head you can be saying, "they did not have the right to abuse me" but in your heart it can be hard to believe.

This separation between our thoughts and feelings is common. We can think or believe something to be true, but our feelings do not always tie up with our thoughts. In other words, we can believe that they did not have the right to abuse but still feel that it was really our own fault.

One woman has said, "I know that he should not have treated me like that, I do know that, but I still feel as if there was something wrong with me, as if I made him like that. But that is what he used to tell me, that it was me, only me, who made him like that."

These mixed up feelings can often make us feel as if there is something wrong with us.

"I remember feeling a pain in my chest

whenever someone was kind to me. It was as if their act of kindness made me feel even more vulnerable. I had learned how to protect myself against their cruelty, by switching off my feelings, but when someone was kind to me I was confused and didn't know how to feel. It's better now that I know that I am worth being kind to, so I feel fine when people are nice to me now. I did used to get very distressed when kindness was so uncommon in my daily life."

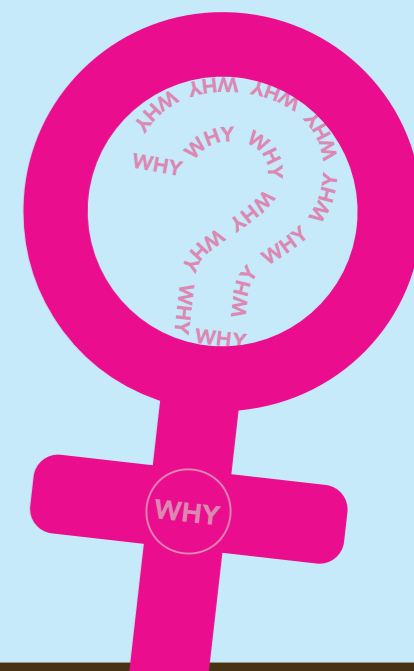
Our feelings do change over time as we come to terms with the effects of abuse. The feelings of worthlessness grow less as we are free from the abuse and as we learn to like, respect and value ourselves. When we learn to understand and trust our feelings, we can feel the strength of them and the joy that feelings can bring.

2.3 Being kind to ourselves

We need to be patient with ourselves when we are recovering from abuse. It is a process. In time our confused feelings will lessen and we will be more able to accept whatever we feel.

We all need the support of people who will believe that we have the right to live free of abuse, and who understand how it feels to be recovering. Talking with other women who understand can be a great source of support.

We all change as time goes on, especially when we are free from the daily damage that abuse does to us. The problem was theirs. You are working through the effects of abusive behaviour.



2.4 Keeping quiet

While we lived with the abuse, we may have kept quiet about it. We accepted that it was our fault and that they were not responsible. Abuse depends on silence. This silence helps the abuser to hide the reality of the abuse. They do not have to face up to the reality of

their abuse. They don't have to face up to any responsibility for their behaviour. Breaking the silence is a power we all have, but abuse can make us lose sight of it. By speaking out, we are taking back control.

2.5 Speaking Out

Just as there was great power in silence we kept, there is great power in the breaking of this silence. By talking to trusted friends, or supportive workers who understand, we break the power the abuser has used to control us. We start to understand the source of our guilt and shame and start to alter our feelings.

When we talk to others who understand and listen to what we are saying, then we feel that we are worth listening to. We feel that what we have to say is important. We feel that we can say what the reality of life has been. We learn that we do not have to feel responsible for what another has done. We also learn that we share common experiences with other women and that we are not alone with our feelings. We

can both get and give support by sharing our thoughts and feelings.

In breaking the silence about the abuse we have taken our courage in both hands and found a key towards removing the guilt, shame and self blame that women who suffer abuse can experience.



2.6 Trusting our feelings

We need to be able to trust our feelings again as they can protect us to recognise danger. If we do not entertain the possibility that we could be in danger, then we will not be able to identify the danger when it is there.

We were not told that we could be in danger by living or falling in love with someone. It can be difficult for us to identify the point at which their behaviour became abusive. When we have accommodated and suffered abuse we lose trust in our own feelings, our judgement and our ability to protect ourselves.

Learning to live without fear, learning to recognise and trust our feelings are part of having control of our own lives again. We need to learn how to control our lives and feel our feelings in a positive way, but this takes time. Once we taste the freedom of having control over our lives we can enjoy the changes we are going through.

The lack of power we feel is not because we are weak or powerless women. It is because we have been affected by the experience of abuse. As we begin to exercise control over our own lives and learn to make our own choices we can start to feel our confidence and self-esteem coming back.

Every woman who has experienced abuse can recover from it. We could not have survived without our inner strength, even if we still do not feel it very strongly at the moment. We are forced to use this strength, or energy, to cope with the day-to-day reality of living with abuse. Once we have left the abuse behind we can begin to use this strength for ourselves.



2.7 Anger

Anger can be a difficult emotion for women. We have been taught from an early age that it is not appropriate for women to be angry. Some women cry rather than express their anger in the ways we usually expect it to be shown. It is also very difficult for us to express anger towards someone that we fear. When the person who is abusive is also the one we are/were afraid of, it is often impossible to express anger towards them directly.

As human beings we express our anger when and where it is safe to do so. If we don't feel it's safe to express our anger towards our abuser, then we can be angry with ourselves or someone else instead. Anger turned in on ourselves can quickly become depression and add to our distress. It is hard work to identify our feelings; what we feel, why we feel it, and why we show some feelings in some situations and not in others. It is hard work but worth it. We will not be such a puzzle to ourselves the more we understand our feelings.

One survivor has said, "The deep anger we feel is sometimes towards ourselves for not seeing what he was doing to us. Then, feeling stupid because we still love this man. How can we face loneliness when it would be easier on our emotions to go back to him?? Some of us are encouraged to believe that we are not a complete person without a partner. When we are alone a lot with plenty of time to think, we naturally remember the good times because it is easier to face that than the unknown days or weeks ahead."

We have to tell ourselves over and over again that:

- We have the right to be angry.
- We all have the right to live free of fear and abuse.
- No one has the right to abuse.
- We do not have to be faultless human beings to have these basic human rights.

Anger is another source of our ability to protect ourselves. When we recognise this it can be easier to accept that it can be good for us to feel angry.

Anger can be life saving to us when we are suffering abuse and while we are recovering. It is the feeling that makes it possible for us to leave. It is the feeling that says, "I am worth more than this, you are not free to treat me this way, I will not let you." It is the feeling that helps us to protect ourselves by staying away.

Anger is one of the main feelings that have motivated women of the past and the present to resist abuse of power and set up organisations like Women's Aid. Women's anger can be positively directed towards creative ends.

3. Why?

Why was it so hard for me to see that he was abusing me?

We still live in a society where healthy discussions around domestic abuse are not the norm. Few people are likely to warn you that it is possible to be abused by a person you love. We receive messages that deny that what abusive people do is abusive. One clear example of this is rape. Some people still believe that it is not possible for someone to rape their wife/partner. This is because attitudes still exist that show a belief that women are property and that abusers can do what they want to with property. So it is extremely difficult for any woman to say that she has been raped by her partner.

Social attitudes towards rape in marriage were clear when in 1992 the House of Lords debated whether or not rape in marriage should become a crime. At that time it was said that the very fabric of our society would be undermined if it did. Despite these attitudes, the law did change and rape in marriage is now a crime in the UK.

Rape is a common form of abuse of women. All rape is a violation of a woman's emotional and physical being. Additionally the rape of a woman by her partner is a betrayal of the trust that she has given through love. Rape is a violation of both mind and body. This total violation is denied by many and accepted by society. Abusers are rarely charged with the rape of their partners and in most countries rape within marriage is legal.

Our social conditioning also makes it difficult to name our experiences as abuse. We are taught from an early age how to care for and trust other people, but we are not taught how to control them. This makes it difficult to identify the tactics of control that abusers use.

For many of us it is a slow realisation that the reason the abuser is doing the things they are, is so that they can control us. It can also take time to realise that the reasons they give to explain away their actions are excuses and not reasons.

Those who want to control women are a danger to us. When we learn to identify the tactics of control they use, we can start to protect ourselves. We can remove ourselves from danger once we recognise that we are in danger. Recognising that we have been brainwashed is very difficult because it takes place gradually, often over a long period of time. The longer it goes on the more difficult it is to see clearly that this behaviour is abusive.

Many of us will respond to things going wrong within our relationships by trying harder to make them work. As the abuse increases we have less and less power to influence things positively.

As one woman has said, "We are programmed from birth to believe that we are stronger,



wiser, and that we can cope. But when we read of our experiences in black and white we have to accept that this is what we have been through.”

We usually enter into a relationship because of the positive things about the person we fall in love with. We accept that these good aspects of them are who they are, just as we accept images of how things should be.

We change the way we look at things when we decide to leave an abuser, but are often left

3.1 Peace of mind

Once we get a sense of having the right to control our own lives and feel the strength within ourselves, we can feel positive emotions. Many women have expressed such feelings:

“I find life really exciting now, I didn’t know just how limited I was. There are still hundreds of things I want to do. I don’t even know what half of them are yet, but I want to do them.”

These feelings of happiness come when we are ready. Everyone is different. We all have to learn to recognise and accept our own feelings, be patient and kind to ourselves, and believe that now that we have removed the source of our pain we can and will recover.

Our feelings of joy can be there one moment and gone the next. We are constantly reminded that we are living in an unequal society. We may have been feeling great until we try to move on and then for example we are offered a ‘hard to let’ house or the courts award child contact to the abuser without recognising the danger in doing so. Sometimes our feelings change because

thinking that our feelings have let us down. This is added to by the fact that we did not know that we could be placing ourselves in a dangerous position by falling in love with someone.

Our feelings are potentially a great source of personal protection, and once we have learned to recognise abusive actions and patterns we can once again feel the strength of our feelings in a positive way. When we are recovering from abuse we can find our inner strength again.

painful memories return.

The process of recovery from abuse is full of changes. It is worth reminding ourselves, no matter how hard it might seem we have survived and we are getting stronger. We **can** rebuild our lives.

Sometimes it is because we are stronger that we remember painful experiences. Women often forget events that are too painful to remember. It can feel confusing to remember pain just at the point we were feeling happy. This is hard, but we can face memories and remind ourselves that this is in the past. We can survive the memory just as we survived the abuse and can ask for support to help become free of the pain. It is important to remind ourselves that we have moved on.

However much effort it takes, we are worth it.

3.2 Denial

While we are being abused we often deny the full extent of what is happening to us. Denial is one way of coping that we use to protect ourselves and to hide the shame we feel. Sometimes we deny to ourselves that the abuser means to be the way they are because it is too painful to think that they choose to be so hurtful. Sometimes we deny to other people that they are abusive because it makes us feel worthless to think of other people knowing about what is going on. Whatever the reason, it is difficult to stop denying the abuse when we live in a society that denies the extent and danger of domestic abuse.

Finding our voices to name the abuse women are subjected to by abusers has been a long and slow process both for individual women and for women’s organisations.

Denial helps abusers to continue to abuse: therefore we support not only ourselves but all women when we bring abuse out into the open.

3.3 Shock

Some women are shocked when they learn how common domestic abuse is. Recognising all of these feelings, and finding our sense of reality again will protect us in the future. When we know what the tactics of control are, when we know that some abusers actually get

pleasure from another’s pain, when we know that we have the right to live free of abuse, we are informed. Knowledge is power, so with our new information we will, in time, feel stronger.



3.4 Numbness

Recovery from abuse is hard work and we get tired. One woman has described her feelings as, "Nothing. There are times when I feel nothing at all. It's as if I don't exist, I just don't feel a thing."

Most women struggle to protect themselves

from the pain of abuse. There is only so much pain that any human being can take, so there are times when we shut down our feelings. This is how we cope. Once we are away from the abuse we can begin to feel safe enough to experience our feelings again. This freedom is something to look forward to.

3.5 Loss

A feeling of loss can be there for many reasons. All of us who have suffered abuse want the abuse to stop, but we may not have wanted the relationship to end. This can mean that there is a sense of loss when we leave. However as we get on with our lives free of abuse we will feel less pain. There is great relief in the end of suffering.

Emotional pain takes time to go and the length of time will be different for all of us. Healing any pain starts by removing the source of the pain. As it is not within our power to change the abuser we often have to leave them before we can begin to feel free of pain.

Even within relationships where our partner is abusing us there can be times when the abuse stops and we feel there are good bits. These may be the good times in the past. It could be that having a child was one of the good bits, or the material things that we gained from being in the relationship. Whatever the good things were we may have had to leave some of these behind and we can miss them. It is a difficult process to leave or end a relationship, especially the more we have put into it.

By the very nature of being in an abusive relationship, we suffer a loss of identity. In general, women's identity can be lost by the loss of her name, her independent status and

her legal right to be considered as a person in her own right, independently of her partner. In addition to all of this women are given the responsibility of keeping the family together. Our sense of loss can be great when we end a relationship in order to end the abuse we suffer. However, as we cope with this change in our identity and experience the feelings of freedom more and more, we can see that what we have lost is a drain on our emotional resources. This can feel very liberating.

The loss can be: the loss of an abuser, the loss of pain, the loss of self blame, the loss of powerlessness, the loss of social embarrassment, and the loss of fear.

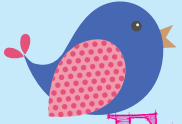
As one woman has said, "With the loss of the abuser I now have freedom, happiness, enjoyment and a feeling of self containment. I know that I've still got a long way to go but now I have the freedom of choice to pick whatever road I want to go."

Freedom

With the gaining of freedom there is a new space in our lives for all the creative feelings: hope, joy, excitement, new interests, fun, new friends, new choices, new things to learn, people to meet, places to go, a new sense of trust in our own feelings and abilities, poetry to write... the list is up to you!

One woman has said, "I think that peace of mind is a big factor in my life now, as I can do the things that I want to like going out to work, going out with friends and most importantly being and pleasing myself."





Further Support

Glasgow Women's Aid can offer you further support through the opportunity to speak with our workers.

Contact Glasgow Women's Aid at:

4th Floor, 30 Bell St, Glasgow G1 1LG
or call us on **0141 553 2022**.

Google search for, "**Glasgow Women's Aid**," or look us up on social media like **Facebook** or **Twitter**.

Details of other Women's Aid groups can be obtained from Scottish Women's Aid on **0131 226 6606** or on the Scottish Women's Aid website.

This booklet was originally written and produced by Glasgow Women's Aid staff in October 1995.

Revised by Glasgow Women's Aid staff in January 2017.

Thanks to the many women and staff who made this booklet possible.

