

Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships

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A simple guide to help you spot what's abusive, what might be someone's lack of relationship and communication skills, and what YOU need to focus on so you stop shrinking yourself.

1. What *is* abusive?

Abuse isn't someone being moody once. It isn't someone struggling to say how they feel. Abuse is **a pattern of behaviour** that leaves you feeling small, scared, confused, or responsible for their emotions.

Common signs:

- Your feelings are dismissed or twisted.
- They blame you for everything.
- You feel like you're always "wrong," even when you know you're not.
- They control money, time, friendships, family contact.
- You change how you speak, dress, act just to avoid upsetting them.
- You apologise all the time even though you've done nothing wrong.
- You walk on eggshells.
- You feel drained, anxious, or unsafe more often than not.

Abuse isn't about a bad day.

It's **power and control** over time.

If the behaviour strips away your voice, safety, or independence... that's abuse.

2. What can look similar but isn't abuse?

Some people, especially neurodivergent adults (autistic, ADHD, etc.), may:

- Struggle with emotional expression
- Miss social cues
- Get overwhelmed and shut down
- Hyper-focus on their own thoughts and forget to check in
- Communicate bluntly without meaning harm
- Avoid conflict because they freeze, not because they're playing mind games

These things can be hurtful, but they come from skill gaps, not control.

The difference?

When they realise something hurts you, they *try* to do better. Slowly, imperfectly, but willingly.

You'll see:

- Curiosity instead of defensiveness
- Effort rather than excuses
- Accountability instead of blame
- Openness to learning, trying tools, or getting support

If someone cares, they'll want to meet you in the middle.

3. The real deciding factor: How do YOU feel?

Stop analysing them and start checking in with you.

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel safe?
- Do I feel heard?
- Do I feel valued?
- Do my needs matter here?
- Do they show effort when I express something important?
- Do I feel calmer with them or more anxious?

Your body tells the truth long before your brain catches up.

4. Your boundaries, wants, needs, and desires matter more than any label

You don't need to figure out if they're a narcissist or neurodivergent or just clueless.

You only need to decide:

Does this relationship work for me?

Does it match the life I want?

Do I like who I become around them?

Healthy relationships feel like:

- Space to speak
- Space to disagree
- Space to grow

- Feeling wanted, not tolerated
- Effort going both ways
- Need-meeting, not need-minimising

Unhealthy ones feel like:

- Shrinking
- Silencing yourself
- Guessing how they'll react
- Feeling guilty for existing
- Carrying the whole emotional load
- Never quite being enough

**Your boundaries aren't about controlling them.
They're about choosing what you allow into your life.**

5. How to refocus on YOU

Here's what helps women get clarity fast:

1. Name your non-negotiables

These are the basics you need to feel safe and respected.
For example: honesty, consistency, effort, space to express emotions.

2. Pay attention to patterns, not promises

Change is seen, not spoken.

3. Stop giving gold to someone who keeps dropping it

If you've repeated the same need 10 times and they still don't try... that's your sign.

4. Don't shrink yourself to keep the peace

If you need to silence your wants to stay in the relationship, you're losing yourself.
No relationship is worth that.

5. Choose the life you want, not the potential you imagine

You're not here to raise a grown adult or keep fixing someone who won't meet you halfway.

6. Final words

You deserve a relationship where you feel seen, heard, and wanted.

You deserve connection, not confusion.

You deserve calm, not chaos.

You deserve to be YOU, not a watered-down version built to keep someone else comfortable.

If someone's behaviour leaves you anxious, lonely, or doubting your own reality, trust that.

Your boundaries aren't negotiable.

Your needs aren't unreasonable.

Your voice matters.

Stop shrinking. Pick the relationship that lets you breathe.

Exit Plan For Abusive Relationship

The Next Step: Your Exit Plan

This is your step-by-step guide to safely preparing, planning, and protecting yourself while leaving an abusive relationship.

I created this guide because I know how impossible it can feel when you become aware you're living in an abusive relationship.

You might not have money, you might feel watched, or like there's no one you can trust.

But there *is* a way out and there are people and places ready to help you, even if it's the middle of the night and you have nothing but the clothes on your back.

This plan isn't about rushing you.

It's here to provide help so you can prepare safely, quietly, and with the best support so when the time comes, you can leave with dignity, protection, and a clear plan one step at a time.

Every woman's story is different, but no woman deserves to live in fear.

Step 1: Getting Ready

I know right now you're feeling confused and carrying mixed emotions but there is always a way out. This guide will help you plan that way out safely and quietly, with the right support.

Gather important documents like birth certificates, passports, driving licence, medical records, and keep them safe. If you can, scan each one or take photos. Give copies to a trusted friend or save them online in a secure folder/cloud based server.

Think of a safe word you can use with someone you trust so they know "I need help now."

Memorise key phone numbers for support, domestic abuse helplines, a close friend and consider contacting solicitors who could offer you Legal Aid. (some useful sites in section 4)

Pack an emergency bag with some essentials like clothes, medication, some cash, and keep it somewhere outside your home.

Step 2: Your Legal Rights & Leaving Safely

If you are in immediate danger and need to leave your home quickly, there are safe places you can go called a refuge, these offer confidential space for women and children escaping abuse.

Refuges can help with emergency housing, legal aid, benefits, and emotional support.

You may share accommodation with other women and children.

You'll have your own room and access to support workers who understand trauma and recovery.

In the first few days, you might feel scared, numb, or even guilty for leaving.

Those feelings don't mean you made the wrong choice.

They mean you've been in survival mode for a long time.

Ways to find a refuge quickly:

- **Local Council Emergency Housing Team** Every council must provide emergency accommodation if you're escaping domestic abuse.
- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Refuge)** Call **0808 2000 247** (available 24/7). They can find a space for you anywhere in the UK.
- **Women's Aid Directory** [womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory)
- **Scottish Women's Aid** [womensaid.scot](https://www.womensaid.scot)
- **Welsh Women's Aid** [welshwomensaid.org.uk](https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)
- **NI Women's Aid** [northernirelandwomensaid.org](https://www.northernirelandwomensaid.org)

Your Safe Exit

Disable your phone location tracking/Find My Device and change all your passwords on emails, banks, and social media.

Leave when your abuser is out.

Take your children to your safe place, ensure legal measures are in place if needed.

Consider obtaining a Non Molestation order to keep your abuser away, if you are in immediate danger you can make an application the same day without notice to your abuser.

[More details can be found here](#)

Avoid phone and in-person conversations and where possible only meet in public spaces you feel safe in or go with a friend.

If you need to **flee immediately**, please go to your local **A&E department, police station, or pharmacy** and ask for "ANI", this will discreetly alert staff that you're in danger and need help finding a safe place.

Step 3: Building Your New Life & Healing

You don't have to do this alone.

Creating a safety network of people you trust and having safe spaces to go to will help you feel supported before, during, and after leaving.

Your network might include a friends, your GP, your child's school, or a domestic abuse charity. Seek therapy for post separation abuse, join support groups (physical and online) to facilitate healing emotionally.

When you're ready to connect with others who truly understand, join The First Step, a new private community for women rebuilding their lives during and after abuse.

Section 4: Financial Safety & Legal Support

Financial Safety

Create a new email address only you can access (Gmail or ProtonMail in incognito mode).

Open a bank account with a new bank, you can do this online (Monzo, Starling)

Gather proof of income, debts, and any financial control messages.

Apply for benefits in your own name when it's safe.

Legal Help and Protection

Child Law Advice <https://childlawadvice.org.uk>

Rights of Women rightsofwomen.org.uk

National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) ncdv.org.uk

LawWorks Clinics www.lawworks.org.uk

Legal Aid Check gov.uk/check-legal-aid

Section 5: Gathering Evidence & Understanding Coercive Control

Coercive control cases are built on patterns, not single incidents. Small, consistent notes can become powerful proof.

How to Safely Store Your Evidence

Create a folder in Google Drive (free, accessible from phone or laptop).

Upload screenshots, photos, and notes regularly.

If online access is unsafe, send copies to a trusted friend.

Keep a duplicate on a USB stick if possible.

Document every behaviour or incident with the date, time, what happened, and how it made you feel.

Section 6: Preparing Emotionally & Practically to Leave

Grounding & Nervous System Reset

When your body feels frozen or panicked, place your hand on your chest.

Take three slow breaths in through your nose and hum softly as you exhale.

You could also name three things you can see, two things you can touch, and one thing you can control right now... these help bring your body and mind to the present moment.

Affirmations to Rewire Your Subconscious

I am allowed to choose peace.

Safety is not selfish.

I deserve to feel calm in my own home.

I am taking the first step toward freedom.

Every small action I take now is leading me somewhere safer.

Leaving abuse isn't just walking away.
It's reclaiming your freedom, your choices, and your peace.
You are brave, even if you don't feel it yet.

REMEMBER THIS

You are worthy of safety, even if you've been told otherwise and you are not alone in this next step.

Reach out to your local support services, domestic abuse organisations, or when you're ready, join **The Next Step community**, a confidential space of women who've walked this road and understand what you're going through.

CPS-Informed Coercive Control Evidence Checklist

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Goal: To help you build a strong case that the Crown Prosecution Service can pursue

Why This Matters

Coercive control cases are about **patterns** not one-off incidents.

The CPS needs to see **repeated or continuous behaviour** that caused **fear, alarm, or distress** and affected your **day-to-day life**.

Evidence helps them see the full picture, even when you've been made to doubt your own reality.

Keep this simple truth in mind:

Every note, message, photo, and date you record is one more piece of truth they can't rewrite.

Step 1: How to Safely Store Your Evidence

- Create a **private folder** in Google Drive or Dropbox (free and accessible from phone or laptop).
- Use a **neutral name** (e.g., "Work Notes" or "Receipts").
- Upload screenshots, photos, and documents regularly.
- If this isn't safe, **email copies to a trusted friend or relative**.
- Keep a backup on a **USB stick** or **burned CD** (labelled something ordinary, like "holiday pics").
- Never store evidence on shared devices or shared cloud accounts.
- If you suspect monitoring, use **incognito/private mode** or a **safe device** at a library or friend's house.

Step 2: Keep a Timeline & Log

Record incidents in a simple format like this:

- **Date:** (DD/MM/YYYY)
- **Time:** (Approx.)
- **What happened:** (Describe behaviour, words, or actions)

- **How it made you feel:** (Fear, shame, confusion, panic, etc.)
- **Impact:** (Stopped you going out, couldn't sleep, withdrew from family, etc.)

Even the smallest incidents help show the *pattern* and emotional impact — that's what the CPS look for.

Step 3: Digital & Communication Evidence

Save or screenshot:

- Texts, emails, WhatsApp messages, DMs (including deleted message notifications).
- Missed call logs, call durations, blocked call attempts.
- Social media posts or comments targeting, shaming, or threatening you.
- Evidence of stalking or monitoring (location sharing, tracking apps, spyware, "find my" misuse).
- Proof of online accounts he controls or demands access to.

 **Tip: Screenshot entire conversations with visible names, dates, and timestamps.**

Step 4: Financial Control Evidence

The CPS recognises **economic abuse** as part of coercive control. Gather:

- Bank statements showing withdrawals or debts in your name.
- Evidence of denied access to funds or joint accounts.
- Screenshots of messages where you're made to ask for money or permission to spend.
- Proof of forced financial decisions (e.g., loans, credit cards, cancelled payments).
- Receipts or notes of withheld child maintenance or shared bills.

 **Tip: Save PDFs from online banking in your evidence folder.**

Step 5: Isolation & Monitoring Evidence

This shows how you were cut off from your friends, family, and professionals (Health Visitors, Teachers, GP)

Keep a record of:

- Messages or comments telling you not to see certain people.
- Witness statements from friends or family noticing your absence.
- Proof of controlled movements (e.g., being driven everywhere, checked locations).
- Screenshots showing access to your accounts, emails, or phone without consent.

 **Tip: Tell friends or colleagues to write what they've observed, the small details matter.**

Step 6: Threats, Humiliation & Intimidation

Evidence that shows how you were made to feel unsafe or worthless:

- Voice notes or texts containing threats, insults, or controlling statements.
- Photos of damaged items, punched walls, or destruction during arguments.
- Notes of physical intimidation: blocking doorways, trapping you, shouting close to your face.
- Witness accounts from children, neighbours, or friends who heard or saw it.
- Police call records or screenshots of 999 calls.

 **Tip: Don't delete messages, even if you think they sound small or subtle. Patterns prove control.**

Step 7: Emotional, Physical & Medical Impact

Show how the behaviour affected your health and daily life.

- GP or hospital visit records.
- Mental health notes or therapy records.
- Letters about stress, anxiety, sleep issues, or panic attacks.
- Medication lists showing prescriptions for trauma, depression, or anxiety.

- Missed work notes, school absences, or messages explaining illness or exhaustion.

 **Tip: Ask your GP to note that your stress is linked to domestic circumstances.**

Step 8: Evidence from Children, Schools, or Services

- School reports noting behavioural changes in children.
- Messages or emails with school staff about safety concerns or parental conflict.
- Notes from social workers, counsellors, or domestic abuse teams.
- Letters or records from police or housing officers documenting your situation.

 **Tip: These third-party records are powerful because they confirm external concern.**

Step 9: Supporting Witnesses

Encourage trusted people to document what they've noticed:

- Friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues.
- Notes, texts, or letters describing your distress or incidents they witnessed.
- They don't have to give formal statements immediately, just write what they recall.

 **Tip: Keep all names and contact details in your evidence folder.**

Step 10: Visual or Audio Proof

- Photographs of injuries, damage, or property destruction.
- Screenshots showing tracking devices or apps.
- Short voice recordings of abuse (only if safe and legal to do so, never provoke a situation).
- CCTV, doorbell, or neighbour footage if relevant.

 **Tip: Label every photo with the date and what it shows.**

Step 11: Victim Personal Statement (VPS)

When police or CPS prepare a case, your **Victim Personal Statement** lets you describe:

- How the abuse made you feel.

- How it changed your daily life.
- The ongoing emotional impact on you and your children.

 **Tip:** Keep a running document of your feelings and experiences so your VPS is accurate and complete when the time comes.

Safety Reminder

- Only gather and store evidence **when it's safe to do so**.
- **Do not share or confront your abuser with it.**
- Prioritise your **immediate safety** over collecting evidence.
- If you feel unsafe, call **999** or contact **Refuge (0808 2000 247)** for immediate help.