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## WHY DO VICTIMS STAY?

***[Note: While this handout refers to perpetrators as male, and victims as female, it is important to note that a perpetrator may be male or female, that a victim may be male or female, and that domestic abuse occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Services are available to all victims of violence, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.]***

As a society, we often ask the question: “Why do victims stay in abusive relationships?” A more appropriate question would be: “Why is the perpetrator abusive?” Instead, the question – “Why does the victim stay?” – puts the responsibility back on the victim and is often followed with the statement, “She must like it.”

Victims stay in abusive relationships for many reasons. They do not stay because they “want to be abused.” Victims must weigh the few options available to them in order to determine the safest and best choice for them and their children.

### **A battered woman may believe:**

- His abuse is temporary.
- With loyalty and love, she can make him change.
- His promises that it will “never happen again.”
- It’s her responsibility to keep the family together.
- There will be more good times.

She may deny or minimize the abuse. She may believe her abuser when he tells her that his abuse is “her fault.” Many women do not want the relationship to end; they want the abuse to end. Many women believe their abusers’ threats. Fear is a major factor in why she stays.

### **She may fear:**

- More severe abuse.
- Retaliation if he finds her.
- Destruction of her belongings or home.
- Harm to her job or reputation.
- Stalking.
- Being charged with a crime.
- Harm to children, pets, family, or friends.
- His committing suicide.

- Court or police involvement.

There are many other reasons women stay in relationships. Some include:

### **Economics**

- Few job skills.
- Limited education or work experience.
- No access to bank account.
- Fear of poverty.

### **Pressure from community of faith/family**

- Family expectation to stay in marriage “at any cost.”
- Family denial of the abuse.
- Religion may disapprove of divorce.

### **Guilt/self doubt**

- Guilt about failure of the relationship.
- Guilt about choosing an abuser.
- Feelings of personal incompetence.
- Concern about independence.
- Loneliness.

### **Concern for children**

- Abuser may charge her with “kidnapping” or sue for custody.
- Abuser may abduct or abuse the children.
- Questions whether she can care for and support children on her own.
- Fears losing custody of her children.
- Believes children need a father.

### **Lack of community support**

- Unaware of services available to battered women.
- Lack of adequate child care.
- Negative experiences with service providers.
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Isolated from community services.
- No support from family and friends.

Source:

“Cut It Out” Participant’s Guide  
Domestic Violence Education Program  
Salons Against Domestic Violence Abuse Fund  
401 North Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60611  
[www.cutitout.org](http://www.cutitout.org)