

EXIT ACTION PLAN

10 Steps For Leaving
An Abusive Relationship



Introduction



Thank you so much for your interest in my eBook, **Exit Action Plan: “10 Steps to Leaving an Abusive Relationship”!**

Let me start by asking you a simple yet difficult question....

Are you ready to take the steps needed to leave an abusive relationship or do you know someone that these tips could help?

The effects of domestic violence, abuse, and sexual assault are too numerous to list, but here are a few:

- Fear
- Low Self-Worth
- Low-Self-Esteem
- Shame
- Embarrassment
- Frustration
- Un-forgiveness
- And Many More.

I asked the question about being **ready** because taking action is not easy for anyone nor are we all at the same level of preparedness.

Therefore it is extremely important for anyone to first acknowledge where they are.

Once you're away from the situation the healing can begin.

We all heal, survive, grow and rebuild ourselves at our own pace. Those of us who have shaken off the negative thoughts and feelings of shame, regret, remorse and embarrassment can now prepare to tackle the effects of domestic violence in our own lives, plus be able to help someone else slay the dragon in their life and reap the reward for doing so.

If your answer is "YES" to being ready, then I'm glad you're here.

You see once upon a time I too lived in fear not only for myself but my children as well. No one knew what I was going through -- not my family or the few friends I managed to keep. I didn't know where to turn and was ashamed to even try to find the help.

Of course it wasn't easy to make that transition and I had a few bumps along the way. I'm proud of myself for staying the course and deciding to do something instead of hiding my abuse as a secret never to be spoken of again. You see, as much as we may want to think no one else is going through this...statistics tells us a different story.

This book isn't about statistics though...it's about taking those hard learned lessons and using them for good.

With my own healing the lessons learned were for my good first and secondly, for the good of others who were looking for someone somewhere to understand and show them a better way.

Domestic Violence Wheel

Before I share my story let's take a look at this monster called "***Domestic Violence***".

There are 10 signs you're in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Let's see how many you find in my story. You don't have to experience them ***all*** but it is highly likely if you experienced one, then another will happen (or has

happened). Not all at the same time but it does go in a vicious cycle.

Intimidation

1. Making you feel afraid because of how they use their words, gestures or actions.
2. Smashing things, destroying property or harming pets.



3. Displaying weapons or threatening to use them against you.

Emotionally Abusive

4. Putting you down or making you feel bad.
5. Calling you names, playing mind games.
6. Humiliating you or

make you feel guilty.

7. Saying you caused the abuse/blame.

Isolation

8. Controlling what you do, who you see and talk to.
9. Limiting your outside activities.

10. Using jealousy (though they may not admit it) to justify their actions.

A healthy relationship **will not use your children as a pawn** in a game of control. Children should never be caught in the middle of grown up situations. They are not messengers, nor should they be used to deny visitation, demand support or threaten to be taken away.

A healthy relationship doesn't promote **male privilege** as a means of leaving you to simply play the role of servant while all decisions are made by him and only him.

It does not involve **economic abuse**, whereby your money is his money and his money is his money and you must give an account of every penny spent. The financial health of the family shouldn't be a secret that only he knows!

A healthy relationship should not be in conflict, instead it should compliment. A healthy relationship does not use blaming or minimizing of your concerns in order to make them invalid.

First I have to be honest with you. I didn't learn my lesson the first time around...thus I found myself in a second

marriage that also turned abusive. But let's examine my first marriage.

My Story

I can admit it now that I was entirely too young to be married. This happened because I found myself pregnant at an early age and my parents insisted that we get married. (I'm being nice with the word "*insisted*"). I had not been married long when the abusive signs began to show but I was *in love*, and overlooked what was happening and besides I figured it was my fault.

The first sign is the time my face was slapped because dinner was late. Then the abuse began happening for just about any reason. As my pregnancy advanced it seemed the verbal abuse got even worse. The scariest thing for me was the day I "fell" down a flight of stairs. It's only by God's grace that I didn't suffer any broken bones or that I didn't go into premature labor.

The day my son was born was a happy time and my husband showed me so much tenderness and kindness. I

just knew the rough patch was over and that we would finally, truly be a family.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I knew what was happening was wrong but there was also a part of me that said, "***I can fix this, I just have to do better***".

- Have you ever had a similar thought?

I guess you know by now that was a false assumption. We can't fix anyone but ourselves.

As women we are such caring and nurturing creatures it can lead us into a false sense of power to affect change in another adult. That privilege is left to us for our children and even then it runs out when they reach adulthood.

I didn't know that then but of course I eventually did learn that lesson; unfortunately not before a second child was added to a very volatile household.

Before the decision to leave was made I cried many sleepless nights and when my husband began to drink heavily it only seemed to make the problems in our marriage grow even more out of control. ALOCHOL and ABUSE is a very bad combination.

Okay, I'm sure by now you're wondering why I hadn't left before then. Or even why hadn't I told anyone what was happening. At the time there was a part of me that felt all marriages had these problems, especially since I witnessed some of this dysfunction in my own parents' marriage.

There was also **SHAME**. Shame that were I to tell anyone, then I'd be laughed at, ridiculed or told to just deal with it. In this instance the thing that pushed me out for good was the fear I saw in the eyes of my 2 boys.

The breakup wasn't easy and for a few months I had to return to live under my parents' roof. At least I had a job and was able to save to get a place of my own. Once I did move out one of my brothers came to live with me, not just to be a babysitter for the boys, but I can admit it now it was also for a sense of security.

That was my first marriage.

Did I learn? Oh no!

The saying that “If you don’t learn from your mistakes then you’re destined to repeat them” is so true!

Suffice it to say I repeated the cycle and once again found myself in an abusive relationship.

And So it Begins Again

This time before I knew what was happening I’d lost all contact with my family and friends. It started so subtly that by the time I realized it, it was too late!

How did it start?

It began with the constant phone calls whenever I visited my parents, he was always checking the bus schedule to see how long it would take me to get home.

Eventually I didn’t even know what our bills were or when they needed to be paid. It didn’t matter that I worked. I just deposited my check and waited on my allowance for groceries and the like. And if I wanted

something for myself, well it evoked such uncontrollable rage in him, that eventually I stopped asking.

I thought I knew what to do to get away. So one day when I knew he'd be gone for a few days I got to work. I found another apartment. I changed the boys' school and with the help of my family moved out. I thought I'd made it!

I was wrong, you see he knew where I worked and one day he waited for me and followed me home. I didn't know this of course until there was a knock on the door and there he was. I remember my heart pounding so hard that it was such a deafening sound to my ears; I almost didn't hear his ranting because of it.

I tried to close the door but I wasn't fast enough. I ran to the kitchen to call the police but he beat me there and yanked the phone out of the wall!

What saved me?

A neighbor came up to see what all the commotion was about and threatened to call the police. My abusive husband left.

It was time to move again and this time I changed jobs as well. The biggest lesson for me of course was learning to love myself and realizing that I deserved so much better than what I was accepting. I also knew I needed to work on myself and to listen to my inner voice.

I needed to make my happiness and security a priority not just for me, but my boys as well.

The Journey to Healing

Today, I'm happy to tell you that I've been with a wonderful man for the past 30 years who respects and loves me unconditionally, who is not in any way shape or form abusive and who has my back. This didn't happen overnight. It was a slow and steady process because I needed to fix me.

By fixing me I learned to love me and to know that I deserved the best and nothing less. This journey to a healthy relationship took a lot of work.

There were some false starts after all my emotions and sense of self and well-being were raw and my intuitive senses were on high alert.

The good news is that I did learn and I've never forgotten it.

On these next few pages are some tips from the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** that if followed will allow a person in an abusive relationship to safely exit.

I've listed what I consider the top 10 and added additional ones as well. *I wish I'd known these back then.*

10 Steps to Leaving an Abusive Relationship

1. Know the phone number to your local battered women's shelter.
2. Let a trusted family member, friend, coworker or neighbors know your situation.
3. Develop a plan for when you need help; code words you can text if in trouble, a visual signal like a porch light: light on = no danger; light off = trouble.
4. If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.
5. Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, events and threats made. Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures, text messages, social media messages, etc.

6. Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
7. If you need to sneak away, be prepared. Make a plan for how and where you will escape.
8. Back your car into the driveway, and keep it fueled. Keep your driver's door unlocked and other doors locked for a quick escape. Hide an extra set of car keys.
9. Set money aside. Ask friends or family members to hold money for you. Store them at a trusted friend or neighbor's house.
10. Keep important phone numbers of friends, relatives, doctors, schools, etc. with you at all times.

Those are what I consider the top 10 steps to help ensure a safe exit from an abusive relationship. If time is available, also take:

- Citizenship documents (such as your passport, green card, etc.) Titles, deeds and other property information.
- Medical records Children's school and immunization records Insurance information.
- Verification of social security numbers.
- Welfare identification.
- Valued pictures, jewelry or personal possessions.

And when it's time to leave it is advised to:

- Know your abuser's schedule and safe times to leave.
- Be careful when reaching out for help via the internet or telephone.
- Erase your internet browsing history, websites visited for resources, e-mails sent to friends/family asking for help.

- If you called for help, dial another number immediately after, just in case your abuser hits the redial button.
- Create a false trail. Call motels, real estate agencies and schools in a town at least six hours away from where you plan to relocate.
- Most important of all – stay calm, be wise and stay safe.

This information I am constantly sharing. It's out there but many still don't have the access to get it.

A Vision is Birthed

Several years after being in a very healthy and supportive relationship I decided I was ready. Well, actually I had a little help with that decision. God had been preparing me for quite some time. I was strong, confident and determined to help women who may have no one to turn to. Naturally I had to think about what exactly it was I wanted to do.

This required me to take pen and paper and do a rough draft of what I hoped to accomplish. And of course I needed to have a talk with members of my family for the secrets I'd carried for so long were about to be shared with everyone.

I knew they deserved to hear it from me. It took several months from the fruition of this idea to it being a reality to take shape.

In the process I learned a lot about myself. Things I've always been able to share with the women and teen girls I work with through the organization birthed out of my healing, **Fresh Start for Women.**

Putting the Work In To Reach "Healing"

As I mentioned earlier, you have to put a lot of work into the healing process. You have to learn to love yourself all over again and in the majority of cases you'll have to learn to forgive yourself.

When I decided to use my experiences to help others, I also knew it was an important part of my continued healing.

During my preparation there were things about me that required improving. I needed to be comfortable speaking to people and not feel ashamed; for me that meant joining a Toastmasters Club as well as the drama ministry at my church. Each of these played a big role in preparing me to do the work I love and helped build up my self-confidence!

I also needed to be crystal clear on the reasons for doing what I wanted to do. My main goal was to help someone else transition to a place of safety, peace and harmony, so that they too can be truly free and happy.

The Reward of a Lifetime

Without a doubt, besides the birth of my sons, helping women leave and heal from domestic violence is the most rewarding work I do.

I love seeing a woman who was once beaten down and defeated emerge strong and capable with the knowledge that she does deserve better than she's been receiving.

For my teen girls, my *precious jewels*, who are willing to work for what they want, whether it's a career or the knowledge that they can be better students, daughters, friends or great leaders in their community. To watch their eyes light up with understanding and excitement gives me a great sense of accomplishment.

I love holding "reunions" with the women and teens to see what everyone is doing; and sometimes when one has fallen I'm there ready to encourage them again.

Learning to Live Again

Domestic violence and abuse is a disease and requires ample time to heal. Once accomplished it will no longer hamper you from living the life you're meant to live. Put in the work and surround yourself with a supportive and encouraging circle of friends.

Fresh Start for Women has a number of seminars and workshops that can aid you in the process, including ***God's Divine Divas, Celebrating a Healthier You, Mind...Body...and Spirit*** in addition to our group and individual counseling and our popular and power packed retreats. I hope you'll avail yourself of some or all of them.

Your new self is waiting to emerge!

Sincerely,



Janice G. Pettigrew