

Why People Stay in Relationships

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Many people recognize they are being mistreated or even abused, but choose to stay in the relationship for a number of reasons. When friends or family members ask them "Why do you stay...?" they may have a hard time explaining. After all, it is never easy to end a relationship, even a hurtful one. Whatever your reasons for staying in an abusive relationship, those reasons are very real and very important to you. However, it is also important to look at both sides of the situation. Some of your reasons may be based on misunderstandings or myths, and some might be based on fear. Below are some of the common reasons people stay in unhappy or abusive relationships. After each reason a reflection has been added to for you to consider.

1. **Love.** *You love your partner, and there are still times when your partner is very loving.*
Reflection: No one can argue with the way you feel-your love is real and you can't ignore it. But loving someone doesn't always mean they are healthy for you. Ending your relationship does not mean you will automatically stop loving your partner, but with time your feelings will be less intense as you are able to look at the whole picture. It might help to focus on nurturing you love for yourself and your family or friends. It may seem impossible now, but if you end your relationship, you will someday find another boyfriend or girlfriend to love-and hopefully it will be a healthier love.
2. **Hope.** *You have many memories of happy times, and hope those times will return. Your partner may promise to change, or you may think if you do things differently, the abuse will stop.*
Reflection: You are not the cause of the abuse, so nothing you do or change about your behavior will end the abuse. While abusers will usually promise to change during the honeymoon stage, it is rare for an abuser to change while still in a relationship-usually, the only way to stop the abuse is to end the relationship.
3. **Making light of the abuse.** *Your partner may deny that his or her behavior is abusive, or act like it's not such a big deal, and you want to believe this. It's very painful to admit that someone you love would hurt you, so you might try to convince yourself it's not really that bad.*
Reflection: Abuse is a big deal. No one deserves to be abused, and physical abuse is a serious crime that can result in jail time for the abuser.
4. **Blaming yourself.** *Your partner might blame you for his or her abusive behavior-saying you made him or her angry, or that you did something to deserve it. A part of you may believe this.*
Reflection: The fact is there is nothing you can do to make another person hurt you, and no one deserves to be hurt under any circumstances. Everyone is 100% responsible for their own behavior.
5. **Link between love and violence.** *If you grew up in a home where there was violence, or if you were ever hit by a parent and told they were doing it because they love you, you might have learned to think that love and violence go together.*
Reflection: Physical abuse is not about love -- it's about gaining power and control. Even if violence was normal in your upbringing, the fact is that it is NOT a normal part of a healthy, loving relationship.
6. **Hopelessness.** *You may feel like you'll never be able to be happy, you'll never find a partner who treats you any better, or that all relationships include abuse.*
Reflection: The idea of being happy without your current partner may seem impossible now, but remember that you are a person who deserves to be treated with respect. There are many people out there who don't abuse!
7. **Gender roles.** *If you are a woman in a relationship with a man, you may have learned from family, religion or culture that men are supposed to be in charge, can't help being violent, or have the right to discipline their women. You may believe that women have to put up with this behavior and try to keep their men happy.*
Reflection: A healthy relationship is a partnership based on equality, regardless of gender. If you checked this as a reason for staying, work with a counselor on understanding gender roles.