

# 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.

8. **Embarrassment and shame.** *You may not want to admit what's going on to others because you're afraid of what they will think about you.*

Reflection: It is true that some people judge or blame people who are being abused because they are not educated about relationship abuse. You must remember that you are not the one doing something wrong, and you have nothing to be ashamed of! Counselors at domestic violence hotlines and agencies will not judge you, and can help you figure out which friends or family members you can talk to.

9. **Financial dependence.** *You may depend on your partner for financial support.*

Reflection: There are ways to become more financially independent, including programs specifically set up for people who are financially trapped in abusive relationships. Your counselor can help you make a plan for financial independence.

10. **Lack of supportive relationships.** *You may have become isolated from your friends and family. Or, family and friends may pressure you to stay with your partner.*

Reflection: Your friends and family may be more willing than you think to help you if you want to end an abusive relationship-but, you may have to develop new supportive relationships. A good place to start is with a support group where you will meet other people who have been in abusive relationships.

11. **Fear.** *Your partner may have threatened to hurt or kill you or someone you care about if you leave.*

Reflection: If you have been threatened, it is very important to develop a safety plan with a counselor before leaving. Know there are safe homes, shelters and other programs to help you get away from an abuser.

12. **Not wanting to be alone.** *You may panic at the thought of being without your partner.*

Reflection: You are a strong person who has endured a great deal and while the idea of being alone is scary, you can live without an abusive relationship. Developing other supportive relationships will be helpful.

13. **Loyalty.** *You may feel the right thing to do is to stick with your partner no matter what.*

Reflection: Loyalty must be earned. Someone who is supposed to love you, but abuse you, has betrayed you. No reasonable person should expect you to be loyal to someone who abuses you.

14. **Rescue complex.** *You think you can change, fix, or heal your partner if you stay.*

Reflection: No amount of loyalty or understanding will change your partner.

15. **Guilt.** *Your partner may make you feel guilty about how much it would hurt him or her if you left. S/he may even threaten to commit suicide.*

Reflection: Guilt trips are a way of manipulating you. Your partner is responsible for his or her own actions; you are only responsible for yourself. You have nothing to feel guilty about if you choose to leave an abusive relationship.

16. **Children.** *If you have a child with your partner, you may believe it is best for the child to have two parents who are together.*

Reflection: The fact is, witnessing abuse is extremely psychologically damaging to children. A child is better off living with one non-violent parent than with two parents in an abusive relationship. You can work out a way for you child to see the other parent in a safe setting.

17. **Dependency on drugs or alcohol.** *Many people use drugs or alcohol as a way of coping with abuse, which then makes them less clear and strong and makes it more difficult to leave.*

Reflection: If you use drugs or alcohol as a way of coping with abuse, it's important to get treatment for this problem so you can make healthier decisions about your relationships.