

WHY THEY STAY

One of questions we receive frequently is “Why do victims stay?” The answer is that victims stay for many different reasons, including some of the following:

FEAR

Fear of losing belonging, social status, or her/his children. Fear of more severe/lethal abuse by the batterer if s/he reports it to anyone. Fear of the unknown (“What will happen to me/my kids if I leave?”)

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

Some victims have been kept dependent by parents or past partners. They begin to feel they are unable to do things for themselves. They have learned to be passive and have been beaten into obedience.

CHILDREN

Some victims do not want to disrupt children’s lives. Others fear they cannot provide adequately for their children if they are on their own.

BELIEF IN TRADITIONAL SEX ROLES

Some victims are brought up to believe in traditional sex roles such as, “The man is the boss of the house,” or “The man will ‘do,’ and you will ‘obey.’”

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Some victims feel they don’t deserve love or that they deserve to be beaten. Others feel they must earn love. Some victims confuse need with love. Others may believe that the abuser is the best I can do, or that I’ve never had it so good (economically). Some victims need to preserve the illusion of being cared about, no matter how little affection they actually receive.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Other victims hold to strong religious prohibitions against divorce. They believe that marriage means going through everything together for better or worse. To leave the marriage would mean they had broken their solemn vows to God or that they had failed.

ABUSED AS A CHILD

Frequently, violence is what the victim grew up with and what they know as “normal.”

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE

Some victims have been kept economically dependent on their mates. They have no money of their own and must account for every cent they’re given.

HOSTAGE PSYCHOLOGY

Like other hostages (concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, etc.) battered victims adopt a hostage mentality. Under siege, they bond with their captors and convert to their abuser’s way of thinking in an attempt to survive. Other common responses to life-threatening abuse include feelings of powerlessness, a reduced capacity for problem solving, and an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness. These symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder make it difficult for victims to leave.