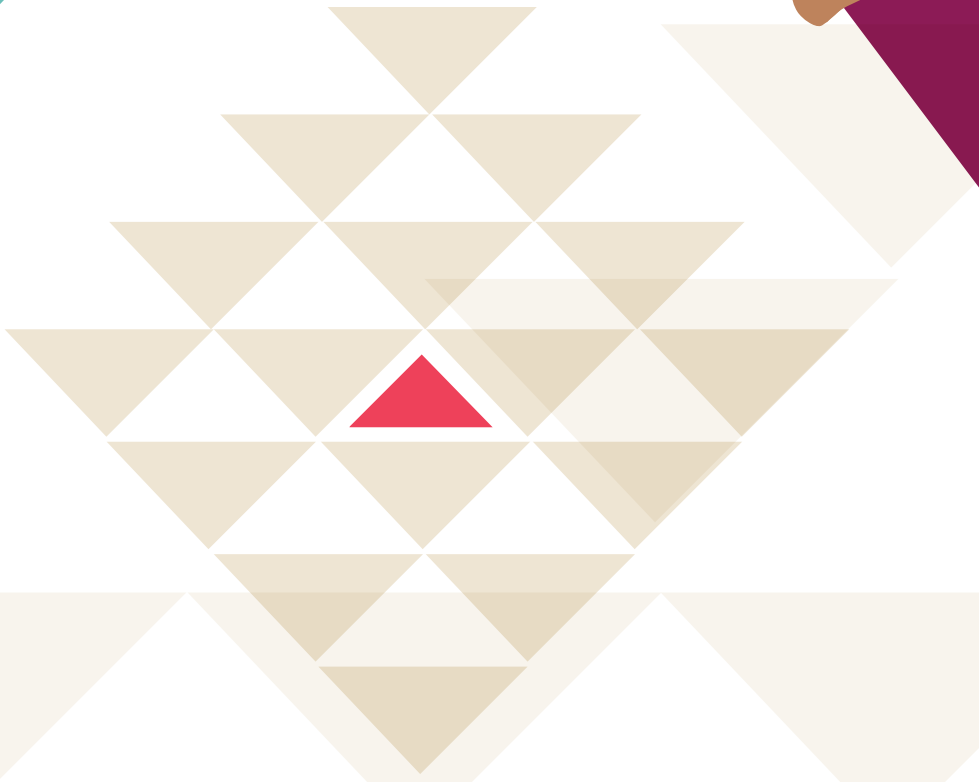


NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES  
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



# You Are Not Alone:

a Toolkit for Indigenous  
women, girls and gender  
diverse people escaping  
domestic violence



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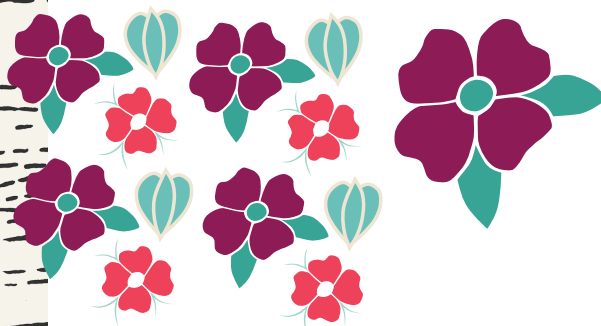
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Note: the word 'women', and the female pronouns are meant to identify with cis-women, trans-women and gender diverse as well as 2 spirited people's identities.



## About this Toolkit

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is committed to healing in our communities. No matter what your situation, you do have options and there is a way out, do not give up! We hope this toolkit will give you information and strategies to make healthy and positive changes in your life and the lives of your children. We also hope this toolkit will help you to recognize your inner strength and to see that, with the help and support of those people and organizations who care about and love you, you can stand strong and build a better future for yourself and your children.



## Grandmother Moon

**You know all women from birth to death**

**We seek your knowledge**

**We seek your strength**

**Some are STARS up there with you**

**Some are STARS on Mother Earth**

**Grandmother, lighten our path in the dark**

**Creator, keep our sisters safe from harm**

**Maa duu? Mussi cho**

**-Kukdookaa**

## What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence happens when your partner or ex-partner, whether you live together or not, controls you or attempts to control you by using physical violence, threats of violence, or harassment.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic violence can include:

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Emotional abuse

Verbal abuse

Psychological abuse

Spiritual abuse

Financial abuse

Threats of violence

Criminal harassment and stalking



Domestic violence can also be called “intimate partner violence”, “wife beating”, “wife battery”, “relationship violence”, “domestic abuse”, “spousal abuse”, and “family violence”.<sup>2</sup>

Domestic violence is not necessarily a single act of violence, but a long-term pattern of violent and threatening behavior meant to exert power and control over a partner.<sup>3</sup>

**Domestic violence is never the victim’s fault**

*“ I was scared of my abuser, and scared to lose my partner. My friends were worried about me.”*

## Domestic Violence and Violence against Women and Gender Diverse People

The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>4</sup> Violence against women/gender diverse people is any violent act or threat that is directed at a women or gender diverse people.

Domestic violence is a gendered crime, meaning it is most often men abusing women in domestic violence situations. Most cases of domestic violence involve a male partner or ex-partner abusing the female partner or ex-partner. We can see gender inequality in many areas of life, including the lack of participation by women in politics and the workplace, and in the sexualisation of women and girls in the media. We are given messages that men are more important and deserve more than women, and this thinking contributes to men believing they have the right to dominate and control women, even if they need to use violence to do it.<sup>5</sup>

Violence against women can happen whether you are poor or rich, in all cultures and religions, at every age, and in all ethnic and racial communities. However, due to Canada’s history of colonization, Indigenous women face higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous people.<sup>6</sup>



## Domestic Violence and Colonization

The roles of Indigenous women and gender diverse people have changed since the beginning of European contact. Once held in high regard as leaders and givers of life, Indigenous women and gender diverse people have been devalued not only because they are Indigenous people, but also because they are women or gender diverse. In fact, they have a harder time going to school, getting a job or getting access to social services than any other group in Canada. Indigenous women and gender diverse people and their children are more likely to live in poverty, with poor physical and mental health. Too often, violence plays a central role in the lives of Indigenous women and gender diverse people.<sup>7</sup>

NWAC believes that knowing and understanding how colonization, Indian residential schools, and racism have impacted our family structures is essential to building a better life for future generations. It is important to acknowledge the impacts of colonization and recognize that it continues to exist and affect Indigenous women, men, gender diverse people and their families. By understanding the intergenerational effects of colonization, we can begin to address current issues and create a better future for Indigenous women and girls and gender diverse people.<sup>8</sup>



The legacies of colonization such as the residential schools and the 60s scoop, socio-economic conditions like poverty, and sexism, racism and discrimination have all played major roles in the breakdown of healthy families and communities for Indigenous peoples. This is especially noticeable in the high rates of violence experienced by Indigenous women, who face life-threatening, gender-based violence, and experience more violent crimes than non-Indigenous women.<sup>9</sup>

According to Statistics Canada's 2009 General Social Survey, Indigenous women experience much higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous women. Statistics Canada also reported the following findings:

- **Indigenous women are more than 3 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women**
- **Rates of spousal assault against Indigenous women are more than 3 times higher than those against non-Indigenous women.**
- **Indigenous female victims of spousal violence more likely than non-Indigenous female victims to report injuries.**
- **Indigenous female victims of spousal violence were more likely than non-Indigenous female victims to state that they feared for their lives as a result of the violence.**
- **Close to two-thirds (63%) of Indigenous female victims were aged 15 to 34. This age group accounted for just under half (47%) of the female Indigenous population .**


## The Residential School System

Residential schools were set up by the Canadian government and run by the churches, with at least 150,000 Indigenous children being forcibly placed into and living at these schools from the 1800s until the last one closed in 1996. The impacts of the residential schools are ongoing, and have disrupted Indigenous families and cultural transmission for generations.<sup>10</sup>

At the residential schools, children were not allowed to see their families, practice their cultures or speak their languages, and were taught to be ashamed of who they were as Indigenous people. Indigenous cultural traditions that respected healthy relationships were replaced by poor health and non-Indigenous education taught by unqualified teachers, principals and administrators; many of whom were sexually, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually abusive. Mortality rates at residential schools were estimated between thirty to sixty percent between 1892 and 1907.<sup>11</sup>

As the guardians of Indigenous children, most staff at residential schools neglected the emotional and physical needs of the resident children. As these Indigenous children grew older and started families, their lack of parenting skills, shame and lack of self-worth, and the trauma they suffered at the residential schools impacted their ability to form healthy relationships with their children, partners, family, and friends. In this way, the residential schools continue to negatively impact generations of Indigenous families, whether the individuals have direct experience being in the schools or not.<sup>12</sup>

**Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are strong and beautiful. They are our mothers/parents, our daughters/children, our sisters/siblings, our aunties and our grandmothers. Women and gender diverse people are to be loved and treated with respect, not hurt and devalued.**



# ARE YOU IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?



While physical injury may be the most visible danger, non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging and dangerous.

## Five Forms of Domestic Violence<sup>13</sup>

**Physical Violence:** Attempting or causing physical injury and/or not giving you access to resources that you need to stay healthy.

**For example:**

- > Hitting
- > Slapping
- > Pinching
- > Grabbing
- > Stabbing
- > Biting
- > Kicking
- > Punching
- > Pushing
- > Choking
- > Tripping
- > Burning you
- > Using weapons against you
- > Not allowing access to medication, mobility aids, food, fluids, or sleep
- > Making you use drugs and/or alcohol when you don't want to
- > Throwing objects at you
- > Punching walls
- > Restraining you

**Sexual Violence:** Forcing or trying to force any unwanted sexual contact with you and/or making unwanted sexual comments about your body.

**For example:**

- > Touching or grabbing you in sexual ways against your will
- > Having sex with you when you don't want to
- > Criticizing your sexual interactions
- > Criticizing your body - for example, calling you "fat" or "ugly"
- > Making you act out sexual fantasies against your will, such as making you wear certain clothing or making you perform a sexual act that you don't want to do
- > Forcing you to have sex or perform sexual acts with others
- > Making you perform humiliating sex acts and/or humiliating you during sex
- > Criticizing you for your sexual history
- > Using derogatory words against you like "slut" or "frigid"
- > Refusing to take "no" for an answer
- > Using pornography to show you how it's "supposed to be done"
- > Making you watch pornography when you don't want to
- > Involving children in sexual acts
- > Involving weapons or unwanted objects in sexual acts
- > Involving animals in sexual acts



**Emotional/ Psychological Violence:** Using fear, intimidation, threats and name calling to hurt and control you.

**For example:**

- > Shaming you – for example, blaming you for the abuse, telling other people you are “crazy”, or making fun of you in front of others
- > Controlling your behavior – for example, not allowing you to wear make-up or to dress the way you want to
- > Constantly questioning you about where you’ve been, who you were with, and what you were doing
- > Judging or criticizing your thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs and/or actions
- > Making racist and/or sexist comments about you or other women or Indigenous women
- > Humiliating you or embarrassing you in front of others
- > Yelling at you
- > Calling you names like “stupid” or “idiot” and putting you down
- > Insulting the people you care about
- > Acting very jealous – for example, constantly accusing you of cheating and checking your phone or computer to find “evidence”
- > Minimizing your feelings or needs, such as telling you you’re “overreacting” or “too sensitive”

**Financial Violence:** Controlling all the money that comes into the home, tracking the money you spend, and refusing to give you any financial support.

**For example:**

- > Telling you how or how not to spend your money
- > Taking control of your bank card or credit card
- > Not allowing you to have your money
- > Threatening to kick you out of the house
- > Keeping you from seeing shared bank accounts or records
- > Forbidding you to work or limiting how much you work or where you work

- > Using your social insurance number to obtain credit without your permission
- > Using your child’s social insurance number to claim an income tax refund without your permission
- > Giving you presents and/or paying for things like dinner and expecting you to return the favour or give something back in return
- > Using their money and status to make you feel like you are not important
- > Trying to control you by making you financially dependent on them

**Spiritual Violence:** Not allowing you to practice your culture, language, or spirituality, and criticizing your spiritual beliefs.

**For example:**

- > Making fun of your spiritual beliefs or culture
- > Preventing you from practicing your spiritual beliefs or culture, such as stopping you from seeing an Elder or participating in community events and ceremonies
- > Using spiritual beliefs or culture to manipulate you



***“To leave this unhealthy relationship was the only way I could heal in time, build on my confidence, and be the person and mother that my two children could rely on...”***

## Identifying Domestic Violence

Although anyone can experience domestic violence, women and gender diverse people are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and men are more likely to be the perpetrators. Often victims of violence may feel they are at fault for causing abuse to occur in the relationship.<sup>14</sup>

It is NEVER your fault if someone abuses you.

*If you have discovered that you are in an abusive relationship you may not know where to turn. Addictions to drugs and alcohol can make this process even more complicated. Do not be afraid to reach out for support. Learning how to deal with stressful situations or negative feelings in a healthy way will help you move toward the life that you want for yourself. Healing may involve speaking to a counsellor, calling an anonymous addictions line, and building a sober support network.*

### **Are You in an Abusive Relationship?**<sup>15</sup>

- > Do you feel nervous when you are around your partner?
- > Do you watch what you are doing to avoid making your partner angry or upset?
- > Does your partner force you to have sex with them?
- > Are you afraid of voicing a different opinion than your partner?
- > Does your partner make fun of you and/or embarrass you in front of others?
- > Does your partner check up on what you have been doing, and not believe your answers?
- > Is your partner jealous? Do they constantly accuse you of cheating?
- > Does your partner tell you that they will stop hurting you when you start behaving yourself?
- > Have you stopped seeing your friends or family because your partner doesn't want you to?
- > Does your partner threaten to harm you, your children or other family members, or pets?
- > Do you try to please your partner rather than yourself in order to avoid being hurt?
- > Does your partner keep you from going out or doing things that you want to do?
- > Do you feel that nothing you do is ever good enough for your partner?
- > Does your partner say that if you try to leave them, you will never see your children again?
- > Does your partner say that if you try to leave, they will kill himself, your children, or you?
- > Is there always an excuse for your partner's behavior, like "I was drunk! I'm stressed because of my job! I was just joking!"?
- > Do you lie to your family and friends about what is really happening in the relationship?
- > Does they always promise to change and say that this will be the last time they will harm you?

## Early Warning Signs of Domestic Violence

When entering into a new relationship, always be sure to trust your instincts and watch for early warning signs of abuse or “red flags”.

### Potential Red Flags

#### Your partner:

- > Wants to move into the relationship too quickly
- > Wants to know where you are all the time
- > Expects you to be with them all the time
- > Doesn't want you to visit your friends or family
- > Gets upset or angry when you socialize without them
- > Disrespects women by saying things like, “all women are sluts”
- > Puts down their ex-partners by calling them “crazy”, “whores”, or “bitches”
- > Makes you feel guilty for being successful
- > Gets upset if you don't text or call them back right away
- > Makes you believe that any request is too much
- > Blames everyone but themselves for their actions
- > Has poor communication skills and is unwilling to talk about serious issues
- > Angers easily and apologizes quickly and this behaviour keeps happening
- > Showers you with compliments and gifts then abruptly stops
- > Treats other people badly or sexualizes them by making inappropriate comments
- > Makes racist remarks toward Indigenous peoples or people of colour

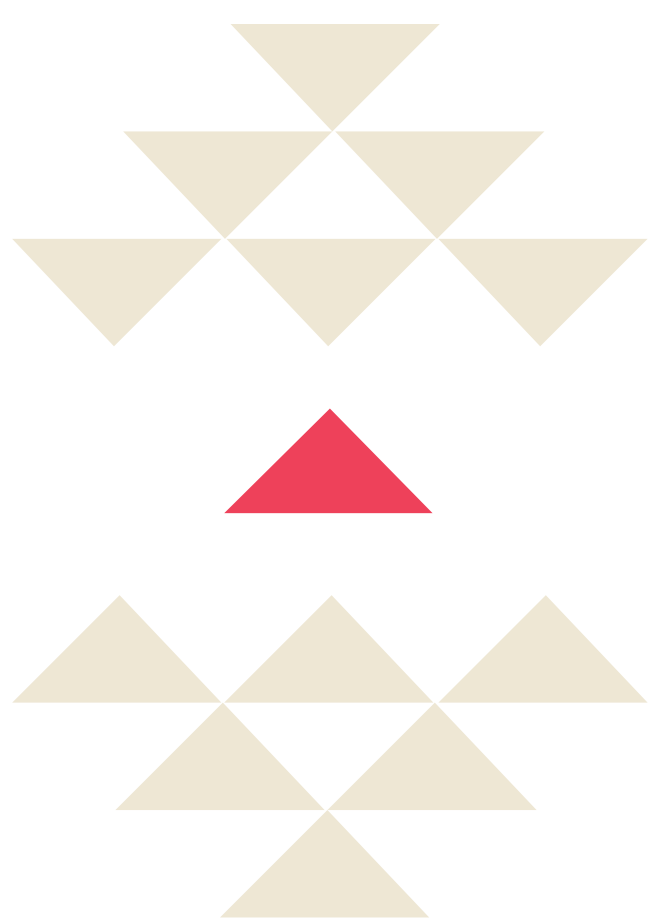
**“She was telling me about her abusive ex-boyfriend who would text her all the time and expect her to respond right away. It was in this moment that I heard my own story and realized my relationship was abusive”**



*If your partner exhibits many of these “red flag” behaviours, you should consider talking to someone you trust before involving yourself further in the relationship. Stay connected with a good support system and be sure to participate in healthy self-care practices to avoid getting involved with a man who is abusive. You deserve to be treated with respect. Never settle for anything less.*

## Why Do We Stay?<sup>16</sup>

- > You love them, but don't love their behaviour
- > You doubt your ability to start a new life, find a new home, and raise your children by yourself
- > You're afraid that they will harm or kill you, your children or other family members, or themselves if you leave
- > You feel guilty about "breaking up the family" or you feel guilty because they can be kind sometimes
- > You're worried about leaving your community or your culture behind
- > You believe their promises and apologies
- > You hope that they will change and start treating you well
- > You don't have enough money to support yourself and your children
- > You're worried that you won't find another man who will want to be with you
- > You feel like you don't deserve to be treated better
- > You believe that children needs both partners in their lives, even if they are violent
- > You believe that you should "make it work" and stay committed to a relationship, even if it's abusive



***"It was hard but I never regretted my decision to leave, only that it took so long to do it."***

**These are all common fears and beliefs that cause people to stay in abusive relationships. Know that you are valued and loved and you deserve to be treated with respect and kindness. When a person feels safe and happy, their children will feel safe and happy too. You do not have to stay in an abusive relationship, you can leave. Many people have had these same fears and beliefs and have managed to build healthy, safe, and happy lives for themselves and their children by leaving violent relationships, you can too!**



# PLANNING TO LEAVE





## What is an Advocate?

An advocate is a friend, family member, community member, or support worker that can stand with you and offer you support, information, and help as you navigate through a situation. For example, an advocate may be able to help you fill out social assistance forms or get housing, or go with you to the hospital or when you speak to the police. Going through these things can be confusing and frightening. Having an advocate with you can help to assure you receive the treatment and services you are entitled to. In the *Who's Who Guide*, many of these organizations have advocates that can offer you confidential support, information, and help.

## Community Safety Planning

Community safety plans are important tools for women or gender diverse people who are in domestic violence situations.

A community safety plan will help you to identify support people and organizations that can help you, and will also help you to plan out actions you can take, alone and with others, to keep yourself and your children safe. Community safety planning is important while you are in the relationship, when you leave the relationship, and after you have left the relationship.<sup>17</sup>

## Safety Planning Tips:<sup>18</sup>

**Build a support network.** A support network can include a trusted friend, family member, a women's or gender diverse group, an Indigenous women's group, an advocate, or community member to help you leave an abusive relationship safely. It's important to make sure that people in your support network have your full address, including apartment number, in case of an emergency.

**Try to establish check-ins with your support network** regularly to update them so they can offer you support and help keep you safe.

**Don't let your partner know** about your plan to leave. Keep your plan to leave between you and a support person or advocate only.

**Remember to delete the history** on your computer and phone to make sure they do not find out your plan to leave. Keep a password lock on your phone if it is available.

**Keep evidence** of the abuse, such as photos. You can email them to a support person or advocate and then delete your sent emails. You may also want to keep a journal of all violent events including dates, times, and location, and who was there to witness the abuse. If they sent threatening messages to you by text or on social media, make a copy of these messages. If you decide to use the police or have to go to court, this information will help the investigation or your court case.

**Pack a bag with overnight and essential items** and keep it with a trusted friend or family member so you can access it easily if you decide to leave.

**Make sure you have somewhere safe to go.** Approach a trusted friend, family member, or community member, preferably ahead of time, to make arrangements to stay with them in case you need to leave quickly. Keep the phone number of a transition house or emergency shelter hidden with you. Sometimes transition houses cannot guarantee there will be space for you in the future, and sometimes they will be full. Transition house staff will help you find a safe place to go, do not give up!

**Make a list of telephone numbers** you need to know and keep them hidden or memorized.

**If you are injured, get medical attention.** If you are injured, make sure you get medical attention and go to the hospital or to a clinic. Ask the doctor to record your visit and what happened to you. Make sure to take your own pictures of your injury or injuries and email them to your support person or advocate, erasing your sent email after.

**When you are ready to leave be sure to leave quickly** and when your partner is not at home. Remember to turn off your cell phone if they are tracking you using your phone.

# Sample Community Safety Plan<sup>19</sup>

Make sure to keep this information in a place where your abuser cannot find it.

## My Support Network

These people will help me while I am in a violent relationship, thinking about leaving, or when I am ready to leave. They will provide me with the confidential and trusted support I need to keep myself and my children as safe as possible. I can always call them in an emergency.

Name	Phone Number
<u>My Mom</u>	<u>(555) 677-0845</u>
<u>Pauline Jones</u>	<u>(555) 660-9184</u>
<u>Georgia James</u>	<u>(555) 777-2000</u>
<u>Star Transition House</u>	<u>(555) 700-7777</u>

## Important Phone Numbers

Police: (555) 777-0001

Transition House: (555) 777-3387

Shelter: (555) 777-8282

Health Centre: (555) 777-9910

Bank: (555) 773-2221

Day care: (555) 777-0222

Children's school: (555) 777-0912

Taxi: (555) 777-0202

Lawyer: (555) 776-4040

## Safe places I can go

I know I can go to these places when I decide to leave or it is an emergency. I trust that I will be safe in all of these places.

Who	Address	Phone Number
<u>Star Transition House</u>	<u>(555) 700-7777</u>	
	<u>23 Star Drive, Bereville, MB, K7V341</u>	
<u>Georgia's House</u>	<u>(555) 777-2000</u>	
	<u>23 Beach Drive, Bereville, MB, K7V 341</u>	
<u>My Mom's House</u>	<u>(555) 677-0845</u>	
	<u>56 Lake Drive, Bereville, MB, K7V341</u>	

I can take my pets with me to Star Transition House

OR I can leave my pets with Georgia

## Pack a Bag Checklist

I will have my emergency bag packed with the following items and it will be located in a safe place and ready to go when I am in a hurry.

My emergency bag will be safe from my abuser at: My Mom's House

Their phone number is (555) 677-0845

- Emergency cash
- Copies of important documents for me and my children, such as identification cards, health cards, status cards, social insurance cards, passports, medical records, and birth certificates.
- Driver's license
- Spare keys, such as to the house or car
- Picture of the abuser
- Banking information including bank cards and credit cards
- Items of sentimental value
- Extra clothing and toiletries
- Cell phone
- Bus tickets
- Your children's favourite toy(s)
- medications for myself and the children







# AFTER YOU LEAVE





The most dangerous time for a person in an abusive relationship is when and after they leave.<sup>20</sup>

### The following safety tips will help to keep you and your children safe.<sup>21</sup>

**Get support from an Indigenous women's group, women's and gender diverse group, or an advocate and ask them to help you through your situation.** This could mean asking them to help you figure out child custody, what to do about the home you left, or going to the police.

**Do not tell them your location.** You may want to consider blocking their phone number, or getting a new phone and/or phone number. Also, be sure to change any services you share with your ex-partner, such as a joint cell phone plan, cable, or hydro. Consider deleting and blocking them from social media, such as on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

**Be aware at work, at home, and in the community.** You may want to consider telling your boss or co-workers and your children's school principal about your situation. You should also provide them with a picture of your ex-partner so they know to watch out for them. Consider changing the children's school altogether.

**Make sure all your banking information, bills, and accounts are in your name and change your address.** Let the bank know you are no longer with your partner and ask them to set you up with a new account. Change your address so your mail goes to your new home instead of your old address where you can't access it safely.

**Contact an Indigenous women's group. Women / Gender Diverse groups or an Advocate** to help you go through police and court processes. This may include asking for a peace bond or restraining order. It is important to get support as these processes can be complicated and are different in each province and territory. Many people have gone through this to protect themselves and their children and you can do it too.

**Family law is something you will have to consider when leaving your partner.** Family law deals with parenting arrangements, separation and divorce, division of property and debts, restraining orders, and child and/or spousal support payments. Family law is different in each province and territory in Canada and can be difficult to understand, but do not give up! You can do it! Talk to someone you trust and get help with family law issues. The **Who's Who Guide** contains a list of Indigenous women's groups, women and gender diverse groups and legal services you can contact for information

## Social Media Safety <sup>22</sup>

Social media has become an important part of our lives by allowing us to stay connected with others online. For example Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram allow us to share pictures, posts, and videos. However, you should always be careful about how much personal information you share, especially if you have left a violent relationship.

### Social Media Safety Tips:

- > **Change your passwords.** Make sure all your passwords are changed after you leave your abuser, so they can't hack into your account.
- > **Check your privacy and security settings.** These settings allow you to control who sees what you post. For example, it is important to turn off location-based services so your abuser can't see where you are located.
- > **Take action.** If anyone harasses or threatens you on social media, keep evidence, remove them from your friend list, block them, and tell someone you trust.
- > **Know and manage your friends.** Social media makes it easy to pretend to be someone else. For example, your abuser may create a new account under a different name or use an account of someone you know to try and contact you. Make sure only the people you trust can see your profile and be careful who you add and chat with as a friend online.
- > **Keep personal information to yourself.** Limit the personal information you post so your abuser can't find you. Even if you have your abuser blocked on social media, friends of theirs may still be able to see your profile and give them information. Be careful what you post on other friends profiles as well, as they may be able to see those posts.

## Matrimonial Real Property Act <sup>23</sup>

Matrimonial real property refers to the house or the land that a married or common-law couple lives in while they are in a relationship. Provincial and territorial laws do not apply to real property on reserve.

As of December 16, 2014, the *Matrimonial Real Property Act* came into effect. This Act applies to all common-law or married couples that live on reserve where at least one partner is a member of the First Nations Band. Each individual nation can create their own Matrimonial Real Property Law, but until they do, the *Matrimonial Real Property Act* applies.

### **The Matrimonial Real Property Act states:**

Both partners in a common-law or married relationship have the right to occupy the family home during the relationship. This applies to both partners, whether or not they are First Nations.

Both partners in a common-law or married relationship have to give free and informed agreement in writing for the family home to be sold. This applies to both partners, whether or not they are First Nations.

Upon separation, each partner in a common-law or married relationship is entitled to half of the value of the family home. This applies to both partners, whether or not they are First Nations.

## **The Matrimonial Real Property Act and Emergency Protection Orders**

The *Matrimonial Real Property Act* says that emergency protection orders can be issued in urgent situations, such as when there is domestic violence or abuse in the family home. The emergency protection order can remove the abuser from the on-reserve family home for up to 90 days. Emergency protection orders can provide other protections as well, such as saying the abuser can't contact the victim or victim's family members, or taking away any weapons the abuser might have.

You can apply for an emergency protection order, or someone else, such as a police officer, social worker, or advocate, can apply for you. An emergency protection order can be applied for at any time, even in the middle of the night.

It's important to know that the abuser can also apply to have the order changed or cancelled.

Once you have received an emergency protection order, you can also then apply for exclusive occupation of the family home for a longer period of time.

## **The Matrimonial Real Property Act and Exclusive Occupation of the Family Home**

The *Matrimonial Real Property Act* says that one of the common-law or married partners can apply for an *Exclusive Occupation Order*. This order means that one person in the common-law or married relationship gets to stay in the family home, and the other person has to leave. Depending on the situation, the order can last for a short time or a long time.

The *Exclusive Occupation Order* can be applied for because of a divorce, separation, or death and can be issued to either of the partners, whether or not they are First Nations.

**There is much more to know about the *Matrimonial Real Property Act*. You can get more information on the pamphlet included in your kit or at the Centre of Excellence for Matrimonial Real Property at [www.coemrp.ca](http://www.coemrp.ca). Please note that they have examples of all forms and many tools available to you on-line, free of charge.**

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Common Law Relationships: A common law relationship is an intimate relationship where two partners are unmarried but live together.<sup>24</sup> The legal definitions of common law relationships are different in each province and territory. For example, the province of Quebec does not legally recognize common law relationships at all. Make sure to check what the legal definition of a common law relationship is where you live.

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As the *Matrimonial Real Property Act* is a new law, police, judges, and lawyers are only beginning to familiarize themselves with this information and may not know about this law. It is best to refer to the Centre of Excellence for Matrimonial Real Property for information. Although they do not give out legal advice, they can help direct you to the information that you may require.

## Self-Care

It can be very difficult to remember to take time for yourself when fleeing an abusive relationship. Here are some suggestions of things you can do to treat yourself with kindness:

Seek out counselling to begin your emotional healing journey

See an Elder for traditional teachings, support, and guidance

Look to cultural teachings and ceremony for strength, healing, and guidance

Eat healthy and exercise. It can be difficult to do this in a crisis situation, but do your best to make healthier food choices and get some exercise. Perhaps take a walk or do some stretches

Try to make your home feel like home, even if it is temporary

Watch a favourite movie

Spend time with trusted friends

Seek out free support groups to network with others on the healing journey

Make time for sleep and rest; you are going through a lot right now

Write about your feelings in a journal

Talk to supportive friends and family

**List 10 actions you would tell a friend in crisis to do for themselves, such as taking a bath, going for a walk, reading, going to the movies, or talking to a counsellor.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

***Now, practice self-care and do these actions for yourself!***



## Self-Care Exercise

**When you are feeling sad or stressed, know that these feelings are a normal reaction to a crisis situation, and like your situation, they will pass!**  
**When you are feeling overwhelmed, look at this list and all the amazing things you are capable of!**  
**You deserve to be treated well, and you are on a healing journey!**

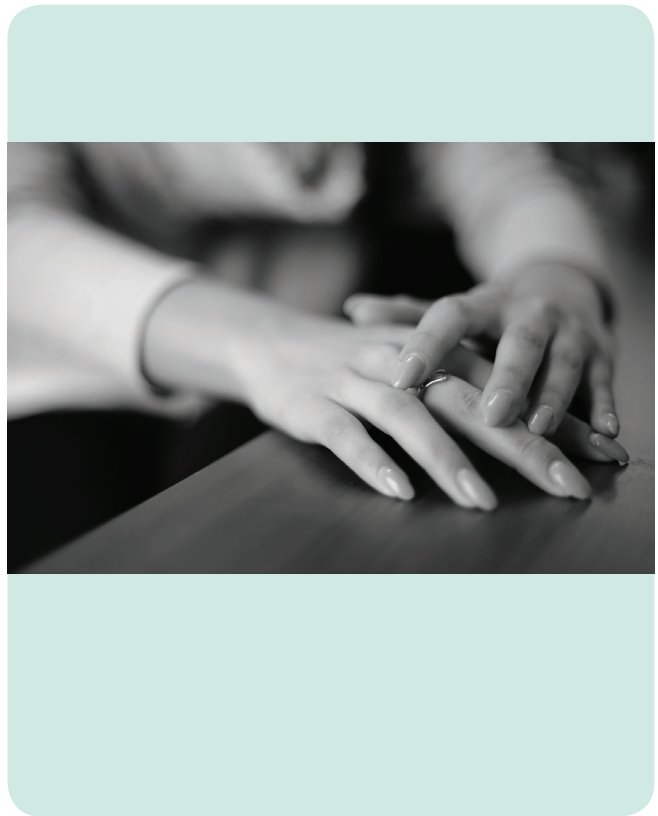
## Self-Esteem

Domestic violence can take many forms, each of which affects how you think about yourself and damages your self-esteem. Self-esteem is how much worth you think you have. Negative self-esteem can affect many areas of your life and bring on feelings of depression and anxiety. When healing from an abusive relationship, rebuilding self-esteem is very important in order to begin to move forward toward a healthy, safe and happy future for yourself and your children.<sup>25</sup>

### Self-Esteem Exercise

In the space below, write down 10 qualities you like about yourself or positive actions you have taken to feel better. For example, maybe you have a great sense of humour, maybe you're strong and proud of your culture and traditions, or maybe you're a good listener. For the actions, maybe you've left a bad situation and are now providing a safe environment for yourself and your children, or maybe you've finally told someone – a friend or a professional – about the abuse.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_



***“Although I was ashamed and embarrassed, I talked to friends and family about their treatment towards me. I needed to hear from those I trusted that what I was experiencing was not normal or my fault.”***

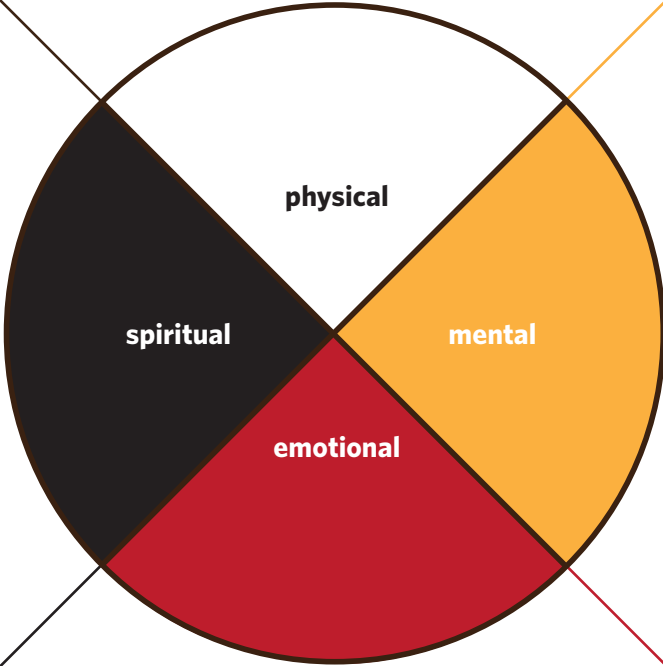
# Positive Statements

Here are some positive statements to help you begin your healing journey. They are grouped using the medicine wheel according to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.



# Positive Statement Exercise

List some positive statements of your own below. These can be things you do now, such as caring for your children, or they can be things you would like to be doing in the future, such as exercising regularly. Place this on your fridge or mirror so you can see it often.



## Healthy Relationships<sup>26</sup>

Identifying healthy behaviours at the start of your relationship will help you build a solid foundation for the long run. Sometimes, relationships start out being effortless and exciting but turn out to be unhealthy and abusive. Make sure you can identify healthy relationship behaviours and that those behaviours are maintained as the relationship progresses. You deserve to be in a healthy relationship that makes you feel happy and safe! Know as well that it is okay to take time before you enter into another relationship and that it is okay to choose not to enter another relationship.

### A healthy relationship means:

- > **Honesty**
- > **Trust**
- > **Acceptance**
- > **Mutual respect**
- > **Respect for your family and friends**
- > **Supporting each other**
- > **Friendship**
- > **You can be yourself**
- > **Good communication**
- > **Feeling safe and secure**
- > **Equality**
- > **Laughing together**

### Ask myself:

- \_\_\_ Do they consider my feelings?
- \_\_\_ Do they ask for my opinion when making decisions?
- \_\_\_ Do they respect my family and friends?
- \_\_\_ Do they support my decisions?
- \_\_\_ Do my partner and I respect each other?
- \_\_\_ Do I feel safe in my relationship?
- \_\_\_ Can I go out with my friends without my partner?
- \_\_\_ Can I participate in activities and hobbies I enjoy?

***If you answered yes to the questions above it is a sign that you are in a healthy relationship.***

**Do not blame yourself for your abuser's actions. No matter what happens between two people, you are never responsible for your abuser's actions.**

**Remember the Seven Sacred Teachings, particularly Respect. We all deserve to be treated equally and with respect in a healthy relationship.<sup>27</sup>**





## The Seven Sacred Teachings <sup>28</sup>

To cherish knowledge is to know **wisdom**

To honour all of creation is to have **respect**

**Bravery** is to face the foe with integrity

**Honesty** in facing a situation is to be brave

**Humility** is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation

**Truth** is to know all of these things

To know **love** is to know peace



## Survivor Stories

**We were friends** when we were young, so when he reached out to me on social media, we began talking and set up a date to hang out. Things seemed fine at first, although I did notice he wasn't very good at sharing his feelings with me and he didn't want to define our relationship. He would get a bit jealous sometimes, but I thought that just meant he cared about me. I had grown up in a home where there was a lot of abuse by my father. He had been in residential school. We were all very scared of him.

I thought relationships were supposed to look like the one my mom and dad had, so the little "red flags" I saw, I just ignored them, thinking it would get better if I just gave him time and showed him how much I cared about him. We continued our relationship and instead, things got worse. He would tell me I was fat or a whore and make "jokes" that I was stupid. He liked to watch violent and sexist movies that I didn't like, and he would get mad and tell me I was no fun if I wouldn't watch them with him. He told me how to do my hair and said he didn't want me to wear makeup unless I was with him. At meal times, he would get angry if I didn't eat everything on my plate.

He would punch walls in front of me, and would say things like, "I really want to hit someone right now". He would drive fast to scare me sometimes, and other times, he would drive me around aimlessly, refusing to tell me where we were going or let me out of the car. He would text me all the time, and he would get mad at me if I didn't respond to his text messages right away, accusing me of being with someone else or not caring enough about him to respond.

I felt so anxious all the time, and was constantly checking my phone, even when I was in the shower, so that I wouldn't miss his text messages. I was scared of him, and scared to lose him. My friends were worried about me.

I remember sitting across the kitchen table from a new friend. She was telling me about her abusive ex-boyfriend who would text her all the time and expect her to respond right away. It was in this moment that I heard my own story and realized my relationship

was abusive. Eventually, I left him. I asked him not to contact me, but he would anyways.

I lived in a ground-level apartment and he would show up late at night sometimes, and knock on my window. At first, I would let him in, my self-esteem was so low and I thought I loved him. Besides, I thought, it hadn't all been bad because he got me flowers a few times.

One night, I let him in and we went to get dinner. He drove us there and on the way back, he took a different route and wouldn't tell me where we were going or let me out. I started to feel afraid and realized he hadn't changed at all. He eventually drove me back to my place. I didn't want to have sex with him that night and told him no, but he didn't listen and raped me. The next morning he cooked breakfast like everything was normal.

I was so confused and ashamed and my body was hurt. I called a friend and she said that she would go with me to the hospital. After that happened, I decided I wasn't going to be treated like garbage by him anymore and that I deserved to be treated better. I realized he wouldn't change, and only I could change. My friends supported me and helped me move to a new apartment that was on a higher floor so he wouldn't know where I lived. I blocked his number, but he kept trying to contact me through social media or through my family members.

Even after all these years, he still tries sometimes, but I don't ever respond. I still have a safety plan in case he shows up at my place. But now, after much healing, I feel strong and proud and happy to be me. I know now that I deserve to be happy, whether I am single or in a relationship. I know now that even though I saw abusive relationships growing up and thought they were normal, that violent relationships are not normal or healthy and we, as women, we all deserve to be safe and happy and treated with respect, especially by those that claim to love us.





**I was just shy of 15** when I met my future husband. He was 21. My parents disapproved – I continued to see him. The signs were there from the beginning; the binge drinking, lying, verbal and physical abuse. I thought I could change him. I thought all he needed was someone to love him, and give him a stable, warm home and family. I married him when I was 20, still convinced that I could change him. The cycle of drinking, lying, abuse, and apologies continued very soon after the wedding.

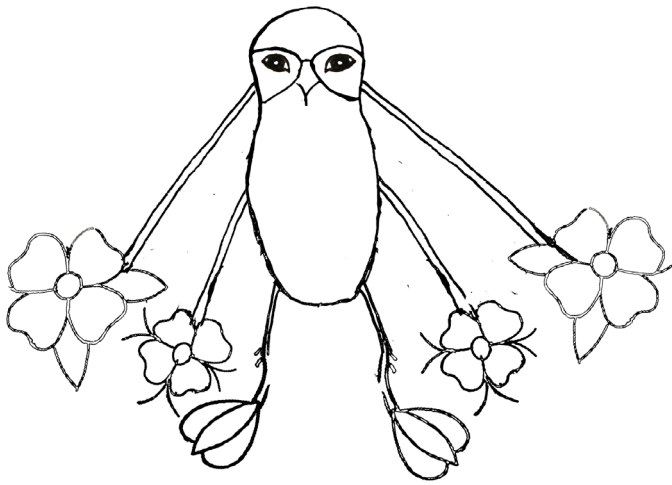
He worked shift work. Often his days off were during the week. He called it his weekend. He always came home very late and drunk. He would want to talk at three in the morning. He often dragged me out of bed and talked with his face inches from mine always about things that happened weeks or even months before – things he would never talk about when he was sober. Furniture was often broken during these episodes. Many times my nightgown would be torn off. In the morning there would always be an apology and much crying, saying it would never happen again, but it always did.

Finally, I contracted an E.coli infection on a business trip. In the hospital I was told, had I waited another 24 hours, I probably would have died. His first visit came on the third day of hospitalization. He was there for a short time and talked about how tired he was. He did not come back until the fifth day to drive me home.

A few months after my recovery, he broke my front tooth the evening before I was to go on a business trip. On this trip is when I decided that it was over. To leave this unhealthy relationship was the only way I could heal in time, build on my confidence, and be the person and mother that my two children could rely on, and perhaps could look to as a role model.

Four years later I remarried and I've been happily married for sixteen years. I now have all the elements of a healthy family relationship, just as I imagined it would be when I was younger – I am now safe. I am now respected and accepted for who I am. I am now truly loved.





**In the beginning**, he swept me off my feet with romantic dinners, fun outings, and loving words.

Six months later, we moved in together. And 3 months after that, I was pregnant. That's when everything changed. He angered easily, he began shouting, cursing, and being cruel towards me. The man I thought I knew and cared for was no longer there. Perhaps he never really was.

I was both excited and uncertain with the arrival of my new baby. I was alone in preparing the nursery and going to doctor appointments. I focused on work, paying bills, and being a good partner to help ease his stress and sense of burden. I was overworked and went into labour at 7 months. I laid on the kitchen floor in pain and pleaded with him to take me to the hospital, he told me I was just being a "drama queen". A friend took me to the hospital and they were able to stop the labour.

Over the next few months, he became increasingly agitated, impatient, and aggressive. His emotional abuse was constant. I would fluctuate from doubting myself and my worth, to questioning my relationship. In the back of my mind, I knew he wasn't treating me right. I was tired of every conversation turning into an argument or emotional beating.

Although I was ashamed and embarrassed, I talked to friends and family about his treatment towards me. I needed to hear from those I trusted that what I was experiencing was not normal or my fault. I even tried speaking with his parents and although I could tell that his mother was sympathetic, his father said I was too sensitive.



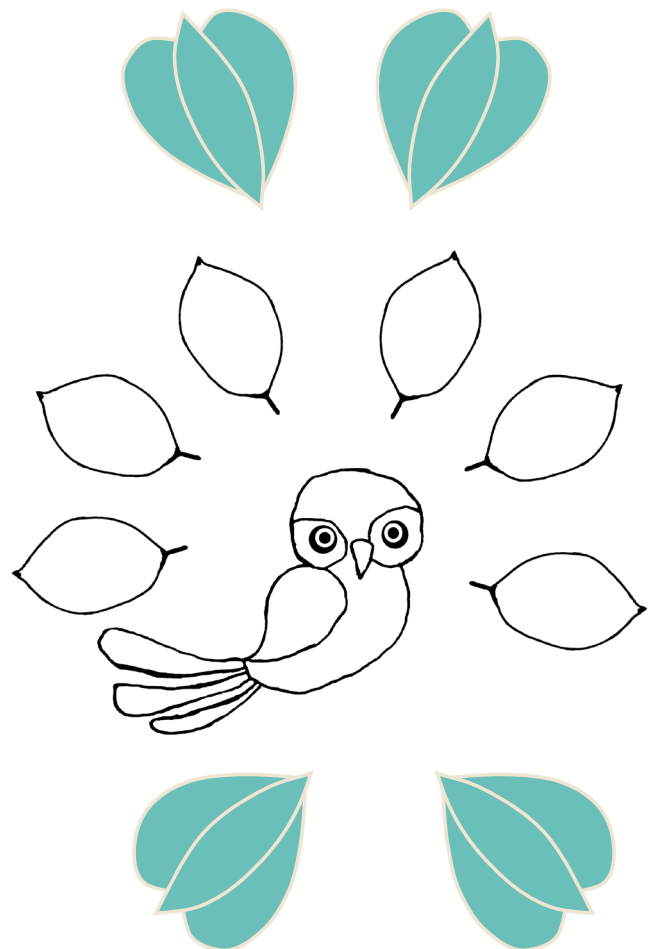
When my daughter finally arrived, she was my source of joy and became my primary focus. Her needs came first above all and I felt an overwhelming need to protect her. Although his angry outbursts continued, I was able to shield myself with the love that I had for my daughter. When I would get extremely scared, which was frequently, I would pack a bag and go for a visit to my parents place nearly 6 hours away. He would apologize and promise to change his behaviour. The longest I stayed away was 30 days, and returned when he promised to seek counselling for anger management. He never lasted in his sessions and returned to his old ways. Continuous episodes of raging, Jekyll and Hyde

behaviour, breaking down doors, chasing me in his van, shouting, cursing, calling me names, belittling me...his efforts to tear me down and harm my self-confidence were not successful. I found strength in being a good mother, seeing my baby happy, healthy, and laughing. The unconditional love that I felt for my daughter and the love that she returned gave me hope. I tolerated him and hoped that he would change. I desperately wanted to remain a family for my daughter's sake.

On her 2nd birthday, after a happy day of celebrating with friends and family, he raged again. His angry outbursts in front of our daughter had become frequent and uncontrollable. She held her tiny hands over her ears, cried while looking down at the floor, and pleaded her daddy to stop. I kept asking him to stop. He just continued to scream in my face, his rage had taken over again. It felt like time stood still, I was frozen, scared to move and powerless to do anything or stop him. I finally reacted and scooped her up and ran upstairs. I frantically locked the bedroom door and phoned my mother. He broke the door down. I pretended that my mother answered the phone and he immediately backed off.

When I finally reached my mother, I asked her what I should do. I was overwhelmed with emotions and guilt. Do I leave for the safety of my daughter and myself? Do I break up the family, abandoning him and his issues? She in turn asked me, "What would you do if a man was treating your daughter the same way he is treating you?" My answer was immediate, "Scoop her up, and take her far away from him!" I never want her to experience what I was going through with him. And my mom said, "And that's how I feel about you." Then it clicked. I had my Eureka moment, my moment of clarity when I knew exactly what to do. Why did I deserve any less.

Two weeks after, we had left and I had a new home. Having the support of my family and friends helped me find the strength to leave him. Unfortunately, the struggle does not end here. Understanding what and why this abusive relationship happened and how I found myself is a long journey of self-awareness and growth. It was hard but I never regretted my decision to leave, only that it took so long to do it. He is still abusive after 11 years and continues to rant over text, Facebook, email, and phone, but I just keep blocking him.



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