

## Should I stay or should I go?

Relationships are hard work! Despite our fairy tales anyone past the age of 25 who has been in one or two relationships know that relationships are not all “down hill”. They are challenging, they require us to adjust, dig deep, become better people, forgive, support and nurture. That’s why they are actually so good for us. However there are some **basic principles** that are useful to keep in mind when grappling with difficult relationships and dealing with the most basic of all relationship questions – **should I stay or should I go?**

Whilst all relationships are challenging, some relationships are not challenging or growth producing – instead they are destructive. You can approach the question and the problem in several different ways but at its heart the question is: “Is this worth it?” In the end will I be better off staying in this relationship, or will I be better off leaving?

Whilst these are the basic questions, we often don’t know how to assess whether we will be better off in or out. Sometimes we know we will be better off out of the relationship but we don’t feel strong enough to leave, or we are afraid of leaving. If we really believe that we would be better off out but we don’t want to leave out of **fear, apathy or weakness** it is important to know that **help is available**. Some of these sources of help will be listed below.

One of the most common obstacles to leaving even when you have decided that you would be better off out of the relationship is the belief that you don’t have the right to leave. It is important to know that **you do have the right to leave**. This is a free country and every individual has the right to decide whether to be in a relationship. The relationship does not, and can not, exist without the consent, that is the **free choice** of both parties. One party might want the relationship but unless the other party also chooses the relationship there is no relationship.

This way of looking at things is helpful because it brings into high relief the key basis of the relationship – **it is a matter of choice**. You choose to be in a relationship with a certain person and every moment you stay with that person you are choosing to be in the relationship. It is important to actually feel this choice and to get in touch with the choice aspect of the relationship. Sometimes we try to fool ourselves and believe we are “stuck” in a relationship in the same way as if we were shipwrecked and stuck on a desert island. Why would we do this?

Probably one of the most common reasons is that we don’t want to admit that although there are lots of things about the person and the relationship that we don’t like we figure that even a broken-down relationship is better than no relationship at all. So it comes back to our choice – we are choosing to be in the relationship – but now we don’t want to admit that it is our choice – we like to think we are stuck in the relationship or being held in the relationship against our will. This way we can complain about our partner, feel bad about the relationship and ourselves but also don’t have to face the prospect of being alone.

Some people even stay in destructive relationships because of this **fear of being alone**. Even though they know that they are losing more and more self esteem and that they are unhappy they believe that the prospect of being alone would be so terrible it is better to stay in the prison they know as their relationship. Just as a smoker develops an intimate relationship with cigarettes and believes he/she couldn't survive without them a person in a destructive relationship often comes to believe that things would be so terrible if they were to be alone it is better to put up with a life sentence of an unhappy relationship.

No one else can make you stay or leave a relationship: That choice has to be yours. If you are stuck in a destructive relationship and want to get out but don't feel strong enough be aware that there are many people willing and able to help you.

**A healthy relationship is a safe relationship** – you should feel safe in a relationship that is healthy. A relationship that involves violence is unhealthy. Violence is the extreme form of **coercion or control**. When one party tries to take the choice away from the other person by using emotional or physical abuse, they are being violent and they are violating the first rule of all relationships – it is a matter of choice. We are not living in a country where anyone has the right to take this choice away from you. But we are living in a country where many people will try and take this choice away from you. This is because they have developed the belief that they can do this maybe even that it is right to do this. Mostly people get these wrong ideas from the families they grew up in – maybe they watched their mum and dad abuse and control their partner and so they think this is OK – or even normal - and they try to get away with it in their relationship. This is not good, right or healthy. Everyone has a choice ~ everyone has their rights.

Many women have experienced some form of physical domestic violence. Many more have experienced the non-physical forms of domestic violence – attempts to control or coerce through verbal, emotional and psychological abuse.

Attempts to control or coerce are most likely to come out at the time when a women chooses to exercise her rights and leave a relationship. It is important that if you feel like you are with someone who could get violent that you have a **safety plan** – that means a carefully worked out plan to get away from where the violent man will be and where he knows you will be. If you are planning to leave a relationship and there is any suggestion or possibility of physical force being an issue – plan your move carefully get to a safe place somewhere he doesn't know about and break the news over the phone or with a letter – this gives him time to absorb the message and calm down. Don't be fooled into putting yourself at risk for any reason.

The Women's Domestic Violence Helpline is a state-wide 24-hour service. This service provides support, resource information and counselling for women experiencing family and domestic violence. They can help connect you with a place to go. Local Call (08) **9223 1188** or Free Call **1800 007 339**

For more information see: <https://stopthehurting.initiatives.qld.gov.au/>

and: <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/>