

Her father was an alcoholic. She grew up with and understood living with alcoholism. She knew from her mother how to be the wife of an alcoholic and knew how to live in the dysfunction of alcoholism. She seemed to keep going back to what was most familiar -- and thus most "comfortable."

For brevity, this is necessarily a simplified explanation. To explain it a little further, -- if a spaceship landed in your front yard, the door opened and funny little green people came out, -- you might be frightened.

What if I assured you that these were very friendly people, that they would take you to live on another planet in a stress-free paradise but you could never return to what you now know as life on Earth? Would you go with the aliens?

Probably not. Because you haven't been there, you don't know if you can trust me and you don't know what to expect.

You would probably stay where you are, -- despite creditors banging on the door, a leaking roof, your mother-in-law living with you, standing daily in the unemployment line, your daughter prostituting herself and your son in jail for dealing drugs.

The unknown and uncertain can be too frightening for change, -- even when it is needed or wanted.

Women in abusive relationships that have escalated to threats of death must decide if they will continue to endure the violence that could also end in death, -- or if they will take the risk to leave. This decision can be in the form of no decision, -- which is in itself a decision to stay.

Our adult protective system and shelters must do more to help these women and their children. But this plea is met with the valid complaint from those who try to protect, -- that the abused women they are sheltering will call their abusers and give away confidential housing locations, -- endangering others in the safe-house.

The solution to the ultimate threat of death is to leave an abuser as soon as the violence begins and not to wait until it has escalated to threats of death. But that is overstating the obvious.



Domestic Violence: "Why Women Stay"



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Domestic Violence: "Why Women Stay"

It can be truly confusing to people on the outside looking in, wondering why a woman would stay with a man who beats her.

Those who don't understand say things like, "I'd leave him in a heartbeat if he ever hit me -- it would only take one time!"

And yet, despite repeated assaults, -- which can include trips to the emergency room, irreparable physical damage, alienation from family and friends, deteriorating self-esteem, children who live in fear, repeated calls for police protection and threats of death, -- many women remain with the men who abuse them.

There can be many reasons, with more than one contributing to the problem. The categories are not discrete, with many overlapping characteristics among the arbitrary divisions.

- ✓ The Safety Seeker:
It may be familiar and oddly enough, a comfortable lifestyle.
- ✓ The Blind:
Not realizing it is "abuse."
- ✓ The Worthless:
"No one else would ever love me."
- ✓ The Defective:
"I deserved it; I'll do better."
- ✓ The Manager:
"I can keep it from happening again."
- ✓ The Gullible:
"He's really sorry and it won't happen again."
- ✓ The Pretender:
"I know I make him sound terrible, but he's really a good person most of the time."
- ✓ The Defender:
"He didn't mean to hurt me."
- ✓ The Caretaker:
"No one else understands him the way I do."
- ✓ The Fantasizer:
"But I love him."
- ✓ The Martyr:
"He isn't hurting the children; if he ever did, I'd leave."
- ✓ The Helpless:

"I can't support the children on my own."

- ✓ The Hopeless:

"He'll kill me if I try to leave him."

These reasons may not be as simple as they initially appear, and warrant further explanation.

The Safety Seeker:

It may be familiar, and oddly enough, a comfortable lifestyle.

This is probably the concept that is most difficult for people to understand. People tend to move toward relationships that are familiar and thus most comfortable. "Comfort" in this sense does not necessarily mean physical or emotional contentment; but rather "comfort" in the sense of having lived in similar situations. Superficially, it seems easier to deal with the "known" and "expected" than with uncertainty. For example, there are women who repeatedly marry alcoholic men. In a therapeutic session with a woman in her forties, we reviewed her life and relationships. She had been married seven times to seven alcoholics. Between each marriage -- and consistent throughout her life, -- was one man who was not an alcoholic. She admitted truly enjoying his company, but never married him and could not figure out why.