

COPING WITH AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP PART 2

Abuse is about power and control. The core results of being abused are disempowerment and disconnection from oneself and others.

When in an abusive relationship you have to find a way to cope on a day to day basis or cope with recovery once you are no longer in the relationship. Either way it is not easy and you are probably over your head with just trying to stay glued together most of the time.

According to Judith Herman, recovery cannot occur in isolation. Recovery involves re-establishing a sense of trust in others, independence, the initiative to think and act for oneself again, building up competence and the ability to get close to others. Most importantly it involves rebuilding a shattered identity.

Principles of coping with an abusive relationship:-

1. The first principle is **physical safety**. Many women find themselves running out in the middle of the night and hiding with their children. Make sure you have somewhere to go, have an emergency packet of things packed with e.g. spare car keys or taxi fare, a toothbrush, clean underwear or children's /baby's minimum requirements and phone numbers of friends or shelters. Think of getting a *protection order*.
2. Think about your **psychological safety**. If you are feeling depressed or suicidal, go for help. Do not tell the person who is abusing you where you are going to for help.
3. **Name it**. If you are being abused, acknowledge it.
4. **Denial** is useful in the short term to help us cope with the shock of hearing bad news. To deny the impact of your situation on you over a long time can prevent you from dealing with it constructively.
5. **Speak** about your feelings and situation to someone. You may have lost trust in others or their ability to help or been isolated from others by the person who abuses you. This will lead to a feeling of hopelessness. **Do not isolate yourself**.
6. **Reframe** your situation. While you are being victimized, it is not useful to see yourself as a victim, but as a **survivor**. You are an amazing woman with potential and you need to find ways to deal with your situation before it destroys you.
7. Look at the ways in which you have been **disempowered**. What things about yourself have you changed that you don't want to? How many of these can you change back? Can you wear your hair in the way you want to, make friends with people you want to even if your partner criticizes them?
8. Look at your **coping mechanisms**. Try not to self medicate with alcohol or other substances. If you need medication rather get it from your G.P.
9. Do not counteract **violence** with violence. It is never useful.
10. Improve your **self esteem**. Look at what you have taken blame for. Remember what used to make you feel good about life and yourself. Think about what would make you feel comfortable now. What are you saying to yourself about your situation? Would you say them to anyone else and if you did how would that leave them feeling?
11. **Project yourself into the future**. If you are still in this situation in 5 years, 15 years what do you see yourself being like? What does that feel like for you? Research indicates that emotional and physical abuse increases in frequency and severity over time. Sometimes when testosterone levels drop in older age, men may become less abusive. By that time their partners are so diminished anyway it may not make much difference to their wellbeing.
12. Think of all the things you **fear**. There are those in the relationship – unpredictability, having your identity disappear, being criticized, etc and those of leaving, being independent, etc. Work consciously with this. Take out paper and a pen.
13. Find **role models** of women who you admire. Think about what it is about them that you would like to emulate and how to do that.

14. **Reconnect** with a **purpose**. **Set goals** for yourself as to how you would like to go about making a difference to your situation. **Set time limits**.
15. **Do not give up**. These are the things that will make a difference. Acknowledge the problem, find support, speak out, find healthy coping mechanisms, deal with your fears and set goals to work towards. You may have to review and change these at times. It may not be easy and it may not be quick but it is a start.
16. Find community resources that can be useful e.g. that run groups, know about interdicts (protection orders) or can provide knowledge.
17. **Get professional help** in the areas that you need in order to make progress in your situation.