

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

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“I don’t know what to do! I never know when he’s going to blow up, and I hate to think how this is affecting the children. But at least I sort of know what he’s up to here. I may not sleep soundly ever again if I can’t keep an eye on him. And I believe him when he says he’ll never let me leave. What should I do?”

I have been asked some version of this question many times over my career. There are generally no good alternatives for women targeted with Domestic Violence. Everyone needs to be able to make a decision of this magnitude for herself.

On the one hand, if a woman stays with an abusive partner, she can reasonably predict that the behavior will continue, and that it may intensify over time. However, when a woman leaves an abusive relationship, her situation can become significantly more dangerous.

I can’t make this decision for my clients, but I can help them weigh the alternatives.

If she stays:

- Are there ways to limit the ways her partner can control or monitor her?
- Can she limit her partner’s access to her and the children when he is angry?
- Can she make lethal weapons harder to access?
- Are there steps she can take to make it easier to leave if she feels she has to?

If she leaves:

- Is there a place she can keep a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, keys, and important documents as she puts in place a plan to leave?
- Does she have her own bank account (preferably not at her family’s bank)?
- Could she access enough cash to live without credit cards for a while?
- Is there a place she could go where her partner wouldn’t know to look for her?
- Are there ways she can limit access to her and the children?
- Who are her allies – the people who know what has been happening and are able to help?

Neither choice of staying or going is without risk. And in spite of many good intentions, the system is not set up well to make it easy for women to leave unsafe situations.

Even so, having a plan (and a couple of back-ups!) can empower women to trust their thinking and help them make the best decisions for themselves.

If you or someone you care about is trying to think about how to handle an abusive relationship, feel free to reach out to me via email or phone. You can find more resources at the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence <https://nccadv.org/> or the Guilford County Family Justice Center <https://www.guilfordcountync.gov/our-county/family-justice-center>.

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