

Escaping the clutches of domestic violence

By Naomi Snell

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(Image via Unsplash)

Domestic violence can be debilitating and sometimes fatal, but there is hope for those who live in fear. [Naomi Snell](#) reminds fellow victims that there is a way out.

***CONTENT WARNING: This article discusses domestic violence**

YOU THINK you are strong. You think you are tough. You think you are smart. You have always been aligned with feminist principles. You've never taken kindly to bullying. You have always been the friend gently (and even not so gently) encouraging others to leave toxic relationships.

But then one day, it's you being coerced into having physical, emotional, social and psychological connections with people you don't want to.

And it goes on... and on... and on.

Then, after a while, it's you being scared to ask for

or even have independence because after a period of time, you become so worn down and psychologically damaged you feel like you can't breathe "correctly".

Suddenly, you are cowering in a corner, isolated and voiceless because every time you try to leave, thinly veiled threats make you fearful and paralyse you with dread.

Not just for your own safety, but the safety of others. So you stay silent. That doesn't help. It gets worse and you watch the window of escape slowly closing centimetre by centimetre.

So you end up having a breakdown (or several) and being gaslit into thinking you are completely off-the-wall delusional to the point you are convinced you are imagining things.

This cannot be real.

You end up tolerating stuff you never dreamed of putting up with when you met someone who was supposed to love you the most.

If this sounds familiar, or God forbid, ever happens to you, I understand. You are not alone. You don't deserve it. You never did. And most importantly, I believe you.

There *is* a way out.

Don't ever believe that there is no escape. That's the exact trap perpetrators of domestic violence use to control you. Fear in a relationship is not normal.

I am tough. I am smart. I am a feminist. I don't take

kindly to bullying and even still, somehow none of that makes you immune.

What it does do, though, is help you build resilience as you recover and remind yourself who you once were, are and will be again.

If someone confides in you that they are the victim of family violence, you need to listen, trust and believe them. You must also help them in whatever capacity you can.

Family violence and coercive control can literally happen to anyone and when it gets so miserable you think it's inescapable, you might even contemplate suicide like I did.

You don't know whether to run. Nor do you feel safe to end it, so you freeze and you're stuck in a vicious cycle on repeat. It might even get to the point that you end up being medicated beyond which can literally render you even more powerless.

But feelings of total hopelessness are trauma talking. Victims who *will* become survivors must believe there is always a way out.

Never, ever let anyone blackmail you into feeling like you've done something wrong when you know you have not. I've made a lot of mistakes in my life but there's not one I'm not willing to or haven't taken responsibility and apologised for. Don't ever let shame stop you from being happy. Shame lives in a place where happiness and freedom die.

If you ever relate to any of this, please seek out help. I know I am only one of many women willing to get in the trenches with you to fight maladaptive behaviour if and when necessary.

Many will do whatever they can to give you a second chance at life like the one I now have. No one deserves to live with abject tyranny. *Ever.*

Don't succumb to a bullshit family violence epidemic like I nearly did. Taking the risk to leave an abusive relationship can seem overwhelming but there was life before the toxic relationship. And there will be

again after.

No one deserves to be miserable, least of all kids watching adults struggle through such soul-destroying fear.

You were strong, you were tough and you were smart — you just temporarily adapted those skills to survive. But you're also allowed to leave.

And I'll be one of many there holding the door open for you on the way out. Your new life is on the other side.

The bullshit domestic and gendered violence epidemic in this country is off the charts out of control and no one deserves any of it.

So here is a reminder it's not just up to the women to leave scary relationships and their female counterparts' role to help them do so.

It is also up to the men not to tolerate and enable shit behaviour. They need to tell their mates when they need to pull their heads in because silence will guilt a woman into thinking she asked for it. She never did. She deserves to feel like she used to — strong, smart, tough, even known to be quite funny. And she deserves to be free and happy.

Love should never hurt. And it definitely should not terrorise you.

If you would like to speak to someone about domestic or sexual violence, please call the 1800 Respect hotline on 1800 737 732 or [chat online](#).

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