



IS/WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP ABUSIVE?

Most people have a clear concept of abuse: it's physical, 'hands-on' behavior. It doesn't have to leave a mark. It includes physical abuse and sexual assault. Women who have suffered physical or sexual abuse have long-lasting negative impacts to their self-esteem and future healthy relationships. Children who have witnessed such abuse also suffer.

In the past decade, police and other women's advocates have lobbied governments and health care agencies to recognize "coercive control" as a criminal offence that can lead to physical/sexual abuse. Coercive control includes behaviors that indicate a relationship is at risk of escalating to physical violence or homicide.

On March 14, 2022, the *Globe and Mail* published an article by Molly Hayes titled: *"Coercive control can be a life or death issue in relationships. But few people even know how to recognize it."*

Some of the behaviors listed include:

- Name-calling (*slut, whore*), degrading comments
- Jealousy, accusations of infidelity
- Isolation
- Power games, including restricted access to money, food, medication
- Damaging property, hurting pets
- Blaming
- Gas-lighting (e.g. pretending/miming physical violence, which is followed by "Can't you take a joke?")
- Cruelty
- intimidation
- text barrages
- monitoring social media

The list is similar to behaviors I listed in the previous article (IS/WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TOXIC?). The usual aim of such behavior is to control a partner, compel him/her to comply with the wishes of the toxic/abusive partner. The result is that many women "give in" and remain in the relationship to the point that they and their children are at risk of serious psychological and/or physical harm.

Perhaps this article helps you identify that you are currently in an abusive relationship. Preparing an escape plan is essential. Check this link for help.

[How to plan for your safety if you are in an abusive relationship - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/justice/abuse-violence/plan-safety-abusive-relationship.html)

I found myself in a counselling session in 2015, taking notes on my session. When I say ‘found myself’, I mean I had not intended to seek counselling for myself. My 12-year-old son was in counselling to cope with his own mental health condition (ADHD). He divulged to his counsellor that his dad was “mean”. When she asked him what that looked like, he responded, “he yells, throws things and punches holes in walls”. I did not recognize this as abuse. I had been physically abused in a previous relationship, and because my new husband had not “put his hands on me”, I was reluctant to use the word ‘abuse’.

Other signs of his coercive control included: text barrages, monitoring and withholding finances, gas-lighting and threats.

When I began my own counselling, I preferred to refer to my partner’s outbursts by a different name: Mr. Nasty. I wrote my counsellor’s words down in my notebook: *Stop calling it ‘Mr. Nasty’ - minimizing the seriousness of “abuse”. Call Women’s Services. Make escape plan.* I could hardly believe what I was reading and hearing. But the nasty truth was, I needed to acknowledge the seriousness. I needed to call it what it was. I needed to plan my escape to prevent the inevitable escalation. When the final blow-out happened, our things were packed and ready, stashed away. My employer and family were alerted and offered support and a place to land. I had pictures, files, important bank account numbers, amounts and VIN numbers on our vehicles and details on our joint assets.

If you don’t have support or a safe place to land, Women’s shelters and services can be found here:

[Home - Nova Vita \(Brant County\)](#)

[Home - Haldimand & Norfolk Women's Services \(hnws.on.ca\)](#) (Haldimand Norfolk)

[Home - ShelterSafe](#) (how to find a shelter near you)

After getting away, truly tending to your self-care and esteem during this time is a must. Use the UR Guided Journal to focus on your needs and safety. Value and save yourself.

Perhaps this article has helped you identify that a past relationship WAS abusive. If so, the journal and support sessions can help you resist the ‘giving-in’ in a future relationship. You may not realize how the impact of your past relationship is driving important decisions around current relationships. The GLITCH affects us all for years after the threat is over and makes it more likely we will choose another abusive or toxic partner. If we find a healthy relationship, the GLITCH makes it harder to keep it that way.

My name is Lori Holstein. I am the author of “UNLIMITED REVISIONS Exposing the Glitch: Confronting Female Complicity in Recovery from Toxic Relationships”. I published this book under a pseudonym (Lorelie Friesen). I have developed a workshop series, guided journal and on-line guide for women wanting help. You can find these resources at
www.unlimitedrevisions.ca