

5 ways to find the courage (you already have) to leave/heal:

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It's difficult to rescue yourself from a bad relationship when you sort of feel like you belong there. It would seem that leaving an unhealthy relationship *would be* super easy, but it's not that simple. Like any relationship, leaving is often more of a process than an event. Because of the impact unhealthy relationships can have on your self-worth, leaving can take extra time, mental energy, pep talks with friends, and an extra large dose of self-love before you are ready.

You may find that you're in a place where the narrative in your head sounds like: *Who am I to want more; I'm not perfect either? Who am I to be happy? Who will even want me, if I leave?* The very important thing to remember is you are worthy, you will be happy, you do deserve more, and you will very much be wanted. Know that successfully leaving an unhealthy relationship is complicated, but not impossible. The best antidote to combat these thoughts and help you through the process is to add in some extra self-love. To give yourself love and compassion, consider the following seven tactics.

1. Keep a journal

Writing in a journal can be a great way to air out your thoughts and feelings. Engaging in a free writing exercise where you write without censor will often reveal more about who you truly are and what you want/deserve. Journal writing will give you a way to document any incidents of unhealthy behaviors and mistreatment. Also, having a space to document this unhealthy relationship behavior will help you not discount your experience. The act of writing out what you have kept hidden is a great way for you to find your voice.

2. Find Some Joy

It doesn't take much to shift into a place of empowerment. Sometimes the smallest things can give you enough light to find your way through. Reconnect with an old hobby. If painting, writing, singing, decorating etc. was your thing before the relationship, dip back into that. Enjoy the sunrise or sunset, or listen to uplifting music. Engage in activities that make you smile. Doing things that remind you that you are special and worthy can help you move toward letting go of your partner and stepping away from the relationship.

3. Cut Yourself Some Slack

Go easy on yourself. This road has been hard, but it will get better. One of the biggest things to defeat is negative thoughts you may have towards yourself and the relationship. Replacing old thoughts with new affirmations is a good way to get rid of thoughts that don't serve you well. Anytime you have a thought that doesn't make you feel good, switch to a thought that leaves you feeling more empowered. If you struggle in this area, here are a few examples:

Negative Thought: *"I'm so stupid to have been with this person."*

Affirmation: *"This was a learning experience, I am learning how to love myself better and prepare for a more healthy relationship."*

Negative Thought: *"Nobody else is going to want me after this relationship."*

Affirmation: *"I am strong, beautiful/handsome and intelligent. The right person will appreciate me."*

Negative Thought: *"Relationships take a lot of work. I just need to hang in there."*

Affirmation: *"I deserve someone that makes me feel supported and loved for who I am."*

Negative Thought: *"Maybe I'm not supposed to be happy."*

Affirmation: *“I am a good and worthy person who deserves to be happy.”*

Always remember you are not alone. Many have been in your shoes and have made it out just fine. The fact that you are seeking better is a good indication that you are on your way.

4. Don't Rationalize Bad Behavior

When a person is in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, it's very common for them to make excuses for the partner's actions: They are *only mean sometimes*; *s/he's really a good person, s/he doesn't hit me* (but s/he emotionally abuses me). *We don't argue* (but s/he can be passive aggressive). *I am to blame because I agitate him/her, I don't do enough to help him/her, or I don't do anything right.*

If a person is making excuses for their partner, they are usually also taking the blame for their bad behavior. A classic case of gaslighting is when you feel responsible for your partner's bad behavior. Any given situation can be twisted around and the abused person will mistakenly see themselves as the cause of their own misfortune.

Regardless of whether or not the abuser will ever admit when they're wrong, it's not up to you to take the blame.

5. Find Support

Being in an abusive relationship can feel very isolating. The shame, guilt, social pressures, and expectations can keep you from wanting to open up to others. When you keep it bottled up inside, it's easy to straddle the fence and convince yourself that nothing is really wrong. Talking to a professional counselor who specializes in relationship or domestic abuse can be instrumental to getting you the assistance you need. They will most likely have access to resources that you may find helpful.

A professional counselor can help you identify the abuse. For people in an abusive relationship, it's not always easy to recognize abuse, especially if the only kinds of relationships they've known have been abusive. It may not even seem like a big deal. A counselor will reassure you that it is a big deal and help teach you the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. When this happens, it becomes difficult to turn away from what you know is true. The truth will empower you to make changes. A counselor can be your cheerleader, advocate, or person in your corner that helps give you the push you need.

6. Ignore Bad Relationships Advice

If your loved ones are telling you things like, “At least you have somebody,” or “S/he makes good money, you better hold on to him/her,” and a bunch of other bad advice that is not aligned with the way you feel as a result of being in the relationship, you should ignore them. Sometimes well-meaning friends give us relationship advice that is not healthy or realistic. When this happens, gently offer them some of the healthy tips you're learning on your own journey.

7. Reconnect With Family/Friends Who Care

Isolation is something people often experience in unhealthy relationships and can happen when a person is separated from their family/friends or anything that gives them a connection to something other than their partner. Isolation makes it easier for an abuser to control without any interference. In the process, the abused person loses their identity. A critical step toward healing and moving forward in the process of ending the relationship is reconnecting with family/friends that have your best interest at heart. They help remind you of those great things that you forgot about yourself when you entered this relationship. Family and friends are critical for reinforcing your self-worth and supporting your decision to leave the relationship.

It's important to note that the most dangerous time in an unhealthy or abusive relationship is during and after a breakup. If you or someone you know is considering leaving an abusive relationship, it's critical that a safety plan is created. For help with safety planning, or for counseling and advice, check out our “real-time resources” page to find help from trusted professionals like the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** and to develop a path to safety. #1 800 799 7233 (Safe)

