

## Stories of survivors of domestic abuse

*This resource shares stories of domestic abuse survivors for you to use during 16 Days to help people understand domestic abuse and how it can affect people. Print them out and distribute them to be read aloud, to be prayed for or for publicity.*

### **Ailish's story**

“That Christmas, I couldn't take any more. Things were getting more and more volatile – not only were we walking on eggshells but we were holding our breath so often and for so long that we felt like we were running out of oxygen.

Christmas day was spent with my three children huddled around the kitchen table staring at the tiny portable TV screen and taking turns to hold the broken indoor aerial in a certain position. He, on the other hand, was lying on our huge seven seater settee watching the 47 inch brand new TV. We weren't allowed to go in there.

As Christmas turned into another new year, things got worse. I could sense his rage bubbling under the surface, ready to explode. I also knew that, in order to shield the children from it, I would be in the firing line. He had almost killed me once, this time I might not be so lucky.

So I contacted Women's Aid. They couldn't find a place for us straightaway as just after Christmas is the busiest time. Tis the season to be jolly...ha! But after a few days, find us a place they did. As soon as he left for work, we ran.

When my children and I arrived at a women's refuge, scared, skint and emotionally battered, I had no idea what to expect. We were shown to our room, and left to settle in. And you know what? Those nights in the refuge were the happiest we had known in years.

The children played to their hearts' content, they laughed, they tumbled, and they were children. We bought what WE wanted, and ate when WE wanted. Nobody shouted at us for making too much noise when we ate, or for spilling a drink, or for dropping a knife on the table. We were free. It was bliss.

I wasn't strong enough that first time. Amid hundreds of suicide threats from him, promises of change, and counselling, I went back. And that night he did it again... But something inside me had changed, I

was no longer going to put myself, and more importantly my children, through it. [With ongoing support] I went to court, got a court order, and had him removed from the house.

I would never have had the strength to do it if it hadn't been for the time we spent in that refuge. Being there changed our lives. I met the strongest, most inspirational women I have ever met. Women who had lost everything yet had the ability to rise again from the ashes."

[Women's Aid](#)

## **Emily's story**

"I had lived and created a great life for myself before the abuse but ending up having to leave it all behind.

I lost my home, my car, my belongings, my career, my self-worth, and my dignity. I even physically lost my voice because of the trauma I'd experienced.

When I left, I had no money to support myself or my child because he had all financial control. There were days in the beginning of leaving when I stood in the housing line with my two year old, wondering if I was going to be able to provide a meal for us that day.

My pride was on the floor and I felt like a charity case. I didn't want to be a burden to anyone.

Through abuse, I became isolated from people and withdrawn from life. I was a shadow of myself and had almost lost my faith in humanity. After reaching rock bottom, I started to rebuild my life away from my ex-partner.

I was lucky enough to have the support of Women's Aid, an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor and a few close family and friends along the way. Having these services and people around me were invaluable and helped so much.

Rebuilding myself after such a disempowering situation has been the toughest but most rewarding journey I think I will ever have to go through."

[Women's Aid](#)

## **Isobel's story**

"When I met my ex-husband, I had my own business, my own flat, supportive friends and family. I was confident and self-assured and independent. Domestic violence was not something I ever thought would happen to me.

“He was controlling from the beginning. I was constantly walking on eggshells. I was undermined and humiliated in a million different ways. But whenever I tried to leave, he would reel me back in, telling me that he would change and that he wanted us to be a family. One day a normal conversation suddenly turned into a frenzied attack. He punched me to the ground, kicked me in the back, and then threw me across the room – all in front of our two children. I called the police, and eventually they put me in touch with Refuge.

“One of Refuge’s outreach workers, Anna\*, began supporting me. We talked about everything I had been through and she helped me to understand that Ben’s behaviour was a deliberate pattern of control. It was not my fault. [...]

“Now things are so much better. It isn’t easy to break away from a violent partner; I don’t think I could have done it without Refuge’s support. Refuge saved my life.”

[Refuge](#)

## **Laura’s story**

“When I look back it’s easy to see that my relationship was abusive from the start and followed a text-book pattern. Initially my ex was fun, complimentary, encouraging, understanding - all the things you would want in a partner. I told him things I wouldn’t tell anyone else; I felt like he was really trustworthy and had my back.

That really good phase lasted about nine months, but I realise now that it was a made up fantasy and the person he presented to hook me in doesn’t exist. The compliments turned into insults; “you’re so good at your job” turned into “you’re so condescending, you’re such a know it all”. [...]

I started to realise it had become an abusive relationship and my close friends were worried about me. By then though, I was so stuck, I kept thinking that if I changed how I was, ‘supported’ him better (code for doing everything he wanted and not questioning it) kept going through this tricky phase etc that things would go back to the way they were at the beginning. I know everyone says that - I think it’s because they’re so good at convincing you their behaviour is all your fault.

The abuse was mainly verbal and psychological but there were peaks of physical and sexual violence that kept me in fear of him all the time and I thought a few times that he was going to kill me.

[...] I phoned the RISE helpline and got advice from them about how to end the relationship and what to do afterwards. Although I was scared I knew I couldn't live like this anymore and ended the relationship.

[...] I used to feel so ashamed about being in an abusive relationship, I couldn't believe it had happened to me and felt so stupid. What I realise now through working with RISE is that perpetrators are so skilled at breaking you down and making you think you're crazy, worthless and that it's your fault. I know I did nothing to deserve what he did to me and I'm a good person.

I'm slowly getting better but I know it's going to take time, I have good weeks and bad weeks and suffer from severe anxiety and depression. I've lost friends and family members since all this, people who got angry at me because I couldn't leave, not understanding what life was like for me and how it wasn't that simple at all. Now I have a small circle of amazing friends who I can be honest with about how I'm feeling. Maybe I'll always be scared of him but he no longer has control over me, bit by bit I'm feeling like me again and feel positive about the future."

[Rise](#)