

Why Doesn't She Leave?

The Power of Coercion

The tactics listed below are from the mouths of abusers themselves
(Italicized statements are from actual survivors)

I WOULD ISOLATE HER, BREAKING HER TIES WITH ANY SUPPORT SHE HAD:

- I convinced her family and friends that I was the good one.
(Survivor: "He met my parents and they really liked him.")
- I took all of the money so that she depended on me for everything.
(Survivor: "At first, I felt I was a contributor to the home, but then I questioned why he had to control EVERYTHING. He insisted that he take me to the grocery store. He paid the power bills, he mocked me if I didn't eat what he ate.")
- I would start a fight before she visited with friends and family so that eventually, she just stopped visiting.
(Survivor: "I felt too guilty about leaving after an argument. I was also too embarrassed for my family to see my bruises.")
- I moved her way out in the country or to another city. When I left, I took her car battery with me.
(Survivor: "At first, I felt excited to be in a new adventure, a new town. After a while, I felt I had no one to turn to — nowhere to go.")
- I convinced the people around her that that she was crazy, imagined things, and needed counseling. I could prove it by pointing out her erratic behavior. That way, she had nowhere to go if she tried to leave.
(Survivor: "I remember thinking, 'Am I crazy?' I couldn't follow the conversation because he kept talking in circles.")
- I convinced everyone around her that she was incapable of caring for the children because of her stupidity, mental illness, and laziness.
(Survivor: "He convinced me that I would lose my child if anyone knew what was really going on in our house.")
- I ripped the phone cord out of the wall during a fight when she tried to call for help or threw her cell phone.
(Survivor: "He even controlled who I called on my cell. I felt sick to my stomach as he read my text messages wondering if the smallest thing would tick him off.")
- I had her back me up on illegal things so that I could hold it over her head if she tried to leave.
(Survivor: "He would tell me that he'd turn me in if I tried to leave.")

I'D MAKE HER DOUBT HER SANITY AND CAPABILITIES:

- I'd convince her she was crazy by playing mind games with her. I'd hide her things, and tell her how incompetent she was so that she'd believe me when I told her that she needed me.

(Survivor: "I felt that something was WRONG with me. I questioned my sanity.")

- I kept her up in the night so she was easier to control.

(Survivor: "I remember feeling 'crazy.' He'd fight with me when I returned from work. I'd kept wanting to just go to sleep.")

- I turned the kids against her by making her the bad parent and tricking the children. I would make her hit the children by saying her or me (and I would hit them harder) and then threaten her to report child abuse if she left me.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'If I hit them, it'll hurt less; if I let him do it, it will hurt more.'" "I feared the day when my little one got old enough to talk back.")

- I made her feel guilty about wanting to break up our family, that she was being a bad mother and wife if she wanted to leave every time things got

difficult. (Survivor: "He'd say that people who love each other stick it out through rough times — that we could get through this, and I'd think to myself, 'he'll change.'")

- I told her how fat and ugly she was all the time, and how badly she did things around the house. I told her how embarrassed I was of her.

(Survivor: "I wanted him to adore me so I tried really hard to do things to get his approval.")

(Survivor: "He didn't let me come home until I lost weight.")

- I told her that no one else would want my sloppy seconds, that she was used goods.

(Survivor: "No one else will understand. Who wants to marry a prostitute?")

- I'd rape her.

(Survivor: "I kept wondering why he was doing this to me. I left for a while but then he came to find me. No one knew that I'd been raped.")

I MADE HER AFRAID OF LEAVING ME:

- I told her that women's shelters were for women who really needed it, not for women who wanted to give up on their family, not for whores and prostitutes.

(Survivor: "I believed him. I believed that the shelter staff would not take me in; thinking that it was my choice.")

- I made sure she knew that she wouldn't get a dime from me if she left and that she'd be poor and homeless. I ruined her credit by putting things in her name and not paying them.

(Survivor: "He told me, 'you leave with what you came with.' Even though I had lots of things and made lots of money, I couldn't take any of it with me.")

- I followed her without her knowing so that I could make her believe I had people watching her.

(Survivor: "I thought there were cameras in my car. I thought I was crazy as I searched for the camera." "He knew all my actions — what I'd done the day before. He said he'd dreamt it.")

- I threatened suicide.

(Survivor: "I felt like he needed me.")

- I told her I would kill her.

(Survivor: "I believed him.")

- I threatened to hurt people she loved.

(Survivor: "I knew he was capable of this. I would do anything to protect them. The abuse was a 'small price to pay' to keep them safe.")

- I would lock up all of her things, including the social security cards, birth certificates, and pictures.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'How am I going to start again? I feel hopeless.")

- I broke things and told her that it was her fault for upsetting me.

(Survivor: "I knew better than to do what made him mad.")

- I reminded her of the last time she left me, that it only made things worse. *(Survivor: "I thought, 'he's right; it did get worse last time I tried to leave.'")*

- I told her that I'd never let her go, no matter what it took.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'He loves me that much that nothing can separate our love.'")

- I convinced her that I'd find her wherever she went.

(Survivor: "He had.")

- I laughed and told her about men that had violently hurt (or murdered) their ho's when they tried to leave.

(Survivor: "He threatened to take me to their house to have them burn me or douse me with gasoline. I knew they had done it to others so I was afraid.")

- I always kept one of the kids with me so I knew that she'd always come back.

(Survivor: "How could I leave my step son to take all of my pimp's anger? The children couldn't handle it.")

I CONVINCED HER THAT I DESERVED ANOTHER CHANCE:

- I convinced her that I was sorry for what I'd done.

(Survivor: "He said he knew he had problems and he wanted to change.")

- I cried to her.

(Survivor: "I believed him.")

- I promised to change my ways.

(Survivor: "It got better for a while.")

- I promised to go to drug and alcohol treatment.

(Survivor: "He looked up class times online and they all conflicted with our schedule. Well, he 'tried.'")

- I promised to go to counseling.

(Survivor: "But how could a square doctor understand our lifestyle? I didn't want him to subject himself to that kind of judgment, so I insisted he didn't.")

- I blamed the abuse on stress.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'we are going through a lot right now. It will get better soon.'")

- I romanced her with flowers, took her shopping, talking about all the good times, and telling her how much she meant to me.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'This is how things are supposed to be . . . if only I'd start acting right.'")

- I even arranged for us to take a romantic trip together to get back on track.

(Survivor: "We went to Mexico on a week's vacation.")

- I made her think she needed to stick by me because of all I gave up to be with her.

(Survivor: "I reminded myself: 'people in love stick it out through rough times. You don't just give up.'")

- I made her feel sorry for me, and that her love could change me.

(Survivor: "I believed our love was that strong.")

- If she didn't have children, I'd introduce her to mine and tell her I wanted a family with ONLY her because she was special.

(Survivor: "I really believed, 'our situation is different. I am different than other girls.'")

- I'd give her a night off and rent movies and spend quality time to convince her that I cared.

(Survivor: "I thought, 'This is how life will be when we finally have enough money.'")

*Courtesy of Women's Crisis Center, Grants Pass, OR
Adapted for Sex Trafficking by Rebecca Bender, Survivor*