

# Domestic/Family Violence Post-Separation

Choosing to end an abusive relationship is a difficult decision. There is a common misconception that ending an abusive relationship should be easy – but the truth is that ending an abusive relationship is harder than ending a relationship that has not been abusive.



**WARNING:** SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACT SHEET MAY BE DIFFICULT TO READ. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIND ASSISTANCE IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO.

Some women also choose not to end an abusive relationship because it is safer not to do so – and they probably are not wrong.

**Pregnancy and ending the relationship are the two most dangerous times of an abusive relationship.**

Women on average leave and go back seven times before they end the relationship for good. It is crucial for you to remember and understand that ending the relationship will not guarantee your immediate – or long-term – safety and before you attempt to leave the relationship you should plan for yours and

your children's safety, and this can be done with the help of a domestic/family violence support service. It is not all bad though - many, many women have successfully ended abusive and violent relationships and have gone on to have happy, fulfilling, and healthy lives for themselves and their children.

For many women who are experiencing domestic/family violence, ending the relationship does not mean that the abuse and violence has ended or will end. In fact, the violence can escalate, and it can take many forms. The following 'post-separation power and control wheel' is a visual representation of post-separation violence and it can help you to recognise the tactics that your abusive partner is using or may use:

## UNRELENTING FOCUS ON HER

**Prior physical and sexual violence, coercive & controlling behaviour against mother & child(ren)**

### Disrupting her relationships - children

Coercing them to ally with him - Degrading her to them - Using children as spies - Isolating children from her or her from her children.

### Disregarding children

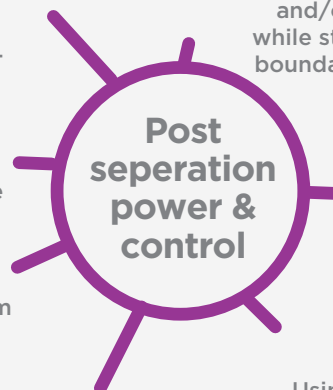
Ignoring school schedules, homework - Ridiculing their needs, wants, fears, identities - Forcing family members, new girlfriends or wives, other women to do his parenting work - Treating them as younger or older than they are - Enforcing strict gender roles.

### Endangering children

Neglecting them when they're with him - Putting them in age-inappropriate emotional, physical situations - Using violence in front of children.

### Withholding financial support

Withholding child support, insurance, medical, basic expense payments - Using court action to take her money, resources - Interfering with her ability to work - Blocking access to money after separation.



### Using harrassment & intimidation

Destroying things belonging or related to her and the children - Using children to justify breaking no-contact orders - Threatening & stalking her and/or her children - Making his presence known while staying conspicuously outside protection order boundaries - Abusing animals - Using third parties to harrass, threaten or coerce her.

### Undermining her ability to parent

Disrupting children's sleep or feeding patterns - Withholding information about children's social, emotional or physical needs - Contradicting her rules for the children - Demanding visitation schedules at children's expense.

### Discrediting her as a mother

Using her status against her, such as her sexual identity, immigration status, race, religion, education or income - inundating systems with false accusations of bad parenting, cheating, using drugs or being "crazy" - Exploiting "children need a father" to gain sympathy - Isolating her from her family, friends, practitioners or other supporters.

Victims of domestic/family violence have said that following separation, their former partners have harassed, stalked, beaten, verbally and emotionally abused, and sexually assaulted them. It is often the case that after separation, the children you have had together are the only remaining 'link' between you and your former abusive partner. This means that shared and co-parenting are potentially dangerous times for both you and your children.

Following separation, abusers do not always direct their abuse towards you. They may direct their abuse towards your children, a new partner, and anyone else that the abuser considers to be 'on your side.' In fact, the legal and family court systems are often used by domestic/family violence perpetrators as a way for them to exert and maintain power and control over you through litigation and custody issues. Using systems in this way also serves as a way for the domestic/family violence perpetrator to regain the control and power that they lost when you ended the relationship with them.

Abusers often threaten to take your children away – often by making false reports to child protection. They may also kidnap their children and/or prolong court proceedings regarding custody and visitation of their children. It is in this way that professionals and courts can – and sometimes do – inadvertently become tools that the abuser will use to continue their abusive behaviour towards you. This is made worse by the fact that these proceedings are also expensive and can make you financially disadvantaged. Whilst not exhaustive, the following list are some of the common tactics that an abuser will use following separation:

- Reporting you to authorities for things like child protection concerns or concerns for your mental health issues.
- Telling the children that you are making it so that they cannot be a family.
- Showing up outside of arranged visitation contact times to see the children.
- Not paying child support.
- Calling you constantly using the excuse that they need to talk to the children or talk to you about the children.
- Telling the children all the things that you 'did wrong'.
- Staying unemployed, or quitting their job, so that they do not have to pay as much child support
- Giving the children too many gifts during contact visitation.
- Undermining your rules that you have set for the children, for example they might let the children 'get away' with everything so that they feel like you are the 'bad' parent.
- Picking the children up from school without telling you first.

- Stalking you and/or the children.
- Kidnapping the children and/or not returning them home from arranged contact visits.
- Questioning the children about what you are doing and who you see and spend time with.
- Assaulting, threatening and/or criticising your new partner to you, your partner and/or your children.
- Blaming you for your relationship ending.
- Threatening to fight for full day-to-day care of the children if you do not go back to them.
- Telling your children that you are an addict, are mentally ill and/or are an alcoholic.
- Prolonging court cases by constantly filing new documents.
- Physically abusing your children and ordering them not to tell you about it.
- Perpetrating domestic/family violence towards their new partner in front of your children, and
- Changing arranged contact visitation plans without any notice.

### **Safety Tips Following Separation:**

Because you are not responsible for your ex-partner's decision to use violence and abuse, you are also unable to make it stop. The only person that can make it stop is the perpetrator of the violence and abuse. However, there are some tips that can be helpful for your safety after ending a domestic/family violence relationship.

- As soon as you can change the locks on your doors and windows.
- If you can, install security systems such as extra locks, bars on the windows, a security chain on the doors, security cameras, sensor lights and an electronic alarm system.
- Purchase fire extinguishers and make sure smoke alarms are installed and are working.
- Install a motion censored light so you know when a person is outside your home.
- Turn caller ID on your phone and ask the phone company to make sure your number is 'silent' and not listed. You can also get an answering machine for your landline and turn it on for your mobile phone.
- Buy a prepaid mobile phone sim so that calls are not itemized and pre-program important numbers into the phone, for example the police and a domestic violence support service.
- If your ex-partner is near your home, or if they have threatened you or tried to communicate with you in other ways you should report this to the police.

- Ask the neighbours to call the police if they see your ex-partner and/or their vehicle near your home and/or if they hear violence from your home.
- Teach your children how to call the police or a trusted adult if they are in danger and to call you if they are kidnapped by their father (or stepfather).
- Tell the school or child-care centre who is and who is not allowed to collect the children – provide them with copies of protection and/or family law court orders if you have them.
- Change your post and bank details so that your ex-partner does not know what they are.
- Try not to go to the places you used to go to before you ended the relationship.
- Change the way you drive to work and/or school. Keep a map in the car and prearrange your travel routes so that you do not need to leave your car in unknown areas.
- Ask your employer to screen work calls at work because of the domestic/family violence you have experienced.
- Get into contact with the Australian Electoral Roll and ask them to exclude your name and address from being published.
- If your ex-partner breaches any protection and/or family law court orders you should report them to the police and /or the family law court.
- Visit a domestic violence women’s support service so that you can get help to empower yourself and to understand your experiences.

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## Further Information

### Yemaya Women’s Support Service

**P:** (03) 6334 0305

**E:** [admin@yemaya.com.au](mailto:admin@yemaya.com.au)

Please note that all information contained within this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only. If you require further information or assistance please contact Yemaya Women’s Support Service.