



# West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

56<sup>th</sup> EDITION

JULY,AUGUST,SEPT 2014

## Some long-term effects of abuse

Domestic violence affects people from all social, racial and financial backgrounds. It may start almost immediately, or after several years of being in a relationship. The shock, pain, confusion, feelings of guilt and betrayal of trust experienced as a result of being subject to domestic violence is common to all.



Many sufferers of domestic violence do not speak out about what is happening at home, but suffer in silence, often for years. They may try to deny it to themselves, not wanting to admit to the reality of the abuse; they may feel shame about the abuse, as though it were their fault. A feeling of guilt about the abuse is almost universal - the victim of abuse believing, and being told by the perpetrator, that they or their actions are the cause of the abuse. This has a double effect: it enables the abuser to continue to feel justified in continuing their destructive behaviour, as the victim takes responsibility for the abuse, and it also means the victim believes that they can change the situation and can in some way control the abuse and stop it. Real change in a perpetrator of abuse however is sadly very rare.

While it seems obvious that physical violence can result in long-term effects, disability and even death, the consequences of suffering ongoing emotional abuse are often overlooked or minimised. Emotional abuse can affect us deep inside and leave permanent emotional and psychological scars. Those who have been abused often experience long-term feelings and reactions, which can cause a lot of distress, including flashbacks, sudden feelings of anxiety, an inability to concentrate or feelings of unreality. These reactions and feelings are a normal reaction to a traumatic event. However in their extreme form - especially where accompanied by depression and suicidal ideation - they can be considered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which requires medical assistance and support. Even where the abuse does not have physical long-term effects or result in PTSD, the survivor of an abusive relationship will often suffer low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness.

### in this issue...

Some long-term effects of abuse.....	1
Domestic Violence and your mental health.....	2
Affirmations .....	3
Surviving Domestic Abuse .....	4
Healthy/unhealthy relationships .....	6
Medical Card & GP Card Appeals ....	7
Where to go for support.....	7
Contact Card.....	8
Support Services .....	8

Survivors commonly comment on feeling somehow 'different' to their peers, as though their experiences have in some way set them apart from the rest of society. Due to the controlling aspects of an abusive relationship, the survivors may find it difficult to make personal decisions and easily feel overwhelmed by everyday tasks. Throughout the abusive relationship, the victim of abuse will use various different coping mechanisms to survive emotionally and physically which are a necessary strategy while in such a situation. However these strategies can be debilitating in a non-abusive environment and have to be unlearned. Since abuse and violence within an intimate relationship are also a huge betrayal of trust, the survivor of abuse will often also have difficulty learning to trust someone else and open up emotionally for fear of being betrayed again.



# domestic violence & your mental health

Domestic Violence can have devastating impacts on your mental health. The impact of living with a perpetrator of domestic violence, who systematically distorts a woman's beliefs about herself and her world, will have a profound effect on her mental health, including the way she thinks, feels and behaves, and the distress that she experiences. It is now well accepted that abuse (both in childhood and in adult life) is often the main factor in the development of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and may lead to sleep disturbances, self-harm, suicide and attempted suicide, eating disorders and substance misuse.

## SOME STATISTICS:

- Abused women are at least three times more likely to experience depression or anxiety disorders than other women.
- One third of all female suicide attempts can be attributed to past or current experiences of domestic violence.

## HOW YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE USED TO ABUSE YOU FURTHER

If you have a mental health disorder, your partner may have used this to abuse you even more. For example by

- Saying "you are mad or crazy".
- Undermining you when you disclose the abuse or ask for help "You can't believe her – she has delusions/ she's paranoid".
- Undermining your intelligence : "You know you get confused / you're not very confident / you don't understand the issue"
- Speaking for you in interviews or doctors surgery.
- Saying you couldn't cope without him.
- Not allowing you to go anywhere alone because he is your "carer"
- Deliberately misleading or confusing you – for example by constantly moving important items.
- Withholding or tampering with your medication.
- Telling the children "Mummy can't look after you".
- Threatening to take the children away.
- Threatening to tell *Social Services* - implying they will take the children away.
- Telling you you're a bad mother and cannot look after the children properly.
- Forcing you to have an abortion because "you couldn't cope".
- Withholding or coercing you into using alcohol or drugs.

These tactics will certainly add to your emotional distress and exacerbate any existing mental health issues.

## SEEKING HELP

If you have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder you will be in a particularly vulnerable position and are likely to face further obstacles when trying to report domestic violence than other women. It's possible that you feel a sense of shame because of the stigma attached in our society to having mental illness of any kind and you may feel even more powerless. The response for service providers is also likely to be more problematic

- They may not believe you when you disclose abuse
- They may see you only when your partner is present.
- They may accept your partner's account instead of yours.
- They may feel sympathy for your partner "after all he has to put up with" or blame you for the abuse.
- They may judge you (particularly if you are self-harming or have attempted suicide, or if you use alcohol or drugs).

Don't blame yourself. Your mental health difficulties are not your fault and you are not responsible for the abuse: the abuser is. You are entitled to help as much as any other abused woman, and if you have additional support needs, then you should get help with them too.

Some refuge organisations may not be able to offer accommodation to women with severe mental health needs as they may have insufficient or suitable resources. However make contact with your local refuge or support service and they can assist you to locate the most suitable support within your local area. While depression tends to ease when women are no longer being abused, it may take a long time for you to come to terms with what has happened. Post separation, you may suffer continued abuse and harassment long after the relationship itself has ended. You are also likely to experience flashbacks long after the violence has eased. It is crucial that you seek support to get through the experience and move out from the prison that you have been placed into.

Taken from: [womensaid.co.uk](http://womensaid.co.uk) domestic violence survivors handbook

## the power of positive affirmations

Affirmations are short, powerful statements that can change the way you think. When we say them, or think them, or hear them, they become the thoughts that create our reality. Research has shown that for most people 80% of thoughts are negative. Affirmations can stop the negative thoughts taking over and pulling us down.

Saying an affirmation every day for 21 days will change our conscious thoughts to positive ones and that will change how we feel about ourselves, make us stronger and better able to live our lives. (21 days is how long it takes our brains to form a new habit, in this case the habit of that thought.)

We suggest that you take 1 to 3 of these affirmations to say every morning and every evening for 21 days. You can also change them to suit yourself or make up your own. Say them out loud or quietly to yourself. And you can repeat them as many times as you want during the day. It gets confusing to have more than 3 to say every morning and evening but you could have some of your other favourite affirmations written down somewhere you can look at them throughout the day and say whenever you feel like it.

Sometimes I have to do what's best for me and my life, not what's best for everyone else

The way people treat me is a statement about who they are as a human being. It is not a statement about me.

Today I don't have to fit into anyone else's emotional atmosphere.

I recognise my strength and I trust myself to do what is right for me in each moment.

I realise there are some people I need to lose from my life in order to find myself.

I have the strength to face what is happening now



# surviving domestic abuse

Surviving domestic abuse and healing from domestic violence does not usually happen from one day to the next. The leaving can happen - you can be in the same house when an incident occurs and you may find yourself leaving in a crisis or it could be a planned leaving. But that is just leaving. Surviving involves finding yourself again, putting yourself back together and learning to live again. Surviving domestic abuse is a process, which might initially look scary, but is actually the road to freedom and back to being able to enjoy being alive.

So now you have left your abuser, or he has finally left your home. You are on your own. You may have children to look after, work to go to, or other responsibilities. You thought that once you had made the decision to end the relationship and were no longer together with him, things would suddenly be much easier. But actually it is still a struggle to get through each day.

*Taken from HiddenHurt.co.uk*

Maybe your confidence is low, and you are not sure that you can cope with dealing with the responsibility of everyday chores (bills, children, home to maintain, work, etc.) on your own? Maybe you are not used to making decisions and all the options and choices are frightening? Maybe you are lonely and wondering whether you have made the right decision? Maybe you still feel guilty about what may feel like 'giving up' on him or letting the children down by not providing them with a 'normal family life'? Maybe you are still fairly isolated, feel somehow 'different' from the other people at work or at the school gate, your self-esteem is low and you find it difficult to relate to others? Maybe you are frightened about what he might do next, this is a new situation, and you don't know what to expect?

These are all feelings and fears which are normal after escaping an abusive relationship. Living with an abuser can erode your self-esteem, self-worth and confidence. But once you have escaped, you will find that your sense of worth and confidence does return, even though it may take some time to 'find yourself' again. You have already shown yourself that you have the ability to make decisions, that you have the courage and strength to carry through your resolves, and you know you can cope with almost anything you have to face - after all, if you managed to maintain your sanity and keep functioning (i.e. coping and surviving) while in an abusive relationship, you have all the skills and strength needed to continue to do so. Remember, each day you get through you are a Survivor, no longer a Victim. For most survivors, symptoms of fear, anxiety, re-experiencing and any other triggers, if present, will gradually decrease over time.

Below are a few suggestions for helping you through those first few weeks or months after the separation. Indeed, some of these are good to do long-term for health and self care.

- 1 Keep a diary of everything you manage to do,** even mundane things such as making a proper meal, taking the kids somewhere, cleaning the kitchen floor or paying a bill. Give yourself credit for everything you achieve. When you are feeling low and as though you cannot cope, this will serve as a reminder of how much you do actually get done on a daily basis.
- 2 Seek out a local support group.** This will help you feel less isolated and help validate your experiences and feeling and help you understand what has and is happening.
- 3 Educate yourself on Domestic Abuse.** At your own pace read up on how an abusive relationship works, its short- and long-term effects, etc. This will help you to understand and better deal with the abuse, will validate your feelings and help you feel less isolated.
- 4 Be creative.** Draw or paint pictures, whatever comes into your head, compose poems or write down your experiences, what has happened, how you feel. Often this helps to work through and formalise your experiences and feelings.
- 5 Pamper and reward yourself.** Buy yourself something nice, bubble bath, perfume, a new book or an outfit. It doesn't have to be big or expensive, but it has to be something for you!
- 6 Change things.** Many survivors have found making changes in their surroundings or their own appearance has helped. Paint a room, change your hairstyle, re-arrange the furniture, etc. anything that personalises you or your place. This will stamp your own identity on to your surroundings, and also give you a sense of achievement and satisfaction.
- 7 Set yourself goals.** Make them realistic and start at the beginning. If it is difficult facing people, set yourself the task of just saying 'hello' to one other person. But don't pressurise yourself to reach your targets too soon. Sometimes we learn more by not reaching our goals on target than by doing so easily. Work at your own pace, not the expectation of other people.

**8 Keep the number of a good friend next to the phone** for those low patches when you just need someone to talk to. If there is no-one whom you can confide in or at least not any time day or night, keep the number for the Samaritans nearby or another 24-hour helpline number. That's what they are there for!

**9 Ensure you get time-out.** Time just for yourself. Arrange for a friend or family member to look after the kids for the afternoon or evening (if none are available, find a reliable babysitter) and do something you enjoy. This isn't selfish - you need to look after yourself to be any good to anyone else, especially if you have children. And you need to learn to look after yourself and be kind to yourself first and foremost. You deserve it!

**10 Get some exercise and fresh air.** Go for a walk, take up swimming or some other sport. Some survivors find doing a self-defence or martial arts course helps build their confidence back up (however, some people find martial arts too tactile to begin with, especially if they have been raped). Keeping fit is good for body and mind.

**11 Make up a tape of your favourite music tracks.** Music can lift your spirits and encourage you in your resolve.

**12 Take a few days off now and again,** visit friends or family and enjoy a change of scenery. This can help boost your batteries again and can act as a good reminder that there is more to life and still plenty to enjoy.

It can be really important to obtain professional help (counselling). ANY form of abuse is traumatic and nibbles away at our deep-seated need for security. It can challenge our understanding and perception of how life works, leaving us feeling insecure and fragile at the very least. Good counselling helps us work through both the short-term and long-term effects of abuse, enabling us to learn and grow from our experiences. Check out the list of Helplines and Organisations, ask your local GP for local services or charities or phone West Cork Women Against Violence for local information.

# healthy/unhealthy relationships

is your relationship  
**healthy?**  
do you.....

Have fun together.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Each enjoy spending time separately .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always feel safe with each other .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trust each other .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are faithful to each other if you have made this commitment.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support each others individual goals in life .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect each others opinions even when they are different .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Solve conflicts without putting each other down .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both accept responsibility for your actions.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both apologise when you are wrong.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have equal decision-making power.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Each control your own money.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are proud to be with each other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage each others interests.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have some privacy .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have close friends and family who like the other person and are happy about your relationship.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never feel like you are being pressured for sex.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allow each other space when you need it .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always treat each other with respect.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

your relationship is  
**unhealthy?**  
if one of you.....

Is extremely jealous.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accuses the other of cheating .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Puts the other down.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes the other feel bad about themselves.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes the other feel like a child.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't take the other person or things that matter to them seriously .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't listen when the other talks .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frequently criticizes friends or family .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pressurises the other person for sex .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurts, humiliates and embarrasses the other person ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is unfaithful.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tells the other how to dress.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has ever grabbed, pushed, hit or physically hurt the other .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blames others for their behaviour .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Destroys the other persons possessions .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prevents education or job success.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes all the decisions .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breaks promises.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is controlling or very possessive .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Withholds affection .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses alcohol or drugs as an excuse for bad behaviour .	<input type="checkbox"/>

# medical card & GP card appeals

If you have lost your Medical Card or GP Visit Card you have the right of appeal if you are not satisfied with decisions taken by personnel of the HSE relating to applications for specified services and entitlements e.g.: Medical Cards, GP Visit Cards, Nursing Home Subvention, Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal), Miscellaneous Allowances and Long Stay Hospital Charges.

## Unhappy with a decision?

If you are unhappy with a decision made by the HSE concerning your entitlement to a Medical Card or GP Visit Card you have the right of appeal to the HSE Appeals Officer.

The Appeals Officer will review the original decision and make a decision taking into consideration relevant legislation and guidelines.

## How do I appeal?

You can appeal by writing a letter, clearly indicating your grounds for appeal.

NOTE: It is important that you set out your case fully and provide grounds for the appeal.

If you are unsure how to do this, you should seek help from your local Citizens Information Service.

If you wish to appeal a decision made in relation to a Medical Card or GP Visit Card you have 21 days from the date of the decision to lodge the appeal.

## What happens with my appeal?

When your appeal is received in the Appeals Office, an acknowledgement will be sent to you. The Appeals Officer must then request the file and a report regarding the decision from the relevant HSE section, for example, Medical Card Section, Nursing Home Subvention Unit etc. the relevant section may then revise the decision at

this stage in light of new evidence presented. If however, the decision remains unchanged, on receipt of the requested file and report, the Appeals Officer will look at all the relevant information and they will then decide whether the original decision was reasonable or not, bearing in mind legislation and guidelines.

The Appeals Officer may also seek further information to gain as much information on the circumstances as possible. They may then agree with the original decision, or change the decision in your favour. In either case, you will be informed in writing. If there is to be any change as a result of this decision, then the appropriate HSE Section will be informed and asked to take the necessary action.

- You do not have to pay anything to make an appeal.
- A personal interview will be held if considered necessary by the Appeals Officer.

Any information provided by West Cork Citizens Information Service Ltd is a general guide only, and not a definitive interpretation of the law.

## Where to go for support

We at West Cork Women can support and listen to you. We are a free, confidential listening and information service. We support any woman, over 18 years of age, who is now or has in the past been in an intimate abusive relationship. We will listen to you and support you no matter what your choices. We will not judge you or tell you what to do. It is our belief that you are the only person qualified to make decisions for your life.

If you're outside of the West Cork area please feel free to phone us for details of the nearest domestic violence support service to you. Alternatively the number for the Women's Aid (based in Dublin) helpline is on the back page of our *Whisper*.

## HOW TO CONTACT US

- Freephone Helpline 1800 203 136. This will be answered weekdays when a trained Support Worker is available.
- Our office line, 027 53847, is usually staffed weekdays 9am to 5pm. Call to arrange a telephone or one-to-one appointment with a Support Worker.
- Drop-in to our Bantry office or make an appointment.
- Skibbereen office Fridays 11am to 2pm. Drop in or call 027 53847 to make an appointment.
- Phone to make an appointment in other locations in West Cork

## SERVICES WE PROVIDE

- Ongoing support for you whatever your choice may be.
- We can provide you with information on court orders, housing entitlements, etc. and can refer you to other appropriate services.
- We can go with you to Court for a Domestic Violence Order or can accompany you to other services.
- We can provide transport for you in a crisis.
- We can advocate on your behalf.

## POSITIVE AFFIRMATION

Don't change  
so people  
will like you.  
Be yourself  
so the *right people*  
will love  
the *real you*





**GOOD FOOD**, with real nutrition, is a fuel for your body, mind, spirit and family and is worth prioritising. Good food can increase your energy and boost your mood, as well as being important for physical health and self care.

But eating can be a way of coping with difficult emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, loneliness, resentment, and shame. It can also be a physical response to stress. If your stress levels are high your levels of the stress hormone cortisol will also be high. Cortisol triggers cravings for salty, sweet, and high-fat foods - foods that give you a burst of energy and pleasure.

So don't give yourself a hard time if you are turning to food to cope with stress and emotional issues.

Hopefully some of the suggestions elsewhere in this issue can help you deal with some of your stresses in the long-term. But also consider what healthier eating choices are possible for you. Could you bake flapjacks instead of buying processed biscuits? Could you cut the sugar in your tea, or in your baking by 10% or 20? Could you increase the fruit and vegetables you and your kids eat? Remember, small sustainable changes can often be much more successful than ambitious intentions.

## we're here to help

If you - or someone you know - think we could help we're offering you this card to cut out and keep in your wallet for when you get the chance or courage to ring us. We've purposely made it discreet so only you will know what it is about. Trust us, Trust yourself

**We are here to support you.**

**1800 203 136**

# support services for women

## cork

West Cork Women Against Violence ..... Freephone 1800 203 136

Cuanlee Refuge, Cork.....021 427 7698

Free Legal Aid Clinic ..... Locall 1890 350 259  
Information and referral

IRD Duhallow Domestic Violence Support.....Helpline 087 7733 337  
from Monday to Saturday 10am - 10 pm or office at 029 60633

Legal Aid Board, Cork.....021 455 1686 / 021 427 5998

Mná Feasa (Domestic Violence Project) .....021 421 1757

OSS, Cork..... Freephone 1800 497 497  
(Domestic Violence Resource Centre for men and women)

S.A.T.U.....021 492 6100

Sexual Violence Centre..... Freephone 1800 496 496

Domestic Violence Social Work.....021 492 1728

Y.A.N.A. North Cork.....022 53915

## kerry

Kerry's Women's refuge and Support Services (Adapt).....066 712 9100

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre..... Freephone 1800 633 333

Legal Aid Board .....066 712 6900

Tralee Women's Resource Centre.....066 712 0622

## national

Women's Aid ..... Freephone 1800 341 900

## west cork citizens' information service

West Cork Citizens' Information Service can provide you with information, advocacy and advice on all your rights and entitlements. The service is free, confidential and independent. Open daily, please call for times.

**The Square, Bantry, .....076 107 8390**

**South Square, Macroom, ..... 076 107 8430**

**CIS Outreach, Dunmanway every Wednesday 10am - 1pm**

**Legal Aid Board - monthly on 3rd Tuesday 10.30am - 4.30am** - For an appointment with the Legal Aid Board please phone the Legal Aid Office on 021 455 1685

**Free Legal Aid Clinic - monthly on 1st Tuesday 6pm - 7pm** - For an appointment please contact West Cork Citizens' Information Service by either dropping in or phoning 076 107 8390.

**MABS outreach Clinic - Each Friday 10am - 11.30am** - For an appointment please phone MABS on 023 885 5155.

West Cork Women Against Violence Project, Harbour View, Bantry, Co. Cork  
www.westcorkwomensproject email: admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie