

Empathy Exercise: Intimate Partner Violence



Why Don't They Just Leave? What Would You Do If Home Wasn't Safe?

Imagine being in a relationship where your partner controls your money, isolates you from friends, and threatens you when angry. You're scared to leave—but scared to stay. What would you do?

Choose Your Path: Make a choice at **each step** and reflect on the consequences.

Step 1: First Signs of Abuse - your partner checks your phone constantly and criticizes what you wear. You feel uncomfortable. What do you do?

- A) Confront them (risk escalating tension).
- B) Confide in a friend (but they know your partner).
- C) Ignore it—it's not physical abuse... yet.

Step 2: Escalation - your partner slaps you during an argument. You consider leaving.

- A) Stay quiet and avoid future conflict.
- B) Seek a shelter (but they're full or far away).
- C) Call police (but worry about retaliation or disbelief).

Step 3: Planning to Leave - you secretly gather documents and save a little cash. What's your biggest concern?

- A) Losing custody of your children.
- B) Becoming homeless.
- C) Being found and harmed.

Step 4: After Leaving - you've left and are staying with a friend. Your partner starts texting threats. What do you do?

- A) Get a restraining order (hard to enforce).
- B) Change your number (but they may find you through others).
- C) Return—at least you know what to expect.

Reflection Prompts

- What made leaving difficult?
- What risks were you willing (or unwilling) to take?
- What did this exercise teach you about survivor experiences?

Optional Challenge

Take one day to reflect on how much you rely on your phone, money, or car. Now imagine not having access to those things without permission.

- What would change about your sense of freedom or safety?
- How would this impact your decisions?

Quick Facts

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience intimate partner violence.
- Most survivors attempt to leave multiple times before succeeding.
- Emotional, financial, and psychological abuse often come before physical violence.
- Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and families – 38% of survivors report experiencing homelessness at some point (NNEDV).