SUPPORTING NEURODIVERGENT WOMEN AND WOMEN WITH SLCN IN RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING ABUSE

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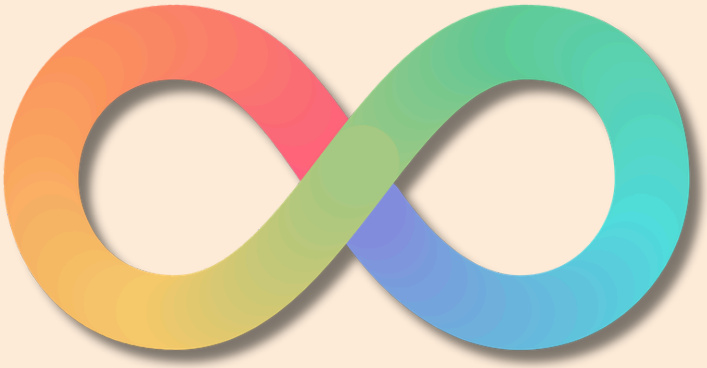


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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to support women, particularly those who are neurodivergent or have speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN), in recognizing the signs of abuse and understanding their unique vulnerabilities. While this resource can also benefit men, it uses gendered language (victim as “her” and perpetrator as “male”) based on research showing domestic abuse remains largely a gendered crime rooted in systemic oppression and patriarchal dynamics (Women’s Aid, 2024).

Best regards,

Jamie x

WHAT DOES SLCN MEAN?

Before we dive deeper into understanding abuse and its dynamics, it's important to explain the key terms used throughout this guide:

SLCN (Speech, Language, and Communication Needs)
SLCN refers to difficulties with understanding, using, or processing language and communication. These needs can vary greatly between individuals and may include:

- Expressive language difficulties: Challenges in putting thoughts into words.
- Receptive language difficulties: Struggles with understanding what others are saying.
- Social communication challenges: Difficulty with conversational skills, interpreting body language, or understanding social cues.

SLCN can be lifelong or temporary, and people with these needs often require tailored strategies to support their communication.

"Adults Can Have DLD
Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a lifelong condition affecting understanding and use of language. It's not caused by hearing loss or intellectual disability but impacts everyday communication"

WHAT IS NEURODIVERGENCE?

Neurodivergence is an umbrella term that describes brain differences that impact how individuals think, learn, process emotions, or interact with the world. It includes conditions like:

Autism
ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
Dyslexia
Dyspraxia
Tourette's Syndrome

Neurodivergence is not a defect but a variation in brain function. Many neurodivergent individuals face barriers in a world designed for neurotypical ways of thinking and communicating, which can contribute to misunderstandings and increased vulnerabilities.

Why Is This Relevant?
Women with SLCN or who are neurodivergent may face additional risks in abusive relationships due to communication barriers, societal stigma, and systemic gaps in understanding their needs. Recognizing these terms and their implications helps us better understand how abuse can uniquely affect them.

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WHY ARE NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN MORE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE?

It's essential to emphasize that the responsibility for abuse lies solely with the abuser. Neurodivergent women are not vulnerable because of who they are but because abusers choose to exploit their traits for control and manipulation.

Kindness and Empathy

Many neurodivergent women approach relationships with honesty and a genuine belief in the goodness of others. This makes them vulnerable to manipulative men who take advantage of this trust. As Lundy Bancroft explains in Why Does He Do That? (See resources and more from Lundy Bancroft later in this resource).

Trust and Belief in Others

Neurodivergent women are often highly empathetic and compassionate. As described in How He Wins by Don Hennessy, abusers actively seek out women with these qualities. They exploit their kindness by manipulating emotions and taking advantage of their willingness to give second chances.

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WHY ARE NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN MORE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE?

This manipulation allows the abuser to create a deep emotional bond, making it even harder for the victim to recognize the abusive behavior early on or leave the relationship when it becomes harmful.

"An abusive man works to shape how his partner perceives him, focusing on gaining her trust and sympathy while masking his true intentions. He crafts an image of himself as misunderstood, wronged, or in need of saving."

A Desire to Make Things Work

Neurodivergent women often approach relationships with a strong sense of loyalty and problem-solving. Abusers exploit this, knowing these women will work tirelessly to repair the relationship, even when the abuse becomes evident.

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WHY ARE NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN MORE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE?

Communication Challenges

Women with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) or other neurodivergent traits may find it harder to articulate their experiences of abuse, especially if the perpetrator uses complex or manipulative language. This can make them feel unheard or doubted, further isolating them.

Perceived Vulnerability

Abusers seek control, and they may see a woman's neurodivergent traits as an opportunity to manipulate or isolate her. They may use gaslighting or other tactics to exploit her processing style or challenges with interpreting social situations.

It's About the Abuser's Choices

Abuse is never the fault of the victim. Abusers actively seek women who are kind, empathetic, and willing to nurture. They exploit these strengths not weaknesses, to gain power and control. Recognizing this helps to shift the focus from blaming the victim to holding the perpetrator accountable.

BUT, WHAT IS PATRIACHY?

Patriarchy is a social system where power, privilege, and authority are predominantly held by men. It reinforces male dominance and often positions women and marginalised groups as subordinate. This system shapes societal norms, expectations, and structures, influencing how relationships and power dynamics function.

Key Features of Patriarchy

Male Authority: Men are often seen as decision-makers in households, workplaces, and governments.
Gender Roles: Women are expected to be nurturing, submissive, and self-sacrificing, while men are encouraged to be dominant and assertive.
Power Imbalances: Patriarchy normalizes unequal power dynamics, often making women vulnerable to exploitation and control.

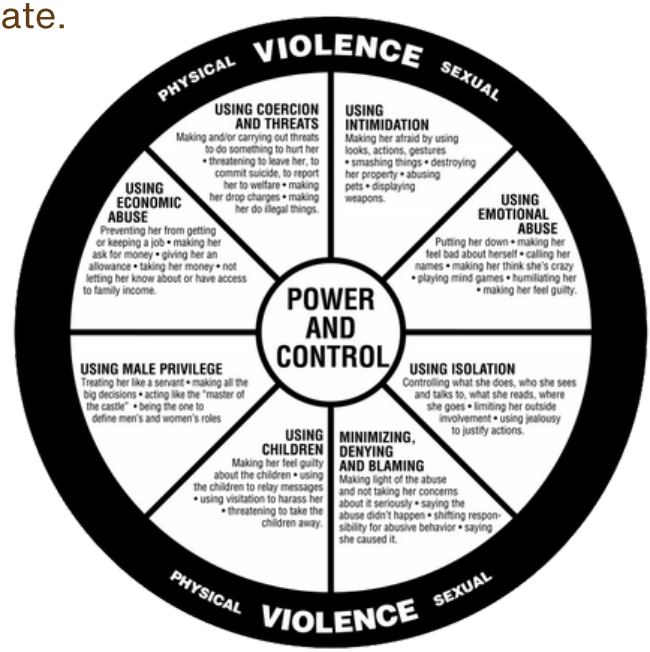
Why Does Patriarchy Matter in the Context of Abuse?

Abuse thrives in patriarchal systems because it gives men the tools and social acceptance to dominate women. It perpetuates the belief that men are entitled to control their partners, while women are blamed for the abuse or expected to “fix” the relationship.
Understanding patriarchy helps us see that abuse isn’t just about individual choices but is rooted in systemic inequality.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

The Power and Control Wheel, developed by the Duluth Model, is a visual representation of the tactics abusers use to dominate and control their partners. At the core of the wheel is the abuser's use of power and control, achieved through various methods such as emotional, verbal, and physical abuse.

This framework also reflects how abuse is deeply rooted in patriarchy, a societal system where men hold power over women and reinforce inequality. Abuse is not just an individual issue but a reflection of systemic oppression that positions men as dominant and women as subordinate.



How Neurodivergent and SLCN Women are Exploited through the Power and Control Wheel

Emotional Abuse

- Exploiting sensory sensitivities by intentionally triggering overstimulation or meltdowns.
- Example: “You’re so dramatic; it’s just a little noise.”
- Gaslighting her into doubting her perception of events, especially if she has processing delays.
- Example: “You misunderstood; that’s not what I said.”

Isolation

- Restricting access to supportive friends, family, or professionals by claiming they “don’t understand her.”
- Example: “Your therapist doesn’t know you like I do.”
- Exploiting communication challenges to make social interactions overwhelming.
- Example: Refusing to help interpret or support her in situations where she struggles to express herself.

HOW NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN ARE EXPLOITED THROUGH THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Minimising, Denying, and Blaming

- Dismissing her concerns by framing her neurodivergence or SLCN as the "real problem."
- Example: "You're overreacting because of your ADHD."
- Blaming her difficulties for the abuse.
- Example: "If you didn't need so much support, I wouldn't get so frustrated."

Using Intimidation

- Using her communication or processing style against her to make her feel small or incapable.
- Example: Speaking rapidly or aggressively, knowing she can't keep up.
- Making threats related to her accommodations or routines.
- Example: "I'll cancel your appointment if you don't do what I say."
- Using forgotten details to question her parenting abilities.
- Example: "How can you take care of the kids when you can't even remember their appointments?

HOW NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN ARE EXPLOITED THROUGH THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Economic Abuse

- Controlling her finances, especially if she depends on him for managing money or accessing benefits.
- Example: “I’m the only one who can deal with this paperwork.”
- Sabotaging her ability to work by causing stress, undermining confidence, or manipulating her schedule.

Using Threats

- Threatening to hurt himself, others, or even pets to keep her compliant.
- Example: “If you leave, I’ll have nothing left, and it’ll be your fault.”
- Threatening to expose her neurodivergence or SLCN as a “weakness” to others.
- Example: “Everyone will know how difficult you are to deal with.”

HOW NEURODIVERGENT AND SLCN WOMEN ARE EXPLOITED THROUGH THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Using Privilege

- Exploiting patriarchal norms to justify control.
- Example: “It’s my role to make decisions for the family.”
- Positioning himself as her protector because of her perceived vulnerabilities.
- Example: “You’d be lost without me.”

Using Children

- Undermining her parenting abilities due to her neurodivergence or SLCN.
- Example: “You can’t even communicate properly, how can you be a good mum?”
- Using the children to manipulate her actions.
- Example: “If you leave, I’ll make sure you never see the kids again.”

SUMMARY: HOW SLCN AND NEURODIVERGENT WOMEN ARE EXPLOITED

Neurodivergent women and those with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) are often targeted by abusers who exploit their unique traits. Their kindness, empathy, and trust in others are manipulated to create dependency, while challenges such as working memory issues or processing delays are weaponised to blame them or undermine their confidence. Abusers also isolate them, deny their experiences, and use threats to maintain control, reinforcing the dynamics of power and control.

- This exploitation often centers around manipulative language and communication tactics, which play a key role in creating confusion, dependency, and self-doubt. Understanding these tactics is critical to recognizing abuse and taking steps toward safety.

MANIPULATIVE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION OF ABUSERS

Abusers use manipulative language and communication tactics to exert control, create confusion, and undermine their victim's confidence. These tactics are designed to destabilize the victim, making it harder for her to trust her own perceptions and easier for the abuser to maintain power.

Common Manipulative Tactics

GASLIGHTING

- What It Is: Making her doubt her memories, perceptions, or feelings to gain control.
- Examples:
- "I never said I'd do that; you must be confused again."
- "Stop being so dramatic, it's not like that at all."

STONEWALLING

- What It Is: Refusing to communicate or engage, leaving her feeling unheard and powerless.
- Examples:
- Silent treatment during a disagreement to punish her.
- Leaving the room when she asks to discuss something important, saying, "I'm not doing this with you."

DERAILING

- What It Is: Changing the topic or redirecting blame to avoid accountability.
- Examples:
- When discussing their behavior, they say, “What about all the things you’ve done wrong?”
- In response to a valid concern, they say, “Why are you always attacking me?”

DENYING

- What It Is: Refusing to acknowledge abusive behavior or gaslighting her into believing it didn’t occur.
- Examples:
- “I never said that; you’re twisting my words.”
- “You’re making things up again to make me look bad.”

WITHHOLDING

What It Is: Refusing to share information, emotions, or affection as a form of control.
Examples:
“I don’t need to explain my choices to you.”
Avoiding intimacy or emotional closeness as punishment.

COMMON PHRASES ABUSERS USE WHEN SHE RECOGNIZES THE ABUSE

When an abuser senses the victim is starting to see through his tactics, he often adopts language designed to:
Reinforce her self-doubt.
Shift blame onto her.
Frame the dynamic as “mutual” to avoid accountability.

1: Examples:
“I’m working on myself; now it’s your turn.”
He claims to have admitted his faults and insists the victim must “face her own issues,” framing the abuse as a shared problem.
Reality: Abuse is never mutual. The abuser is solely responsible for the harm caused.

2: “You’ve been abusive too, you’re not perfect.”
He reframes her reactions to his behavior (e.g., anger, standing up for herself) as abusive, attempting to equate his actions with hers.
Reality: Reacting to abuse is not the same as causing it. This tactic shifts focus away from his harmful behavior.

COMMON PHRASES ABUSERS USE WHEN SHE RECOGNIZES THE ABUSE

3: "You never see your part in things."

- He minimizes his actions and pressures her to accept blame, creating a false sense of mutual responsibility.
- Reality: An abusive dynamic is never the victim's fault, as Lundy Bancroft highlights in Why Does He Do That?. The abuser seeks power and control, and the victim is not responsible for his behavior.

4:"I've changed, but you're still stuck in the past."

- He claims to have "transformed" without showing meaningful or sustained change, then blames her for not moving forward.
- Reality: True change requires accountability, consistency, and the absence of manipulative tactics.

5:"I only act this way because of how you make me feel."

- He justifies abusive behavior by blaming it on her emotions, actions, or perceived flaws.
- Reality: Abuse is a choice. External factors do not excuse harmful behavior.

THE MYTH OF MUTUAL ABUSE

Some abusers frame the relationship as one of mutual conflict to obscure their responsibility. They may say:

- “We’re just as bad as each other.”
- “You bring out the worst in me, and I do the same for you.”

- **Why this is a myth:**
- Power Imbalance: Abuse is not a disagreement or argument; it’s about power and control. One person seeks to dominate the other.
- Blaming the Victim: Equating the victim’s reactions (such as anger or frustration) with abuse perpetuates the false narrative that she is equally at fault.

Recognizing the Truth

When abusers escalate these tactics, it can be confusing and emotionally draining. However, it’s important to remember:

The victim is not responsible for the abuser’s choices. Accountability is key. Real change requires acknowledgment of harm, accountability, and the absence of manipulative behaviour, not deflection. Your feelings are valid. Recognizing these patterns is the first step toward breaking free from the cycle of abuse.

As difficult as it is to acknowledge, the reality is that most abusive men rarely change, even when they claim to or seek professional help. Research and lived experiences show that abusive behavior is deeply rooted in beliefs about power, control, and entitlement, which are challenging to dismantle.

Evidence on Change

Lundy Bancroft's Insights

In Why Does He Do That?, Lundy Bancroft explains: "Abusive men who do make significant changes are the exception, not the rule. The majority either do not change or become even more dangerous after exposure to intervention programs."

Weak Evidence for Intervention Programs

Abuse intervention programs have limited evidence of effectiveness.

Many men attend these programs as a way to avoid legal consequences or to appease their partner, not because they genuinely want to change.

Even in the best-case scenarios, the changes are often superficial, with little impact on the underlying attitudes driving the abuse.

The Risk of Escalation

Depressingly, some men become worse after attending intervention programs.
They may learn new manipulative tactics, using the language of accountability to justify or deflect their actions.
Example: “I’ve done the course, so I’m not abusive anymore, it’s you who won’t let go of the past.”

COMMON THINGS AN ABUSIVE MAN WILL SAY WHEN HE IS NOT CHANGING

When an abusive man is unwilling to change, he may use language designed to manipulate, confuse, and destabilize you. Here are some examples:

1: "You're the one who's abusive, not me."

- He reframes your legitimate reactions to his abuse as harmful behavior, creating doubt in your mind.
- Reality: Reacting to abuse, whether it's anger, frustration, or standing up for yourself is not the same as causing it.

2: "I've admitted my problems, now it's your turn."

- He pretends to take responsibility but shifts the focus onto you, suggesting the abuse is mutual.
- Reality: Abuse is not mutual. It is a one-sided pattern of control, and you are not responsible for his choices.

3: "You bring out the worst in me."

- He blames his behavior on you, suggesting that you're the reason for his actions.
- Reality: Abuse is a choice. No one else is responsible for his actions but him.

COMMON THINGS AN ABUSIVE MAN WILL SAY WHEN HE IS NOT CHANGING

4: “I’ve changed, but you’re the one holding onto the past.”

- He claims to have changed without showing consistent, meaningful actions to back it up, then blames you for being unable to move forward.
- Reality: True change involves accountability, humility, and long-term behavior changes, not just empty words.

5: “If I’m so bad, why are you still here?”

- He uses your presence in the relationship as proof that he isn’t abusive or that the abuse isn’t serious.
- Reality: Staying doesn’t mean the abuse isn’t real. It often reflects the complex dynamics of fear, hope, and emotional manipulation.

6: “I’m trying, but you’re impossible to please.”

- He minimizes the abuse and suggests that you’re too demanding or unreasonable.
- Reality: Abusers often claim to “try” as a way to avoid taking full responsibility for their actions.

COMMON THINGS AN ABUSIVE MAN WILL SAY WHEN HE IS NOT CHANGING

7: "If I'm so abusive, why do you always argue with me?"

- He uses your attempts to stand up for yourself as evidence that you are at fault too.
- Reality: Arguing or defending yourself is not abuse. It is a natural response to being mistreated.

Key Reassurances for You

- You Are Not the Problem: Abuse is a choice made by the abuser, not a reaction to your behavior or personality.
- Abuse Is Not Mutual: Even if he claims that you're abusive too, remember that an abusive dynamic is about one person seeking power and control.
- True Change Is Rare: Real change requires time, accountability, and action, not just words.
- Your Feelings Are Valid: If something feels wrong, it probably is. Trust your instincts and seek support when you need it.

WHAT SHOULD CHANGE LOOK LIKE?

Take full responsibility for his actions without blaming you or anyone else.
Show consistent, long-term changes in behavior not just promises.
Accept the consequences of his abuse, even if it means losing the relationship.
Respect your boundaries and focus on your healing without demanding forgiveness or reconciliation.
If he isn't doing these things, it's a clear sign that he is not changing, no matter what he says.

Affirmations for Women: Validating Your Experience and Choices

No matter where you are in your journey, whether you choose to stay, are planning to leave, or are still processing your experiences, it's important to know that your feelings and decisions are valid. These affirmations are here to remind you of your worth, strength, and ability to navigate this situation.

AFFIRMATIONS

1: My feelings are real, valid, and important.

If something feels wrong, it's okay to trust your instincts.

2: I am not responsible for someone else's abusive behaviour.

Abuse is a choice made by the abuser, not a reflection of who I am.

3: I deserve to feel safe, valued, and respected.

My worth is not determined by anyone else's actions or opinions.

4: I have the right to set boundaries and expect them to be respected.

My needs matter, and it's okay to advocate for them.

5: My experience is my own, and I don't need to justify it to anyone.

It's okay to take time to process and understand what I'm feeling.

6: I am allowed to feel confused, scared, or unsure.

Healing is not linear, and I'm doing the best I can with the tools I have.

7: Staying or leaving does not define my strength.

My decision is personal, and I don't owe anyone an explanation.

8: I am more than this relationship.

I have my own identity, dreams, and worth beyond this situation.

9: I am capable of making the best choices for myself.

I trust myself to do what is right for me, in my own time.

10: Support is available to me, and I deserve to seek it.

I am not alone, and there are people who care about me and want to help.

Why These Affirmations Are True

These affirmations hold true no matter your situation or decision. Abuse does not reflect your value or strength, and your choices are yours to make. Whether you stay or leave, you are doing what feels possible and right for you in this moment.

Supporting a Woman You Believe Is Being Abused

If you think a woman you know is being abused, it's natural to want to help her leave the situation as quickly as possible. However, the way you approach this is crucial. Remember, she has likely spent significant time with someone who controlled her thoughts, feelings, and decisions. Your role is to provide support, not pressure, and to empower her to take steps at her own pace.

SUPPORTING A WOMAN YOU BELIEVE IS BEING ABUSED

Don't Pressure Her to Leave

- Leaving an abusive relationship is incredibly complex. On average, it takes a woman seven attempts to leave for good.
- Pressuring her to leave before she's ready can backfire, increasing her isolation or making her feel unsupported.

Understand She Has Likely Not Shared the Worst

- Victims often minimize the abuse when speaking to others. They may feel guilt, shame, or fear of being judged.
- Many have been manipulated into feeling responsible for the abuse or guilt-tripped into silence.

Respect Her Autonomy

- She has likely been told for years what she thinks, feels, and should do. Your role is to listen, validate, and let her make her own decisions.
- Example: Instead of saying, "You need to leave," say, "I'm here to support you in whatever you decide."

SUPPORTING A WOMAN YOU BELIEVE IS BEING ABUSED

Acknowledge the Emotional Manipulation She's Faced

- Most victims have been pressured to withdraw police statements or forgive their abuser.
- Understand that she may feel conflicted, protective of her partner, or even blame herself for what's happening.

Be Patient and Empathetic

As much as it hurts to see her in pain, she needs time to process her situation. Be patient and let her move at her own pace.

Don't Criticise or Judge

- Avoid comments like, "Why didn't you leave sooner?" or "How can you still care about him?" These can make her feel ashamed and isolated.
- Focus on validating her feelings: "I believe you," or "You don't deserve this."

WHAT TO EXPECT IF THE VICTIM LEAVES

If the victim decides to leave, do not be surprised if the abuser reaches out to you. This is a common tactic used to:

Control the Narrative

- The abuser may try to discredit the victim by telling you she's lying, exaggerating, or unstable.
- Example: "She's being dramatic, I'd never hurt her."

Gain Allies

- They may try to enlist your support by playing the victim or appealing to your emotions.
- Example: "I just want to fix things, but she won't talk to me."

Isolate the Victim Further

- By turning others against her, the abuser seeks to increase her isolation and make her doubt her decision to leave.
- Example: "She's making a big mistake, I just need one more chance."

Maintain Power and Control

Even after she leaves, the abuser's goal is often to retain control, whether by manipulating those around her or directly trying to pull her back into the relationship.

HOW TO RESPOND IF THE ABUSER REACHES OUT

Say nothing

Example: “This isn’t something I can get involved in.”

Don’t Share Information About the Victim:

Even seemingly harmless updates, like where she is or how she’s feeling, can be used against her.

Be Aware of Manipulation Tactics:

Recognize when the abuser is attempting to shift blame, play the victim, or charm you into taking their side.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

This booklet was written from my real-life experiences of living with domestic abuse for over 10 years. If you're reading this and feeling overwhelmed or confused, I want you to know that living with abuse is not a reflection of your intelligence or worth.

As an ADHD woman, I often struggled to sequence my thoughts and make sense of what was happening to me. Abuse is designed to confuse and isolate, making it incredibly difficult to see the situation clearly. It took me over three years of reading multiple books, engaging with online support, attending therapy, and becoming a therapist myself to truly understand the dynamics of abuse.

I recognize that many women may not have the privileges I've had, access to education, professional training, and therapeutic support. My background as a speech and language therapist gave me tools to analyse and understand manipulative language, which helped me gain clarity about my experiences. I'm sharing what I've learned in the hope that it might support you or someone you care about on this journey.

RESOURCES

Books

- Why Does He Do That? by Lundy Bancroft
- The Verbally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans
- How He Wins by Don Hennessy
- Men Who Hate Women by Laura Bates
- Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life by Evan Stark

Websites

- Women's Aid: www.womensaid.org.uk
- Refuge: www.refuge.org.uk
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline: www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
  - Call 0808 2000 247 (UK)
- The Survivor's Trust: www.thesurvivorstrust.org
- Bright Sky App: A free app providing support and information for those experiencing abuse.
- Duluth Model - https://theduluthmodel.org/what-is-the-duluth-model/

Online Support and Communities

- Mumsnet Relationships Forum: A supportive space where many women share their experiences and advice.
- Survivor-Led Social Media Pages: Follow accounts dedicated to raising awareness of abuse dynamics, such as @womens_aid and @everydayabuse.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Abuse thrives on isolation, confusion, and self-doubt. But with the right resources, support, and knowledge, you can begin to reclaim your voice and your life. Whether you choose to stay or leave, know that there are people who care, believe you, and want to help.

Thank you for reading, and please share this booklet with anyone who might benefit from it.

ADHD SLT

Neurodivergent-Affirming Speech and Language Therapist and Well-Being Support