

Mens Toolbox

Resources for Men



Shared Real-Life Stories and Experiences From Men
You are not alone!

Through personal experience we have watched our men suffer during relationship breakdowns, family separation and as victims of domestic violence.
Through professional experience we recognise that men are not always the perpetrators and can be the victim of domestic and family violence.
However, their story is seldom heard and their suffering is rarely acknowledged.

The following stories are an amalgamation of the experiences of various anonymous individuals who have shared their life events with us. We have not identified any real person in any one story. All stories and examples of behaviour are the true-life experiences of the men with whom we spoke.

In the telling, many men were extremely emotional, still suffering the emotional pain and anguish; and some showing the physical scars, suffered at the hand of their ex-partner. Some told of experiences long ago as if it was just yesterday. Yet all their experiences touched us deeply, and all said they really wanted their story told in an effort to help other men. They have so inspired us with their courage, pain, and experiences to develop this booklet.

To the many men who have contributed their stories and experiences, we are extremely grateful, and honoured to be privy to such profound and important parts of your lives. From your stories, we trust our readers will find inspiration, hope, and knowledge to continue their own journeys through the difficult time of ending a relationship and the events that occur afterwards. Often a painful journey, our aim is to minimise the trauma for men.



Mens Toolbox



Lifeline



Beyond Blue

If life is in danger, call 000 immediately.

Invisible Chains

Mark's Story.

The insidious nature of coercive control crept into my life. What began as seemingly innocent requests for information about my whereabouts soon transformed into a suffocating regime of surveillance and control. I felt bound by invisible chains that constrained my every move and stifled my sense of self. The early days of our relationship were intense and I enjoyed the fact that Sarah wanted to be with me as much as possible. It felt reassuring to know that someone was interested in my well-being, and I willingly shared details about my daily activities without hesitation. I thought I was special to her.



However, gradually the tone shifted, and the questions changed into demands for constant updates on my whereabouts and activities. If I was out too long or spending time with other people Sarah would accuse me of not caring or that I did not love her. Or she would accuse me of wanting to break up. This would be followed by lengthy periods of silence or angry door slamming. Occasionally she would throw things and once she even slapped me in the face.

Rather than confront the problem, I began to change my habits in an effort to stop Sarah's melt-downs. Without realising it, I had soon stopped regularly seeing family and hanging out with my friends. I even began to ask permission to do simple things like going to the gym. The constant check-ins with her began to feel like I was a prisoner in my own life and I really understood the idea of walking on eggshells!

The emotional manipulation was perhaps the most destructive aspect of this coercive dynamic. Slowly but surely, Sarah chipped away at my self-esteem, using subtle put-downs and veiled threats to undermine my confidence and independence. I was made to feel small and insignificant, dependent on her approval and validation for my sense of self-worth. The lines between love and control had completely blurred, and I found myself trapped in a cycle of fear and subservience that seemed impossible to break. It was only when I reached a breaking point and when the weight of the invisible chains became unbearable, that I began to see the situation for what it truly was: coercive control.

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A coffee and a chat with a close and trusted friend was a real turning point for me. Even though it was embarrassing, I confided in him about how I was feeling and his response hit me like a tonne of bricks. The realisation that I could be a victim was confronting but it also made a lot of sense.

It was not until I talked about it, that I realised how much I had allowed myself to be controlled and manipulated. With my friend's advice and support, I made an appointment to see a psychologist.

At my first therapy appointment, I learned about coercive control and also that my avoidance of conflict and inability to set boundaries had actually enabled Sarah's continued manipulative behaviour.

I tried to encourage Sarah to come to couples therapy as I realised we both had a lot to learn. Sarah reacted poorly to this suggestion and told me I was the one who had the problem, not her. For the next couple of weeks, the usually covert behaviour became more obvious and unbearable. Her continued gaslighting and refusal to attend counselling with me showed that she was not interested in change so I made the hard decision to leave.

I continued seeing my psychologist which helped me learn more about myself. I now recognise both positive and negative behaviours in relationships and how to set and maintain healthy boundaries. With time and lots of work on my part, I have regained my independence and confidence and feel ready to enter into a new, healthy relationship. I am so grateful to my mate for helping me to understand that coercive control can happen to anyone, regardless of gender.

Education and awareness were powerful tools that allowed me to reclaim my identity and independence and equipped me with the knowledge and understanding to break free from the psychological chains that kept me in my relationship with Sarah.

I'm Done!

Alex's Story

I woke up one morning with a heavy feeling in my chest, a weight that had become all too familiar over the years. As I lay there in bed, staring at the ceiling, I knew that today was going to be different. Today, I was going to break free from the toxic relationship that had been suffocating me for far too long. I was done!

I met Kelly at uni. I was young and naïve and got drawn in by her infectious smile and bubbly personality. At first, everything seemed perfect. We laughed together, shared our dreams and fears, and I thought I had found the one. But as time passed, things began to change.

Her words, once banter turned into criticism, her smiles into sneers. She controlled every aspect of my life, from what I wore to who I could see. Every mistake, no matter how small, was met with anger and disdain. I felt like I was walking on eggshells. I was afraid to set her off yet unable to leave.

But that morning, as I lay in bed, I realised that I could not go on like this any longer. I could not continue to sacrifice my own happiness for the sake of someone who only brought me pain. With a newfound determination, I got out of bed and began to make a plan.

I started by reaching out to friends and family, people who had been pushed away by her toxic influence. Their support and encouragement gave me the strength I needed to finally stand up for myself. I began to see a therapist, someone who helped me understand that I deserved better and that I deserved to be treated with respect and kindness.

As I took these steps towards freedom I could feel the weight in my chest slowly begin to lift. I could breathe again. It was as if a fog had lifted from my mind and I could finally see clearly again. I realised that I had allowed myself to become trapped in a cycle of abuse but now I was breaking free, I was finally done.



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The hardest part came when I finally confronted her, when I told her that I was leaving. Her reaction was exactly as I had feared – anger, tears and manipulation. She tried everything to make me stay, to make me doubt myself and my decision. But this time, I was strong. I stood my ground and walked away, leaving behind the toxicity that had consumed me for so long.

I began to rebuild my life. I reconnected with old friends, picked up hobbies that I had long abandoned, and rediscovered the person I used to be before her toxic grip took hold. It was not easy – there were moments of doubt and loneliness and I even the thought of going back – but with each passing day, I grew stronger.

As I look back now, I realise that breaking free from that toxic relationship was the best decision I ever made. I am no longer weighed down by fear and self-doubt. I am free to be myself, to pursue my dreams, and to surround myself with people who lift me up instead of tear me down.

I share my story now in the hope that it may inspire others who find themselves in similar situations. You are not alone and you deserve to be treated with love and respect. Breaking free may be difficult, but it is worth it. Trust in yourself, find the support you need, and take that first step towards a brighter, happier future. Realising when you are done in a toxic relationship can be liberating.

Shadow of Doubt

Jack's Story

Before my relationship with Jessica, I regarded myself as a person who generally had their shit together. I was not perfect but I knew what was going on from day to day and felt successfully independent. Since then, a lot has changed and it has taken me a long time to get back to that guy.

Early in our relationship, Jessica would joke with me about being forgetful or disorganised. I passed it off as banter but felt a bit confused as that was definitely not how I saw myself. Weirdly, I would often find myself apologising for little slip-ups; a confused plan, a missed date or a misinterpreted conversation. We laughed about it and she played it off as misunderstandings but I always seemed to be the one making the mistakes.

As the relationship continued, the misunderstandings became more widespread and confusing. Doubt constantly crept into my mind and I found myself questioning my memory and perception of even the simplest of things. This left me feeling lost and uncertain.

Jessica was a big help, or so I thought. She would remind me of what actually happened or how a conversation actually went. It did not occur to me that these inconsistencies often led to us following Jessica's plans and wishes, rather than my own.

Little things soon gave way to more serious concerns. Jessica took over our finances and most of the decision-making in our relationship. She stated dismissively and with disrespect that I was too unreliable to be the one making decisions for us. She often accused me of being paranoid or mistrustful if I questioned things that seemed to have happened in a different way to how I remembered. At other times she belittled me for forgetting conversations that I had no memory of but according to her had definitely happened.



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The constant questioning of my reality took its toll and I found myself almost completely reliant on Jessica's version of events and plans for us as a couple. My confidence was shattered and I did not trust myself without her help. I doubted myself. It was very confusing. I sometimes thought I must be going crazy.

In a random conversation with a good mate I confessed my concerns. My mate's comments shone a light on the situation. It was not the first time I had heard the term 'gaslighting' but I had not realised what it really was. The idea that someone would deliberately manipulate their partner into thinking they were always misinterpreting situations or just plain wrong was a real shock to me. I could not make sense of the concept of gaslighting, so my mate suggested I start writing a daily journal. This allowed me to document and gain insight into the patterns of gaslighting behaviour in my relationship with Jessica.

My mate also suggested I seek therapy. With help from my psychologist and the knowledge I gained from my journaling, I was able to identify Jessica's gaslighting behaviours in our relationship. Then I could set boundaries, stand up for myself and rediscover trust in my own judgement.

I confronted Jessica about her behaviour and even though I had set strong boundaries she refused to respect them. Eventually I realised that the relationship had to end because I was no longer willing to live with someone who did not respect me or who was prepared to manipulate me for their own sense of control. With renewed clarity and confidence, I realised that I deserved better than this toxic relationship where my mental health was under constant attack.

I learned to recognise the signs of gaslighting and to trust my own instincts. I learned the importance of self-trust, setting boundaries, and seeking support in breaking free from emotional manipulation. No one should have to endure the torment of doubting their own reality, and I am grateful for the strength and clarity that helped me regain my sense of self-worth and well-being. I am finally reclaiming the independence and confidence that I once had.

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Manipulation Unmasked

James' Story

I met Lisa at a local pub in Sydney. She had a smile that could light up the room, and we hit it off right away. We had great chemistry and the relationship progressed quickly, some might say too quickly. We went on adventures, shared laughs, and created memories together. We found ourselves spending almost all of our free time together and it felt right. But as time went on things started to change.

Gradually, Lisa became more possessive and controlling. It started with small things like getting upset when I made plans without her and joking that I was checking out other women. As our relationship progressed her possessiveness escalated. Eventually she was constantly checking my phone, questioning where I was going, and who I was spending time with, she even got jealous about my female doctor.

Behaviour that, at first, seemed cute and protective, began to feel like something very different. I felt smothered and we began to fight more often.

One night, after a heated argument, Lisa threatened to harm herself if I ever left her. She said she could not live without me and that I was the only thing keeping her going. I was shocked and did not know what to do. We kept talking that night and as I surrendered my point of view, she calmed down and played it off as me not understanding her. It did not feel like that to me and I began to feel trapped in the relationship. I was torn between my own sense of well-being and her safety.

I tried to talk with Lisa about getting help, but she would always brush it off and say that there was nothing wrong and that she was happy as long as she had me. I was the only one who could help her.



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The weight of her reliance on me and the relationship was destroying any real feelings I had for her but I was reluctant to upset her in case she did something reckless. As the manipulation continued, I started to feel drained and overwhelmed. I knew I could not stay in a relationship built on fear and guilt, but I was terrified of what might happen if I left. I felt like I was being held hostage by her threats of self-harm.

In the end, I knew that I had to prioritise my own mental health and well-being. I struggled with the fear of what might happen and it was a difficult decision, but I gathered the courage to end things with Lisa.

I spoke with a close friend about my fears and he suggested I might need some professional help to navigate the process. With the help of a psychologist, I learned to set boundaries, process my emotions, and regain my sense of self-worth. I no longer felt responsible for Lisa's well-being and understood that her actions were not my responsibility. It was a painful process, but I knew it was the right thing to do for both of us. Eventually we were both able to move on.

Through therapy, I found the strength to move forward and rebuild my life without the weight of Lisa's manipulation holding me back. I was able to leave the relationship safely and start the next chapter in my life with a newfound sense of empowerment and self-assurance.

Leaving that toxic relationship was a turning point for me; I learned the importance of setting boundaries in relationships and taking care of myself.

Toxic Co-Parenting

Jarrold's story

I never imagined that the love I once shared with my ex-wife could deteriorate into such a toxic co-parenting relationship. Our marriage lasted nine years and followed the typical storyline. As time passed, what had started well, began to sour and the partnership eventually became two individuals sharing a house. We decided to separate due to irreconcilable differences. We realised that our values and beliefs no longer matched.

Our divorce was messy, filled with accusations and blame from both sides but the reality was, we just were not suited to each other any more. The already strained situation absolutely exploded when, soon after our divorce was finalised, I began a new relationship. My ex-wife's anger became overwhelming and she seemed to delight in making decisions that further damaged our broken relationship. Her aggression made it impossible for us to agree on anything, much less how we should proceed with co-parenting. Our communication was strained, and every interaction felt like going into battle, each conversation becoming the next skirmish.. In such a volatile situation, no one could ever be the winner.

Our children became the unwitting victims and observers of our toxic relationship. They were caught in the middle of our battles and forced to navigate our strained co-parenting dynamic. I could see the toll it was taking on them, and it broke my heart to witness their confusion and sadness. The two people they cared about most in the world were treating each other so poorly.

Coordinating schedules, making decisions about schooling, and dealing with the emotional fallout of our broken marriage became a never-ending source of stress and anxiety for everyone. My ex-wife and I were constantly at odds, unable to find common ground on even the most basic parenting issues. Every interaction felt like, a deliberate attempt by her to assert control and dominance over our shared parental responsibilities. Any attempt at discussing parenting decisions was met with unreasonable anger and she refused to agree to anything.



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I tried my best to shield our children from the toxicity of our relationship, but it was difficult to ignore the fact that she was using the kids as pawns to score points in a some weird one-sided battle.

The kids could sense the tension between us, and it affected them in ways I could not fully understand. They struggled with their emotions. They acted out at times and retreated into silence at others. I felt helpless. I was unable to protect my kids from the fallout of our failed marriage but I was also unwilling to give up the fight to be an active and present parent in their lives.

As time passed, I hoped our co-parenting relationship would become less toxic, but the battles continued. My ex-wife's resentment towards me only grew stronger with time. Every interaction with her left me feeling drained and exhausted. I questioned my own capacity as a father and value as a human being.

Eventually, with encouragement from my family, I sought out therapy, hoping to find ways to cope with the constant stress and anxiety. My psychologist helped me see that I could not change my ex-wife or the nature of our relationship, but I could change how I responded to it. I learned to set boundaries, to prioritise my own well-being, and to focus on being the best father I could be despite the challenges I faced.

Slowly but surely, I began to manage the process of co-parenting with a toxic ex by changing my response to her poor behaviour rather than expecting her to change. I learned to pick my battles, and to let go of the things that were not important. I learned to focus on what truly mattered – the well-being of our children. I made a conscious effort to communicate with my ex-wife in a calm and respectful manner, even when she tried to provoke me with her words and actions.

Over time, our relationship began to shift. We found a fragile balance that allowed us to co-parent our children without constant conflict. It was not perfect, far from it, but it was a step in the right direction. I realised that trying to control the situation and being inflexible was only hurting my kids and my relationship with them. Sometimes, by accepting the reality for what it is, can be the pathway to an acceptable outcome.

Fighting For Time

Blake's Story

One of the roles that I am most proud of, is being a great dad to my kids. I value time spent with my kids and make a real effort to be a good role model and an active parent in their lives. Unfortunately, since my divorce three years ago being a present parent has been one of the hardest things to do because of the difficulties I am facing with co-parenting.

Co-parenting is tough at the best of times and the week-to-week time with and without the kids is a rollercoaster of emotions for me. The change from having the kids to being without them is such a stark contrast from the busy and noisy times of rushing them around to the quiet, lonely times when they are with their mum. I would choose to spend every day with them if I could.

The school holidays have been particularly tough. What should be a chance to spend quality time with my kids and make memories with them has become a constant struggle. I am always planning ahead, requesting time off work and, making bookings so that I can get a fair amount of access time with my kids. But then my ex wife stuffs it up at the last minute by telling me that the kids are not available for one reason or another. The constant de-railing of my agreed time with my kids has become frustrating and heartbreaking for me and the endless cycle of negotiation and disappointment tests my patience and resilience to its limit.

Each interruption to my time with the kids sounds understandable on its own. My ex uses excuses like; sports camps, playdates or trips with friends, and family trips that go a couple of days longer than agreed. Frustratingly these all seem to be planned for my visitation weeks. Every school holiday, my time off work and bookings are wasted because of apparent little problems that are revealed at the last minute in an off-handed way that makes arguing seem petty. The arguments happen, of course, and the accusations inevitably start to fly but nothing ever changes and nothing gets resolved. They usually end with me sounding paranoid and petty and her cruelly questioning my selfishness and my commitment as a father.



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The pain of being kept away from my children during the holidays is devastating. I see my kids caught in the crossfire of our conflict, craving the stability and love of both parents but instead finding themselves caught in the middle of co-parenting conflict. It breaks my heart to think that they might be confused or hurt by the situation or that they might wonder why I am not around as much as they might like me to be. I feel caught in an impossible situation. I am unable to defend myself and I am unable to get fair access to my kids.

Despite all the conflict and frustrations, I know I will continue to fight to be present in my children's lives. I value my role as dad above anything else and I am prepared to go through whatever it takes to make sure my kids understand that I have always had their best interests at heart.

I hope the co-parenting conflicts calm down and we can set aside our differences for the sake of the children. I hope that my ex-wife can eventually understand that my presence in the lives of our kids is not only fair but also important for them. I hope for these things, but I am preparing myself for the fact that it may not happen. I will fight the good fight because my kids deserve to have me in their lives, doing the best that I can to be a great dad.

My Dependent Ex

Peter's Story

It has been a rollercoaster ride since my breakup with my ex-girlfriend. Dealing with Sheryl's dependency after we-split has been like navigating a minefield of emotions and challenges. From the moment we called it quits, she seemed unable to stand on her own two feet. Constant calls flooded in, each one involved a plea for money or a favour. At first, I tried to be understanding and to lend a helping hand where I could. But soon enough, it became clear that Sheryl's dependence was preventing both of us from moving on.



Sheryl's reliance on me only seemed to grow with each passing day. She would turn up at my home unannounced and expect me to drop everything to cater to her needs. It was frustrating to say the least. I found myself torn between wanting to be kind and to help and the need to establish boundaries. Eventually, I had to put my foot down and make it clear that our relationship was over, and she needed to start standing on her own two feet.

Setting those boundaries was not easy. Sheryl did not take it well. She resorted to guilt-tripping me and playing on my emotions with claims like, "You owe me for all the time we spent together," or "I'm struggling because of you." I finally realised this was a manipulative tactic designed to keep me connected to her in some way. And I knew I had to stay strong and resist falling into that trap.

The situation with Sheryl was like a never-ending battle. It was like trying to shake off a stubborn flu – no matter what I did, it just lingered. Yet, I knew I had to stay firm, to hold my ground and focus on moving forward with my life. Continuing to get sucked into Sheryl's many dramas was a surefire way to derail my own progress.

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Despite the challenges, I knew that setting boundaries was essential for my own well-being. I could not allow myself to be dragged down by someone who could not stand on their own two feet, no matter how much I had loved her in the past. I called her out on her demands and suggested she get counselling. It was tough love, but it was necessary and it helped. Sheryl's calls became less frequent, her visits fewer and it seemed she was less overwhelmed by her problems. It felt like she was slowly starting to find her own way.

I realised that by setting strong boundaries, standing my ground and refusing to be her crutch, I was actually helping Sheryl in the long run. I was not letting her continue to be dependent on me. She needed to learn to rely on herself, to find her own strength and independence. And by not enabling her dependency, I was actually helping her to do just that. This was difficult for both of us, but we got there in the end and remain friends.

Dealing with a dependent ex is not easy. It was a test of patience, resilience, and self-control for both of us. By staying true to myself, being kind to her yet prioritising my own well-being, I was able to emerge stronger on the other side, as did Sheryl. Setting strong boundaries with Sheryl and encouraging her to access therapy helped her become more independent. This was a tough but necessary process, which allowed us to reclaim our own sense of independence and move forward with our lives.

As time passed, we both found our way and since then we have developed a close friendship based on mutual respect and trust.

False Allegations

Dale's Story

When I separated from my partner, I thought that would be the end of that chapter of my life and I could move on. How wrong I was? I had no way of knowing the extent of legal trouble and social difficulty I would have to endure. Soon after I ended the relationship, my ex-partner took out a Domestic Violence Order [DVO] against me, claiming that I had been abusive in our relationship.

I was shocked when I was served with the Order, surely there had been a mistake. I had never laid a hand on her and I had prided myself on always being able to communicate calmly, regardless of the situation. Sure, we had our arguments, like any other couple, but to suggest that I was abusive in any way, seemed ridiculous to me. If she actually believed this, why had she waited until now to make a complaint? Despite this, when I spoke to my lawyer, he confirmed that the application was legitimate and serious. She had clearly created a story painting me as the villain.

Despite my innocence, my lawyer recommended that I respect the Court's process, consent without admissions and comply with the terms of any Order the Court determined. After all, why would I want to interact with someone who was making false accusations against me? Why would I need to have any contact with her in the future if the relationship was over? This made sense to me. The Order was made and I kept my distance from her but I was hoping that the truth would eventually come to light. Little did I know, she had other plans in mind.

My ex started baiting me, sending provocative messages and showing up at places where she knew I would be. I could tell she was trying to provoke a reaction from me, trying to make me breach the Order. As much as I wanted to defend myself, I knew that the only way to clear my name was to stay calm, no matter how much she tried to push my buttons. It was a cruel game, and I refused to play along. I avoided all contact. As the months went by, her behaviour became more erratic and her taunting escalated. I had started taking contemporaneous notes about the dates, times and details of her efforts to interact, as per my lawyer's guidance. This was done to protect myself from further potential false accusations.



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One day, everything came to a head. My ex orchestrated a meet-up, claiming that she wanted to talk things out and find closure so we could both move on. Against my better judgment, I agreed to meet her in a public place, hoping that we could finally put an end to this toxic cycle of manipulation, gaslighting and her trying to ruin me. As soon as I arrived, she attacked me verbally with accusations and wild claims that made no sense. I realised quickly that she had no interest in moving on but was focused on trying to have a fight. She was trying to gain the upper hand. I got up immediately and walked away, leaving her fuming and frustrated.

I quickly learned that she had made a complaint to the police that I had verbally attacked her and I was charged with breaching the DVO. The following weeks were exhausting. I immediately sought legal advice and because I had made a habit of doing contemporaneous notes and had kept records which supported my defence I was able to fight the breach allegations and the terms of the original Order.

This was a challenging period in my life. I felt like every move I made was scrutinised and it felt like the whole world was against me, but I refused to give up. With the help from family and friends who knew the truth I fought tooth and nail to clear my name.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the truth came to light. It was revealed that she had fabricated evidence against me and manipulated the situation to her advantage. The Court eventually discharged the breach and dropped the DVO. I was exonerated of all charges. It was a bittersweet victory, knowing that I had lost so much in the process. It took ages for me to recover emotionally, financially and in terms of my reputation. I do know however that I will be more cautious in future relationships.

Shattered Trust

Hamish's Story

A year ago, I was living a picture-perfect life. I had a loving wife, two great kids and a job I enjoyed going to each day. I really only started to notice a change about six months ago. It all began with subtle hints by my wife of discontent in our marriage. Megan grew distant, spending more time on her phone and less time engaging with our family. I tried to talk to her, to understand what was bothering her, but she always brushed me off, claiming she was just tired or stressed from work. I tried all the things that the media suggest you should do like date nights, taking over much of the day-to-day housework and running the kids around, all to try and reduce Megan's stress but none of it made a difference.

Then, one night, Megan dropped a bombshell. She accused me of infidelity, claiming she knew I had been seeing someone else. I was dumbfounded! I was committed to our marriage and never even thought about cheating, never mind the fact that there is no way I would have the time or energy to do so! Despite my claims of innocence and a complete lack of evidence, Megan angrily told me that I was a bad husband, an irresponsible dad, a liar and a cheat. It was devastating to have the one person I trusted more than anyone else, turn on me like this. What I thought was a pretty good family life was being destroyed by these confusing allegations.

Megan's accusations continued to escalate. She next accused me of stealing money from our joint account to pay for my affair and she even began to question the safety of our kids. None of it was true. None of it made any sense. There was no evidence or even any logic to her claims but she seemed so convinced that even I started to question what I was doing to cause her distrust. I did not realise until later that Megan had been sharing her concerns with others.

I had noticed that friends and family seemed more distant but did not think much of it with all that was happening, until a mate of mine confronted me. I came to realise that Megan had told everyone, including our kids, that I was cheating on her and ruining our marriage. The people I needed for support and understanding all seemed to take her side. It was so confusing that despite my innocence, my life was crumbling around me.

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I found myself facing a harsh reality. My marriage was over, my reputation trashed, and my relationship with my children under threat. My kids still loved me, I knew that, but I was so worried that the accusations of their mother would start to poison them against me. Through it all I had clung to the belief that the truth would come out but it just did not happen. Megan had created a narrative with me as the villain and everyone was listening. I realised that it was pointless to try to fix what did not want to be fixed and decided to separate from my wife.

In the end, I learned a harsh lesson about trust and betrayal. I found out that Megan was the one having the affair. But I also learned about how easily the ones closest to us can turn into our fiercest enemies. I became a changed man, scarred but wiser, knowing that life's twists and turns can lead us down unexpected paths, testing our resilience and strength in ways we never thought possible.

I started seeing a psychologist because I was so confused about what was going on. She confirmed that Megan's behaviours during the ending of our relationship were consistent with someone having an affair and trying to blame the other partner. Megan never took responsibility for her own actions.

With my psychologist's help and the support of those friends and family who stuck by me, I managed to get through the next few months and even started to find things to enjoy again. I am struggling to get access to my kids, which is heartbreaking. But I am guided by lawyers who are helping me with the process of formalising an arrangement so I can see my kids.

It is hard to look back over the last year to see how my life has changed and how someone I thought loved me could turn against me so completely. With the help and resources from my psychologist, lawyer and my support network, I am rebuilding and can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

My Destructive Ex

Jason's Story

Emily was a firecracker – passionate, intense, and full of life. She had a way of making me feel like I was on top of the world. Her personality and energy were exhilarating and at first I enjoyed every moment we spent together. As time went on though, I began to see a darker side of her that I had never noticed before. She became possessive, jealous and quick to anger over seemingly unimportant things. When we started to argue, she would quickly fly into a rage: yelling, screaming and eventually crying. The fights were rarely resolved and the apologies she offered never resulted in changes to her behaviour. The next time we argued, it was like rinse and repeat.



For a while I found myself making excuses for her behaviour, telling myself and others that she was just passionate or that she was going through a rough time. I convinced myself that things would improve if she felt secure and loved but no matter how much love and attention I heaped on her, her behaviour only got worse.

As the months passed, Emily's destructive tendencies became more noticeable. She would pick fights over nothing and belittle me in front of friends. She would gaslight me and try to manipulate me into doing things I did not want to do. I felt like I was walking on eggshells. I never knew what would set her off or trigger the next argument. My friends and family grew concerned, but I felt like they did not understand her or our relationship and I continued to make excuses for her.

The breaking point came one night when Emily flew into a rage over a perceived snub at a party. She accused me of flirting with another woman, despite my protests to the contrary. The argument escalated quickly, and before I knew it, she had thrown a glass of wine at me, narrowly missing my head. In that moment, I realised that I could not stay with someone who was capable of such violence. My friends were mortified.

I ended things with Emily soon after that night, but the fallout was far from over. Things escalated to a whole new level of fucked-up. She bombarded me with calls and texts, begging for another chance, promising that she would change. I tried to stay strong, to resist her advances, but a part of me still longed for the intense love we once shared.

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We got back together again but nothing changed. Emily said she would get help and we even tried couples therapy. In our joint sessions she would take over and painted me as the person causing the problems, according to her it was always my fault. She never took responsibility for her behaviour and when the psychologist started challenging her, Emily refused to attend further sessions. Shortly after that our relationship ended for the last time.

In the weeks that followed, Emily's behaviour only grew more erratic. She stopped seeing her own therapist. She showed up uninvited at my workplace. She left angry messages on my social media accounts. She even spread rumours about me to mutual friends. I felt like I was being stalked by the woman I had once loved. She appeared to be hell-bent on destroying me.

My friends and family encouraged me to seek therapy and I was reassured that I had made the right decision to end things with Emily by my therapist. It was not easy to let go of someone who had been such a big part of my life, but I knew that staying with her in that toxic relationship was not healthy and would only lead to more pain. I stuck it out and Emily eventually moved on.

I have learned to set strong boundaries in all of my relationships and ensure that I am respected and safe. I am hoping that by reading this story, someone might recognise the signs of toxic and disrespectful relationships to avoid some of the struggles I have been through.

Invisible Leash

Ray's Story

I never thought it could happen to me. Stalking and harassment were things I had heard about in movies or read in the news, but I never imagined I would be a target. Yet there I was living a nightmare that seemed to have no end in sight.

It all started innocently enough. I met Rachel at a friend's party a couple of years ago. We hit it off right away, and soon we were spending all our free time together. She was charming, funny, and beautiful – everything I thought I wanted in a partner.

But as time went on, things started to change. Rachel became increasingly possessive, checking my phone and demanding to know where I was and who I was with at all times. At first, I thought it was just a phase, a sign of her insecurity, but it soon became clear that it was something more sinister.

When I tried to break things off with her, that was when the real nightmare began. Rachel started showing up unannounced at my home, following me to work, calling me and sending me endless messages. At first, I tried to reason with her, to explain that our relationship was over and that she needed to move on. But she would not listen. She became increasingly volatile, threatening me and anyone she thought I might be seeing.

I was living in a constant state of stress. Every time my phone rang or there was a knock on my door, my heart would race. I was always wondering if it was her. I started avoiding going to places I used to go to and I changed my routine in a futile attempt to shake her off. But she always seemed to find me, no matter what I did.

I tried reaching out to the authorities, but without concrete evidence of physical harm, there was little they would do. I felt like they were not taking me seriously because I am a man and Rachel is a woman. I felt trapped, like there was no one to turn to for help.



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My friends and family tried to support me, but they had no way of really understanding the nightmare that had taken over my life. Eventually they started realising the severity of Rachel's actions and how it was impacting me when I shared with them the relentless messages from her and stories about her stalking behaviours.

As the weeks turned into months, Rachel's stalking continued relentlessly. I began to feel like a shell of my former self and found myself withdrawing from friends and family. I was constantly looking over my shoulder, afraid to let my guard down for even a moment. The stress and anxiety started to take a toll on my health, affecting my work and my relationships with those around me.

One day, I received an envelope in the mail. Inside was a photo of me, taken from a distance, going about my daily routine. There was a note attached, written in Rachel's handwriting, taunting me with details only she would know. That was the moment I knew I had to take drastic action.

I hired a private investigator to gather evidence of Rachel's harassment. With their help, we were able to document her actions, from the endless calls and messages to her uninvited visits to my home and workplace. Armed with this evidence, I went back to the Police, and this time they took me seriously.

A restraining Order was issued against Rachel, and she was forced to stay away from me. It was a relief to know that I finally had some legal protection, but the fear did not disappear overnight. I still lived with the constant worry that she would disregard the Order and come after me again.

It has been a long road to recovery, and the scars from that experience will never fully heal. With therapy and the help of friends and family I have come a long way and my mental health is improving. I have become more cautious in my relationships and I am now more aware of the signs of a toxic relationship.

The biggest lessons I learned were that being stalked can happen to anyone regardless of gender and the importance of providing evidence when reporting stalking behaviour to Police.

Cash Trapped

Andrew's Story

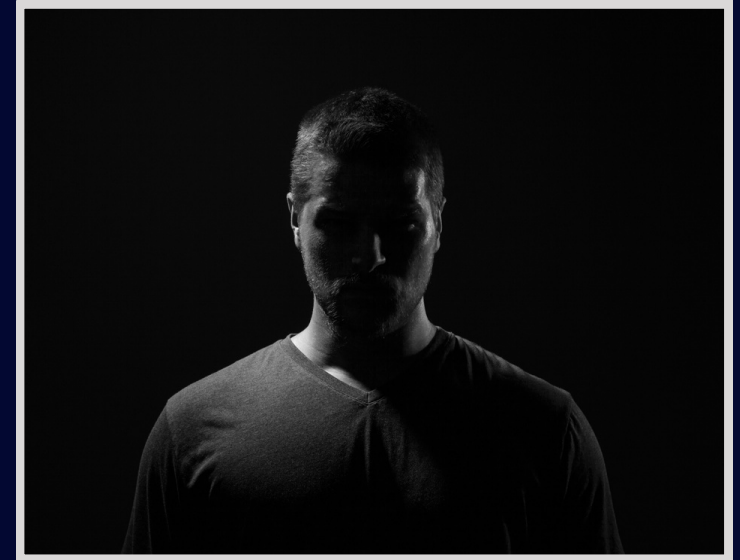
I was proud of being financially savvy and independent, and I never thought I would find myself a victim of financial abuse. It started subtly, almost imperceptibly, but over time, the signs became clearer as the cycles repeated themselves with alarming regularity.

At first, it seemed like a harmless request from my partner to manage our finances together. She convinced me that it would bring us closer and help us achieve our shared goals more effectively. I saw no harm in it and willingly handed over the reins of my financial matters to her.

As time passed, I started noticing small changes in our financial dynamics. My partner began restricting my access to our joint accounts, citing the need for better budgeting and planning. She would scrutinise my expenses but would not share or explain hers. She would question the necessity of every purchase that I made. Any of my attempts to discuss these concerns with her was met with accusations of me being selfish, irresponsible, or not caring about our financial future.

Gradually, I found myself on a tight leash when it came to finances. I had to ask for permission to spend money even on basic items. My partner controlled all of the money, and I was left feeling helpless and dependent. The dynamics of our relationship had shifted, and I felt trapped in a situation I never imagined possible. I felt like a prisoner in my own life.

Despite the red flags waving right in front of my eyes, I rationalised her behaviour in an attempt to come to terms with the reality of my situation. But I was in denial. I justified my partner's behaviour as a sign of her concern for our financial stability. I had convinced myself that it was normal for one person to take charge of the finances in a relationship.



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The cycles of financial abuse became more pronounced as time went on. There were periods of extreme control, where the smallest expense would result in arguments and accusations. I was given an allowance for my own expenses but I had to justify every dollar spent. This was followed by brief phases of apparent generosity, where my partner would buy gifts. I later learned that this is an example of manipulative behaviour.

The emotional abuse that accompanied the financial control was equally damaging. I was constantly made to feel inadequate and incompetent when it came to managing money. My partner would belittle my financial decisions and undermine my confidence and self-worth. I felt like I had lost my voice in the relationship. I felt like I was walking on eggshells. I never knew when the next outburst or restriction would come. The constant stress and anxiety took a toll on my mental health and impacted my ability to focus at work and my overall confidence and sense of self-worth. I became isolated from friends and family, as I was too ashamed to admit that I could not pay my way in social situations.

I eventually sought guidance from a therapist who helped me understand the dynamics of financial abuse and gave me the courage to confront my partner. It was a difficult and emotional conversation, but I knew I had to break free from the cycle of control and manipulation.

With support from loved ones and with professional help, I began the journey of reclaiming my financial independence and rebuilding my self-esteem. It was a long and challenging road, filled with setbacks and doubts, but I persevered. I took back control of my finances, set boundaries in my relationship, and learned to trust my instincts again.

Looking back, I see the signs of financial abuse more clearly now. It was never about budgeting or planning for the future; it was about power and control. I hope that by sharing my story others, regardless of gender, will recognise the signs of financial abuse and seek help if they find themselves in a similar situation. aware that financial abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender.