

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

25th November to 10th December 2020



#notallviolenceisphysicalorvisible

I met him via a dating website in 2010, I lived elsewhere at the time and had a good job. At the first meeting, he had lied about his age by approx. 8 years; that was the start of the lies.

It was 'Love Bombing'; making me feel special, promising things, kind of getting me hooked really. Everything was good at the start and things moved fairly quickly but as I was getting on in years – in terms of having children - we were trying and were initially unsuccessful, but then went on to have two children.

The mental abuse, that I initially did not recognise, began when I moved in with him. He had been in the process of renovating the house for many years but as I didn't want to live in that particular location, he promised me that once the renovations were complete, we would move. Later in the relationship he said we would never move from that property.

The house was uninhabitable; there was no heating or hot water. He would not sort it out and I feel it was a way of making me suffer; it took away my choice. He took away my independence. This was the man I thought I would spend my future with, but he made it clear that I was not allowed to make any decisions about the house.

I had my 2 children close together and I started to look for work after my 2nd child was born; by that stage, childcare costs were prohibitive. Instead of helping me remove obstacles, he made me rely on him for money. He could have got childcare vouchers through work, but his attitude was that I should not be going back to work. I managed to get some work in the evenings on the basis that he would be at home, but at the 'last minute' he would say he was going out and that I would need to find a babysitter; he didn't normally go out but would make arrangements to do so when he knew I was working.

I had one friend that I was able to confide in, she understood the issues and said that my partner was a narcissist, he frequently lied and I'm fairly sure he was cheating on me; when I confronted him, he would deny it and say that I was jealous. He used 'Gaslighting' and 'Stonewalling' techniques; he was always right about everything.

Not all violence is physical or visible; control and manipulation is abuse too.



When I first moved in with him, I had pets, one time I took a cat to the vet and he was telling the vet what was wrong with the cat and challenging the Vet's opinion; at the time I thought he was sticking up for me; now I realise it was a 'Red Flag' – he was always right.

There was a huge issue about the first names of the children but I had agreed to both girls having his surname as he knew it was important to me that eventually we would all have the same family name. He had said that we would get married after we had the children but after returning from registering the birth, whilst still in the car, he told me that I would never have the same name as the children as he would not marry me. As well as not speaking to me for 3 months, he had very little to do with my younger child for the first 6 months of her life; the relationship had reached a point of no return at this stage.

At this time, things escalated, I was walking on eggshells and tried to avoid any topics that would cause an escalation but he brought them up; he also started using physical violence at this time. By now, he was working from home so that he could "Keep tabs on me" all the time; he also constantly berated me for how little DIY I was doing. I was looking after 2 small children and would help out, but my skills were limited.

The first time he got violent it was over the DIY, I used avoidance techniques, including being submissive, they sometimes worked but eventually they had no impact. When I raised this in the 'Finding of Facts' hearing for the court, his response was that I knew being submissive/not responding/walking away "Drove him mad". There were findings made against him of physical and mental abuse and yet it made no difference to the outcomes in any of the proceedings and he is now denying that he is abusive, with Cafcass agreeing with him.

The first time he beat me up was in an evening. He started by throwing objects around but they would always be my possessions, he then picked up my iPad and threw it on the fire but I managed to retrieve it. I was getting angry at this point and said to him that we should also throw his belongings around at which point he completely 'lost it'.

He swung me around by my hair, pulling out clumps; I was on the floor at this point and he was punching me. The assault eventually stopped as he became exhausted. I rang the Police the next day but as I didn't want to press charges, they took no action. I said to him that if he ever did anything like it again, it would be the end of the relationship. He became very apologetic, saying he had never done anything like this before – so was it something about me?



Red flags that I didn't notice at the time were that he would never talk about previous relationships, but they had been very short lived. Others were the mental abuse, he got me to move in with him very quickly, he made me live in substandard accommodation, made me feel ungrateful, gaslighting, taking away independence and decision making, criticising me, my friends, my family and eventually refused to visit my family. He would accuse me of behaviours that he was using, so projecting back onto me. He lied regularly, was unfaithful, frequently undermined my decisions about the children in front of them, criticised my parenting, quickly became angry, overreacted to situations; the relationship felt one sided with me making all the compromises. Others were:

- Did everything in his power to prevent or distract me from working, so I was dependant on him
- Continued with actions that he knew would also impact the children
- Tries to avoid paying child maintenance
- Financial Abuse
- Abuse directed at me but could charm everyone else
- Covert narcissist
- Charmed professionals, e.g. CAFCASS
- When the relationship ended, was one step ahead in terms of legal advice, already had things in place to reduce what I was able to do after the split
- Child Contact issues

He took things away from me, he had a makeshift safe that he stored items of value in and he locked my passport/birth certificate/IPad/jewellery in there; after I left him, he refused to return all of my jewellery and didn't return anything that he had bought me for birthdays/Christmas etc.

It was approx. 6/8 months after the first physical assault that I ended the relationship. The key factor that triggered this was when he went to hit me and ended up hitting my youngest round the face. However, I was still financially dependent on him and when I contacted the council for accommodation, they advised that I was not homeless; I was only offered a refuge which I did not want to take the children to. I couldn't move out for another 3 months due to financial issues but this was used against me, with professionals saying it could not have been that bad if I had stayed there after the relationship had ended.

I had started looking for rented accommodation and asked him for help with the start-up and ongoing costs as my income was not sufficient and he refused to help. He did agree on a sum for child maintenance but in the few years since we separated, he has reduced this by 80%. As he is technically unemployed, I have no means of redress in terms of getting him to pay any arrears etc.



He is still financially controlling me, both by withholding maintenance and dragging me through court; he knows that my parents will help me out.

In terms of support, I accessed local and national helplines but they didn't offer me much support; people pay 'lip service' to non-violent abuse and there is legislation to cover it but I don't think the offer from agencies matches the theory of it.

In terms of child contact arrangements, over the years, I have agreed to about 90% of changes that he requested, he has only agreed to about 25% of my requests. I feel totally let down all the time. The family court process really is a 'Perpetrator's playground'. Approximately 75% of the time since separation, there have been proceedings ongoing. He is using his substantial means to bully me via the court system, he is getting what he wants, and it is empowering and validating him. One of my real bug bears in all of this is I was contacting loads of agencies/people and all the advice I got was different. I was left in the middle trying to make decisions, wondering what to do.

I can't offer any advice to anyone else in my position; I don't believe there is anything that can help. I don't believe that solicitors should be involved in family court and making money from it. One person, i.e. CAFCASS, should not be able to make all the decisions, they can be swayed by the perpetrator. What I would say is that if you are going to use the domestic abuse issues in court/child contact proceedings, go as hard and as heavy as you can and refuse contact. I did the opposite and it worked against me; they dismissed all my allegations.

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