

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

25th November to 10th December 2020



I met a lad in town, I was 16 years old and he was my first proper boyfriend. Things were going well, but after a couple of months things started to change. I wasn't allowed to see my family or friends. I had to stay with him. Once I told him I was going home but he pushed me in front of a taxi and told me I wasn't going anywhere. Things got worse. He held a knife to my throat and I used to go for days without eating or drinking, sometimes sleeping rough when he was off his head on drugs. He had violent mood swings and used fear and violence to control me. To begin with I thought this was normal but then the violence got worse. He threw me down the stairs and tortured his friend really bad and made me watch. After 8 months I tried to escape but he caught me and nearly strangled me - but I stayed with him because I loved him.

For me the turning point came when I got pregnant and the violence continued. He threatened to take me away to a traveller site in London if Social Services got involved. I knew that I needed to keep my unborn baby safe, that I needed to escape for me and my baby. I made a plan and arranged for my brother to take D out for a few hours. I packed my bag and my Mum picked me up and took me home. This wasn't the end - he kept coming to my Mum's house trying to get me until the police got him.

I told my story to a police officer from The Domestic Violence Unit who was fantastic - very patient and supportive. Social Services, Domestic Abuse Outreach services, my midwife and housing helped my family to relocate so that we could be safe. This was 9 years ago and I still receive support from the Young Women's Housing Project (YWHP). At first it was help to stay safe and to get my life back on track. I now have five children and can still call on my YWHP worker for parenting support or advice. My oldest daughter also does Creative Movement Therapy with one of the YWHP therapists. I am now happy, more confident and love being a mum.

I have done really well considering the trauma I experienced, but the memories will always be there. Honestly there were times before my baby was born that I thought of returning to D - because he was the Dad - and he might have changed. Deep down I knew that wouldn't be right but when you love someone you want to be with them. Luckily I had my family and support services to keep me strong and help me to make the right choices. Looking back, leaving D was the best decision I have ever made.

#notallviolenceisphysicalorvisible



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My advice to others in abusive relationships would be to get help, get out and be happy. It might not seem like it at first but honestly it is the best thing you can do.

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

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