

## Alice #47

The forgotten side of domestic violence is the verbal abuse and sheer neglect from a partner on all levels. It is also thought that DV happens to lower socio-economic levels. We lived in a large executive luxury home, he held a high level job, our kids went to private schools.

I lived with my ex for 20 years before I could break free. Fear of him tracing and continuing to follow us held us there. He had access to firearms which were licensed. He did not like to lose. We worked at the same place, he owned most of our assets, meaning I would have ended up with nothing and being chased by him. The law does not provide enough protection nor confidence for those of us wanting to leave. Too many women and children have been killed on access visits, too many hunted down and killed despite DVO and AVO court orders.

His narcissistic nature and ability to charm people outside of the home and his high job position and high regard meant I had no witness to back me up as to his violence and abuse. Everything was hidden at home.

I had to wait until my children were past the court stage of being ordered to do access visits and my ex could no longer demand or coerce them into contact.

The first 5 years (after a 'honeymoon' period of about 2 years) were physically violent. No warnings, no reason. He was a very angry, controlling man, who kept the household in fear. The children were very young, I had no job, no car, no ability to escape without him following us. Then just as suddenly the violence stopped focusing on me and household items were trashed instead. And the verbal abuse stepped up. Finally all physical violence stopped but the rest remained. By then he only had to threaten violence to keep anyone in line. He had us where he needed and could continue the verbal abuse and control he had on the household. Everything was about him. He was also an alcoholic during the early years and this added to the DV on all levels.

Whichever way you choose - to stay or go - there are big psychological and emotional issues - for both yourself and your children, particularly your children. Whatever we choose to do will impact them. Mine have suffered through depression, anorexia, suicide attempts and anxiety. All of it linked to their father. This is the high insidious cost of the verbal, emotional and psychological abuse. It is not all about physical abuse and violence. - constant nagging; constant complaining; name calling; put-downs; withholding affection, money, food; sudden frightening anger outbursts not related to anything; changing the goal posts; threats of violence, legal action, blackmail; dumping all his own fears and insecurities on the children; verbally berating them when I wasn't home; paranoid thoughts and behaviours; always watching us; his needs were paramount over everyone else. No thoughts, actions or behaviours other than his were tolerated; high level of neglect as to affection, finance, support; mind games - he was a master;

Breaking free finally happened when my children were past the court system and it became clear that recovery from anorexia was being hampered because of his behaviour. By then I too (through years of counseling for severe depression) was strong enough to take him on. The mind games and game plays were huge during this time as he jostled for the higher position legally. It was extremely stressful and dangerous. Trying to negotiate both safety, settlement and a new beginning for myself and my children was almost an overwhelming challenge. The key is to not give up.

Even breaking free didn't give us the complete cut off from him though. He has hounded and tried to contact us in several ways - all just below the threshold of what constitutes getting an AVO order. His children refuse to have any contact with him. They all know that their mental health and emotional well-being is far too important and they need to recover and grow stronger before they can have any contact with him.

For myself the emotional damage caused will always shape my life. There are many things that will also 'live' within me that no counseling or pill will cure. But overall, I am free. I can breathe. I can make decisions and choices that benefit me and my children.

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