

Case study: Alison*

Alison spent over 15 years of her life married to a man who was emotionally and sexually abusive.

“In the first years of our marriage, I knew something wasn’t quite right, but I’d made a commitment to be with him and thought I could love him enough to heal him,” Alison says.

“It was a very difficult time because I was working, as well as looking after two small children, keeping the house spotless and helping him to seek treatment.”

“I felt ashamed and embarrassed by his public outbursts. He’d say derogatory things about me and scream at me when we were out in public as well as in front of my friends and family.

“I was a very social person. When I couldn’t go out in public with him anymore, I’d organise for friends to come around to our place. But, even that stopped because of his anger and my children and I were only able to see others when he was at work. I felt like a prisoner in my own home.

“He’d accuse me of not paying bills on time and restrict how much money I could spend on clothes for our children. I had to borrow money for essentials, while he splurged our money on expensive items. I was not allowed a separate bank account.

“I was confused at the time, but now I see it was a cycle of behaviour. The emotional tension and control would build up and then he would explode into physical and sexual violence.

“There were so many rules he forced me to abide by. Gradually, it wore me down. Shame governed my choices during that time. I didn’t tell anyone what he was like and my perception of ‘normal’ behaviour became skewed.”

Alison said that eventually friends and family began to bring up his behaviour with her, particularly as he began to be abusive towards their children. Alison reached a turning point when a male friend pulled her aside and said her husband’s behaviour was unacceptable.

“Since my husband left, I’ve experienced a sense of freedom and reconnected with my friends and family. Our home is happier and safer now than it’s ever been. Looking back, I can’t believe we lived that way for so long.”

** Name has been changed*