

Sarah's Story: Taken from Disrespect Nobody

Sarah, 17, contacted Women's Aid about her abusive and controlling boyfriend

I was friends with my boyfriend for a year before we started going out. Three months into the relationship everything changed, he became possessive and controlling. I wasn't allowed to see my friends, or spend time with family. If my phone rang he'd answer my phone and read my messages. He made me overeat so I would put on weight because he said he didn't want other boys looking at me. He would bombard me with texts and phone calls. I once had over two hundred missed calls in three hours because I wouldn't answer my phone.

I soon couldn't face going to college because he'd be there, waiting for me outside lessons. And it got physical; he'd grab me so I couldn't leave his side, he took my phone so I couldn't call anyone. Once he wouldn't let me on the bus and then he dragged me off down the road. He hurt my wrist and I had a sling for a few days.

But I would always go back to him because he told me he wouldn't do it again and he made me feel like I had nobody but him. I felt dependent on him.

People tell you to end it, but it's not easy. It can be the most dangerous time. When I did, he cut his wrists in front of me, held me against a wall and screamed abuse in my face. Now whenever I see him, I shake and feel sick. I have so much respect for people who leave abusive relationships.

Sarah contacted Women's Aid who talked through her options with her. They didn't tell her what to do, but listened to her concerns and priorities. They talked to Sarah about the importance of her safety and wellbeing and how domestic abuse can have a negative impact on self-esteem.

Women's Aid explained to Sarah it can often take many attempts to leave an abusive relationship. Women's Aid also talked about what the different types of physical abuse can look like, but also explained how domestic abuse can also include things like controlling behaviour and emotional abuse that Sarah experienced.

Women's Aid were honest with Sarah about her risk, as leaving an abusive relationship can be dangerous, this meant that she was able to make informed choices. They enabled Sarah to explore and plan for her safety and signposted who she could make contact with to get the support that she needs, and encouraged her to call the police in an emergency situation.

Women's Aid took Sarah's situation very seriously. They didn't make her feel that she didn't deserve support as she is young. They explained that any woman could experience domestic abuse regardless of her age, ethnicity, religious group or disability, and reassured her that she was not to blame for the abuse, her abuser is to blame for abusing her and that nothing justifies domestic abuse.

Is something like this happening to you?

Any type of abuse is wrong and never okay. It's not normal and it can seriously damage your confidence and your self-worth. You're not on your own and help is out there. You can contact the

National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid, on 0808 2000 247. And remember, if you ever feel in immediate danger, call the Police on 999.