



Why don't women in abusive relationships just leave?

In Canada, around 78,000 women report domestic violence to the police each year, but leaving an abusive partner isn't always a simple or easy option. **Jessica Howard**, Senior Writer at the Canadian Women's Foundation, delves into the hurdles stopping victims from severing ties with their spouse

It's one thing to come to terms with being in an abusive relationship. It's another to find a safe way out of that relationship when you have five young children.

For Christina*, who shared her story with [SHE magazine](#), [the [Canadian Women's Foundation](#) biannual magazine] it required a huge leap over a chasm of uncertainties. There were safety, financial, legal, and emotional issues to consider as she tried to get through each day. *'How can I end our marriage? What if he comes after me? How will I support the children? What if they miss their dad?'* But she did eventually land on the other side. She now volunteers at a crisis line, supporting women facing many familiar questions and helping them see that there is hope.

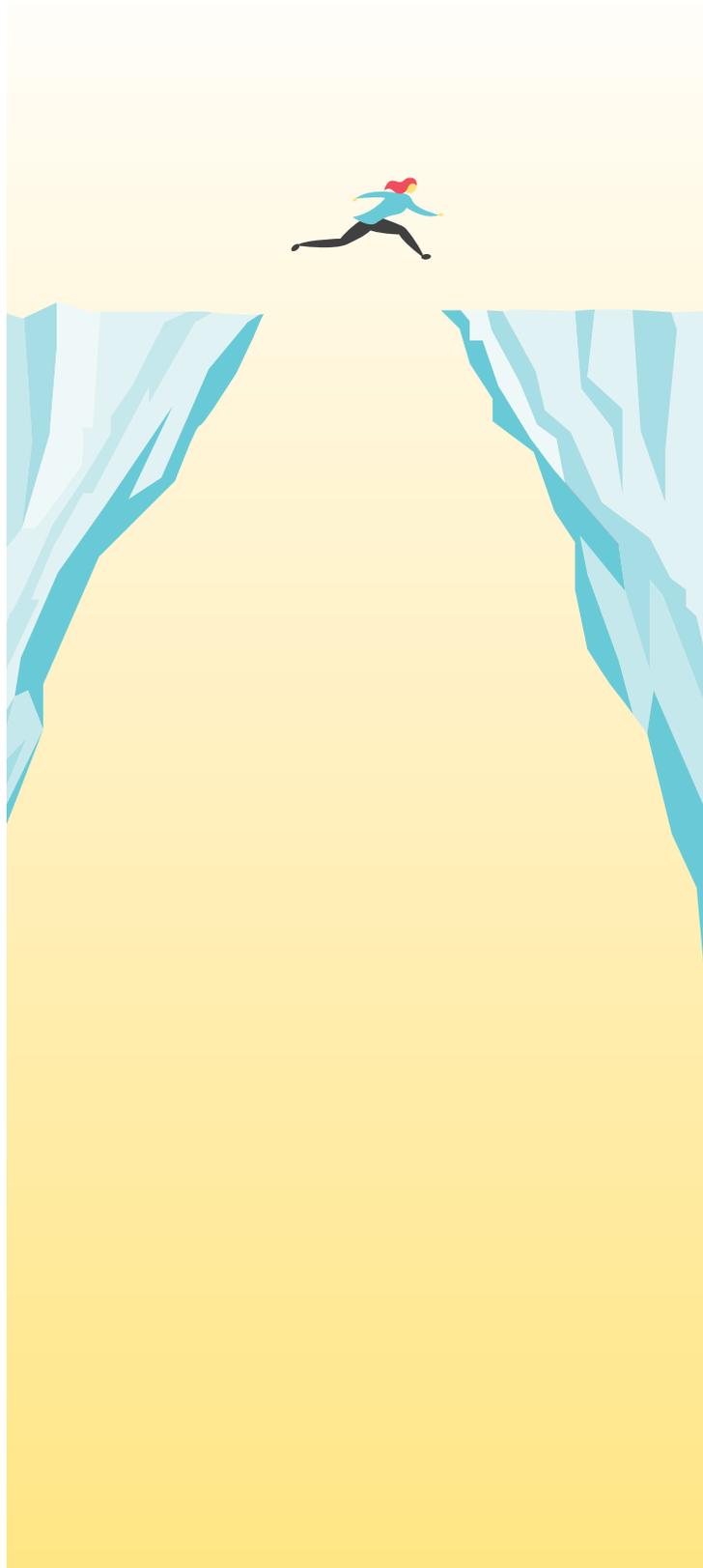
Christina's story powerfully illustrates the whirlwind of fears and uncertainties faced by survivors of abuse. And her story is one of thousands. In 2011, about 78,000 women in Canada reported intimate partner violence to police, according to [Statistics Canada](#). For many women, there is often a heart-wrenching choice to make between violence and poverty. This is why supports and services for survivors of domestic violence are so important. To be able to leave abusive situations safely and permanently, many women need help.

The Canadian Women's Foundation [supports shelters](#) across the country, which help women plan a safe exit for themselves and their children, and offer access to the emergency refuge and counselling that these families need as they move forward.

To read Christina's story and learn more about shelter services, read [Leave? Easier Said Than Done](#).

*Name has been changed.

The Canadian Women's Foundation is working towards building the first generation to experience real gender equality in Canada. [Learn about GEN1](#).



SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Women in abusive relationships often find it difficult to leave, for good reason.

When deciding whether to leave or to stay, they must consider many challenging questions and consider the reality of an uncertain future. Since many women who experience abuse already feel desperate and alone, finding answers to these questions can be overwhelming without support.

WOMEN IN ABUSIVE SITUATIONS FACE MANY BARRIERS TO LEAVING, INCLUDING:

SAFETY CONCERNS

What if he finds out I'm trying to leave?
 What if he retaliates?
 Will he try to hurt the kids?
 Will he try to kill me?
 Is there a shelter in my community?
 How will I get there secretly?

FINANCIAL WORRIES

How can I withdraw money without him finding out?
 How will I support myself?
 How can I work if I'm on my own with the kids?
 Will I have to move and start my career over again?

LEGAL QUESTIONS

How can I prove I am being abused?
 Will I lose custody of the kids?
 Will he go to jail?
 I hit him back once—will I be arrested?

PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

What will I tell the kids?
 How will I parent by myself?
 How can I break up our family?
 Will the kids miss their dad?

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Will they believe me?
 Will they blame me for being in this relationship?
 Will I bring shame on my family?
 Will they take his side?

THE FUTURE

How long can I stay at the shelter?
 Where will I go next?
 Will it ever be safe to go back?
 Is our relationship really over?
 How can I possibly start over on my own?

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