WHEN WOULD YOU LEAVE?

Objectives

By the end of this activity participants should be able to:

- Recognise the difficulties women experiencing domestic abuse might have in deciding when they should leave a relationship
- Challenge attitudes about women leaving being a relatively simple action to take

Materials

- Copies of Activity Sheet: When would you leave? - a copy for each participant. See pages 127 and 128

Equipment

- None

Suggested timing

- 30 to 45 minutes
Method

1. Introduce the theme of the activity by quoting the type of comments that are often voiced by people about women who continue to stay with an abusive partner:
   - If it were me, I wouldn’t put up with it. I’d be off at the first sign.
   - I know about domestic abuse... but why doesn’t she just leave?
   - The first time he lifted a finger to me, I’d leave.
   - I know what kind of person I am - I’d leave.
   - I wouldn’t let anyone mess with me in the first place.

2. Invite pairs or small groups to look at a particular situation and say when they would leave. Give everyone a copy of Activity Sheet ‘When would you leave?’ Invite the pairs/groups to discuss their responses to each section in turn before going on to the next section.

3. Re-convene in the whole group and invite comments on the activity from each of the pairs or small groups. Possible discussion points:
   - Was there a right time to leave? (Many women say that the abuse they experience gets worse over time but it is only with hindsight that they see this. At the time, women often see each incident as a one-off.)
   - Are there warning signs to look out for during the early stages of a relationship?
   - How are young people meant to know what is ‘healthy’ in a relationship?
   - How might a woman’s cultural background influence her situation?
   - What other factors not already mentioned influence women’s situations?
WHEN WOULD YOU LEAVE?

In the beginning...

You are an 18-year-old woman and have fallen in love with a young man of 19. He is charismatic, fun and attentive. All you've ever dreamed of. He is so keen on you that he wants to spend every minute he can with you. You are so happy that you have found someone who obviously cares so much for you. Oh, it's great to be loved.

Should you be concerned about your boyfriend's behaviour?
Would you end the relationship now?

A year on...

You are engaged. The ceremony is all planned and you are having a 'hen night'. During the evening, your boyfriend turns up. You don't immediately notice him but, as you are talking to a couple of male friends, you see someone approaching. You are pleased to see him (he really loves you - can't even stay away for one night). He doesn't look too pleased though and says you shouldn't be talking to other men - might give them the wrong idea. He's a bit distant with you for the next couple of days, but is fine by the time of the wedding. You have a great day.

Should you be concerned about your boyfriend's behaviour?
Would you have called off the wedding?

Another year on...

You are pregnant with your first child. You are so pleased to be pregnant and so is your husband. One thing is spoiling your otherwise idyllic happiness - your husband has become a bit 'iffy' about you seeing your mum and dad. He says they are interfering too much in the pregnancy and that it's better for you if you see them less. While it's true that your mum especially has lots of advice to give (even when it's not always asked for) you like seeing them. However, it's not as if he's saying don't see them - just less often.

Should you be concerned about your husband's behaviour?
Would you leave now?  

continues overleaf...
Three years later...
You now have three children and, whilst you love them dearly, you feel a bit weighed down with all of the domesticity. You’ve talked to your husband about nursery and maybe getting out and about a bit more, but he’s not at all keen. He says if you love the children why on earth would you want anyone else looking after them? He also says if you really loved him and the children why would you want anyone or anything else? When you try to talk to him he tends to give you the silent treatment. It’s a shame that you don’t see your mum and dad much and your friends have all fallen away.

Should you be concerned about your husband’s behaviour?
Would you leave now?

Two years later...
You have had a particularly difficult year. You’ve started experiencing panic attacks. You husband is very caring and does all the shopping, drops your eldest child off at school for you and arranges for him to be picked up and taken home. You are hardly going out at all. When you spoke to your husband about going to the doctor, he said he didn’t think it was a good idea as the doctor might insist you go into hospital for treatment. You’re feeling really confused. Is he right?
Are you going mad? You’re not sure anymore. Occasionally, he brings you back flowers or cooks a lovely meal and tells you how special you are to him and how he couldn’t live without you. He’s a good man in many ways - he doesn’t drink or smoke or go with other women. He must really love you, to put up with how you are these days.

Should you be concerned about your husband’s behaviour?
Would you leave now?

A year further on...
Things have deteriorated recently. He has taken to locking you in the house when he goes to work (for your own safety). He still takes the children to school and nursery and attends all of the parent evenings, etc. You barely see the light of day. Life is difficult. You have no one to talk to and no means of getting help. You are 26 years old and there seems to be no way out of this nightmare.

Should you be concerned about your husband’s behaviour?
Would you leave now?