



Safely Exiting the Chaos, A Resource for Ending It, On Your Terms

As you read through this resource, we acknowledge and understand that the decision to end a relationship or create distance is difficult and has no timeline. It could be a few months in; it could be 25 years later. And some relationships may continue to exist, for reasons outside our control. A step-parent, a relative or close family friend may not be easily removed from our lives. Those relationships are navigated differently, with awareness providing insight, power and the courage to maintain distance.

Before actually making a decision, there is a shift from acknowledging something *feels off* to knowing that something *is off*. When reliving past behaviors, revisiting conversations and then connecting the dots, patterns appear; love bombing to gaslighting, gaslighting to contradictions, contradictions to blame shifting, triangulation to isolation, isolation to silent treatment then full circle back to love bombing. The cycles repeat, sometimes in different order, yet the chaos is constant. We've named the patterns here. For many living it, the patterns may not have names yet.

Once the patterns have been discovered, a lightbulb goes off. Most abusers are very astute and will recognize even the most subtle shift in behavior, the way a question is asked or how responses are different. The lightbulb moment is the catalyst. The patterns are real, the chaos is real and now recognized. "Could things be different?" The steps taken after asking that question are unique for everyone.

Possibly a need to observe for a while longer and gather data? Possibly a desire to reconnect with a friend before sharing the secret? For some, possibly hours of research; what is this and is there a name? The steps taken will provide insight and may reveal possibilities of a different future. The most powerful question becomes: what **do** I want the future to look like?

It may be filled with twists, turns, second-guessing, walking back internal dialog, self-contradiction, celebrations and discoveries along the way. The discoveries could illuminate the path forward and reveal possibilities. Possibilities leading to a decision; to stay or to walk away.

For this resource, the focus is on ending it - safely walking away - on your terms. The steps taken toward safety may happen quickly or may take time. Please remember, the path forward and steps taken will be by choice, individually defined and uniquely owned.

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Observe

- Recognize the patterns to build awareness
- Observe when they occur, the sequence of events, reactions, triggers and outcomes

Research

- Search for the behaviors and patterns, definitions will appear
- Search for “is the behavior normal” and “does it have a name,” a name will be given
- Continue gathering information until confusion shifts to understanding, the fog is lifting

Plan

- Determining the way to leave (the how) – for safety, in person is not recommended
- Planning the when - living arrangements may influence the plan; living together often requires additional consideration
- Making a list of what must go and what can be replaced
- Safety is the priority

Depart

- Acting on the “how,” when the moment arrives
- Timing requires flexibility, there is no perfect day or time
- The moment may not happen as envisioned or exactly as expected
- When delivering the message - remember the focus is on departure, not prolonged engagement; short ... sweet ... done ... breathe

Protect and Maintain after Departure

- There will be repeated attempts to reestablish contact
 - Phone calls, voicemail is safe, until blocking is necessary
 - Text messages, do not show notifications is safe, until blocking is necessary
 - Email, adding a rule to send to junk or trash is safe, until blocking is necessary
 - Social media, removing the connection and blocking is safest
- Personal spaces, sharing the relationship has ended and contact is unwelcome, is safe
- No contact and no engagement, at all, is safest
- Silence is necessary in protecting peace now and in the future

Ending it is final. The strongest and safest response is no response at all. The peace that will eventually follow is now protected by boundaries - your boundaries - on your terms.