

## Tia's Story

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I'd never really considered myself to be in an abusive relationship (which lasted best part of 9 years) until I was forced to step back and look at what had actually been taking place.

It had all just become what I was used to and I expected things to be better after each episode – the usual pattern. After particularly bad episodes I used to promise myself that this would be the last time I allowed this but I was always talked round. One summer, I spent night after night crying alone after 'the ex' had gone off in a drunken rage. Every time I tried to talk things through I would get things thrown at me and he would swear at me.

That summer I was that depressed that I rang a 'crisis helpline' who I found to be completely unhelpful in my hour of need.

I persevered but getting help was hard at first as it would have been so easy to go back – that's the hardest part: being strong and saying, "no more". The help I have received at the refuge has been fantastically supportive, although I would say you reach further depths before you accept the need to move forward. Knowing that it won't happen overnight and that having mixed feelings are normal and 'allowed' has helped enormously, especially when others have got frustrated and expect you to just 'get over it'. Also knowing that when you start to feel better about life you will still have doubts and bad days but you won't be cast aside as support is there for you for as long as you need it.

The most important part is rebuilding yourself and your self-esteem bit by bit; coming 'out of the other side' thinking, "You know I think I will be OK after all".

Remember there are women from all walks of life affected by abusive men, it would be better if we could all talk about it more.