

8 DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE  
SURVIVORS SHARE  
THEIR GREATEST  
MOMENTS OF JOY  
AFTER LEAVING  
THEIR ABUSERS

• HELLO •

# April

9 WAYS TO TAKE  
YOUR POWER BACK  
IN A RELATIONSHIP,  
ACCORDING TO AN  
EXPERT

INSPIRATIONAL  
CORNER

Uplifting encouragement  
anyone can use!



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*Inspirational Corner*



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# 8 Domestic Violence Survivors Share Their Greatest Moments of Joy After Leaving Their Abusers

By Lauren Krouse







I've always loved October for many of the reasons you'd expect: crisp fall leaves, pumpkin spice everything, and Halloween, to name a few. But as a victim and survivor of domestic violence, this time is even more special to me. Domestic Violence Awareness Month provides an opportunity for people like me to share our stories, raise awareness of how to support and advocate for survivors, mourn those we've lost, and celebrate our healing and recovery. That last piece doesn't get enough attention. For many of us, this month presents a rare opportunity to be open about what we've survived and to acknowledge just how much we've accomplished. Any other time, though, it can be tough to open up—and many of us just don't. While some survivors can't share their stories due to genuine safety and legal concerns (and no one should feel pressured to share if they don't want to), stigma can also be a major silencer—even when it comes to seemingly small healing moments that are actually monumental.

In virtual support groups and survivor circles, you often hear that someone doesn't feel comfortable or able to share small-but-huge victories with family and friends because, as people who haven't been in our shoes, they just don't get it or don't seem to want to hear about it. But having a witness to these important markers of healing is incredibly important as it validates your reality and confirms that you are indeed strong and able to regain control of your own life, Eileen Martin, L.C.S.W., a North Carolina-based licensed clinical social worker who works with abuse survivors<sup>1</sup>, tells SELF.



And small wins are everything. “There are thousands of losses within the loss of yourself in an abusive relationship. Each reclaimed loss builds strength and empowerment,” says Martin. “Post-traumatic growth looks like survivors finding their way back to their intuition and learning to trust themselves in the world again. Healing the relationship with themselves will shape all other relationships in their life. This also provides the space for survivors to reclaim their narrative and choose to live their lives in a way that’s meaningful to them.”

It’s important to note that every domestic violence survivor has a unique story, and “after” isn’t always clear or safe. Often, abusers become more violent after you leave, and research shows the end of a relationship is actually the most dangerous time for survivors<sup>2</sup>. The road to safety and healing can be long and complex, riddled with court battles, debt, insecurity, and struggles with physical health, mental health, and substance use. Recovering your self-esteem and security can be an ongoing, challenging process.

But looking back on my past self, the girl who was devastated by the end of her relationship and struggled to recover for so long, I wish I’d known just how much there was to look forward to. I wish someone had taken me aside and told me how much better life could be. As rates of domestic violence have risen since COVID-19<sup>3</sup>, it’s essential that we keep spreading the word.

In this spirit, I asked eight domestic violence survivors to share some of their greatest moments of joy since leaving life with an abuser. Here are their stories. Please note that all names have been changed for privacy and protection and that some of the details may be triggering if you or a loved one have been through something similar.





1. *“My small win was when I didn’t feel ashamed of my words anymore.”*

— *Aditi*

“During my abusive relationship, the one thing that brought me any comfort was writing. I started out simply using the Notes app on my phone and then gradually began sharing posts on social media. When my work started growing and being recognized more, my partner wasn’t pleased. He told me I would have to give it up at some point—and that his family would never approve of the things I talked about, most of which were my own traumas.

One moment that stands out to me is when a reader reached out to let me know I’d captured so much of what people go through and stay silent about. I still look back on that message, even now, and wonder how I could have had such a deep impact on someone. With what’s become my writing career, I reclaimed my voice.”

—Aditi



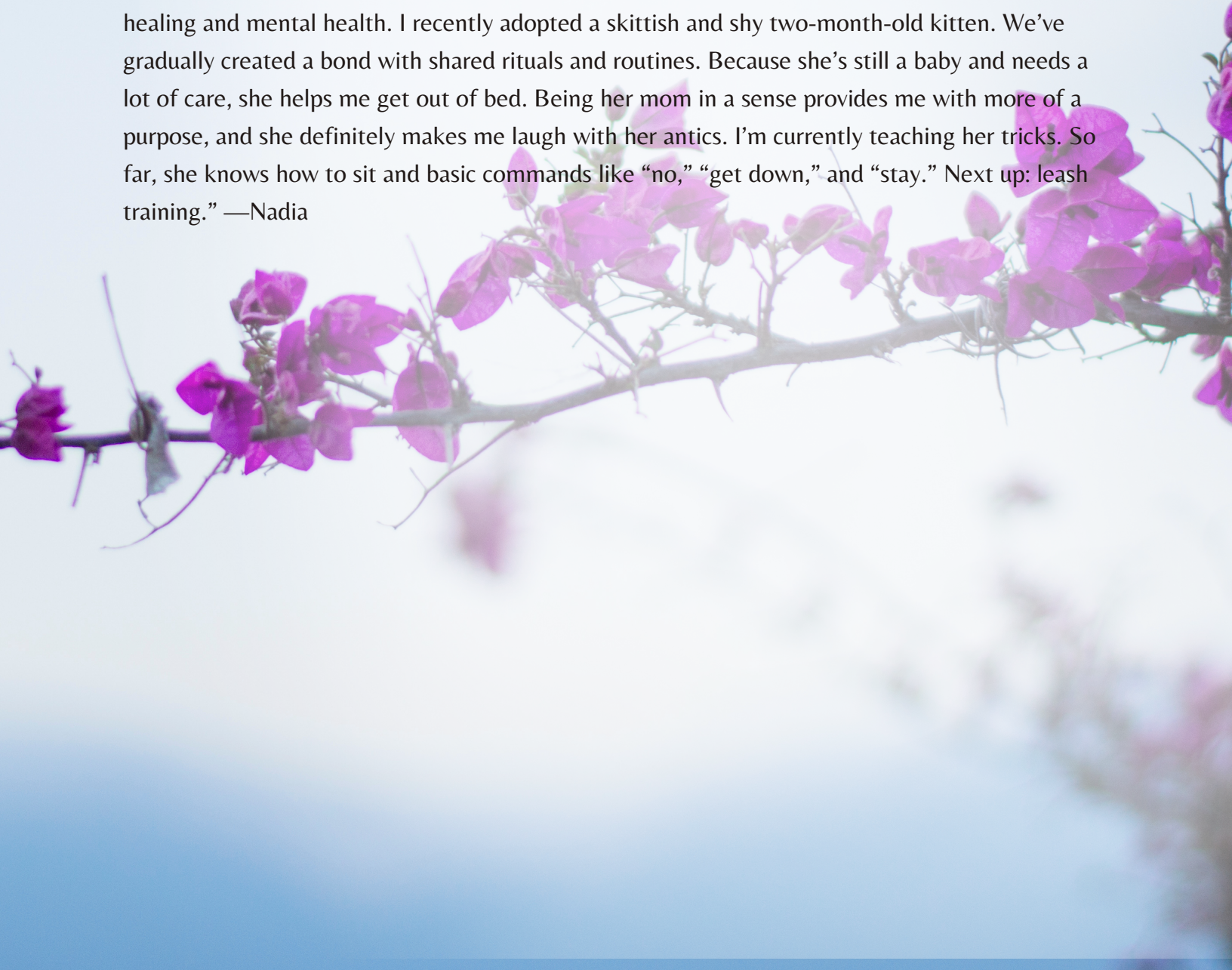


## *2. “Raising a new kitten helps me find happy moments every day.”*

— *Nadia*

“In the last few months of our relationship, my boyfriend became increasingly violent and aggressive. One night when I wanted to leave to go home, he refused to let me take my baby kitten with me. He was my first kitten and we’d developed a strong attachment, so this was really distressing for me. I cried every day for weeks and tried everything I could to get him back, but I was never able to. I still worry and think about him often, hoping he’s okay.

Though I knew it wouldn’t be the same, I wanted to get another kitten to help me with my healing and mental health. I recently adopted a skittish and shy two-month-old kitten. We’ve gradually created a bond with shared rituals and routines. Because she’s still a baby and needs a lot of care, she helps me get out of bed. Being her mom in a sense provides me with more of a purpose, and she definitely makes me laugh with her antics. I’m currently teaching her tricks. So far, she knows how to sit and basic commands like “no,” “get down,” and “stay.” Next up: leash training.” —Nadia





### 3. *“I just finished my first half-marathon.”*

— *Emily*

“Many years ago, in retaliation for my filing for separation, my husband attacked me, murdered our three-year-old daughter, and then killed himself. Ever since, I’ve struggled with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and devastating grief. I still struggle every day, but I’m managing now, and I am once again finding joy. I’m married to a wonderful man who is my rock, and I have a new career running my own business alongside an amazing friend.

Thanks to two reconstructive surgeries, years of physical therapy, and a driving determination to prove this man didn’t take every part of my identity from me, I’m proud to say that I ran a half-marathon last weekend. I ran every step of the way and crossed the finish line almost twenty minutes before I had hoped to. I ran farther and faster than I could before I was assaulted, and I am celebrating this accomplishment every day.” —Emily





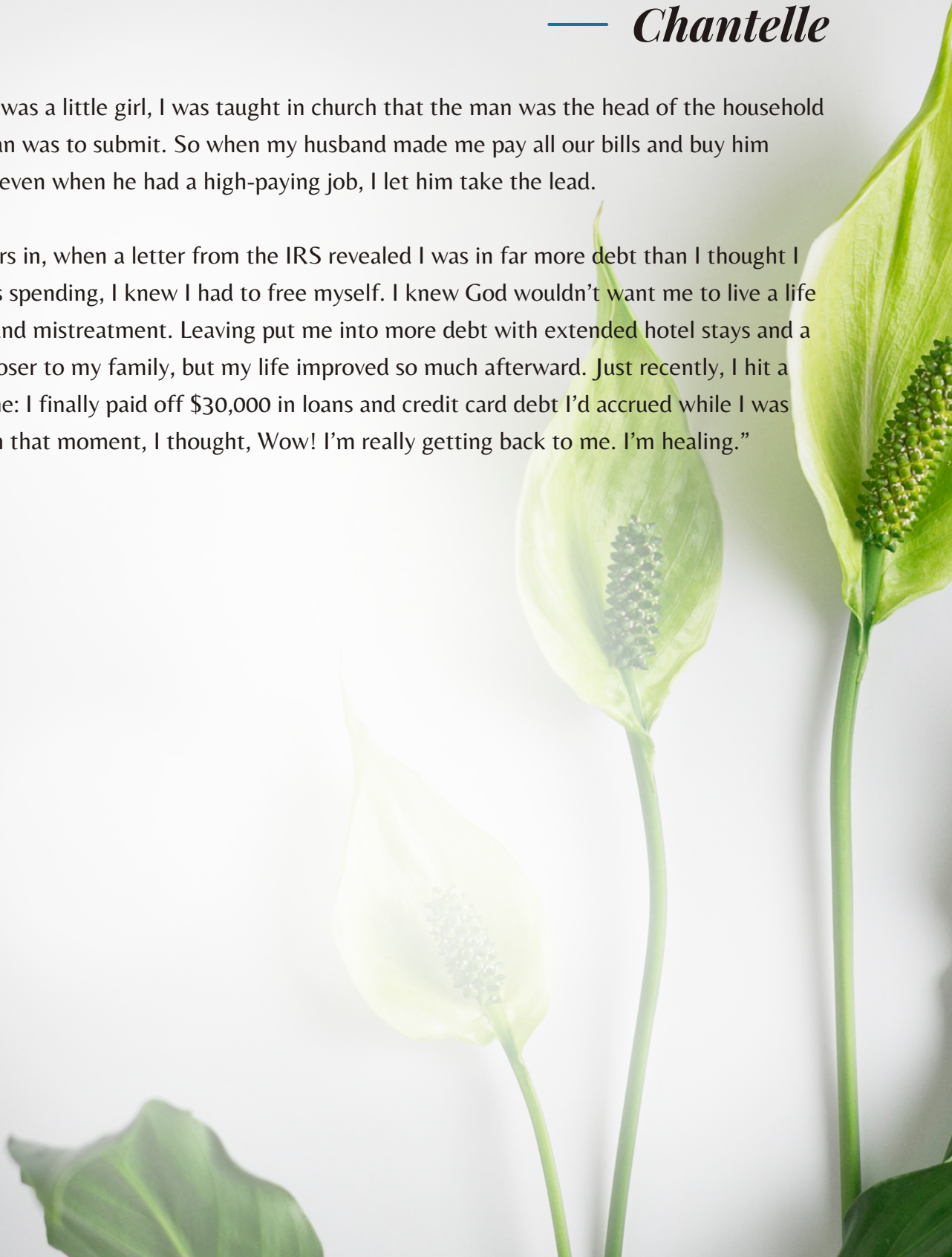
4. *“Paying off debt is my proof that the weight I acquired from an abusive marriage is being lifted from me.”*

— *Chantelle*

“Ever since I was a little girl, I was taught in church that the man was the head of the household and the woman was to submit. So when my husband made me pay all our bills and buy him flashy things, even when he had a high-paying job, I let him take the lead.

But a few years in, when a letter from the IRS revealed I was in far more debt than I thought I was due to his spending, I knew I had to free myself. I knew God wouldn't want me to live a life full of abuse and mistreatment. Leaving put me into more debt with extended hotel stays and a move to be closer to my family, but my life improved so much afterward. Just recently, I hit a huge milestone: I finally paid off \$30,000 in loans and credit card debt I'd accrued while I was with my ex. In that moment, I thought, Wow! I'm really getting back to me. I'm healing.”

—Chantelle



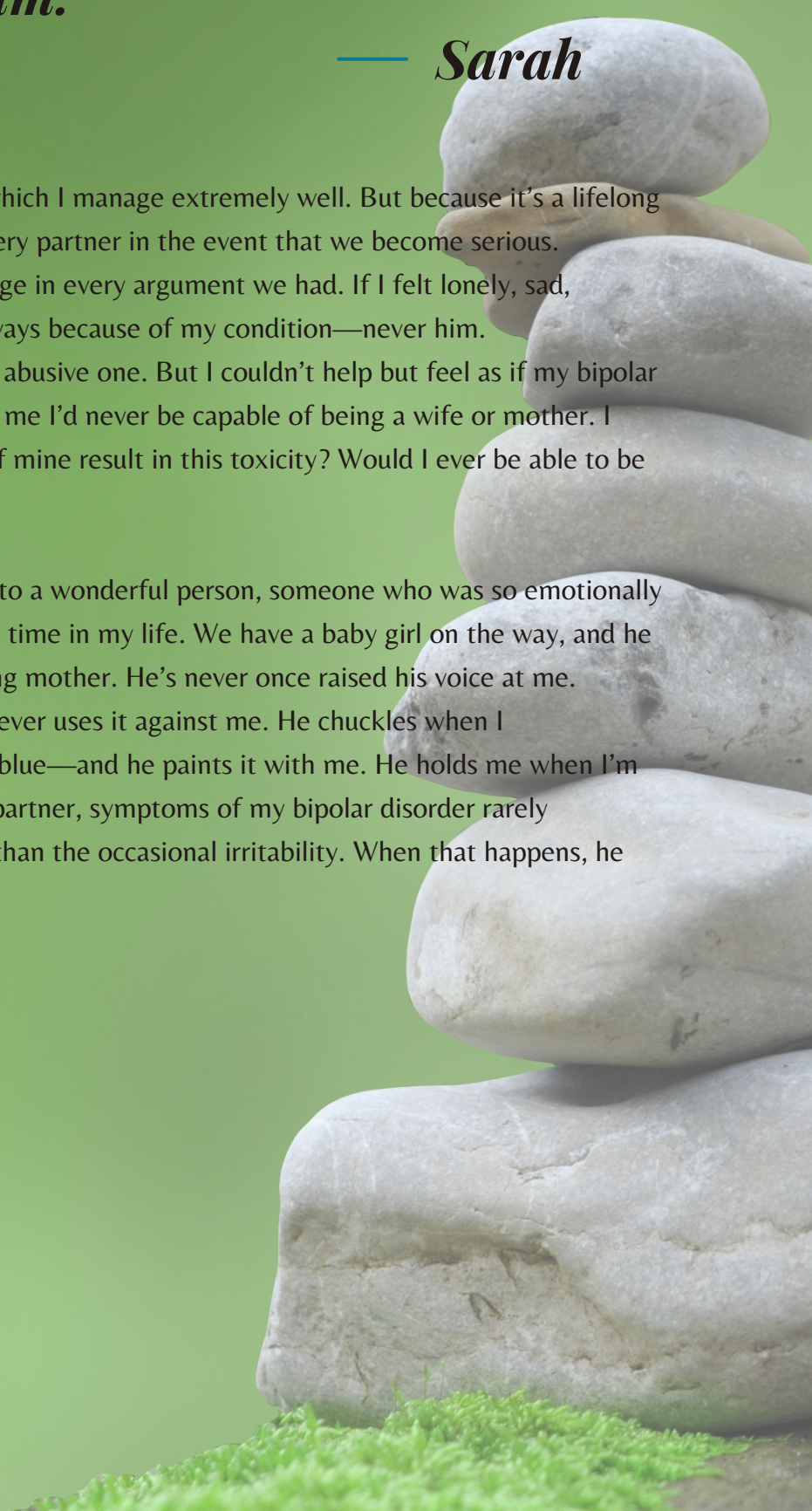


5. *“I found the relationship I’ve always dreamed of with someone who accepts and loves me for who I am.”*

— Sarah

“I’m diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which I manage extremely well. But because it’s a lifelong condition, I disclose this condition to every partner in the event that we become serious. Unfortunately, my ex used this as leverage in every argument we had. If I felt lonely, sad, disrespected, or afraid of him, it was always because of my condition—never him. After I left, I knew he was the toxic and abusive one. But I couldn’t help but feel as if my bipolar diagnosis made me unlovable. He’d told me I’d never be capable of being a wife or mother. I would think, Would every relationship of mine result in this toxicity? Would I ever be able to be the mom I wanted to be someday?

Fast forward to today, and I’m engaged to a wonderful person, someone who was so emotionally supportive throughout the most difficult time in my life. We have a baby girl on the way, and he says I’m going to make the most amazing mother. He’s never once raised his voice at me. He’s aware of my bipolar disorder and never uses it against me. He chuckles when I spontaneously want to paint the ceiling blue—and he paints it with me. He holds me when I’m sad. And because I have such a healthy partner, symptoms of my bipolar disorder rarely negatively affect our relationship other than the occasional irritability. When that happens, he helps me laugh it away.” —Sarah





## 6. *“Changing my name helped me start a new chapter of my life.”*

— *Brittany*

“On my 31st birthday, my best friend threw me a party with a twist: We were celebrating my name change. When I left my abusive marriage, I knew I wanted to change my last name, but I had a lot of difficult memories attached to my family name too. So, I chose a brand new one for myself.

I chose a word that means confident, strong, and brave. I hadn’t had a birthday celebration at all in the time I was married, and my 30th birthday had been particularly difficult. So sitting in a room full of incredible women who celebrated me and supported my choices was more head-turning than the champagne in our glasses. I remember looking around the room and being so in awe of how I had changed my life for the better. Today, I keep a card given to me at that party on my desk. Whenever I need to summon some of that positive energy, it’s there for me.”

—Brittany



***7. “Getting an apartment gave me joy, independence, and the freedom to start helping other survivors.”***

***— Destiny***

“After I was hospitalized due to abuse, I was released to the streets because there was no room in the domestic violence shelters. I was homeless and felt lost, sleeping on park benches in the middle of winter. At one point, I contemplated going back to my abuser, but I knew if I did it might be the end for me.

About a year later, with the help of some support programs, I finally got an apartment. This was definitely a moment of joy for me. I felt like I could regain my sense of self-worth and find myself again. Having a home also gave me the security and safety I needed to begin helping others who had endured domestic violence, to give them hope that there is life after abuse. When I got on my feet, I started a Facebook page and have begun to build a community. My goal is to found a nonprofit organization, invest in real estate, and open my own domestic violence shelter one day. My mission is to help as many survivors as possible.” —Destiny





*8. “I’ve found joy in reclaiming my passion for adventure and looking for the beauty in the world that surrounds me.”*

— *Theresa*

“After more than two decades of extreme control and abuse, I didn’t realize how much I lost of myself until I started hiking again. On a late summer day, I walked down a trail with the sound of gravel crunching beneath my feet. I noticed the most beautiful petite lilac flowers on my path. The cool breeze blowing through my hair was welcome. And I felt a great sense of peace overtake my soul.

I hiked daily as a teen and young adult. But for so long, I’d lost that adventurous spirit. I walked for a few miles and ended up at a small pond. The dam at the end of it had white caps on the tips of rushing water. I saw it as a parallel to my life: White water caps symbolized freedom to me, with the dark murky waters as the darkness I left in my past. The young woman I’d lost so long ago, she was back. I’d found myself again. As the sky started to turn for the evening, the fiery amber sunset became my backdrop. Tears of joy rolled down my face. I hadn’t noticed the changing sky in years. I knew at this moment I was going to be alright. All the struggles and major setbacks I went through to get to this point had made it all worth it. I was free. Since my divorce, I’m no longer the shell of a person I once was. Freedom is bliss.” —Theresa

Quotes have been edited and condensed for clarity.

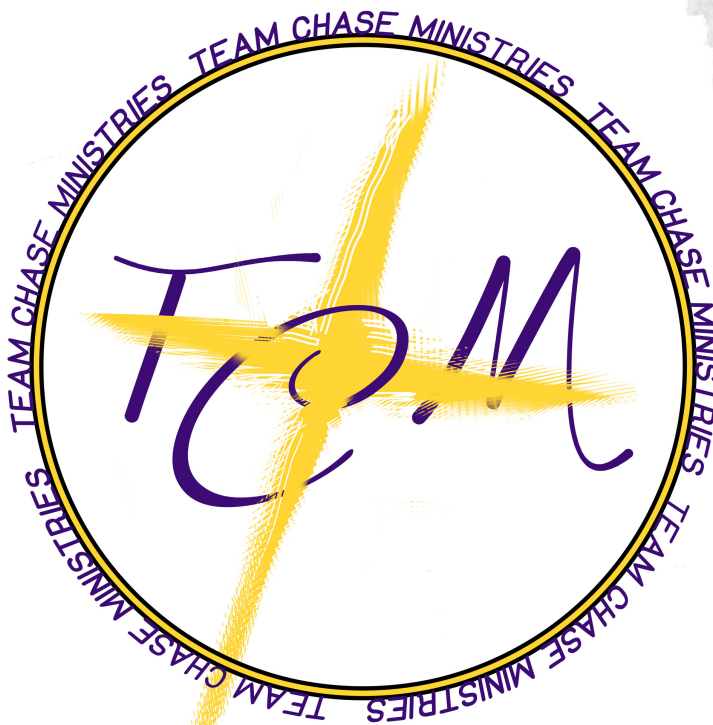
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# Power

## 9 Ways To Take Your Power Back In A Relationship, According To An Expert

by Laken Howard

In a perfect world, all relationships would be healthy, happy ones where both partners feel like equals in every sense. In the *actual* world, the existence of unhealthy power dynamics in relationships means that not every partnership is one that's balanced and mutually fulfilling. You might not initially see it as a big deal if your partner tends to take the lead more than you, but if it becomes clear that they wield all the power in your relationship, it can lead to conflict down the road — conflict brought on by feelings of anger, resentment, neglect, sadness, and more. But what does it mean to have power in a relationship in the first place?

"Power and choice are inextricably linked," Adam Maynard, a relationship coach who specializes in helping people navigate relationship challenges, tells Bustle. "Your power in relationships comes from your ability to make empowered choices about them, so that you can effect the change you want and need. There's always something you can do to feel better about your relationships. You always have a choice. It's just a matter of figuring out what that choice is." Simply put, you shouldn't let anyone — especially your partner — make you believe that you don't have the power to make the best choices for yourself, regarding your relationship and beyond. If you feel like you need to regain some power in your relationship, here are nine steps that can help you feel confident as you venture to take your power back into your own hands.



## **1. TELL THE TRUTH**

Learning how to feel comfortable and confident asserting your power in your relationship isn't easy, and while it's understandably tempting to just ignore the problem altogether, this won't do your relationship any favors in the long run.

"If you're not being honest with yourself about what's going on or how you really feel, you'll be limited in your ability to find a satisfying solution to your pain and discomfort," Maynard says. "Any effort you do put in won't bring you the relief you're looking for because it won't address the root of the actual issue."

## **2. FEEL YOUR FEELINGS**

In order to start your journey to self-empowerment, it's crucial to be honest with yourself about what you're feeling — whether that's helpless, upset, angry, or even afraid that you don't have power in your relationship.

"Your emotions provide essential clues about what's true for you about the situations and circumstances you face," Maynard says. "If you ignore, deny, or invalidate them, you're charting a course without one of your best navigational tools. You're also a more effective relationship participant when you can process your emotions — an effectiveness that lends itself to feeling powerful."

## **3. CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WHERE YOUR POWER LIES**

As cliché as it might sound, it's so important to remember that, even if you're 'attached' to someone else, your power lies within you, and you alone — and you don't need anyone else's permission to access that power.

"So much of our ability to access our power depends on where we think it resides," Maynard says.

"Any relationship advice that dangles the solution to your problems somewhere outside yourself will be disempowering because you can't always effect change there. 'Reclaiming your power' is the steady practice of shifting your understanding of where the generative source of your life lies, from that elusive external place to within yourself and your abilities."

## **4. FOCUS ON THE CHOICES \*YOU\* ARE MAKING**

One hack to help you rediscover your power in a relationship? Stop spending so much time worrying about the choices your partner makes, and instead focus on the choices you make in your relationship.

"You'll feel powerless in relationship if you're only focusing on what the other person is or isn't doing," Maynard says. "They have free will — the power to choose — which by definition you have no control over. But you have free will too. So, what are you choosing?"

## **5. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR PORTION**

Part of being in a relationship means taking responsibility for your words and actions and, while it might not always be easy, taking accountability in your relationship can actually be empowering.

"There's no quicker way to help yourself feel better about your relationships than owning the parts of them that you're responsible for," Maynard says. "Why? Because you're investing your time, energy, and attention in the parts you actually have control over."



## **6. PUT ENERGY INTO CHANGING WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU**

We all need to vent from time to time, but if you want to feel truly empowered, make a habit of nipping your relationship complaints in the bud — and use that energy instead to actually change the things that irk you.

"Complaining suggests that you can't feel the way you want to until someone or something changes," Maynard says. "It breeds self-victimization, and there's no position of lesser power in relationships than that. When you interrupt the impulse to complain, you recenter your agency in the situation — and empower yourself to actually do something about what's bothering you."

## **7. KNOW YOUR WORTH**

Everyone has their own struggles with self-esteem, but in order to assert your power in a relationship, it's important to get to a place where you know your own worth — because then you'll be less likely to let a partner trounce all over you.

"Low self-esteem manifests as weakness," Maynard says. "A loss of self-determination. You're more likely to let someone else take the reigns of a relationship if you feel like their needs matter more than yours do. Knowing your worth restores your ability to stand up for yourself, and advocate for the parts of the relationship that are important to you."

## **8. USE THE RELATIONSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR GROWTH**

We've all been through relationships that are difficult or challenging in some way. If you can dig through the rubble of your past relationships and find lessons that can help you grow, you can retroactively take some of your power back.

"If you can mine challenging relationships for meaning, you'll feel like the experience has a greater purpose — that it's serving you in some way," Maynard says. "You'll feel more powerful when you do, because you've turned something that dragged you down into something that supports you."

## **9. Ask For Help**

If you're serious about feeling more empowered — in your relationship or just in general — it's OK (actually, it's healthy!) to seek help in others, whether that's your friends and family or a professional.

"Sometimes the first step to reclaiming your power is to admit that you feel like you have none — and to seek out the people who can help you sort out where it's broken down," Maynard says. "If you can at least do this much in your moments of powerlessness, you'll always be able to find your way through to the other side."

Ultimately, the only way to find and assert your power in a relationship is to first find it within yourself. It can be a long process, but once you do that, you'll be confident and empowered enough to make healthy choices in your relationships — and in life — that will bring you true happiness, on your own terms.



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Remember God's amazing power and His unconditional love for you! Consider what He has done in the past. If He has done it before, He will do it again. Therefore, do not only believe in miracles but depend on them. I know from first-hand experience that prayer works!

We have to let God take us through things and let Him work in us so our mess becomes our message. Difficult things that you have endured in your past will prepare you for God's blessings in your future.

**You have to forgive those who have hurt you because resentment will control you.**

*You are a child of God, and everything He has belongs to you. Take time to enjoy, appreciate, and love what God has made and given you.*

*Please understand this: People only bring up your past when they are intimidated by your present, and they are terrified they will not be a part of your future.*

**PRAY, PRAY, AND KEEP PRAYING.  
NEVER STOP PRAYING. IF YOU  
KNEEL BEFORE GOD, YOU CAN  
STAND BEFORE ANYONE AND  
ANYTHING.**

**be happy when god answers your prayer but  
be more thankful when god makes you the  
answer to someone else prayer.**

**You have to stop! Stop beating yourself up because you are not where you thought you would be. God is not done with you yet. He is still working on you, shaping you and developing you. God has put a promise in your heart. Keep praying! Keep expecting! Your increase is coming!**





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