

JESSICA JONES:

TACKLING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“I want you to say it: ‘None of it is my fault.’ Say it back to me.” – Jessica Jones

In Marvel’s *Jessica Jones*, the audience meets a new kind of hero: one who is not only smart, strong, and snarky, but also unapologetically willing to tackle evils like toxic masculinity and domestic violence. She has been through it, and her story can help others get through it too.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: WHAT IS IT?

Domestic violence can involve a range of physical, sexual, mental, or emotional abuse, but it always involves one intimate partner striving to maintain **power and control** over the other. Being a supervillain with mind-control powers is not required. It happens in all types of communities, from Hell’s Kitchen to Honolulu, and if it can happen to someone as powerful as Jessica Jones, you can bet that it happens to all sorts of people regardless of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, class, nationality, or ability.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

Domestic violence typically escalates over time. At first an abuser may seem wonderful (perhaps a suave British guy wearing a purple suit and an arresting smile?) but gradually become more controlling or aggressive. Because abusers may appear apologetic or suggest their actions come from a place of love and care (like Kilgrave to Jessica: “I’m not torturing you. Why would I? I love you!”), their behavior can *seem* justifiable. However, abusers’ need for power and control intensifies until it is unmanageable and dangerous.

HELPING THOSE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING ABUSE

1. Don’t generalize or assume leaving is easy. As Jessica says of freeing herself from Kilgrave, “Getting you out of my head was like prying fungus from a window. I couldn’t think.” It takes time to recognize, much less accept, the reality of an abusive relationship. Before helping them creating an exit plan, be sure to consider financial, emotional, and mental safety as well as cultural and religious beliefs.
2. BELIEVE THEM. Acknowledge that they did not/do not deserve to be abused. Take them seriously, and let them know that they can actually trust you. Recognize and praise their courage and strength. Remind them that none of it is their fault.

KNOW YOUR WORTH

Your feelings are real and valid. It’s not your fault. You are so much more than what has happened to you. You are not less-than because of what you have been through. You are strong and brave, and you have meaning in this world.

SOME (BUT NOT ALL) WARNING SIGNS:

- controlling behavior, such as stopping you from visiting friends/family/work/school or restricting your finances
- insults and backhanded compliments
- decision-making without your input
- destruction of property
- physical violence or intimidation
- gaslighting
- making you feel like their behavior is your fault or that you cannot trust yourself
- threats, including suicide

ENDING ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

For many reasons, it is not often as simple as “just leave.” However, if you are in an abusive relationship and have made the decision to get out, here are a few guidelines from other survivors:

1. engage with your support system
2. get resources and legal support from a domestic violence center
3. create safety and exit plans
4. protect your privacy and cover your tracks

