

# Navigating Post-Separation Abuse

## Supporting Clients With Knowledge and Care

This information sheet is designed to guide therapists in supporting their clients navigating the challenges of post-separation abuse. It draws on trauma-informed principles and practical strategies to help clients manage the emotional, psychological, and legal complexities of this stage.

### Acknowledge Emotional Burnout and Encourage Nourishment

**Expect collapse after leaving:** Clients often feel worse before they feel better. The end of survival mode can bring exhaustion, overwhelm, and emotional collapse.

**Normalise trauma responses:** Anxiety, panic, numbness, or self-doubt are trauma responses, not personal failings. Reassure clients these experiences are common and expected.

**Somatic approaches:** Suggest a range of body-based practices (trauma-informed yoga, mindful movement, breathing exercises, self-defence classes) to rebuild a sense of safety and connection.

**Grounding routines:** Support clients in establishing small, nurturing rituals- like tea in the sun, time with pets, or calming music—that promote stability.

**Permission to rest:** Validate that they do not have to “do it all.” Encourage saying no, stepping back from draining commitments, and accessing practical supports (e.g., the 10 days Family and Domestic Violence leave).

### Combat Self-Doubt, Guilt, and Shame

**Identify self-gaslighting:** Help clients notice when they minimise their experiences (“Was it really that bad?”). Frame this as a lingering impact of abuse, not a personal flaw or a sign they have made bad choices.

**Teach about emotional abuse patterns:** Education helps separate the survivor’s own voice from the abuser’s narrative. Use resources for validation - e.g. books, podcasts, and online resources that affirm their lived experience.

**Journaling for clarity:** Encourage journaling about abusive events and what occurred in the relationship - this helps counter minimisation and can support the legal process with facts.

**Combating isolation:** Isolation fuels self-doubt; peer connection restores perspective. Suggest support groups (online or in-person) where other survivors share their journeys.

**Leaning on allies:** Encourage clients to rely on trusted others (friends, family, support workers) when they struggle to trust their own judgment.

## Setting Boundaries in Communication with Ex-Partners

**Legal planning first:** Where possible, support clients to seek early legal advice to reduce panic and protect rights.

### Assist clients in maintaining safe and protective communication

**Remind them to limit unnecessary contact:** Promote the use of lawyers or professional third parties as buffers. Recommend apps like OurFamilyWizard or MyMob to ensure written records and civil tone are maintained.

**Strategic responses:** Coach clients to respond briefly, factually, and neutrally. Remind them: their true audience is a judge and the court, not their ex.

**Discourage phone or in-person conversations whenever possible.**

**Don't match urgency:** Manipulative messages often create false urgency. Teach clients to take their time with well thought-out responses unless child safety or legal obligations require immediate reply.

**Safety in shared spaces:** Remind clients to request staggered arrivals, separate waiting rooms, security measures, or support people in mediation or court contexts.

## Mindset Shifts for Empowerment

**Reality-checking threats:** Many threats are exaggerated. Support clients to distinguish fear from fact. Recommend resources such as The Divorce Course Podcast to remain legally informed.

**Redefining urgency:** Not every demand requires immediate response. Clients can request delays to prepare, especially in mediation or legal proceedings.

**Protecting resources:** Abusers often prolong conflict to drain time, energy, and finances. Encourage clients to prioritise their health and stability.

**Promote hope:** Leaving an abusive relationship is draining, but it marks the beginning of recovery, dignity, and renewed autonomy.

## Nourishment to Sustain the Legal Battle

**Pacing the process:** Remind clients that legal proceedings are lengthy. Encourage them to use intervals between hearings or mediation to rest and restore.

**Promote self-affirmation and recovery:** Suggest trauma-informed activities such as therapy and EMDR, yoga, writing, or hobbies that reinforce identity beyond the abuse.

**Investing outside the legal case:** Recovery deepens when clients nurture parts of life not defined by the conflict. Encourage cultivating relationships, goals, and activities that reinforce self-worth.

## Resource Recommendation

### **The Divorce Course - [www.thedivorcecourse.com.au](http://www.thedivorcecourse.com.au)**

A podcast, webinars, and an online course led by a female lawyer and her daughter for navigating divorce. Very practical and providing all the information you need to know when facing a separation.

#### **Relevant Episodes:**

Divorcing and Abuser: Coping with Post Separation Abuse - episode 199

Are You a Victim of Financial Abuse? - episode 190

Is It Emotional Abuse? How to Identify and Protect Yourself in Divorce - ep. 187

Parental Alienation False Allegations: How Abusers Use it to Maintain Control - ep. 183

Dealing With Narcissistic Lies in Divorce, Mediation and Family Court: 7 Survival Tips - ep. 179