


Speaking Up

Making your voice heard when you are in a relationship

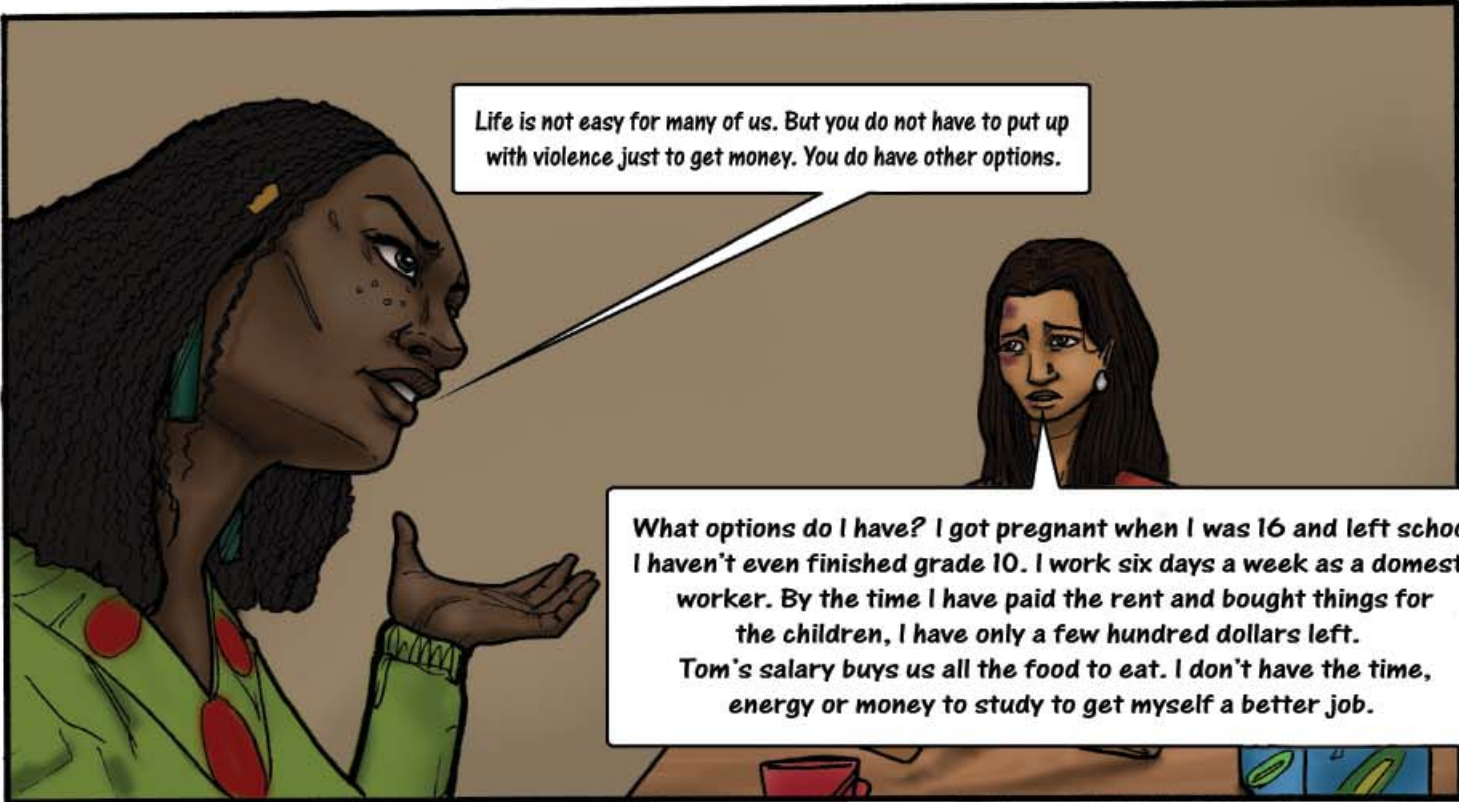


Sarah, what is wrong? Why are you crying? What are these bruises?

I am so ashamed. Tom beats me when he is drunk and forces me to have sex with him. Usually I manage to avoid people afterwards so nobody finds out what is happening.


Do you tell him no, that you do not want to have sex? Nobody, not even a husband or a boyfriend, can force you to have sex when you do not want to. That is rape. And if he is beating you, that is domestic violence. If you want, you can report him to the police because it is an assault.

The truth is I said yes to sex because I'm scared. If I don't agree to sex, he will leave me and if he leaves me, how will I have money to look after my children?




Life is not easy for many of us. But you do not have to put up with violence just to get money. You do have other options.


What options do I have? I got pregnant when I was 16 and left school. I haven't even finished grade 10. I work six days a week as a domestic worker. By the time I have paid the rent and bought things for the children, I have only a few hundred dollars left. Tom's salary buys us all the food to eat. I don't have the time, energy or money to study to get myself a better job.



And I do love him. And he loves me. He just drinks a lot, and when he is drunk he gets violent.



Alcohol is not the cause of violence. Tom has the same feelings when he is sober but he manages to control them. Alcohol makes him lose that control and then he lashes out. He is assaulting you and that is a crime.



Sarah, my friend, you must ask yourself what is love? Is it really true that someone who loves you will beat you? Is it really true that someone who loves you and chooses you to be their partner, their equal, will beat you?



I am going to leave you some information to read. You may have more options than you think. It is not good to make excuses for his behaviour.



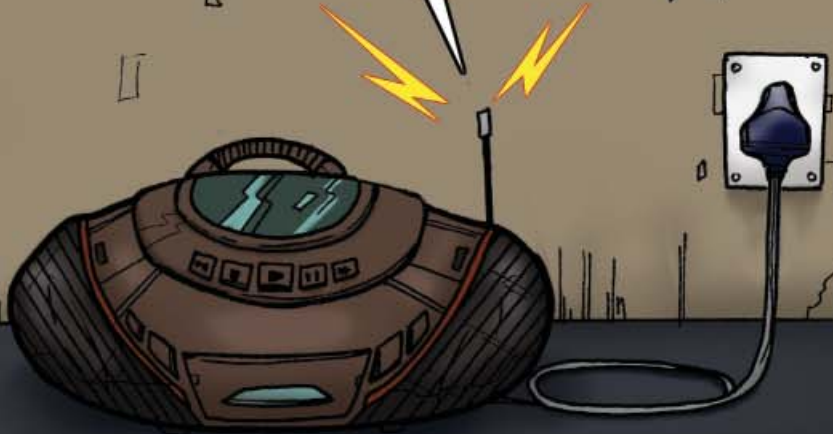
"What to do if you are raped"
Tom has never raped me but I want to read more about this any way.



What can I do about my situation?
I feel that Tom pressures me to agree to sex when he is drunk. I don't tell him no, but I don't really want to have sex either.



This radio show about assertiveness was produced by the Gender Research and Advocacy Project of the Legal Assistance Centre. People deal with conflict in different ways. Some people become aggressive, while others try to avoid the situation. Aggressive people use shouting, insults and personal attacks to get their way. Some people are indirectly aggressive. They may make others feel guilty to get what they want. A better way to deal with a situation of conflict is to be assertive. An assertive person states their opinions and feelings calmly, clearly and honestly. An assertive person is not dependent on the approval of others. An assertive person can still be polite and respectful, but has the confidence to speak out. In many cultures, women and girls are brought up to accept dominating or violent behaviour from other people. It can be very difficult to say 'NO'.....

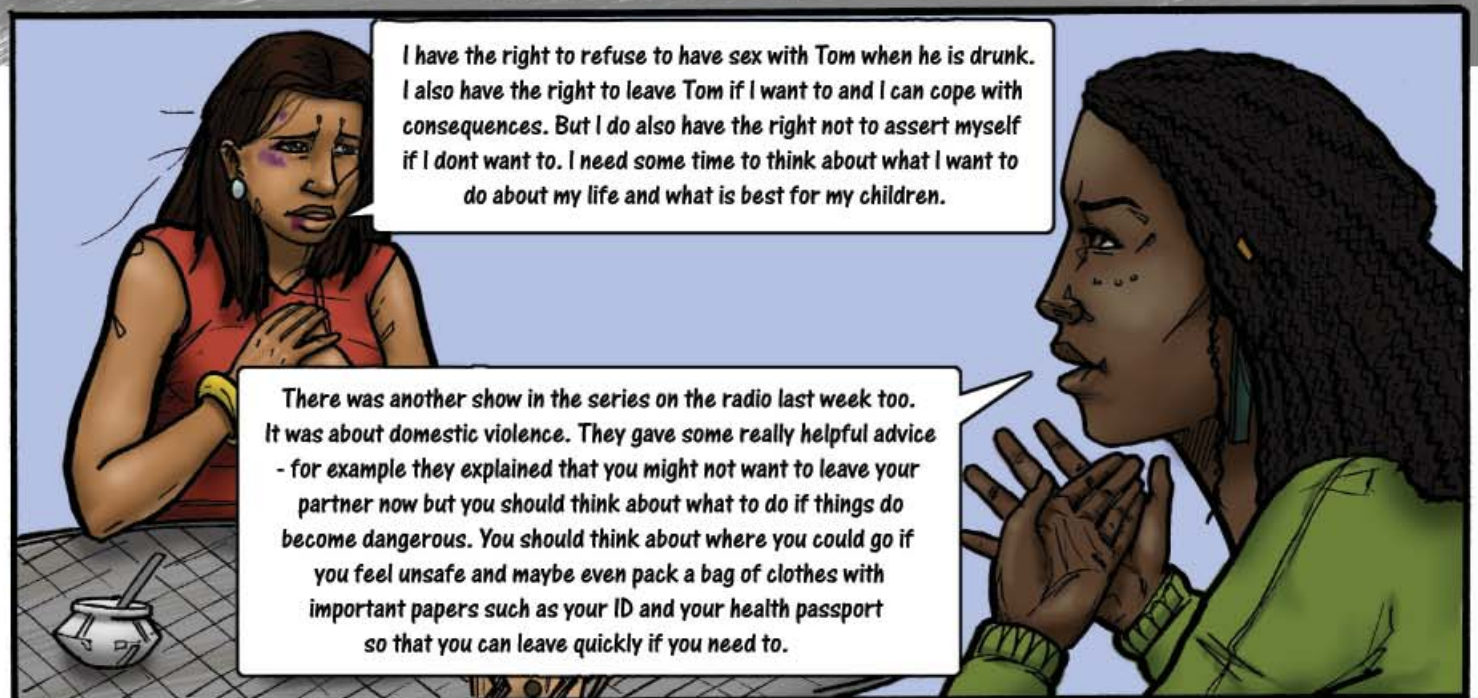




I listened to a radio show last night about how to be assertive. But Luke woke up just as the presenter was summarising. Did you listen to the show?

Yes I did and I even wrote that list down!

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1. You have the right to ask for what you want (but note that the other person has the right to say "no" to your request).
 2. You have the right to refuse requests from others.
 3. You have the right to have an opinion, feelings and emotions and you have the right to express them appropriately.
 4. You have the right to make your own decisions and to cope with the consequences.
 5. You have the right to change your mind.
 6. You have the right to make mistakes and to be responsible for them.
 7. You have the right to say "I don't know", "I don't understand", or "I don't know how I feel", or "I need more time to think", without apology.
 8. You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
 9. You have the right to choose not to assert yourself if you do not want to.
 10. You have the right to privacy.



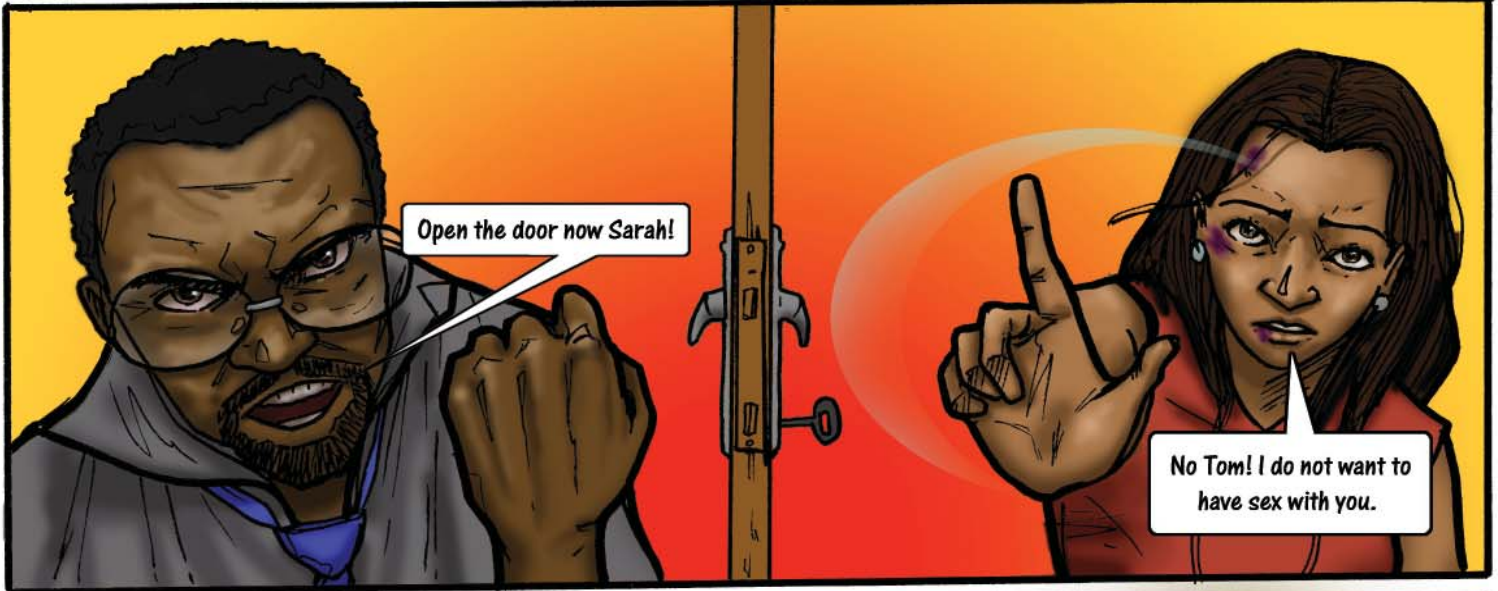
I have the right to refuse to have sex with Tom when he is drunk. I also have the right to leave Tom if I want to and I can cope with consequences. But I do also have the right not to assert myself if I don't want to. I need some time to think about what I want to do about my life and what is best for my children.

There was another show in the series on the radio last week too. It was about domestic violence. They gave some really helpful advice - for example they explained that you might not want to leave your partner now but you should think about what to do if things do become dangerous. You should think about where you could go if you feel unsafe and maybe even pack a bag of clothes with important papers such as your ID and your health passport so that you can leave quickly if you need to.

Tom comes home.

Honey I'm home. I went to Good Time bar with Jake. We had a few beers. And now I am ready to see you my baby. Oh I love you my darling.

Tom tonight you have to sleep on the couch. I am not going to have sex with you when you are drunk. You say you love me but in five minutes you are going to be beating me.



Open the door now Sarah!

No Tom! I do not want to have sex with you.




Open this door now or move out. If you do not open this door you can take your bags and your children and get out of this house right now.

Ok Tom, if that is how you feel, we will leave.




The next day at Marianna's house



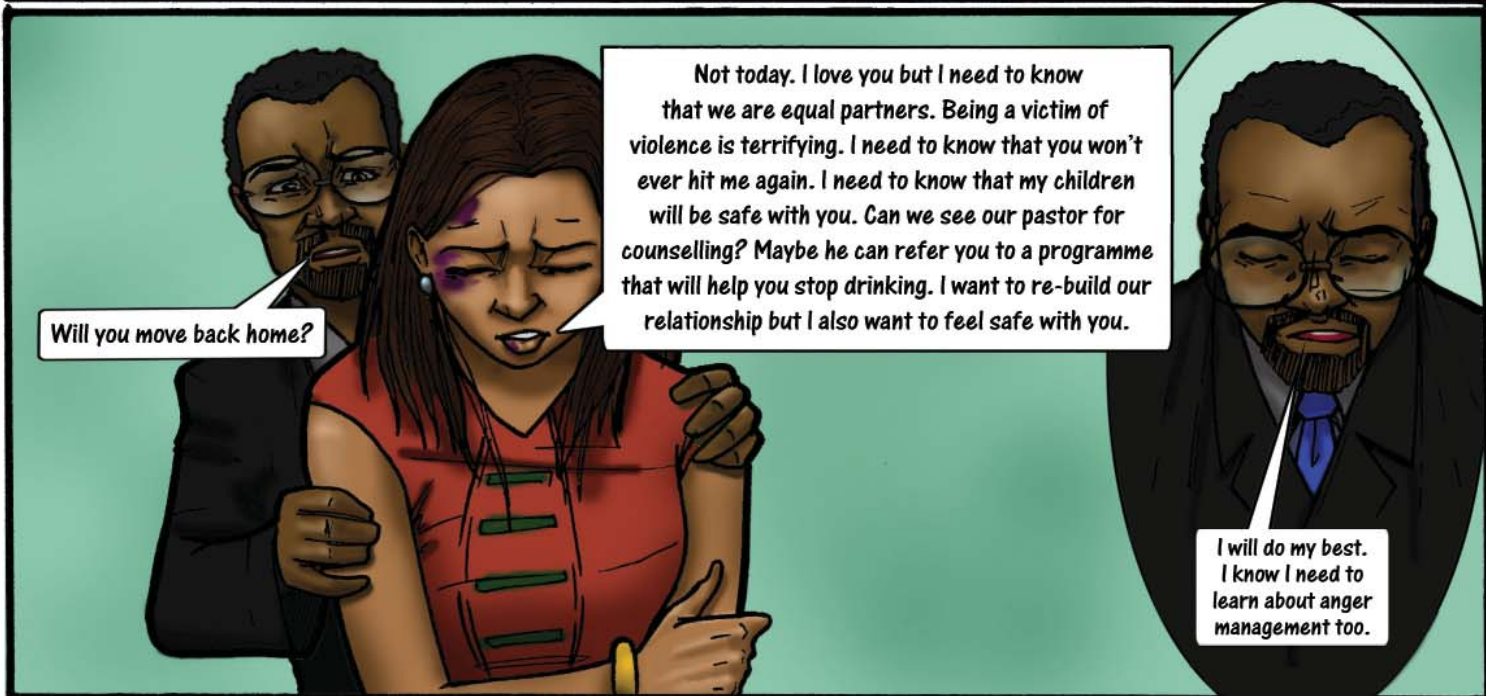
Sarah, can we talk? Last night I realised that I made the biggest mistake of my life by telling you to leave me. I love you. I didn't realise that my drinking was such a problem. I don't even remember half of what I did when I wake up the next morning.

Every time you come home after drinking, sooner or later you beat me. I have the bruises to prove it.




Sarah I am so sorry. Alcohol changes me. I am going to stop drinking.

Thank you Tom. That is a big commitment. I hope you mean it.



Will you move back home?

Not today. I love you but I need to know that we are equal partners. Being a victim of violence is terrifying. I need to know that you won't ever hit me again. I need to know that my children will be safe with you. Can we see our pastor for counselling? Maybe he can refer you to a programme that will help you stop drinking. I want to re-build our relationship but I also want to feel safe with you.



I will do my best. I know I need to learn about anger management too.

What to do if you are a victim of domestic violence

It can be very difficult for people who are being abused by their partner to admit to this abuse. However, it is not your fault if you are being beaten by your partner.

We have 5 suggestions to help people fight domestic abuse:

1. Take it seriously.

Let your abuser know that all types of domestic violence, whether they are physical or emotional, are serious and dangerous. Sometimes it can help if the person who is being abused is able to tell the abuser that the violence is not acceptable. This can be important for people in cultures where men think that they have a right to abuse their partners. Some people may not feel able to tell their partner to stop. As a first step, try telling a friend or trusted person that your partner is being violent towards you. It is very important that you get support from people around you.

2. Make a plan for your safety.

You may not want to leave your partner. But you might want to consider making a plan to escape if things become dangerous. Think about where you could go to stay or who you could call. You might want to pack a bag of clothes together with important papers such as your ID and your health passport so that you can leave quickly. Include other people in your plan for safety, such as a relative or friend.

3. Join or start a support group.

Consider attending a support group to help give you courage. In a large town you might be able to find a self-defence class to attend or a group where women come together to discuss their relationships. If there is no such thing in your area, consider starting a group. You might be surprised to find out how many people want to join. Together you will feel stronger and this may help you to deal with your partner at home.

4. Contact a social worker or LifeLine/ChildLine.

A social worker may be able to give you personal counselling, or refer you to a trained counsellor. LifeLine/ChildLine have a dedicated GBV abuse hotline: 116. If you feel that you can not talk to someone you know, consider speaking to a trained counsellor who can give you advice and support.

5. Use the legal system.

Domestic violence is against the law. Your partner's abuse against you is almost always a crime. Under the law, someone who is experiencing domestic violence can:

- make an application for a protection order at a Magistrates' Court.
- go to the police.
 - If the abuse amounts to a crime, such as hitting which is assault, rape, or stabbing which may be attempted murder, you can lay a charge with the police.
 - You can ask the police to give the abuser a formal warning about their behaviour if you do not want to lay a charge.
 - You can ask the police to help you apply for a protection order at the same time.

If you have a comment or question about this comic, contact the Legal Assistance Centre:

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We would like to hear your feedback about this comic.

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