DAY 04· SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2026

# 04 REPLACE “WHY DIDN’T SHE LEAVE?”



**It’s a common question, and often well-meant. But it puts the focus on the survivor’s decisions—instead of on the person causing harm and the barriers that make safety hard to reach.**

## UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC

Leaving is rarely a single moment. It can involve decisions about safety, housing, money, children, health, immigration status and community ties. The period around separation can carry increased risk, so leaving is not always the safest immediate step. Many people leave more than once. Staying, leaving or returning does not make someone responsible for the abuse. They are making decisions within real constraints, and they know their situation best.

## BETTER QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What made leaving unsafe?
- Was affordable housing available?
- Could she access money or support?
- What might happen to her children?
- Why did the person choose to cause harm?

## ONE PRACTICAL ACTION

### CHANGE THE QUESTION.

When the topic comes up—in conversation, in the news or online—replace “Why didn’t she leave?” with “What was standing in her way?” or “Why did he choose to cause harm?”

## KEY TAKEAWAY

**Shift the scrutiny: from the survivor’s decisions to the person causing harm—and the barriers to safety.**

## LEARN MORE

Assaulted Women’s Helpline
awhl.org

Women and Gender Equality Canada — 16 Days of Activism
canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/commemo rations-celebrations/16-days.html

## NEED SUPPORT?

You don’t have to work out next steps alone.
Women’s Habitat 24-hour crisis line: 416-252-5829
Assaulted Women’s Helpline (24/7): 1-866-863-0511 · #SAFE (#7233) on a Bell, Rogers, Fido or Telus mobile
In immediate danger, call 911.