

#### 4. WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

“Had I not been blind he would have chosen another vehicle by which to intimidate me. My disability was just the most convenient means available. It afforded him a myriad of ways to control and strike fear into me, to make me really begin to believe I was crazy.”

You may be abused by your husband or a caretaker. Maybe your husband is your caretaker. If so, it is probably painful and frightening to face the truth. But you can figure out what you want and what you’re willing to do to get it. You have probably survived so far by using your strengths.

An abuser is likely to know what will frighten you most. Maybe he tells you that you can’t survive without him. Then you are scared of being abandoned. It may be true that your life would be hard without his—or her—caretaking. But it is probably hard being with him too. Even if you do need assistance, there may be other places to find it.

What makes it difficult to leave the abuser may also make it risky to stay. The most serious physical harm may be from a physical assault. But disabling your medical equipment can harm you as much as a sock with a fist. The wrong dose of medicine can hurt you as seriously as an attack. But you can find ways to prevent harm and to enhance your safety. An abuser will probably try to stop you from getting around by yourself. He might claim he is helping you as a kindness. But it can be dangerous to depend on him more than you need to. If you are no longer sure what you are able to do on your own, this is a good time to find out. Try not to get bogged down by negative thoughts. Focus on what you can do, or can learn to do. You may have already overcome some of the abuser’s barriers. Gaining control over one area of life can lead to another. And then another. If you decide to stay, you will be in a better position to speak up for yourself.

Analyzing a pattern of emotional abuse can give you ideas about how to minimize the danger. Pay special attention to methods your partner or caretaker uses that make you feel helpless. Or foolish. Or that isolate you. (Check Lists in Chapter 2 of *You Can Be Free* and Chapter 22 of *Getting Free* (<http://www.powells.com/>) help you identify emotional abuse.) If the abusive person says he is taking over your care “for your own good,” be careful. The exercise below may help you decide whether his actions are really good for you. See how many blanks you can fill in.

#### Taking Care or Taking Control: What’s the Difference?

<b>Takes Care of Me</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>What I Want</b>
<i>1. Decides what meds I need</i>	<i>Overdoses me. I feel woozy</i>	<i>To handle meds myself</i>
<i>2. Discusses me with doctor</i>	<i>Gets info I need</i>	<i>To make decisions myself</i>
<i>3. He is my payee</i>	<i>He has my money</i>	<i>To change my payee</i>
<i>4. Reads my mail</i>	<i>I have no privacy</i>	<i>Get CCTV to enlarge print</i>

5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

Suppose your partner really is trying to do you a favor. You still have a right to tell him what kind of help you want. If it is safe, tell him what you want him to do. Let him know what you want to handle yourself. You might want to ask him not to help unless you ask. Setting limits might make him angry. So if you confront him, invite a friend to be with you. If you're afraid to do that, ask yourself what you fear. If it isn't safe to say what you want, you might be in serious danger. If so, it could be time to modify your safety plan. It might even be time to make a plan to leave.

Adapted from You Can Be Free (<http://www.powells.com/>)