



The Own My Life course, Own My Story journal, Own My Life WoManual, and Own My Life Course videos were all created by Natalie Collins:

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The Women's Liberation Collective CIO (registered charity no. 1184411) provide governance for the Own My Life course.

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Every effort has been made to provide accurate web addresses, telephone numbers and other external resources at the time of publication, however neither the author nor The Women's Liberation Collective assumes any responsibility for errors or for changes that occur after publication.

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Contents	3
Introduction	5
Sessions Overview	12
Weekly Evaluation Process	13
Session Plans	15
Session 1	17
Session 2	23
Session 3	29
Session 4	35
Session 5	41
Session 6	47
Session 7	51
Session 8	55
Session 9	59
Session 10	67
Session 11	71
Session 12	75
Own My Group	79
Forms	81



# Introduction

## What is the Own My Life course?

The Own My Life course is an innovative, creative, educational 12-week course for women who have been subjected to male violence. The course enables organisations to support women in regaining ownership of their lives after they have been in a relationship with an abuser.

After attending three-day Own My Life Facilitator Training, practitioners can deliver the course to women. Upon completion of the Facilitator Training, practitioners will be provided with all the resources to run the course with up to 10 women, including:

- WoManual (for delivering the course).
- Own My Story journal (for each course participant).
- Own My Life other resources box (all course activity materials).
- e-Hub access (for all multimedia course content).

The Own My Life course uses multi-media content to show messages within popular culture that reinforce or perpetuate sexism, rape culture, violence, disrespect in relationships and abusive behaviour. The course videos explain complex concepts in easy to understand terms. The Own My Story journal provides participants with all the ideas, key concepts and content from the course with space for reflection and notes. At the end of the course, if it is safe to do so, participants can take their journal away to continue their learning and reflection

The format for each session includes six key elements:

- Own My Mind
- Own My Body

- Own My Choices
- Own My Relationships
- Own My World
- Own My Feelings

The first session introduces women to the course and its values. The twelfth and final week is the Own My Future session and includes opportunity for participants to create an action plan for developing a self-organised group.

The Women's Liberation Collective CIO (registered charity no. 1184411) provide governance for the Own My Life course. The course was created by Natalie Collins ([www.nataliecollins.info](http://www.nataliecollins.info)) and was funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust. Natalie first delivered programmes for women in 2010. She is the Creator and Director of the DAY Programme ([www.dayprogramme.org](http://www.dayprogramme.org)), training hundreds of practitioners to deliver the DAY Programme to young people in schools, youth groups, youth offending services, youth housing services and more. Various factors contributed to the development of the Own My Life course:

- Developments in the science of trauma.
- The problems of a diminished gendered analysis of domestic abuse in the UK.
- The need to rediscover second wave feminism's consciousness raising work with women.

# Introduction

## Why is the Own My Life course Needed?

- 30% of women across England and Wales will be abused by a partner or ex (ONS, 2014).
- In England and Wales, 92% of defendants in domestic abuse related crime are male (ONS, 2014).
- 750,000 children a year witness a parent being abusive to a partner (Women's Aid).
- In 2018, 149 women were killed by men in the UK (Femicide Census, 2018).
- Domestic violence perpetration costs the UK approximately £5.7 billion (Walby, 2009).

The rates at which men are harming women is horrifying. This impacts women and their children dramatically and in long-lasting ways. The Own My Life course helps women to make sense of what has been done to them and gives them the skills to move forward. This course not only gives women information about what abuse is and why their partner or ex would choose to be abusive, it also explores the science of trauma and stress, sexism and misogyny in wider society, safety planning, and motherhood and abuse. It provides high quality videos to articulate complicated concepts in easy to understand ways, and enables women to discover what their strengths are and how they can move forward with their lives.

## Aims

- To educate and empower women who have been subjected to abuse to regain ownership of their own lives.

- To equip and resource practitioners with the most up to date research and understanding about male violence.
- To provide a replicable, easy to use resource for working with women.

## Objectives

- Complete 12 sessions of the Own My Life course.
- Complete 6 Own My Group sessions.
- Enable participants to recognise abusive and non-abusive behaviours.
- Raise consciousness with participants (and facilitators) about a feminist understanding of male violence, patriarchy, misogyny and sexism.
- Build participant (and facilitator) literacy about trauma.

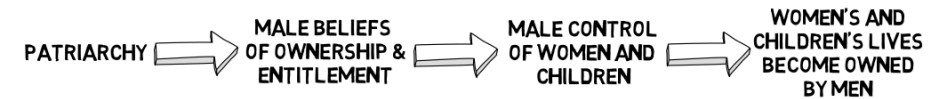
## Core Principles

1. **Feminist Analysis:** A feminist analysis is necessary to effectively respond to male violence and the harm men do to women and children.
2. **Intersectionality:** Alongside sex, there are other axis of oppression including race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, disability, gender identity, education, age, job, religion, and economic status that interact with the impact of male violence on women's lives.
3. **Ownership and Entitlement:** Men's abuse and violence is rooted in their beliefs that they own their partner (and children) and they are entitled to behave in whatever ways they choose to.

4. **Controlling Behaviour:** Men who abuse use the following tactics to control women and children, and to maintain their beliefs of ownership and entitlement: isolation, exhaustion, monopolising their partner's perceptions, threats, occasional indulgences, violence and sexually harmful behaviour, humiliation and degradation, enforcing trivial demands. (Biderman, 1957)
5. **Space for Action:** In order to leave an abuser and move forward with their lives women need space for action, where the abuser's tactics become less effective and they have a supportive space to take positive action for their lives. (Kelly, 2003)
6. **Consciousness Raising:** This refers both to a woman's consciousness of her own personal life but also to gaining understanding about the dynamics of domestic abuse and what is driving the abuser's behaviour. It also includes socio-political education in identifying misogyny, patriarchy, and sexism in media, law, history, and across society.
7. **Regaining Ownership/Building Self-Efficacy:** Women need to be able to take back ownership of their lives from the abuser. They can be supported to do this through having space for action and through consciousness raising. Self-efficacy is defined as having confidence in your ability to exert control over your own motivation, behaviour, and social environment. Helping women to build self-efficacy is integral to recovery after a relationship with an abuser. (Bandura, 1994)
8. **Safety:** Abusive men kill women and children. They rape, injure, disfigure and violate women and children. Any intervention with women may increase an abuser's risk to them, and this requires practitioners and organisations to make every effort to maintain and increase the safety of women and children.

## Theory of Change

### THE PROBLEM



### THE OWN MY LIFE COURSE



## Core Values

1. **Women are the experts on their own lives:** They need our support in moving forward (much like a pregnant woman needs a midwife to help her through labour) but women are the experts on their lives, what they need and how we can best support them.
2. **Addressing the professional/personal dichotomy:** Women's services have developed a tendency to treat professional knowledge and expertise as being of greater value and have viewed it as inappropriate for female practitioners to share their personal experiences with service users. However, appropriate and ethical use of our personal narratives as professionals can be helpful and useful to women.
3. **Depathologisation:** Often women with abusive partners are pathologised, which means to treat them as if they are "psychologically abnormal". However, women's reactions and



management of their lives with an abuser are usually totally normal. The issue is the abuser, not the woman.

4. **Trauma literacy and psychoeducation:** Building women's literacy about trauma will enable them to more quickly regain ownership of their lives and make sense of the ways they have responded to an abuser and the wider pressures and challenges within their life.
5. **Information ownership:** The information within the group will be owned by the group. This is particularly important with regard to the Own My Story journals. Practitioners should NEVER look in women's journals without being invited to do so by women themselves. The journals need to be stored securely. Agreements around confidentiality should be reiterated in every session to ensure that if women do disclose information they are fully aware that the information may be shared outside of the group.
6. **Right use of power:** The facilitator and the organisation running the Own My Life course holds significant power and this must be acknowledged and managed appropriately.
7. **Collaborative not competitive:** The Own My Life course recognises that patriarchy seeks to divide women to conquer them, this is evident in women's magazines, TV programmes, the beauty industry and across society. We seek to foster collaborative spaces that build sisterhood and combat competitive attitudes.
8. **Honouring resistance:** Women always resist abusers and this resistance should be honoured. Sadly, most often when women share how they have resisted abuse, they are met with scorn and blame. The Own My Life course seeks to honour women's resistance.

9. **Liberation and equality:** In light of the Own My Life course's Core Principles of feminism and intersectionality; the value and equality of all human beings is recognised. The current state is one in which women are oppressed by men; black people are oppressed by white people; lesbian and gay people are oppressed by heterosexual ideals; transgender people are oppressed by transphobia; and disabled people are oppressed by a society designed by and for able-bodied people. The Own My Life course works to ensure all participants experience equality of opportunity but seeks to move beyond equality to full liberation.

## Method

- **Problem-posing education:** Based on Paola Friere's work, problem-posing education recognises that education is not simply deposited from a teacher to a student but instead should be a dialogue between the two people. It is not the teacher working for the student but WITH the student. Problem-posing education should include listening, dialogue and action.
- **Reflective practice:** For both facilitators and participants on the Own My Life course, reflective practice is encouraged. This practice involves the ability to reflect on our actions so that we can engage in a continuous process of learning. Within both the WoManual content and the Own My Story journal, exercises for reflective practice are included.
- **Group work:** The Own My Life course sessions include work in a large, in small groups and in pairs.

- **Individual work:** The Own My Story journal includes space for individual writing and/or drawing throughout each session. Also, the course can be delivered on a one-to-one basis if necessary, though this will decrease the full benefit of the course with the community elements not included.
- **Fun and laughter:** Abusers steal our joy, and so we should ensure that fun and laughter are part of how we deliver the Own My Life course.

## Own My Life Course Extra



Course participants are required to leave their Own My Story journals with the facilitator until the end of the 12-week course. This is to ensure participants don't forget to bring their journal to each session. Also the information within the journal can

be quite overwhelming and if women read ahead this could cause distress or change the way they engage with the material. This was found to be the case during the course pilot. To ensure that women can continue to engage with the material between each week, we have developed the Own My Life course Extra sessions, which are found on the Own My Life course website. The material is password protected, with the password changing occasionally. Facilitators will be notified of the password change, so they can pass this onto course participants. Each online session includes:

- A session recap.
- Reflection questions.
- Further reading.

- An additional exercise.
- An extra video to watch.

Webpage: [www.ownmylifecourse.org/extra](http://www.ownmylifecourse.org/extra)

## Resources List

All sessions:

- Tables for participants to place Own My Story journals on.
- Own My Life playlists for when participants arrive.
- Tea, coffee, milk, sugar, sweetener, juice, biscuits, fruit and, if possible, cake.
- Tissues.
- Evaluation resources:
  - Evaluation box.
  - Laminated emoji options.
- Own My Story journal (1pp).
- Pens, pencils, pencil crayons, felt tips, stickers.
- Flipchart and pens.
- AV Equipment (laptop/tablet, speaker, projector/large TV).
- Internet access for the Own My Life e-Hub.
- Own My Choices Traffic Light Laminates and pens.
- Reflective evaluation for facilitators.

Specific sessions:

- Session 1: Pre-course evaluation forms.
- Session 2: Ball of string.

- Session 9:
  - Children's worker present, if possible.
  - Flipchart paper from Session 1 "The Island" activity.
- Session 12:
  - Cake.
  - Sheets of plain A4 paper.
  - End-of-course evaluation forms.
  - Completion certificates.
  - Attendance certificates.

## Evaluation

The evaluation process for the course has two elements:

- Start- and end-of-course evaluation forms for participants.
- A weekly evaluation through the course's emoji-based ballot.

These can be used to measure changes in understanding and give participants an opportunity to share how the Own My Life course has helped them. All completed evaluation forms and ballots should be recorded in the Own My Life course Evaluation Spreadsheet (downloadable from the e-Hub). At the end of the course this provides a format to report the impact of the course with measurable outcomes. Alongside this, facilitators are encouraged to complete a weekly reflective evaluation.

## Guidance

- Facilitators should be confident in leading and facilitating groups.
- The Own My Life course should be run by at least one trained facilitator.
- Facilitators should only ever use inclusive language ('we' and 'I' rather than 'you' or 'they') during sessions.
- Facilitators provide guidance to participants throughout the sessions but also give women space to work independently.
- The Own My Life course operates as a closed programme. After week 2 the course is closed to new participants until the next cycle of the course begins.
  - No students, new staff, volunteers or others should be allowed to join the group mid-course. They should wait until a new course begins and should only be present in the course if they intend to join for the whole course.
- No men should be allowed to attend the course. This includes male workers, students or volunteers.
- Always ensure every woman has her Own My Story journal each week.
- The Own My Story journals should be stored in a safe place (women cannot take them home until the end of the course). Each woman's journal belongs to her and should only be viewed by others at the invitation of the woman who owns it.
  - The "Own My Life Course Extra" sessions are available at: [www.ownmylifecourse.org/extra](http://www.ownmylifecourse.org/extra) for women who want to continue their learning after each session.
- Always have 30 minutes preparation time and 30 minutes debriefing time, in which the Facilitator Reflective Evaluation should be completed.
- Supervision must be available for facilitators.
- The aims and objectives for each week must be considered, to ensure the focus is correct.
- The timings are advisory, and facilitator expertise is required in deciding how long each section should take.
- While the order of the sessions may be useful, there are some sessions where the facilitator and participants may prefer to change the order of the content, for instance by covering the more intense or difficult elements of the session at the beginning.
- Ensure that participants have an email address to be able to contact the facilitator during the week if they need to.
- If possible, have a children's worker present during Session 9.



	Own My Self	Own My Mind	Own My Body	Break	Own My Choices	Own My Relationships	Own My World	Own My Feelings
Time	15 mins	15 mins	15 mins	15 mins	15 mins	15 mins	15 mins	10 mins
Type	My favourite	Flipchart	Video		Traffic lights	Quiz	Video	Writing
Session 1	Introduction	Group rules	Own my story journal		The Island			
Session 2	Place	What is abuse?	Why does abuse exist?		Fixing things	Relationships	The Sick Planet	
Session 3	Song	Why can't we leave?	The Seven Steps of a Break Up		Leaving	Communication	Women's Rights Timeline	
Session 4	Food	Cycle of abuse	The Five Fs		Resistance	Relationship myths/truths	Victim blaming	
Session 5	Film	Neural pathways	Understanding the Brain		Moving on	Collusion	The Soundtrack of Our Lives	
Session 6	Animal	Safety planning	Online Safety		Living safer	Stranger danger	Intersectionality	
Session 7	Book	DASH	Power Play		Leaving safer	Decision inhibitors	Formal/Informal Reinforcements	
Session 8	Activity	Values	Traumatic Attachment		Personal integrity	Singleness	Adverts Hurt	
Session 9	Clothing	The Island with children	The Power Threat Meaning Framework		Dealing with child contact	Children's Roles	Body Modification	
Session 10	Number	Needs	Sexual Control		Attachment seeking children	Assertiveness	Rape Prevention	
Session 11	Fairy tale	New partner values	The Stress Cycle		Love Bombing	Dating calendar	I Am Whole	
Session 12	Cake	Reflect	Discuss		Kind words	What next?	Evaluations and certificates	

**\*\*TIMINGS ARE ADVISORY\*\***

# Sessions Overview



In order to aid in evaluating the course there is a weekly evaluation process.

Resources:

- Evaluation box
- Laminated emoji options
- Whiteboard pen

Instructions:

1. Before the session:
  - a. Using a whiteboard pen, write a statement about this week's content on the evaluation box (if helpful use an example statement from the table, if not create your own).
  - b. Ensure the evaluation box and laminated emoji options are placed in an area where participants can vote on the statement before leaving the session.
2. As participants leave, invite them to place whichever laminated emoji option is most appropriate for their view about the statement into the box.
3. After the session:
  - a. Enter the number of each laminated emoji option into the evaluation spreadsheet.

Example statements:

Session 1	I understand what the course is about and why it could be helpful to me.
Session 2	I know what abuse is and why some people choose to be abusive.
Session 3	I get why it is hard for someone to leave an abusive partner.
Session 4	I feel confident that I understand the cycle of abuse.
Session 5	I can see how understanding neural pathways can help me change my life.
Session 6	I feel more confident about making a safety plan and being safe online.
Session 7	I now feel more able to recognise how an abusive person will try to take power from their partner.
Session 8	I can identify some of the ways traumatic attachment could have affected me.
Session 9	I can understand more about how abusive behaviour can affect children.
Session 10	I feel more able to identify what needs I have.
Session 11	Understanding the Stress Cycle has helped me identify some ways I could cope better with stressors.
Session 12	The Own My Life course has been life changing for me.

## Weekly Evaluation Process