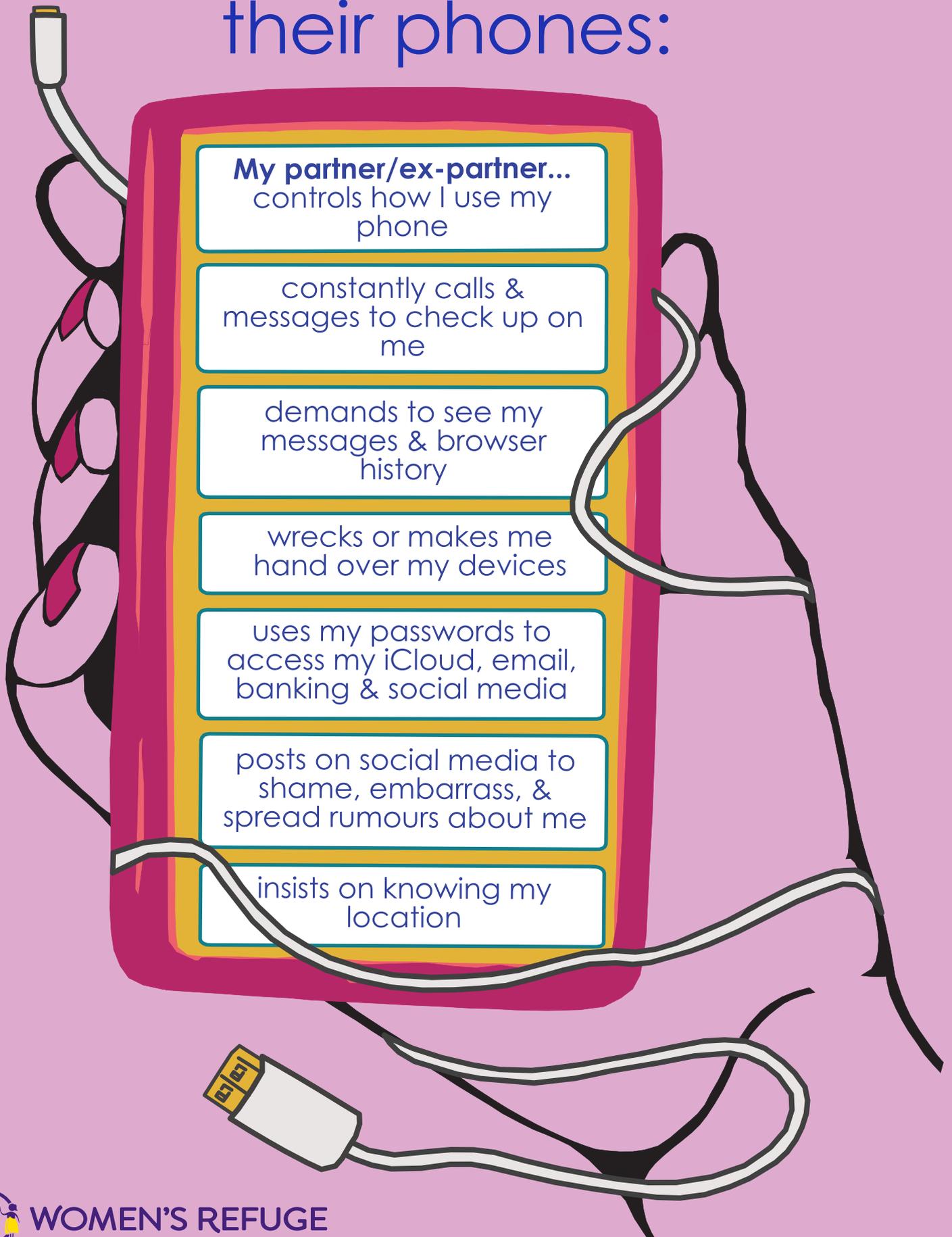


What young women say about abuse & their phones:



Key findings

Digital tactics are part of abuse

Young people's phones are used in every part of their lives. Abusive partners use phones & the internet to control, restrict & monitor them online & offline.

"It became this other way of controlling me, so even when he's not with me, he can wield this power."

Victims are kept on a digital leash

Victims had no privacy or freedom when their partners used phones to constantly check where they were & what they were doing.

"I just never felt that I could turn that off and not be tracked... He could access where I was whenever."

No easy solutions, no right choices

Victims felt there were no viable ways of stopping the abuse. Refusing or defying the abuser made it worse, & pathways to help didn't always offer safety.

"There was no way in my mind that I could avoid that kind of contact, like if I turn my phone off, it [gets] worse."

Victims are kept on-call 24/7

Abusers used smartphones to demand contact all times of the day or night. Having to constantly respond disrupted important parts of victims' lives, like mothering, school, friendships, & work.

"He always wanted me to be on Facetime... [and] would take up all my time with my son.... But it wasn't really my choice."

My phone; his right

Abusers demanded the 'right' to access victims' phones & used info on those phones to accuse victims of wrongdoing. They made victims prove their innocence & their commitment through even more restrictions.

"Every day after school, he would pick me up, he would look at my phone, and he would find something."

Having phones & being mothers

Digital abuse didn't end upon separation. Mothers faced relentless digital contact, harassment & threats, sabotaging parenting time & capacity.

"He flipped, it was a complete 360. 'I'm on my way, I'm going to punch your head in, you are holding my son from me!'"

Victims' resistance is not always obvious

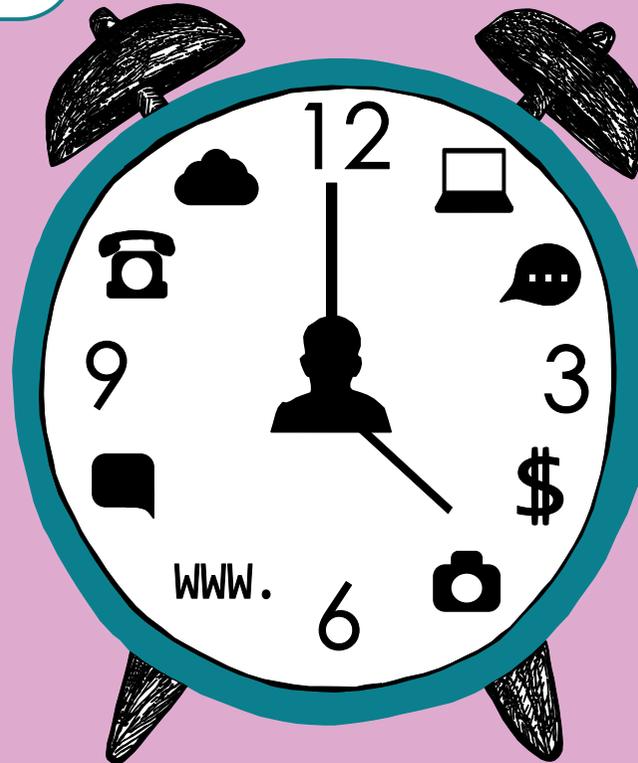
Victims continually resisted the violence & its impacts. Their resistance was often subtle & unseen, but was always purposeful & kept them safer.

"I managed to block all the numbers... there were a few death threats, but I just blocked him on everything."

Everyday abusers; everyday technology

Every phone app that can be used can also be misused. Victims listed calling, messaging, checking locations, inspecting content on devices, confiscating phones & social media shaming.

"I think he knew how important it was... he knows it's pretty important to have your phone, like if you take that away you're pretty much taking everything you can do away, and I think he used that as a tactic to keep me."



Why doesn't she...

Just change your password!

They will accuse me of hiding something

Then I can't call for help

Just switch off your phone!

They will follow me wherever I go

Why don't you just leave?!

They won't take me seriously

Why don't you just report it?!

"It is expected that [they] have [digital] access ...[if] I take it away, [he will think] I must be hiding something."

"At times when he was violent he would take my phone...and I couldn't try and get help."

"I couldn't even go to the supermarket without being messaged."

"If you try and stay away from them you will have a thousand missed calls."

"I have told [Police] and they [have] spun around [and said] 'but did he actually turn up' ... I feel like they brush it off."

The abuser said...

"I had to pick up all his calls. It could be 2 am and I have to pick up a call...I just thought that is what you needed to do."

If you loved me you'd respond right away

I believed constant contact was part of an adult relationship

"He accused me and I said absolutely not...[from then on] every day everything [on my phone] would get checked."

I'm checking your phone for your own good

But I can never look at their phone

"I would be like 'can I please go to bed' ...he would be like 'no you just want to go and sleep with other people' ... 'who is there?' and he'd make me show him all around my house like every single night [over video chat]."

Prove you're not cheating!

But I'm not doing anything wrong

"[The constant contact] would always be there and then if I didn't reply [my friends] would start getting messages being like 'is [she] okay? I haven't heard from her, just trying to seem caring.'"

I can't trust you to take care of yourself

They made it look like they were looking after me

Myth busting



MYTH: To avoid abuse, young women can just 'not engage' or 'switch off'

Phones & tech are a vital part of everyday life, & 'not responding' can escalate the abuse



MYTH: Digital tactics rely on advanced or secretive technology

Most digital abuse tactics use everyday tech like smartphones, GPS, & social media



MYTH: Young women's relationships are less serious, intense & meaningful

Both their relationships & the violence against them are equally intense and severe

MYTH: To help, you have to know a lot about new & advanced technology

We don't need to be tech experts – we just need to ask young women how their partners use phones to control them & stop them being safe



MYTH: Digital abuse is separate from & less harmful than physical partner violence

For young women, some of the most harmful abuse by partners is through smartphones - even after separating



MYTH: Young women are safe from abuse while at home, school, or work

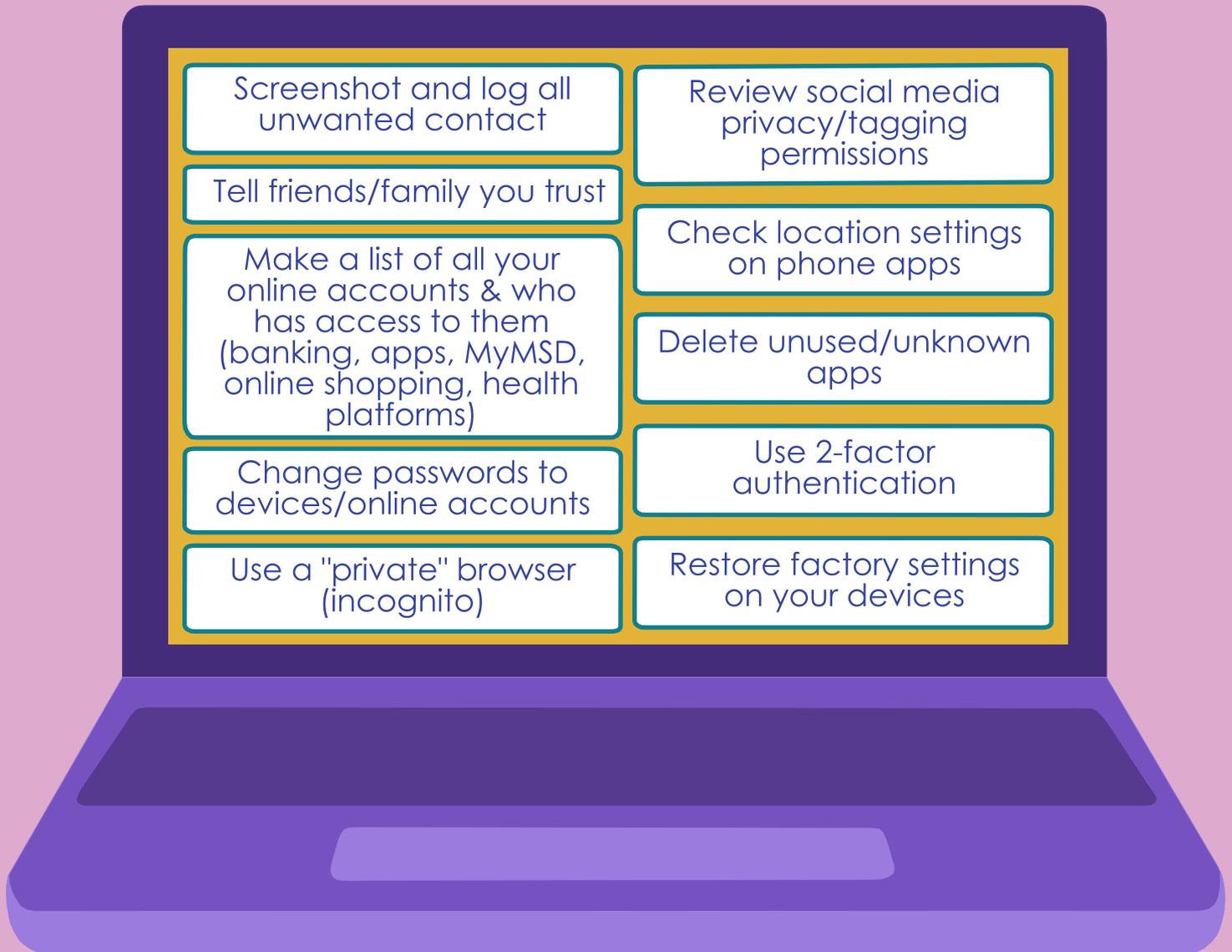
Phones mean they can be alone & unsupervised with abusive partners even at home, school, or work



MYTH: Young women are abused through phones because they don't know how to use tech safely

Abuse happens because perpetrators choose to use violence, including through digital tactics

Possible tech tips to support safety after separation



Victims will also be doing a lot of unseen safety work and will be able to add to this list.

Contact research@refuge.org.nz
for more information about
research into digital tactics



WOMEN'S REFUGE