

RUCKUS

BY JENNA FINCKEN



WILDCARD

SUMMERHALL



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

SELF-CARE GUIDE & CONTENT WARNINGS

SELF-CARE GUIDE FOR RUCKUS

This guide has been designed to support audiences attending performances of *Ruckus* by Jenna Fincken at Summerhall, Cairns Lecture Theatre (3rd - 28th Aug 2022), Southwark Playhouse, The Little (5th - 29th Oct 2022) for the UK Tour in 2024.

We completely understand how *Ruckus* might be challenging to engage with for some audiences, especially if you're affected by the content.

Ruckus is the story about the beginnings of a coercively controlled relationship. Lou is being coercively abused by her boyfriend, Ryan.

The term "Coercive control" describes a range or pattern of behaviours that enable a perpetrator to establish or maintain power and control over a partner, ex-partner or family member. This commonly features an act - or a pattern of acts - of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

In presenting Lou at the beginning of a coercively controlled relationship, this play exhibits themes of domestic violence, economic abuse, suicidal ideation, scenes of sexual nature, scenes of violence and animal cruelty.

We hope this guide will help audiences in experiencing the show, and support planning for anyone who may be concerned about their visit.

CONTENTS

- 1 About the show
- 2 Content warnings
- 3 Helplines & support
- 4 Self-care suggestions
- 5 Synopsis of the play
- 10 Thanks & about self-care

ABOUT THE SHOW

Ruckus is a one woman show that is an analysis of the suppression and destruction caused by coercive control. We follow Lou, a 28-year-old primary school teacher who's fully aware the audience are watching her. She wants to show them exact moments in her relationship, breaking down the progression of coercion as Lou journeys from freedom to being trapped. The play explores the process of coercion:

- Establishing love and trust**
- Isolation**
- Monopolising perception**
- Inducing debility and exhaustion**
- Enforcing trivial demands**
- Punishments**
- Rewards**
- Threats**
- Degradation**

Ruckus is based around Lou's experience of coercive control. Although the character and story is fictional, her story has been inspired by real stories. Playwright Jenna Fincken makes use of reports from leading charities such as SafeLives as well as the work of leading sociologists, investigative journalists and researchers tackling domestic abuse and coercive control, to create *Ruckus*.

Age recommendation: **16+**

CONTENT WARNINGS

Ruckus contains distressing themes which some people may find difficult to watch.

Analysing coercive control raises themes of domestic abuse, economic abuse, suicidal ideation, scenes of a sexual nature, scenes of violence and implied animal cruelty.

The performance includes occasional strong language and sensitive subject matter, including references to and the social care system.

HELPLINES & SUPPORT

FREEPHONE 24 HOURS

NATIONAL DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE (run by Refuge)

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Call 0808 2000 247

WOMEN'S AID

National charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children.

www.womensaid.org.uk

Email helpline@womensaid.org.uk / Live chat

Northern Ireland: 0808 802 1414

Scotland: 0800 027 1234

Wales: 0808 8010 800

GALOP

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

www.galop.org.uk

Call 020 7707 2040 / Web chat

MEN'S ADVICE LINE

The helpline for male victims of domestic abuse

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

Call 0808 8010327

SURVIVING ECONOMIC ABUSE

Provides information and resources for victim-survivors and professionals

www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/

FINANCIAL SUPPORT LINE

Partnership between Surviving Economic Abuse and Money Advice Plus to run a Financial Support line for victim/survivors of domestic abuse who are in financial difficulty

Call or text 0808 196 8845 (9am–5pm Monday to Friday)

SAMARITANS

When life is difficult, Samaritans are here - day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org, or visit www.samaritans.org to find your nearest branch.

SELF CARE SUGGESTIONS

READ THE SUMMARY

If you think the content warnings suggest that you might find the play hard to watch, have a read through the synopsis on the next page. This will give you all the details of what will happen in the play and help you to prepare for any difficult moments. Perhaps it will guide you to decide that this play might not be for you. If that's the case, that's perfectly okay. It's completely your choice.

WATCH WITH SOMEONE

See about bringing a friend, family member or someone you trust with you to the show.

IT'S OKAY TO STEP AWAY

During the performance, if you decide the show isn't for you or maybe it's too much, that's understandable. We welcome you to leave the auditorium at any point. Perhaps look out of a window or get some fresh air. This can help to make us feel grounded. If you'd like to re-enter, a staff member will help to find an appropriate moment to do so. You do what feels right for you.

TALK TO SOMEONE

If you've found the show distressing, or it has brought up anything that you weren't expecting, we'd suggest talking to someone you're with, calling a friend, or contacting one of the support services listed on the previous page.

REMEMBER YOUR BREATH

Breathing is a great way to help you feel calm. Try breathing in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

ACT 1

The piece begins with Lou informing the audience that she's going to tell them everything, and asking them to watch.

Lou starts her story at Jess's engagement party, where we meet the characters of Jess, Bryony and Ryan. When Lou is alone with Ryan outside, Ryan offers her a drink. She refuses. Ryan asks for her number, and she says no. But eventually gives a fake number. In the next scene, Jess asks Lou to move out of her house. It is then revealed that Jess gave Ryan Lou's number. Jess texts Ryan back, encouraging Lou to meet up with him.

Ryan and Lou are on a date in the next scene. After Ryan does up a button from her blouse, Lou asks to go back to Ryan's place. He declines and asks to go to the pub instead. Lou ends the meeting in a hostile way. We see Lou in the next scene organising a coffee date to apologise to Ryan.

A few months later, Lou finds out she hasn't gotten the Deputy Head promotion at Mill Hill Primary. In the next scene we can see she's upset, to the point where she chucks her phone across the room. Ryan tells Lou her screen did not smash, but later in the scene he tells her it actually did smash. Ryan finds strategies for them to move to Newquay, including his offer to pay more and for them to work out money later. Lou explains their evening to the audience, which includes them opening a joint bank account together, her cleaning her teeth so they can have sex, telling Ryan honest truths — like how she cares too much what other people think — and Lou revealing/changing her password for Ryan. It also arises that Ryan has not had a good time with his parents.

Lou and Ryan then move to Newquay. While Lou is making a list of what the front room needs, Ryan asks her why she forgot curtains. Ryan then gives Lou the silent treatment.

Next, Lou is looking for and finding toy animal figurines around the house.

Lou introduces the pupil Noah, Sharky the hamster, and the Headmistress Mrs Lowe to the audience, both characters being part of her new job at St Oaks Primary. Lou receives a bunch of roses from Ryan. Noah's mum picks up Noah and Lou explains how only she can pick up Noah at the moment. That it's the classic kind of case you learn in child protection training.

Lou gives her mum a tour of the house. Once the doors are locked, Ryan gives Lou the silent treatment. Ryan and Lou then get into a contentious discussion about where Lou's mum's boyfriend touches her (elbow or waist). They start getting ready for sex when Ryan informs Lou that he has placed the toothpaste on her toothbrush ready for her.

One month later, Lou asks Ryan for them to make plans for the weekend, after hearing about Jess and Charlie's holiday. Ryan tells Lou it's not healthy to be jealous, and that Jess and Lou are obsessed with each other. This leads to an argument, with Lou asking Ryan to log onto their joint bank account so she can see where their money is going.

At Jess's hen party, Jess takes a photo of herself and Lou kissing. Jess then sends that photo to Ryan. On the way home, Lou prepares what she's going to say to Ryan. Once home, Ryan surprises her with fish and chips. Lou thinks everything is fine. Lou finds a framed picture of herself and her dad in the bin, the photo ripped. She decides it's easier to forget.

ACT 2

Lou is looking for the toy animal figurines again. She can't reach the duck on top of the fridge. She explains to the audience that Ryan — as a game — hides the toys around the house for her to find when she's cleaning.

Next, we see Lou trying to get Noah to come out from under the table. She tells him to be a big boy and stop crying. We find out Noah has hit another pupil. Lou tells Noah he can't hit people just because they're not doing what he wants them to do. Lou listens to Noah, and then asks him what he does that he doesn't want to do. Noah then punches the table.

At home, Lou needs to call Mrs Lowe to speak about her experience with Noah that day. Ryan is not happy about this, as evenings are their personal time. Eventually, Ryan hints towards sex and asks Lou to brush her teeth. Lou says no and asks for his laptop for her work emails. He agrees.

In the next scene, Lou has overslept for work. She asks Ryan why he didn't wake her up but he says he did try three times. She checks her alarm but finds no alarms had been set, though they usually are. Ryan questions the blouse that Lou is wearing to work, as she wore it on their first date. Ryan then asks who she's trying to impress and questions why she's wearing an outfit she wore when trying to have sex with Ryan. The scene ends with Lou calling Jess. Later that day, Lou tells Ryan his behaviour in the morning was unacceptable. He apologises. He tells Lou he hates himself and wouldn't know what he'd do if Lou wasn't there. Lou ignores a text from Jess.

Lou is at Jess's wedding. After Ryan flicks Lou's hair in her face, Charlie, Bryony and Jess confront Ryan. This leads Jess to tell Lou she's worried, and suggests she move back in. Lou fights back saying Jess would only kick her out again. Lou leaves with Ryan.

Lou is looking for the toys again and is panicking that she can't find the toy duck. She checks the vacuum bag after cleaning the whole house. Ryan comes home and informs Lou that in fact: the duck was in his pocket all this time.

Lou's at the dentist with concerns of her bad breath. The dentist confirms there is nothing wrong with her breath and asks who is informing her of this issue. When Lou tells the dentist it was her partner, the dentist asks if Lou is currently experiencing any domestic abuse at home. A few hours later, Lou is waiting for the bus. Ryan has followed her. She tells Ryan she needs a break and will go home for the weekend. Ryan begs her not to leave and ends by saying that if she gets on the bus, he'd hurt himself.

The act ends with Mrs Lowe telling Lou that Noah and his mother have entered a refuge. Also, she asks Lou to keep an eye on her punctuality.

ACT 3

Lou and Jess have met up at a service station. Jess hands post to Lou that has been delivered to her's. When leaving, Jess tells Lou that she'll be at the service station next week. Lou should meet her there, and maybe stay for the weekend. Lou agrees and they hug. Then Lou confirms to the audience that neither of them knew that would be their last hug.

Sharky the hamster is staying with Lou and Ryan for the half term. Lou wants to do anything to get in the good books with Mrs Lowe after her punctuality warning. Ryan encourages Lou to go to the half term meal with her colleagues. Ryan and Lou have a tender moment playing with Sharky.

At the meal, Mrs Lowe knocks over a bottle of wine and heads to the bar. Lou clocks Ryan who has arrived early to pick her up. After Ryan being charismatic to Lou's work colleagues, they leave.

Ryan accuses Lou of being late. They get in the car, where Ryan reveals a letter. It's an interview offer from Mill Hill Primary, from the old post that Jess gave to Lou. Lou tries to explain this, but Ryan accuses her of lying and trying to leave. They enter the motorway and their argument becomes very heated. Lou asks Ryan to pull over, but instead he pulls out the key from the ignition. Lou is almost frozen in time, speaking to the audience about her experience of this moment. She begs Ryan to put the keys back in the ignition.

Hours later, Ryan and Lou are dozing on the sofa, exhausted from the previous event. Lou goes to the kitchen to get water, and notices Sharky is not in the cage. We see Lou look around then jump when she finds her. It's implied that something has happened to Sharky.

Lou tries to escape. She can't find her phone, car keys or back door key. While she looks for the back door key, she talks to the audience about her fears of not being able to go to her family, not being believed, and about what would happen to Ryan. When she finally finds the back door key and opens the back door, she decides to stay.

Lou is talking outside the story. And asks the audience if they 'saw it'. She prepares the audience for what she's going to talk about next. She explains that in three hundred and thirty eight days from now, Ryan strangles her, and how she felt in that moment. Lou explains how she feels like their relationship was her murder in slow motion. Lou confirms to the audience she doesn't want to go into all the details of that day, and how it's about the first sixteen months. How she's obsessed over it, trying to see the exact moments where it went wrong and what she would have done differently. Otherwise, she feels her life was a waste. She finally asks the audience for a final time - if they 'saw it'. She decides to start again.

The whole play rewinds and she's back to the beginning. The piece begins with Lou telling the audience she's going to tell them everything, and asking them to watch. We then hear the beginning line of the engagement party and then — blackout.

THANKS & ABOUT SELF-CARE

This guide was inspired by companies who have taken the leap into self-care in the industry. These companies include:

- 20 Stories High for the productions *Buttercup* and *Touchy*
- Clean Break's production of *Typical Girls* by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm at Sheffield Theatre
- New Diorama, Royal Court and Nouveaue Riche's production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When The Hue Gets Too Heavy* by Ryan Calais

The above companies' work informed *Wildcard* as to how we should proceed with our own approach, and we're extremely grateful. The Self-Care guide created for *Typical Girls* and *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When The Hue Gets Too Heavy* explains further detail about what does self-care means:

“ The concept of self-care comes from the Black Feminist movement. Self-care is important because it's about recognising that we experience discrimination and oppression because of how others react to who we are, or what we've experienced. Self-care is a choice to listen to our needs and look after ourselves, so we are able to keep going and live our best lives, despite the difficulties we experience in life and how they make us feel. ”

We want to end by saying thank you for reading this document, and for coming to the show - if you choose to. *Ruckus* was designed with an aim to raise awareness, and we look forward to welcoming you to the story.



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