

# Is someone you know abusing his partner?

Here's how to talk to him  
about his behaviour

*Help, Hope & Healing*



## Is someone you know abusing his partner?

You may suspect abuse is happening to a neighbour, friend or family member, but don't know what to do or how to talk about it. You may worry about making the situation worse for the woman. Understanding the warning signs is the first step.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing violence against women. This brochure describes the warning signs of abuse and how you can help by talking to the abusive man about his behaviour.



*The information in this brochure was adapted from the following:*

*©2006 Resource produced by a partnership between the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Neighbours, Friends and Families, through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. Reprinted with permission from CREVAWC.*

## Warning Signs of Abuse

If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to take action:

# HE

puts her down

does all the talking and dominates the conversation

checks up on her all the time, even at work

tries to suggest he is the victim and acts depressed

tries to keep her away from you

acts as if he owns her

lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities

acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home

## Warning Signs of Abuse

If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to take action:

# SHE

is apologetic, makes excuses for his behaviour or becomes aggressive and angry

is nervous talking when he's nearby

seems to be sick more often and misses work

tries to cover her bruises

makes excuses at the last minute about why she can't meet you or she tries to avoid you on the street

seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid

uses more drugs or alcohol to cope

*While most abuse occurs in intimate heterosexual relationships, it can occur in gay and lesbian relationships as well. The suggestions in this brochure are equally applicable.*

The danger may be greater if:

# HE

has access to her and her children

has access to weapons

has a history of abuse with her or others

has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him

says "If I can't have you, no one will."

threatens to harm her children,  
her pets or her property

has threatened to kill himself

has hit or choked her

is going through major life changes  
(e.g. job, separation, depression)

is convinced she is seeing someone else

blames her for his problems

doesn't seek support

watches her actions, listens to her telephone  
conversations, reads her emails and follows her

has trouble keeping a job

misuses drugs or alcohol

has no respect for the law

The danger may be greater if:

# SHE

has just separated or is planning to leave

fears for her life and for her children's safety

is in a custody battle, or has children  
from a previous relationship

is involved in another relationship

is pregnant

denies or minimizes the risk

has unexplained injuries

has no access to a phone

faces other obstacles  
(e.g. she does not speak English, is not yet a legal  
resident of Canada or lives in a remote area)

has no friends or family

*Statistics indicate that women who are under 25 years of age, women with a disability, Aboriginal women and women living in a common-law arrangement are at higher risk of abuse. (Statistics Canada – Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005)*

***Always keep yourself safe. Don't get in the middle of an assault. In an emergency, call the police, or 911 if available in your area.***

## How to talk to men who are abusive

Sometimes people who know an abusive man overlook his behaviour and focus on supporting the woman. At other times, people may sympathize with the abusive man, which may inadvertently escalate his abuse. Talking to an abusive man is an important part of preventing violence against women, but it needs to be done carefully. Abusive behaviour won't go away on its own.

## Here is what you can do when you think it's time to talk to him

- Choose the right time and place to have a full discussion.
- Approach him when he is calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen.
- Tell him that his behaviour is his responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments about him as a person. Don't validate his attempt to blame others for his behaviour.
- Inform him that his behaviour needs to stop.
- Don't try to force him to change or to seek help.
- Tell him that you are concerned for the safety of his partner and children.
- Never argue with him about his abusive actions. Recognize that confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse and put her at higher risk.
- If the woman's safety is in jeopardy, call the police, or 911 if available in your area.

## If he denies the abuse

- Men who are abusive will often minimize the impact and deny that they have done anything wrong. They may state that it isn't that bad or blame the victim for their actions. This type of behaviour deflects his own responsibility for his actions.

- Keep your conversation focused on your concerns for his family's safety and well-being and reiterate that abuse is never an answer.
- Keep the lines of communication open and look for opportunities to help him find support.

## Why does he do it?

- *Violence against women is a learned behaviour. The abuser learned to use violence as a way of expressing anger or frustration long before entering an intimate relationship.*
- *He chooses to do it: He doesn't assault his boss when he gets angry, but he assaults his wife.*
- *It works for him: He gets his way.*
- *He gets away with it – if he is not arrested and charges are not filed.*

## Why does she stay?

- *She loves him and hopes he will change.*
- *She believes her children need their father.*
- *She has no means of supporting herself and her children.*
- *She is isolated and has no support from family and friends.*
- *She feels ashamed.*
- *She may not be aware of services that are available.*
- *She may not have transportation.*
- *She believes he will kill her if she leaves.*
- *She is an immigrant, sponsored by her husband, and is unaware of her rights. She may believe she will be deported if she reports the abuse or leaves him.*

Here are some concerns you may have about whether you should help:

## Points of Concern

You feel it's none of your business.



You don't know what to say.



You might make things worse.



It's not serious enough to involve the police.



You are afraid his violence will turn to you or your family.



You think she doesn't really want to leave because she keeps going back to him.



You are afraid he will become angry with you.



You feel that both partners are your friends.



You believe that if he wanted help or wanted to change his behaviour, he would ask for help.



You think it is a private matter.



## Points to Consider

It could be a matter of life or death. Violence is everyone's business.

Saying you care and are concerned is a good start.

Doing nothing could make things worse.

Police are trained to respond and can refer to other services.

Speak to him alone. Let the police know if you receive threats.

She may not have had the support she needed.

Maybe, but it gives you the chance to offer your help.

One friend is being abusive and one lives in fear.

He may be too ashamed to ask for help.

It isn't when someone is being hurt.

## Who can help?

Call VictimLink at 1 800 563-0808, a 24-hour crisis line for B.C. in up to 130 languages.

In an emergency, call your local police or 911, if available in your community.

**Stopping violence against women is everyone's responsibility.**

Ministry of Community Services

[www.gov.bc.ca/csersv](http://www.gov.bc.ca/csersv)

