

# Is someone you know being abused?

Do you know the warning signs?



*Help, Hope & Healing*



## Are you concerned that someone is being abused, but don't know what to do?

You may suspect abuse is happening to a neighbour, friend or family member, but do not know what to do or how to talk about it. You may worry about making the situation worse. This brochure describes the warning signs and the steps you can take to help.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing violence against women. You can reach out to organizations in your community that support women at risk of abuse and those that can help abusers.

### Definition of Violence against Women

*Violence against women is a serious social problem that takes many forms, including:*

- *domestic violence (also known as spousal abuse, wife assault, or intimate partner violence);*
- *sexual assault;*
- *sexual harassment; and*
- *criminal harassment (also known as stalking).*

*Violence against women takes place in homes, workplaces, schools, institutions and community settings, and it puts children who are exposed to it at greater risk of developmental, behavioural and emotional difficulties. Violence affects women of all age groups, cultures, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.*

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

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## 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seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid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.**

## Here are some of the ways you can help when you recognize the warning signs of abuse:

- Talk to her about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her you believe her and that it is not her fault.
- Encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected.
- Offer to provide childcare while she seeks help.
- Provided your own safety is not at risk, offer your home as a safe haven to her, her children and pets. If she accepts your offer, do not let her partner in.
- Encourage her to pack a small bag with important items and keep it stored at your home in case she needs it.
- Know that you or she can call VictimLink at 1-800-563-0808, your local transition house or safe home. In an emergency call the police, or 911 if available in your area.

## If she denies the abuse:

- Assure her she can talk to you any time.
- Don't become angry or frustrated with her decisions. It is important to understand that she may be afraid or not ready to take the next steps.
- Try to understand why she might be having difficulty getting help. She may feel ashamed.
- Offer to go with her if she needs additional information or support.
- If she has children, let her know gently that you are concerned about her and her children's safety and emotional well-being. She may be more willing to recognize her situation if she realizes her children may also be in danger.

## 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 she will become angry with you.



You feel that both partners are your friends.



You believe that if she wanted help, she would ask for it.



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 her alone. Let the police know if you receive threats.

She may not have had the support she needed.

Maybe, but she will know that you care.

One friend is being abusive and one lives in fear.

She 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)

