Safer Families...Safer Communities

You Can Know the Warning Signs that Someone is Being Abused

Home is not always the safe place it is supposed to be. For some women and children it is violent and terrifying.

I'm concerned that someone I know is being abused. What can I do?

Whether it is a **friend, family member, co-worker or neighbour,** you can reach out. Given the extent of family violence in Canada, there is a good chance that someone you know—either personally or professionally—is experiencing abuse, even if you don't suspect it. Learning to recognize the warning signs and risk factors is the first step. And when you do see these signs, you can help. Everyone has a role to play in ending violence in our communities.

How common is family violence?

- One in ten women is abused each year in Canada by her spouse, partner or boyfriend
- 15% of all violent incidents reported to police involve spousal violence
- 83% of the victims of spousal violence are female
- Female victims of family violence are much more likely than male victims to be injured, fearful, or suffer health problems because of the abuse
- 40% of wife assaults begin when the woman is pregnant
- Seniors who are victims of family violence are most likely to report being abused by an adult child or a current or former spouse

Are some people at greater risk of being abused?

Although anyone can be a victim, including men, research shows that some people are at much **greater risk of experiencing abuse** and feeling trapped when it happens. This includes:

- Young women
 - Aboriginal women
 - Women isolated in the home perhaps living on a farm or rural community
 - Women who are pregnant or have young children
 - Women in common-law relationships
 - Recently separated
 - · Persons with a disability
 - Elderly persons

Did you know?

Family violence is a term that describes abuse in the family or intimate relationships. The abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, spiritual, or financial.

Victims of abuse are most often women, elderly family members and/or children.

Other terms you might hear are domestic violence, wife battering, spousal assault, child abuse and elder abuse.

What are the warning signs that someone is at risk of abuse?

In most cases of family violence there are many warning signs that abuse is happening. Although there is no single indicator, you can learn about the many "red flags" that indicate someone is acting abusively and that someone is experiencing abuse.

To reach out to someone experiencing abuse, whether it is physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual or financial abuse, you must first learn the **indicators of abusive behaviour** and **recognize the warning signs that someone is being abused.**



Take these indicators and warning signs seriously

Indicators someone is acting abusively

- Puts partner down and acts superior
- Does all the talking and dominates the conversation
- Tries to keep her away from family and friends
- Checks up on her all the time, even at work
- · Hits or slaps partner
- Threatens to harm partner, children, pets or property
- Makes direct or indirect threats involving firearms
- Minimizes the violent behaviour claims to be the victim.
- Says he can't live without her & threatens suicide
- Has a history of abusing others, even animals
- Has no regard for the law
- Abuses drugs or alcohol
- Is extremely jealous and suspicious
- Uses access to the children to harass her

Warning signs someone is being abused

- May be apologetic and make excuses for the abusive behaviour
- Has no friends or family no access to a phone
- Is nervous about talking when her partner is there
- Tries to cover up bruises
- Fears for her life and for her children's safety
- Makes excuses or avoids you on the street
- Is in denial and cannot see her risk
- Blames herself for the violent behaviour and "walks around on eggshells"
- Seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid
- Seems sick more often and misses work
- Seems defensive and angry
- Copes by using drugs or alcohol
- Is involved in another relationship
- Is in a custody battle for the children

I'd like to help but I don't want to interfere in a family or personal situation. Aren't there professionals to help victims of abuse?

If you are not sure about offering help to someone you think is experiencing abuse, consider these points:

Common concerns	Points to Consider
• It's really none of my business.	It could be a matter of life or death. Violence in the community is everyone's business.
• I don't know what to say.	• Say "I care", "I believe you" and "It's not your fault". Showing you are concerned is a good start.
• I might make things worse.	• Doing nothing could make things worse — abuse often gets worse over time.
• It's not serious enough to involve the police.	 Police are trained to respond — and even if the behaviour is not criminal, they know about other resources to help families experiencing abuse.
• I'm afraid he might turn violent with me or my family if I interfere.	• Speak to her alone. Let the police know if you receive threats. Be sure to say if there are weapons available.
• I don't think she really wants to leave because she keeps coming back.	Maybe she did not have the support she needed to overcome obstacles - no money, no place to live, no job, no babysitter, no transportation, unable to communicate, etc.
• I'm afraid she will get angry with me.	Maybe she will. But she will also know that she can turn to you when she is ready.
• I'm afraid he will get angry with me.	Maybe he will. But he also knows that you are offering your help.
• They are both my friends.	• If one friend is being abused and living in fear, you should be supportive.
• I should wait until she asks for help.	She may be too afraid and ashamed to ask for help.
• If he wanted help or wanted to stop his behaviour he would.	• He may be too ashamed to ask for help.
• What happens in the privacy of the home is a family matter.	• It isn't when someone is being hurt — it's wrong and it is against the law.

For more information

For more information on what you can do if you do see these warning signs, be sure to read the other fact sheets in this series. To find out about family violence organizations and resources in your community call **1-888-236-2444.**





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To learn more on this topic, you can contact the following local organization(s):

