

## Before Getting Married...



Be Sure Your Home is Loving and Safe

### Getting married brings images of love, affection, caring and support. What will your home be like?

Getting married is a very important decision. Couples who make this commitment have the opportunity and the responsibility to create a home environment that is supportive, loving and secure for all members of the family.

Sometimes this is not the case. For some family members, home can be a violent and terrifying place. It can be a place where family members are devalued and humiliated. When this happens, it is called “family violence”.

### But we’re in love!

It takes more than romance to make your home loving and peaceful. Some individuals who seem loving and caring at one moment are controlling and manipulative the next. It might start with an angry outburst, followed by remorse and tenderness, gifts and promises. Next there may be sorrow for hurting you, tears, threats of suicide or pleas for forgiveness. But it happens again and again. This is known as the “cycle of violence”. If it describes your relationship you should get help now, because it usually gets worse over time.

Think carefully about how you can make sure your relationship is a caring and mutually supportive one.



### Don’t all families have their squabbles?

Yes, every family has disagreements and even an occasional argument. But this is not the same as the systematic abuse suffered by victims of family violence. Many live with despair, self-blame, thoughts of suicide, drugs or alcohol. Their misery may be repeated over generations since children who grow up in homes where insults, beatings and threats of harm are part of everyday life, may think this is “normal” family life. It isn’t.

### Once we’re married things will get better!

Getting married is not a magical cure for a hurtful relationship. Once married, many people experiencing abuse feel trapped. They may stay and suffer for many reasons. Here are a few.

- They don’t want to break their wedding vows - not realizing that their spouse has already broken the vows.
- They fear being judged by family, friends, church and community - not realizing that these are the very people who can be supportive.
- They feel shame and guilt.
- They love their spouse and hope for change.
  - They are financially dependent and have young children.
  - They fear people will not believe them because their spouse is a good provider, a loving parent and a respected community member.
  - They are not aware of social assistance, legal solutions or support.

Breaking the cycle of violence is not easy. Consider seriously what you are doing before you find yourself in a difficult marriage. Remember, the situation might even become dangerous.

### Can things change if we really try hard?

Change is not easy. If there is violence or abuse in your relationship now and you decide to get married without seeking help, your home may never be a peaceful place. Consider these points.

- **You can’t change another person - change must come from within.** Your partner must admit it is wrong to mistreat you. He or she must decide to get help and be willing to go for counselling to unlearn abusive behaviour.
- **Just because your partner says “sorry” and “things will change” does not mean they will.** Ignoring insults or hoping it will get better does not work. Things will probably get worse.
- **If your relationship doesn’t get better, your children can be affected even if they are not abused.** Children who see one parent belittle or harm the other are often anxious and confused. They may even lose respect for the parent who is abused. Moreover, they are more likely to find themselves in abusive relationships later on.
- **Your partner may blame you for everything.** Most abusive persons blame somebody else for their acts. Or they make excuses to justify their violence. There is no excuse - nobody deserves to be abused! Your partner needs to change.
- **Change will not happen overnight.** It takes a commitment to real change and outside help.

### It can’t happen in our relationship!

Many people who hear about family violence think it could not possibly describe their situation. Their partner hasn’t beaten them. But, abuse is not limited to **physical violence** and it can happen to anyone.

It may involve emotional abuse such as constant insults and put downs or isolating you from family and friends. It might be subtle like not letting you grocery shop or drive. But it takes more serious forms too such as threats to harm you, the children, pets or your property.



If your partner insists on controlling all the household money, it can lead to financial abuse by forcing you to be completely dependent. Abuse can also include sexual assault if there is unwanted or forcible sexual touching and activity. This can happen even in a marriage.

All these forms of abuse are wrong and some, such as physical and sexual assault, are even criminal. Most abusive persons eventually do use physical force.

## Are there warning signs? Does your partner...

Think he/she is always right?

Put you down, say you are too fat, too skinny, ugly or stupid?

Always decide what to do and where to go?

Tell you how to dress or wear your hair?

Want you to give up all of your friends?

Insult your work or your courses at school?

Force you to have sex when you do not want to?

Get angry and break things?

Slap or push you or threaten to hurt you? If you answer **yes** to these questions, you may be in an abusive relationship.

## What can I do if I answered YES to these questions?

Get help and make sure there has been real change before you go ahead with marriage. Talk to somebody who can tell you about your options. Reach out for help. There are resources available as well as people who take family violence seriously! These might include:

- family counselling or mental health clinic
- minister or clergyperson
- family doctor or public health nurse
- school guidance counsellor
- employee assistance program
- police or RCMP (if you are being physically or sexually assaulted)
- your local transition house
- victim services office
- a lawyer or domestic legal aid
- Public Legal Education [www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca](http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca)
- RAVE – [www.theraveproject.org](http://www.theraveproject.org) – a religion and violence e-learning initiative that seeks to bring knowledge and social action together to assist families of faith impacted by abuse.



Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick

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