

# Family Violence: Recognizing & Helping



## If you are concerned about someone you know

- 1) Look at the list of abusive behaviours in the document “Family Violence: Building a Definition”. Have you observed these behaviours over a time? If so, it may be an abusive relationship.
- 2) Look for changes in the person’s behaviour.
  - No longer attending events they used to attend regularly
  - Withdrawal from friends and family
  - Changes in personality - sadness, anger, weariness
  - A change in medical needs
  - Bruises or other physical injuries inconsistent with how the person claims they occurred
- 3) The following are all clues that the person might be dealing with abuse. These are changes in behaviour that you may have noticed in someone you know.
  - Signs of injury (bruises, sores, broken bones) that are unexplained or not clearly explained
  - Depression, withdrawal
  - Anxiety, fear
  - Unwillingness to make even simple decisions without her partner
  - Limited access to money
  - Very little time spent with friends and family outside the relationship
  - Drug or alcohol abuse

**Know that it is your business.** Preventing abuse is everybody’s business in a safe and caring community.

**Know that there is something you can do.** An act of support and positive encouragement can make a big difference to someone who is being abused. Contact a community or government resource for advice or ideas on helping. Information listed at the end of this document will give you a starting point.

**Know that it isn’t hopeless to get involved.** People who are abused tend to develop low self-esteem and lose their self-confidence. It may take time for them to find their way out of the relationship. They must overcome their fears, plan for their safety, and take steps toward independence. Your positive

support and encouragement can help. Victims may suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This affects their ability to make decisions and take action.

## Finding the right words

Use caution and assess the situation. For example, if you are approaching the person at work, be aware that this is their professional environment. You must be aware of the relationship you have with the person and recognize that they may not be ready to talk.

There is no perfect way to bring up the subject of abuse. Telling them you care about their safety and the safety of the children can be a powerful way to start. Make family violence material available to them as well.

Because people who use abusive behaviours employ isolation as a tactic to control, the person suffering abuse may think no one knows what they are going through. Letting a victim know you're concerned may be a welcome surprise.

Ask permission to share what you know about abuse, and be sure to let them know you will help in any safe way you can.

Because this is someone you know and care about, just let them know that you care and the door may be open to begin talking about the abuse.

## If someone admits to being in an abusive relationship

For example, if a female friend told or student told you this, what should you do?

### *What to do*

- 1) Let her know you believe her. Listen to what she is saying.
- 2) Tell her she doesn't deserve to be hurt, and that the abuse is not her fault. She doesn't deserve to be abused. Nobody does.
- 3) Express your concern privately and ask, "How can I help?" Encourage her to talk to someone who can help her identify the risks and develop safety plans.
- 4) Honour her feelings and experiences. She may need to talk about the good things as well as the bad in the relationship.
- 5) Find out what she wants to do and support her decision. She may seem confused, which is one of the effects of abuse. She may also decide something and then change their mind, which is also typical.

- 6) Accept that she may want to stay in the relationship or try again to make it work. Don't criticize. Just remind her that you are there, no matter what she decides.
- 7) Be prepared for many different feelings or reactions. She may feel guilty or embarrassed for telling you—or even angry that you know. Don't take any reactions personally. Keep reminding her that you are there for her, that you accept her exactly as she is, and that you will back her in her choices.

### What not to do

- 1) Don't make judgments or give advice. You don't know what her experience is like. You don't know what's right for her, even if you've been in a similar situation. Listen and accept her no matter what.
- 2) Do not criticize her partner. Abusive partners may not be bad all the time, so if you criticize the partner, she may feel forced to defend the partner, or may feel that you think she's stupid for staying with him.
- 3) Other than asking, "How can I help?" don't ask unnecessary questions. She may feel uncomfortable discussing the abuse, and may shut down if you ask questions. To her, any question may feel like prying. Open the door for her to talk, and then just listen.
- 4) Don't overreact. If you express shock or horror, she may stop talking.
- 5) Don't confront her partner. It could make a bad situation worse.

## Child abuse & non-reporting

The failure to recognize child abuse, and in some cases the failure to acknowledge its reality, leads to non-reporting.

People often don't want to get involved. The nature of child abuse, the secrecy and shame, the legal implications, and the immaturity and relative dependency of its victims all serve to reduce voluntary reporting.

Children generally want to talk about their abuse so it can be stopped, but they are often afraid that they will not be believed or protected, or are fearful of the possible consequences of disclosure.



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