

Family Violence: Is this me?



It may take time to realize your relationship is abusive. It may take time to admit that a person you love, someone you thought loved you, is willing to say and do things that hurt you. Many of those individuals who realize they are in an abusive relationship want the abuse to stop but want to keep the relationship if they can. It takes time to find out if it is possible to keep the relationship but stop the abuse. If there are children involved, the issues are even more complex.

Changing or leaving an abusive relationship is not easy. It takes time and effort. The process can be messy. A victim of abuse is most at risk for homicide within the three months after ending a relationship. Victims also often face financial barriers to leaving and threats to have the children taken away from them. Sometimes it seems like taking two steps forward and one step back.

Know that you are not alone. In 2004, about 8% of Canadian women report having been abused by an intimate partner—that means 653,000 women were abused that year. Friends, other family members, neighbours, social workers, doctors, and others are all possible sources of support. There are also many community resources available to help you.

Know that you are not worthless, ugly, stupid, or unlovable. You are a normal person in a unhealthy relationship. Living with abuse lowers your self-esteem, your self-image, and your self-confidence, but abuse is not about your worth. It is about how your partner chooses to behave.

Know that you can tell someone. Pick a person you trust: a friend, family member, counselor, health care worker, victim advocate, family violence outreach worker, or community services staff person. It is okay to ask for help. Silence and acceptance will only give the person who uses abusive behaviour more power and allow the abuse to continue.

Know that it is not your fault. Abuse does not happen because of you. Your words and actions do not cause the abuse. Abuse happens because your partner chooses to act in an abusive way. You do not deserve the abuse. Nobody does.

Know that it will happen again. Patterns of abuse are always there. Abuse does not stop until someone does something to stop it. Usually, violence and abuse become more frequent and more severe over time.

Know that there is something you can do. The choices you are facing may not be easy. Whether you leave the abusive relationship or work to create a relationship that is not violent, you may need to let others help you. Many people and agencies are available to help, no matter what you decide.

Know that abuse is never acceptable. Your vows and commitment to your partner did not include an agreement to be insulted, hurt, raped, or scared. Abuse harms your physical and emotional health. If you have children, the abuse causes them trauma and slows down their ability to grow. They may have trouble learning and forming healthy relationships. You are worth more and so are the children.

Know that all abuse counts, even if your abuser was stressed or drunk. Stress, gambling, substance abuse, and other addictive behaviours often go along with abuse. However, they do not cause abuse. Lots of people who experience stress or use alcohol and drugs do not hurt other people. Abusive behaviour is learned, and it is a choice the person who uses abusive behaviour is making.

What to do

I am in an abusive relationship

Local women's shelters can provide information to help women abused by their partners. Even if you do not plan to stay in a shelter, you can call your local shelter for information about abuse in families. They will be able to give you information about resources or services in your community. Visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca or call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at 780-310-1818 to find a shelter near you. Some communities have shelters for partners who use abusive behaviours and for male victims of spousal abuse.

There are children in my household

- 1) Think of the safety and best interests of the children first.
- 2) Get legal advice about custody, access, and maintenance issues.
- 3) Tell the children that even though the adults in their home do not get along, the children are not to blame and the abuse is not their fault.
- 4) Do everything in your power to expose the children to healthy relationships, and to environments that are safe, predictable, and loving. Children need to know that most adults are kind to one another and that most homes are safe.
- 5) Help the children connect with healthy adults outside the immediate household. Find adults who care about the children's well-being and whom the children can count on to be stable and predictable.
- 6) Help the children find ways to succeed. Children who know they are good at something are stronger in themselves, even when they are in abusive environments.

I am a young person living in an abusive home

Know that you are a strong person to have survived as long as you have.

Know that you can have a better life.

Know that you are not responsible for the abuse and violence. The abusers are responsible for their actions. You do not deserve to live with abuse; you do not deserve to be abused. No one does. You deserve a safe, health, and loving home.

Know that you are not alone. Others have been in a situation like yours and have gone on to have a safe and happy life. You can too.

Look for people who are strong without being mean or violent. Look for people living a life that you would enjoy, that have healthy, affectionate relationships with their friends and family. Notice how they act and what they do. If you can, seek out opportunities to be with them or talk with them.

Find ways to be in places that are safe, fun and health. Find places that you enjoy, that make you feel good, and spend as much time in these places as you can.

Find activities that are fun and safe. Find activities that help you discover more of your talents and gifts.