

Neighbours, Friends and Families

How You can Identify and Help Women at Risk of Abuse

Are you concerned about someone you think is being abused, but don't know what to do? This brochure describes the warning signs and the steps you can take to help.

Neighbours, Friends and Families is a campaign to raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse so that people who are close to an at-risk woman or an abusive man can help.

Everyone in the community has a role to play in helping to prevent woman abuse. You can reach out to organizations in your community that support abused women and those that can help abusers.

This campaign is a partnership between the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Neighbours, Friends and Families, through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.



Warning Signs of Abuse

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, or be concerned about what to do. By understanding the warning signs and risk factors of woman abuse, you can help.

If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to take action:

He puts her down
He does all the talking and dominates the conversation
He checks up on her all the time, even at work
He tries to suggest he is the victim and acts depressed
He tries to keep her away from you
He acts as if he owns her
He lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities
He acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home

She is apologetic and makes excuses for his behaviour or she becomes aggressive and angry
She is nervous talking when he's there
She seems to be sick more often and misses work
She tries to cover her bruises
She makes excuses at the last minute about why she can't meet you or she tries to avoid you on the street
She seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid
She 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.)

Signs of High Risk

The danger may be greater if:

He has access to her and her children
He has access to weapons
He has a history of abuse with her or others
He has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him: He says "If I can't have you, no one will."
He threatens to harm her children, her pets or her property
He has threatened to kill himself
He has hit her, choked her
He is going through major life changes (e.g. job, separation, depression)
He is convinced she is seeing someone else

She has just separated or is planning to leave
She fears for her life and for her children's safety **or** she cannot see her risk
She is in a custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship
She is involved in another relationship

He blames her for ruining his life
He doesn't seek support
He watches her actions, listens to her telephone conversations, sees her emails and follows her
He has trouble keeping a job
He takes drugs or drinks every day
He has no respect for the law

She has unexplained injuries
She has no access to a phone
She faces other obstacles (e.g. she does not speak English, is not yet a legal resident of Canada, lives in a remote area)
She 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 common-law are at higher risk of abuse. (Statistics Canada: Family Violence in Canada. A Statistical Profile 2005)

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.
- 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 the Assaulted Women's Helpline, your local shelter, or, in an emergency, the police.

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 recognizes her children may also be in danger.

Here are some concerns you may have about whether you should help:

Points of Concern	Points to Consider
You feel it's none of your business	It could be a matter of life or death. Violence is everyone's business
You don't know what to say	Saying you care and are concerned is a good start
You might make things worse	Doing nothing could make things worse
It's not serious enough to involve the police	Police are trained to respond and utilize other resources
You are afraid his violence will turn to you or your family	Speak to her alone. Let the police know if you receive threats

Points of Concern	Points to Consider
You think she doesn't really want to leave because she keeps coming back	She may not have had the support she needed
You are afraid she will become angry with you	Maybe, but she will know you care
You feel that both partners are your friends	One friend is being abused and lives in fear
You believe that if she wanted help, she would ask for it	She may be too afraid and ashamed to ask for help
You think it is a private matter	It isn't when someone is being hurt

Always keep yourself safe. Don't get in the middle of an assault. Call the police in an emergency. Everyone can work to prevent woman abuse.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline at **1-866-863-0511** offers a 24-hour telephone and TTY **1-866-863-7868** crisis line for abused women in Ontario. The service is anonymous and confidential and is provided in up to 154 languages.

Helpline staff can support you in helping the abused woman or abusive man. They will discuss the warning signs of abuse you have seen and give you practical advice on ways to help.

For more information about the services of the Assaulted Women's Helpline visit: www.awhl.org
In an emergency, call your local police service.

Most Ontarians feel a personal responsibility for reducing woman abuse. Recognizing it is the first step. Take the warning signs seriously. For further information visit:
www.neighbourfriendsandfamilies.on.ca