

How you can identify and help women at risk of abuse

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- She seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid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

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(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
- 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 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
- 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)

Ways to Support Her

Here are some of the ways you can help when you recognize the warning signs of abuse:

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- 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.

Overcoming Your Hesitation to Help

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
- You think she doesn't really want to leave because she keeps coming back

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- 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.

Information

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.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.on.ca

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