

Neighbours, Friends and Families

How to Talk to Men Who are Abusive

Are you concerned about someone you think is abusive to his partner, but don't know what to do? This brochure describes the warning signs and how you can talk to abusive men about their behaviour.

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. 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 may be apologetic and makes excuses for his behaviour or 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She seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid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, reads 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)

Sometimes people around an abusive man overlook his behaviour and only focus on supporting the abused woman. At other times, people may sympathize with the abusive man, which may inadvertently escalate his abuse. Talking to an abusive man is an important part of preventing woman abuse, but it needs to be done carefully. Abusive behaviour won't go away on its own. There are services to help him in his community.

Here is what you can do when you recognize the warning signs of abuse:

- Choose the right time and place to have a full discussion.
- Approach him when he is calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen.
- Tell him that his behaviour is his responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments about him as a person. Don't validate his attempt to blame others for his behaviour.
- Inform him that his behaviour needs to stop.
- Don't try to force him to change or to seek help.

- Tell him that you are concerned for the safety of his partner and children.
- Never argue with him about his abusive actions. Recognize that confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse and put her at higher risk.
- Call the police if the woman's safety is in jeopardy.

If he denies the abuse:

- Men who are abusive will often minimize the impact and deny that they have done anything wrong. They may state that it isn't that bad or blame the victim for their actions. This type of behaviour deflects his own responsibility for his actions.
- Keep your conversation focused on your concerns for his family's safety and well-being and reiterate that abuse is never an answer.
- Keep the lines of communication open and look for opportunities to help him find support.

Always keep yourself safe. Don't get in the middle of an assault. Call the police in an emergency.

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 him 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 going back to him	She may not have had the support she needed
You are afraid he will become angry with you	Maybe, but it gives you the chance to offer your help
You feel that both partners are your friends	One friend is being abusive and the other lives in fear
You believe that if he wanted help or wanted to change his behaviour, he would ask for help	He may be too ashamed to ask for help
You think it is a private matter	It isn't when someone is being hurt

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