



What is intimate partner violence?

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Intimate Partner Violence (domestic violence) is any action or behaviour that causes harm and is perpetrated within an intimate relationship (e.g., marriage, dating, common law). These behaviours can also happen after the relationship has ended. Anyone, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, gender, or faith, can experience domestic violence. This abuse can take many forms.

Coercive Control

A pattern of abusive behaviours that are used to control or intimidate the victim/survivor. This pattern of controlling and intimidating behaviours deprives the victim/survivor of their basic rights to liberty, autonomy, and dignity. Examples include:

- Tracking their whereabouts
- Destroying property or harming pets
- Isolating them from their friends and/or family
- Controlling their access to money or employment
- Using family courts, lawyers, or the child welfare system to intimidate them or maintain in contact with them once the relationship has ended
- Gaslighting (e.g., lying about what happened, blaming them for things that were not their fault, trivializing or dismissing their feelings)

Physical Abuse

Any behaviours that can cause physical harm or threaten physical harm. Examples include:

- Pushing or shoving
- Hitting, slapping or kicking
- Pinching or punching
- Throwing objects at someone
- Strangulation or choking
- Burning
- Using a weapon to threaten or cause harm
- Stabbing or cutting

Sexual abuse

- Forcing or pressuring the victim/survivor to engage in any unwanted sexual activities. Examples include:
- Any unwanted sexual activities, touching or kissing
- Forcing them to watch pornography
- Making unwanted sexual comments or remarks
- Pressuring them to engage in sexual activities with others
- Posting their intimate photos or videos online without their consent
- Misusing a position of power or trust (e.g., doctor, therapist, counsellor, caregiver) to gain consent for sexual activities
- Sexual contact with anyone who is unable to give consent (e.g., underage, asleep, intoxicated from drugs or alcohol)

Psychological or emotional abuse

This includes any non-physical behaviour that can cause harm. Over time, these behaviours often erode a victim/survivor's self-esteem and/or make them question their sense of reality or judgement. Examples include:

- Name-calling
- Yelling or screaming
- Embarrassing them in private or in front of others
- Blaming them for the abuse they are experiencing
- Threatening physical harm
- Threatening to harm someone they love, including their friends, family, or pets
- Threatening self-harm if they leave the relationship
- Accusing them of cheating or being overly jealous of their friendships with others
- Gaslighting (e.g., lying about what happened, blaming them for things that were not their fault, trivializing or dismissing their feelings)

Stalking or criminal harassment

This includes repetitive behaviours that are used to control, intimidate, or scare victims/survivors. In cases where a relationship has ended, an abusive partner might stalk or harass their ex-partner as a way to regain control and continue their abuse. Examples include:

- Using technology to track their whereabouts
- Showing up to their work or home uninvited
- Sending unwanted letters, gifts, or packages
- Sending repetitive text messages or phone calls
- Spreading rumours about them
- Damaging property

Economic or financial abuse

This form of abuse prevents the victim/survivor's access to financial resources or controlling their financial decisions. Examples include:

- Preventing them from working or making them work reduced hours
- Spending their money without their permission
- Preventing them from having a bank account or access to shared bank accounts
- Monitoring their expenses or credit card statements
- Maxing out their credit cards without their explicit permission
- Not paying agreed upon child support or using money set aside for children on other expenses without mutual agreement between the co-parents
- Refusing to provide money for basic needs, such as medicine, food, rent, or clothing

Legal abuse or harassment

Abuse can also include misusing the criminal justice, family courts, or child welfare services to harass, maintain control over, or stay in contact with the victim/survivor. Examples include:

- Threatening to make or making false allegations about them to child welfare, the police, or family courts
- Providing misinformation about the justice system or child welfare agencies to prevent them from accessing needed supports
- Threatening to use family courts or child welfare to “take away” their children
- Engaging them in lengthy custody battles

Cyber abuse or technology-facilitated abuse

This form of abuse includes the use of technology (e.g., social media, phone, internet) to harass, abuse, or control a partner or ex-partner. This can involve:

- Using technology to stalk someone (e.g., spyware apps, hidden cameras, GPS)
- Impersonating someone online to spread rumours or ruin their social connections with friends and family
- Sending repetitive unwanted or harassing messages through text, social media, email, or other online platforms
- Preventing someone from having access to technology (e.g., destroying their phone, not letting them use shared internet devices)
- Sharing or threatening to share someone's intimate or sexually explicit photos or videos online without their permission
- Non-consensual deepnudes and deepfakes
- Hacking to gain access to someone's e-mail account

Spiritual, religious or cultural abuse

In the context of domestic violence, this type of abuse includes the misuse of cultural norms or religious scripture to justify abusive behaviours or assert control over the victim/survivor. Examples include:

- Misuse or misciting of scripture or cultural norms to justify or minimize abuse
- Misuse or misciting of scripture or cultural norms to restrict access to healthcare, including reproductive healthcare
- Isolating them from their spiritual or cultural communities
- Restricting their access to spiritual or cultural practices that they would like to follow
- Forcing them to follow spiritual or religious practices that they do not wish to follow

Immigration-related abuse

Sometimes, abusers might use the victim/survivor's immigration or refugee status to control them. Examples include:

- Threats of deportation if they leave the relationship
- Taking away important immigration or legal documents (such as passports or refugee status card)
- Not allowing them to learn English (or the host country's national language)
- Not allowing them to gain the training or education required for gainful employment in the host country
- Giving them false information about the Canadian legal and immigration systems or restricting their access to obtaining the correct information