

Read this fact sheet if you're a woman who's:

- afraid for your safety or your children's safety because your partner is mistreating you, and
- wondering if your partner's actions are abuse.

In this fact sheet, **partner** means the male person you are or were married to, live or lived with in a marriage-like relationship, or have a child with.

See *Who Can Help?* for resources for the LGBTQ/2S community.

What's abuse?

Abuse includes behaviour ranging from threats to physical or sexual assault. It may also include harmful emotional, verbal, and financial actions.

An abuser uses threats and violence to get power and control over their partner. Often, the abuser blames the abuse on the victim. But abuse is the abuser's fault. *Abuse against you isn't your fault.*

Here are some examples of relationship abuse.

Emotional or verbal abuse includes when your partner:

- embarrasses you, yells at you, insults you, or calls you insulting names;
- constantly criticizes and blames you for everything;
- doesn't let you contact friends and family;
- threatens to have you deported; or
- accuses you of having or wanting to have sex with someone else.

Psychological abuse includes when your partner:

- decides or limits what you do, where you go, or who you see;
- opens and reads your mail, text messages, email, or other private mail;
- follows or watches you wherever you are;
- posts sexual photos or videos of you without your permission;

- phones, texts, or emails you a lot, especially when you've asked not to be contacted;
- checks your phone or internet activity; or
- threatens to hurt you, your children, friends, or a pet.

Financial abuse includes when your partner:

- makes all the household money decisions and doesn't let you have any money;
- doesn't let you use bank accounts or credit cards;
- won't let you get a job or makes you lose your job; or
- runs up debts in your name.

Sexual abuse includes when your partner:

- forces you to have sex when you don't want to or haven't given consent;
- forces you to perform sex acts that make you uncomfortable or hurt you; or
- injures sexual parts of your body without your agreement.

Physical abuse is when your partner:

- stops you from leaving your home;
- breaks your things, damages property, or threatens to damage something that you value; or
- shoves, slaps, bites, chokes, punches, or kicks you, or hurts you with a weapon or any object.

It's also abuse if your partner threatens to kidnap your children, or threatens to use the courts to take your children away from you.

Abuse can continue after you leave your partner. For example, your abuser may threaten to take you to court to pressure you to do what they want. Or they may keep taking or trying to take you to court, or not pay child support that the court ordered.

Who's most at risk?

Abuse affects women of all backgrounds. Studies show that women who are at more risk of experiencing abuse include young women, Aboriginal women, women with drug or alcohol addictions, women with disabilities, and women living in poverty. Help is available for all women.

When is abuse against the law?



Any kind of abuse is harmful. But many kinds of abuse are also crimes:

- **Physical assault** is when your partner hits or hurts you. It's also when your partner threatens to hit or hurt you, and you believe that can and will happen.
- **Sexual assault** is when anything sexual happens to you that you don't agree to. This includes unwanted kissing, sexual touching, and forced intercourse (rape).
- **Criminal harassment** (sometimes called **stalking**) is when your partner forces unwanted and constant attention on you. It's a pattern of threats and actions that makes you afraid for yourself and your children. The law says that your partner can't phone or email you again and again, follow you, threaten you, or threaten to destroy your property.

Why do you stay?

Women stay with abusive partners for many reasons. You may stay for the following reasons:

- You believe things will change. You may be a victim of a "cycle of violence" — a repeating pattern of violence in an abusive relationship. It may begin with tension that slowly builds until a violent event happens. Later, your partner may be sorry, promise it won't happen again, and be loving. This may convince you both that the abuse will end. But this pattern of abuse often happens again.

- You feel financially dependent on the abuser, especially if you have a disability.
- You're afraid for your children's safety.
- You're afraid of losing your home, your children, or your immigration status.
- You think no one will believe the abuse happened.
- You have no social supports and feel alone.
- You don't know about your legal rights or support services that can help you.
- You don't speak English well and think that you won't be understood, or you're a newcomer to Canada.
- You feel pressured by family, community, religious, cultural, or societal beliefs.

You can get help



Because you're in an abusive relationship, you might feel embarrassed, ashamed, depressed, frustrated, trapped, guilty, or afraid and may not want to tell anyone or ask for help. Abuse in relationships *isn't* a private family matter. You can get help, whether you want to stay in the relationship or leave.

Start by telling someone you trust and who you think will believe you about the abuse. Make a safety plan (action plan) that sets out steps you can take to protect yourself when abuse happens. See *Safety Planning*.

Where can you find help?



VictimLinkBC gives confidential, multilingual support to women experiencing abuse. They offer referral services and information about support resources.

1-800-563-0808 (24 hours a day)

There are many trained people and services that give support, referrals, legal advice, and information. See *Who Can Help?*