

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Assessment Guide

This guide is intended to assist community professionals or resource people coming into contact with women who are emotionally abused, by providing tools for assessing emotional abuse, and ways to respond.

Emotional abuse is the repeated use of controlling and harmful behaviours by a partner to control a woman. As a result of emotional abuse, a woman lives her life in fear and repeatedly alters her thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and denies her needs, to avoid further abuse.

Important Factors to Consider:

- ◆ Abuse can happen to any woman regardless of her age, culture, ability, or socio-economic background.
- ◆ If a woman has been physically assaulted, she has most likely been emotionally abused as well, although the reverse is not necessarily true.
- ◆ Emotional abuse is the greatest predictor of physical violence. Therefore, any woman who has been emotionally abused is **also at risk of murder or suicide**.
- ◆ A woman may seek help indirectly and hope the professional will identify the abuse.
- ◆ Abused women have identified that the long-term effects of emotional abuse are greater than any other form of abuse, including physical violence.

TACTICS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

It is impossible to create a complete list of the tactics that are used by abusive men to control their female partners. The following list represents the most reported forms of abuse by women who are or have been in an emotionally abusive relationship. When speaking with a woman, it is also helpful to determine whether the acts are of a repeated and ongoing nature, or isolated incidents.

Does the woman report that her partner has:

Verbal Abuse:

- ◆ Criticized her, told her she is stupid, fat or ugly or called her names;
- ◆ Told her that no one else would want her or that she could not make it on her own;
- ◆ Made racist comments about her cultural background;
- ◆ Criticized her spiritual beliefs;
- ◆ Played mind games with her; lied to her or recreated events;
- ◆ Refused to talk to her for long periods of time - silent treatment;
- ◆ Shamed or humiliated her if she needs him to take care of physical needs related to a disability;
- ◆ Denied his actions or minimized them;
- ◆ Told the woman that all the problems in the relationship are her fault;

Does the woman report that her partner has:

Isolation:

- ◆ Interfered with her relationships with family, friends or co-workers;
- ◆ Made accusations of infidelity if she spoke to another man, or accused her of being a lesbian if she has female friends;
- ◆ Interrogated her about her whereabouts and the people she talked to;
- ◆ Prevented her from attending her faith community;
- ◆ Refused to allow a woman to go to work school or other independent activities;
- ◆ Did not allow her to take English classes;
- ◆ Refused to provide ASL interpretation where needed for a deaf woman;

Threats:

- ◆ Threatened to deport her if she does not stay in the relationship;
- ◆ Threatened to kill himself; said that he can't make it without her;
- ◆ Threatened to take the children from her or ensure she never sees them again;
- ◆ Threatened to harm or kill her, her children, family, friends, farm animals or pets;

Intimidation:

- ◆ Destroyed or thrown out things that were important to her;
- ◆ Slammed doors; punched holes in walls; pulled phone out of the wall;
- ◆ Yelled at her; would not allow her to speak;
- ◆ Held a deaf woman's hands so she could not sign; refuse to use a Blissymbolics board or other communication devices;
- ◆ Took her wheel-chair out of reach or damage her scooter;

Sexual Abuse:

- ◆ Insisted that she have sex with him in whatever manner he wanted and whenever he wanted;
- ◆ Threatened to have affairs, or accuse her of having affairs if she did not have sex with him;
- ◆ Withheld sex in a malicious way, to punish her or make her feel bad about herself;

Financial Abuse:

- ◆ Did not allow her any access to financial resources;
- ◆ Made her account for every penny she spends;
- ◆ Denied her the opportunity to work outside of the home;

Neglect:

- ◆ Refused to assist a woman with a disability to the toilet, left her in bed or neglected her for long periods of time;
- ◆ Denied her basic needs such as food or hygiene;
- ◆ Refused to allow additional help in the home to take care of her needs.

IMPACT OF THE EMOTIONAL ABUSE

You may also be able to identify signs that a woman is being emotionally abused, by her behaviours and the ways she has been impacted by the abuse. One constant for women who are abused is fear. In addition to the indicators listed below, there are two key questions used to assess if a woman is being emotionally abused:

- ◆ Does the woman indicate that she is fearful of negative reprisals from her partner if she does not do what he wants?
- ◆ Does the woman alter her behaviour, preferences or choices as a result of this fear?

How does she present her partner or the relationship?

- ◆ Does the woman seem to be unable to make a decision independent of her husband/partner?
- ◆ Is the woman quick to defend her partner from any criticism or make excuses for her partner's behaviour? Does she minimize his behaviour or the impact on her?
- ◆ Does she take responsibility for making things better in the relationship?
- ◆ Does she seem fearful of doing anything that might make her partner upset?

How does she present herself?

- ◆ Have you noticed that she is becoming less confident and able to speak for herself?
- ◆ Is she quick to put herself down or discount positive feedback?
- ◆ Does she always take the blame for things, especially anything to do with her relationship?

What is her overall well being?

- ◆ Is she having difficulty sleeping and feeling repeatedly tired?
- ◆ Does she report feeling anxious all of the time? Does she appear jumpy?
- ◆ Is she depressed or suicidal?
- ◆ If a woman has a chronic illness or disability, does it seem to be getting worse?
- ◆ Is she developing health problems that are related to stress?
- ◆ Is she using drugs or alcohol to cope?
- ◆ Does she say that sometimes she feels like she is going crazy?

Level of Isolation/Independence

- ◆ Does the woman have any sources of support outside of the relationship?
- ◆ Has she quit or pulled out of work, school or other social activities?
- ◆ Does her partner always accompany her to appointments?
- ◆ Has her partner relocated the woman away from family, friends or job?
- ◆ Does she have access to money?
- ◆ Is the woman prevented from learning English?
- ◆ If the woman has a disability, does her partner insist that she needs no one but him to help her?

RESPONDING TO EMOTIONALLY ABUSED WOMEN

Women consistently report that the biggest problem they have with getting help is that no one takes emotional abuse seriously. Improving your own response to women who have been emotionally abused can truly make a difference.

Unhelpful Responses:

- ◆ Blaming the woman for the abuse or suggesting that if she just tried harder, or was more supportive to her husband the abuse would end;
- ◆ Making excuses for her abusive partner, such as he is under stress, or it is due to his alcohol or drug use;
- ◆ Suggesting that what they need is couples counselling; implying either directly or indirectly that she is equally responsible for the emotional abuse that she is experiencing;
- ◆ Trying to take control of the situation and telling her what she must do;
- ◆ Minimizing the abuse, and telling her to be grateful that he is not hitting her;
- ◆ Blaming the abuse on the woman's disability;
- ◆ Focussing on the treatment of her depression or anxiety — including the use of prescription drugs, and labeling her mentally ill instead of looking at the abuse that has caused it;
- ◆ Discounting the abuse as part of her culture.

Helpful Responses to Emotional Abuse:

- ◆ Listen respectfully and take an abused woman seriously; ask her what she needs;
- ◆ Reassure her that you will keep her confidence and clearly explain confidentiality;
- ◆ Ask open ended questions about abuse, and include examples of emotional abuse;
- ◆ Believe an abused woman's story;
- ◆ Let the woman identify what is having the greatest impact on her;
- ◆ Help an abused woman see her strengths and survival skills;
- ◆ Help an abused woman see how she had been losing self-confidence;
- ◆ Assist an abused woman to plan for change;
- ◆ Help an abused woman understand the impact on the children;
- ◆ Direct the woman to someone who can help her;
- ◆ Have brochures available in different languages;
- ◆ Ensure that a woman with a disability is asked what she needs to come to the office, such as a Braille map or someone to meet her;
- ◆ Utilize trained Cultural or American Sign Language Interpreters;
- ◆ Suggest that she get legal advice so she knows her rights and;
- ◆ Respect a woman's choices.

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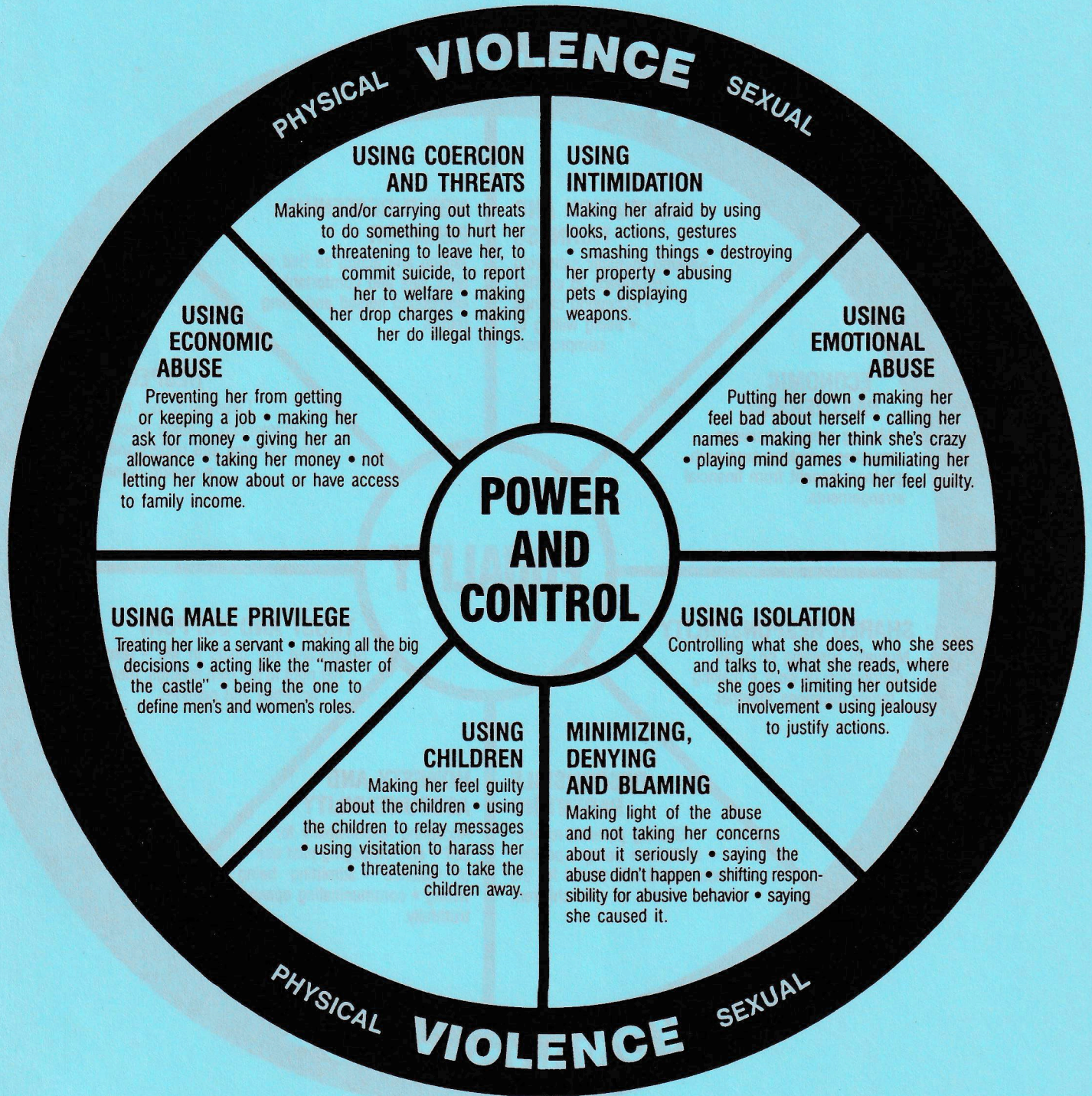
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ARE YOU EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE?

Questions for Men to Ask Themselves

Emotional abuse in intimate relationships is a serious problem. Many people believe that physical violence is the only legitimate form of abuse. Women say that emotional abuse affects them as much, if not more, than physical violence. Emotional abuse can lead to family breakdown, mental distress and physical illness, death, and has a negative impact on the children in the family.

The goal of this fact sheet is to provide information so that emotional abuse can stop.

It begins with you.

Do you...

- ◆ Call your partner names or put her down?
- ◆ Prevent her from having her own life, going to school, work, or getting together with friends and family?
- ◆ Make decisions that affect your partner or family without consulting her?
- ◆ Criticize everything that your partner does, complain about how she cooks or takes care of the children?
- ◆ Do everything to win an argument including threatening or intimidating your partner?
- ◆ Give your partner the silent treatment for hours, days or even longer to punish her?
- ◆ Want to have sex after an argument and insist it's because you love her?
- ◆ Involve the children in your arguments, threaten to harm or take them away from your partner forever?
- ◆ Stop her from using sign language if she is deaf or hard of hearing?
- ◆ Blame your partner for everything and never admit you are wrong?
- ◆ Control the money and make all financial decisions?
- ◆ Lie and hide things from your partner?
- ◆ Refuse to listen to your partner's thoughts, feelings or concerns?
- ◆ Use her disability or deafness to belittle or control her?

Do you believe that...

- ◆ You have the right to make all the decisions in the relationship?
- ◆ Your partner is to blame when things go wrong?
- ◆ Women are inferior to men?
- ◆ Women's role is only to have children and take care of her husband?
- ◆ You alone know what is best for your family?
- ◆ It is only abuse if you hit your partner?

Think about it...

- ◆ Most women say that emotional abuse affects them more than physical abuse. For some it is the main reason they leave.
- ◆ You can be criminally charged for threatening, stalking or harassing your partner or ex-partner.
- ◆ It is wrong to force or coerce someone into having sex. If the person did not consent, you can be charged with Sexual Assault.
- ◆ Children who grow up in abusive homes are more likely to have problems in school, and later on in life. Boys may grow up to be perpetrators of abuse in their own adult intimate relationships.
- ◆ Alcohol or drugs do not cause abuse. You are responsible for your actions.
- ◆ Unemployment and work stresses do not cause abuse. Most people experience problems in life, but not everybody is abusive.
- ◆ Many people may not understand emotional abuse or take it seriously. Find people that can support you to change.
- ◆ Everyone deserves to be valued, respected and safe, and free from abuse.

Take Action Now!

- ◆ Many women say that what they really want is for their abusive partners to take responsibility for their behaviour and go for help.
- ◆ Contact the community services in your area and ask for a referral. Be specific about what you are looking for. Programs may be offered in different languages, or for deaf and hard of hearing men through culturally specific community centres. For centres that do not have a TTY, contact the operator for the Bell Relay Service.
- ◆ If you live in an area where there are no services, talk to your family doctor or someone you trust. Look for written information on emotional abuse.
- ◆ Couples' counselling is not appropriate where abuse is involved. If you are abusive, it is your responsibility to change. Your partner is not responsible for the abuse.
- ◆ Support your partner if she is going for counselling and do not interfere or interrogate her about it.
- ◆ Do it for you! Accept that your partner may leave even if you go for help. Your counselling must not be a way to control your partner or keep her in the relationship. It will still benefit you, your future relationships, and your children.

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Responding to Emotional Abuse: How You Can Help Someone You Know

Violence against women, or woman abuse, happens to more women than we think. Most women who are physically assaulted by their intimate partners are emotionally abused. However, not all women who are emotionally abused are physically abused. It is likely that you know a woman who is being emotionally abused by her partner. It could be your friend, sister, neighbour or co-worker. Whatever your relationship to an abused woman, it is difficult to admit that someone you care about is being abused. Very often, people want to help, but do not know how. If you know a woman who is being emotionally abused, and want to help, these are some things you can do:

1. Gather information about emotional abuse and the resources available.

- ◆ You don't have to solve the problem, but you can provide support and information.
- ◆ Look in the front of your phone book for the crisis line or women's shelter for services in your area.
- ◆ Get information on emotional abuse so you can understand what she is going through.
- ◆ If the woman does not speak English, there may be services in her language, or cultural interpreters available.
- ◆ If the woman has a disability, or is deaf, make sure you refer her to appropriate services.

2. Recognize that emotional abuse has as much, if not more, of an impact on a woman's overall health and well being as physical violence.

- ◆ She may become ill, depressed, anxious, or use alcohol or drugs to cope. If she has a disability, it may get worse due to the abuse.
- ◆ Encourage her to take care of herself. She may want to speak to her family doctor or a counsellor who deals with woman abuse.
- ◆ If she has children, it may be difficult for her to go out on her own. You could assist her with child-care so she can attend appointments or have some time to herself.

3. Assure her that you believe her and that you take emotional abuse seriously.

- ◆ Listen and be understanding. Encourage her to talk about what she is experiencing.
- ◆ Let her know you will keep what she has told you private.
- ◆ Let her know that you are concerned for her safety and well being and want to provide support. Never tell her that she is lucky that she is not being hit.

4. Do not blame her or make excuses for her partner.

- ◆ Alcohol or drug use, a job loss, or a bad childhood does not cause abuse.
- ◆ Having a disability or living with someone who has a disability is not a justification for abuse.
- ◆ The family's cultural or spiritual beliefs are not the cause of the emotional abuse.
Woman abuse happens in all cultures.

- ◆ Understand that it is normal for an abused woman to deny what is happening, or make excuses for her partner.
- ◆ Encourage her to understand there is no excuse for any form of abuse.

5. Support her to be safe.

- ◆ Understand that emotionally abusive partners also commit physical assault, murder, or murder-suicide. An abused woman is at most risk of being killed when leaving her partner.
- ◆ Take her fears seriously. She may have been threatened by her partner and be fearful of him.
- ◆ Let her know that she can go to a shelter for abused women.
- ◆ Suggest that she develop a safety plan.
- ◆ Encourage her to learn about her legal rights and the rights of her children.

6. Ask her how you can help.

- ◆ Do not take over. Her partner already controls her.
- ◆ Remember that she will make the decisions that are best for her.
- ◆ She may want to get help for herself before making any other decisions.

7. Help her to recognize her strengths and feel better about herself.

- ◆ Women who are abused demonstrate incredible strength when they balance the everyday demands of life, such as home, children, work and school.
- ◆ A woman's self-confidence and esteem may have been greatly eroded by emotional abuse.
- ◆ She may believe that she cannot make it on her own.
- ◆ She may start by taking steps towards independence, such as going back to school or getting a job.
- ◆ Encourage her to set small and realistic goals.

8. Respect her decisions and support her if she stays. A woman may not want to leave her partner, even if you think that is what is best for her.

- ◆ Many people do not understand how difficult it is to leave an abusive partner. Do not tell her that you would have left a long time ago.
- ◆ She may lose her home, car, farm and farm animals, and financial support for herself and her children if she leaves.
- ◆ She could be isolated from her cultural community. She may not speak English and be fearful of being on her own.
- ◆ She may not have access to physical supports she needs to be on her own.
- ◆ Understand that abusers often use children or threaten to abduct their children if she talks about leaving.
- ◆ Respect her decisions and tell her she will not lose your support if she stays.
- ◆ Recognize that identifying emotional abuse is the first step, and that it may take time for her to make changes in her life.

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Emotional Abuse of Women by Male Partners: The Facts

In heterosexual relationships, most abuse happens to women by their male partners. Emotional abuse, like physical abuse, is used to control, demean, harm or punish a woman. While the forms of abuse may vary, the end result is the same – a woman is fearful of her partner and changes her behaviour to please him or be safe from harm. Many people think that emotional abuse is not as serious or harmful as physical abuse. Women state that this is not true, and that the biggest problem they often face is getting others to take emotional abuse seriously.

Some tactics of emotional abuse by an abuser are to:

- ◆ Isolate a woman from her friends, family, cultural or faith community, or care providers, and prevent her from having independent activities such as work, English as a Second Language classes or other education;
- ◆ Act overly jealous or possessive; accuse a woman of having affairs if she talks to another man; coerce her into sexual activity to prove her love;
- ◆ Criticize a woman constantly – her actions, size and appearance, and abilities;
- ◆ Use a woman's disability or deafness to demean or control her;
- ◆ Threaten, intimidate, harass, or punish a woman if she does not comply with her abusive partner's demands;
- ◆ Use the children to control a woman, for example, by undermining her authority as a parent or threatening to take them if she should leave;
- ◆ Make all of the decisions in the family, withhold information and refuse to consult her about important matters such as where they live, or the family's finances;
- ◆ Control the money – what is spent, how it is spent, not allow a woman access to financial resources, or refuse to contribute to any of the household expenses.

Commonly Asked Questions

1. How many women are emotionally abused?

More women experience emotional abuse than physical violence. 35% of all women who are or have been in married or common-law relationships have experienced emotional abuse¹. In comparison, 29% of women have been physically assaulted by their male partners².

2. Is emotional abuse a safety risk to women?

The presence of emotional abuse is the largest risk factor and greatest predictor of physical violence, especially where a woman is called names to put her down or make her feel bad³. Emotionally abusive partners also commit murder or murder-suicide. Women are at most risk of being killed when they leave their partners⁴. Women themselves can also be suicidal as a result of emotional abuse.

Please see over

3. How can emotional abuse be as hurtful or harmful as physical abuse?

Most women indicate that emotional abuse affects them as much, if not more than, physical violence. They report that emotional abuse is responsible for long-term problems with health, self-esteem, depression, and anxiety⁵. In one study 72% of women reported that being ridiculed by their abusive partners had the greatest impact on them, followed by threats of abuse, jealousy, and restriction (or isolation). It was also found that the impact increased with the frequency of the emotional abuse⁶. However, like women who are physically and sexually abused, emotionally abused women demonstrate incredible resilience and inner strength as they successfully balance the everyday demands of life such as children, school and work.

4. Aren't women just as emotionally abusive as men?

Emotional abuse, just like any other form of abuse, is about power. Women may exhibit some of the behaviours labeled as abuse, but it is critical to assess whether her actions give her power and make her partner fearful of her. Research has shown that being female is the single largest risk factor for being a victim of abuse in heterosexual relationships⁷, something that is clearly reflective of women's lower status in our society.

5. Why don't women just leave?

Women generally do whatever they can to end the emotional abuse, whether directly or indirectly, such as trying to avoid, escape or resist their [abuser] in some way⁸. Unfortunately, women who are emotionally abused often find that their experiences are minimized or misunderstood by those they turn to for help. In addition, beyond short-term emergency shelters and services, there are few long-term options available to abused women. The lack of accessible affordable housing, inadequate income support, legal aid, and day care prevent a woman from having the resources to live free from abuse. As a result of these and other barriers, an emotionally abused woman usually leaves her partner an average of five times before ending her relationship⁹.

¹ Statistics Canada. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile. (1998:15)

² Ibid:9

³ Ibid:17

⁴ American Psychological Association. Violence and the Family: Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family. (1996:39)

⁵ Education Wife Assault. Emotional Abuse Focus Group. April 1999.

⁶ Follingstad, D., Rutledge, L., Berg, B., Hause, E., Polek, D. The Role of Emotional Abuse in Physically Abusive Relationships. *Journal of Family Medicine*. Vol. 5(2) (1990:113)

⁷ American Psychological Association. Violence and the Family: Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family. (1996:19)

⁸ Ibid:36

⁹ Henderson, A.J.Z., Bartholomew, K. and Dutton, D.G. He loves me: He loves me not: Attachment and separation resolution of abused women. *Journal of Family Violence*, 12(2) (1997): 186

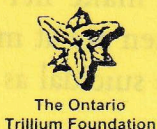
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ARE YOU EMOTIONALLY ABUSED?

Questions for Women in Heterosexual Relationships

Many women find that emotional abuse is difficult to name or even talk about. They often wonder if it is serious because you cannot see it, like bruises or broken bones. Emotionally abused women state that one of the biggest problems they face is that others seldom take it seriously. These questions will help you identify if you are being emotionally abused, and provide some ideas on what you can do about it.

What is your relationship like?

- ◆ Do you feel that something is wrong with your relationship, but you don't know how to describe it?
- ◆ Do you feel that your partner controls your life?
- ◆ Do you feel that your partner does not value your thoughts or feelings?
- ◆ Will your partner do anything to win an argument, such as put you down, threaten or intimidate you?
- ◆ Does your partner get angry and jealous if you talk to someone else? Are you accused of having affairs?
- ◆ Do you feel that you cannot do anything right in your partner's eyes?
- ◆ Do you get mixed messages, such as the reason you are abused is because he loves you?
- ◆ Are you told that no one else would want you, or that you are lucky your partner takes care of you?
- ◆ Do you have to account for every moment of your time?
- ◆ When you try to talk to your partner about problems, are you called names such as bitch or nag?
- ◆ Are you prevented from going to work or school, or from learning English?
- ◆ Does your partner threaten to withdraw your sponsorship or send you back to your country of origin?
- ◆ If you wish to spend money, does your partner make you account for every penny, or say you don't deserve anything?
- ◆ After an argument, does your partner insist that you have sex as a way to make up?
- ◆ Does he use the children against you in arguments? Does your partner threaten that you will never see the children again if you leave?
- ◆ Does your partner blame you for everything that goes wrong?

How are you affected?

- ◆ Are you unable or afraid to make decisions for yourself?
- ◆ Do you do anything you can to please your partner or not upset him?
- ◆ Do you make excuses for your partner's behaviour?

- ◆ Are you forgetful, confused or unable to concentrate?
- ◆ Have you noticed changes in your eating, sleeping, alcohol or drug use?
- ◆ Have you lost the interest or energy to do the things you used to?
- ◆ Do you feel sick, anxious, tired or depressed a lot of the time?
- ◆ Have you lost contact with your friends, family or neighbours?
- ◆ Have you lost self-confidence and do you feel afraid that you could not make it alone?

What can you do about it?

- ◆ Realize that emotional abuse is a serious problem and you can get help.
- ◆ Recognize that emotional abuse is as bad or worse than physical abuse.
- ◆ Take your own safety and the safety of your children seriously.
- ◆ Know that emotional abuse can lead to physical violence or death.
- ◆ Know that you are not to blame for your partner's abusive behaviour.
- ◆ Find people to talk to that can support you. Consider going for counselling.
- ◆ Do not give up if community professionals are not helpful. Keep looking for someone that will listen to you and take emotional abuse seriously.
- ◆ Recognize that you have the right to make your own decisions, in your own time, and that dealing with any form of abuse may take time.
- ◆ Trust yourself and your own experiences. Believe in your own strengths. Remember that you are your own best source of knowledge and strength, and that you already have the tools you need to survive.

Where can you turn?

- ◆ Women's help lines are for you too. Find the number in the front of your phone book.
- ◆ Shelters do accept women who are emotionally abused and have not been physically abused. The help line can refer you to the one nearest you. Use the Bell Relay Service if they do not have a TTY. If you have a disability, ask where there is an accessible shelter in your area.
- ◆ If you have been threatened with harm or death, or are being stalked (followed and harassed) by your partner or ex-partner, you can call the police. Dial 911, or if you are in a rural area, find out the emergency number.
- ◆ If you are considering leaving, especially if you have children, see a lawyer. In Ontario you can call, **1-800-268-8326**, for referrals to a lawyer and be entitled to a free half-hour visit.
- ◆ Abused women are at the greatest risk of being harmed or killed when they leave. Ensure that you have a safety plan in place.

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Tips for Service Providers and Organizations

Until we accurately name and understand the problem of violence in same-sex relationships, our effectiveness in dealing appropriately with this issue will be limited. We encourage readers to contact us with additional suggestions for improving agency responses to victims and perpetrators of violence in same-sex relationships.

TIPS FOR COUNSELLORS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS:

1. **Be ready, willing and able to explore:**
 - your attitudes and assumptions about violence in same-sex relationships;
 - your understanding of the abuse dynamics in same-sex relationships;
 - what, if anything, triggers you with regard to domestic violence in lesbian, gay and transgender relationships; and,
 - gay, lesbian and transgender relationships in general.
2. **Recognize that the gay community is not a single entity.** The lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual communities are highly varied in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, dis/ability, class and political beliefs.
3. **Assist clients in identifying options** if they wish to receive service from a lesbian or gay counsellor and make appropriate referrals if necessary. Before you refer, check out with your client to see if there are any accessibility issues. For example, physical access, cultural interpretation, ASL/LSQ interpretation.
4. **All clients need to have their sexuality openly acknowledged** regardless of whether they are strongly identified as lesbian or gay. Recognize that:
 - a) heterosexist attitudes may impede disclosure of abuse;
 - b) denial of the sexual desires of women and men with disabilities can result in increased "invisibility" of lesbians and gay men with disabilities;
 - c) fear of being "outed" to friends and family--particularly for women and men who are dependent on them for personal care or financial support.
 - d) if there are immediate shelter needs, keep in mind differences in food, cultural differences amongst residents, culturally different parenting approaches, homophobia from other residents, etc.)
5. **Institute a rigorous assessment procedure to assist you** in determining who is the victim and who is the perpetrator when cases of so-called "mutual battery" come to your attention. Check to ensure you do not assume that the person accompanying a victim to an appointment is not the perpetrator.
6. **Be aware of the difference between battery and sado-masochism (S/M).** They are not the same thing. S/M is often blamed or used as a way to dismiss battery and violence in gay and lesbian relationships. S/M is considered consensual power play for pleasure that includes safeguards such as agreements and "safe words" to stop a "scene". If those measures are not respected, it may mean abuse is happening.

(Please see over)

7. **Use non-heterosexist language (partner, spouse)** when asking about sexual partners or perpetrators until the sex of the partner is disclosed.
8. **Be knowledgeable of possible referrals** to gay-positive support groups, legal advocates and intervention programs for batterers.
9. **Inquire about issues related to children**, e.g. are there any child witnesses to the abuse? Issues related to children witnessing violence in lesbian or gay relationships will be similar to heterosexual relationships. Fear of being "outed" may, however, exacerbate the issues for children of lesbians/gay men. Remember that children or youth of lesbians presenting issues related to witnessing violence could be dealing with issues concerning violence in a previous heterosexual relationship. In addition, lesbian mothers who are not the biological or "birth" mother, or who have a disability or who are deaf, may be deterred from taking legal action for fear of homophobic and /or ableist response from the courts regarding custody and access arrangements.
10. **Be aware that sexual assaults can be perpetrated by same-sex partners.** Lesbians may be less likely to receive service for sexual assault from a woman.

In working with victims/perpetrators in gay/lesbian relationships I frame the abuse as power and control issues. I offer them a language of responsibility and accountability. I help the victims with the impact of abuse and their safety needs. I help the perpetrators look at changing their behaviour.
 - Alysa Golden

TIPS FOR ORGANIZATIONS/AGENCIES:

1. **Check your resources and advertising material** (mission statement, philosophy, brochures, intake forms, house rules, etc.) for inclusive language. For example: do intake forms include the terms lesbian, gay and same-sex partner when asking about marital/family status or next of kin?
2. **Review recruitment, hiring and evaluation practices to ensure homophobia is addressed as a barrier to volunteering, employment and promotion.** For example:
 - Are candidates questioned about homophobia and providing service to lesbians/lesbian families?
 - Are jobs/volunteer positions posted to reach lesbians and/or gay men, including those from communities such the Deaf community, ethno-specific communities and people with disabilities?
 - Is anti-homophobia/anti-heterosexism education provided for all new staff, volunteers and board members?
3. **Check policies and programs to ensure they are inclusive and create a gay-positive work environment for staff as well as clients.** For example:
 - Do personnel policies include benefits and bereavement policies for gay/lesbian families?
 - Do anti-discrimination/affirmative action statements include sexual orientation?
4. **Evaluate your programs for responsiveness and accessibility to lesbians and gay men who are victims/perpetrators of domestic violence.** Ensure your programs and materials reflect the diversity of the lesbian and gay communities. Some frequently overlooked issues include:
 - family violence programs addressing children witnessing violence in lesbian or gay relationships;
 - parents dealing with issues related to having gay children; and,
 - the availability of gay and lesbian positive books, videos, periodicals, or articles for clients and staff.

Compiled by Marsha Sfeir and Joanne Bacon

**Contact us with your ideas at www.womanabuseprevention.com
 or call 416-968-3422 (Voice and TTY).**



How to Help Children Who Witness Abuse

For Mothers

- Understand that there is a reason for the child's behaviour, and acknowledge that in words for her. Children will work out reasons of their own for the turmoil, often blaming themselves, unless you discuss what is going on.
- Let your children know that the fighting is not their fault.
- Give them permission to talk about the abuse. Information, and talking about feelings helps to sort out what is going on. If you are not able to handle talking with your child, make sure she knows one or two other people that you feel comfortable having her talk to.
- Help them to work out a safety plan: a safe place to go when there is fighting, numbers they can call, and make sure they know it is **not safe** to get in between fighting adults.
- Acknowledge the mixed feelings they may have toward their dad; it is still okay to love him, and hate what he does.
- Make sure your child knows that keeping silent about abuse at home sometimes leads to keeping silent about other negative experiences.
- Help the child to identify feelings other than anger, and help them find safe ways to express those feelings. Try to notice and comment on what your child is doing right.
- Be as specific as you can about what is going to happen in everyday life. Children who live with abuse need information ahead of time about where they will be, and how long they will stay. If your child has a hard time separating from you, reassure him, and tell him you will be safe and when you will be back.
- Get support for yourself. It takes extra patience to cope with a child who is acting out because of witnessing abuse.

For Teachers and Child Care Workers

- Try to incorporate into daily activities a discussion of feelings and how to express them and recognize them in other people. Some children who witness violence only recognize and express anger: a feeling vocabulary helps them to express what they are experiencing.
- A child who witnesses abuse often has a short attention span, as a result of being constantly on edge at home. Try to avoid focusing excessive negative attention on this behaviour, and if possible, support the child in redirecting his energy.

- Try to discuss behaviour in terms of “safe and not safe”, rather than “bad, good, nice, not-nice”. The child may already be suffering with very low self-esteem and will tend to identify with the aggressor in her family, if she hears at school that she is not nice.
- Consistency, routine and follow-through are very helpful in assisting a child who is coping with violence. Try to create a feeling of safety and predictability in the child’s environment, using visual cues like clocks whenever possible. Self-esteem words and phrases that identify concrete examples of positive behaviour (helpful cleaning up, shared his snack) go a long way to counter feelings of worthlessness and helplessness, especially when written down.
- Be as clear as possible about rules, and consequences. Try to avoid the appearance of arbitrary punishments or decisions. Children who witness violence often have a very keen sense of justice.
- Offer limited choices. This increases a child’s sense of control over her world. Try to be patient with decision making: it may be an unusual experience for her. Give a time limit.
- School-age children can benefit from discussions of gender stereotyping. Boys especially need to know that the abuser in their family is not the only way to be male.
- Challenge stereotypes in popular culture that show helplessness and aggression. Identify other ways of coping with problems.
- Help the child identify her “support systems”: safe family members or adults that can help a child by listening.
- Know that the child’s mother is doing the best they can under the circumstances. Be aware of the issues she is facing, and try not to judge her for what may look like poor parenting practices in your view. If you have noticed routines or patterns that seem to help or hinder the child, share them with his mother, but be aware that she may not always be able to act on the information immediately or consistently.



Woman Abuse: Effects on Children

A child depends upon adults for physical survival, emotional warmth, and protection from external and internal threats. Abuse in a home creates an atmosphere of fear and pain, and puts a child's growth and emotional well-being at risk. When a woman is abused by her partner, children learn to equate love with pain, force with problem solving, and submission with peace-keeping.

Direct abuse of children by a violent man

- Children may be injured trying to protect their mother or their brothers or sisters. Physical abuse causing pain or injury to the child is often excused as discipline or deserved punishment
- Verbal abuse includes yelling and shouting, calling children names, telling them they are no good, using threats, and degrading sexist words and comments.
- Sexual abuse is any behaviour that forces, tricks, threatens or coerces a child into any sexual activity, from touching children inappropriately or showing them pornographic pictures to sexual intercourse.
- Neglect is failure to provide the basic necessities of life, including failure to show love and support for the child, or leaving the child alone for long periods of time.

Indirect abuse of children through witnessing violence

- Children are hurt and confused by being told "your mother is no good" or that she deserves to be punished. The children may even be told to "come and see what your mother deserves".
- Children who are abused or see others abused in the family learn that "might is right" and that pain and coercion are the way to get what you want. Children are damaged by being exposed to this message at home, at school, or on TV.
- Children are forced into dishonesty by having to keep the family secret of violence and abuse, and suffer shame.
- Children may be used as spies, and interrogated about their mother's behaviour.
- Children may be used as hostages. The abuser may insist that the mother leaves some of the children at home if she goes out so she can't run away. He may tell her that if she leaves him she will never see the children again.

Effects of witnessing and living with violence

Emotional difficulties

- General fearfulness, or constant fears of impending danger nightmares
- difficulty dealing with fear, anger and sadness
- feelings of guilt feelings of helplessness

- inability to act for themselves
- anxiety about separation and loss
- quick bonds with unfamiliar adults
- little ability to feel badly for other people
- no connection to their own feelings

Physical difficulties

- Constant stomach-aches, headaches, ulcers, rashes, diarrhoea, or bed-wetting
- very high levels of stress
- delays or regression in development
- speech disorders

Social difficulties

- Identification with the aggressor; better to be "big and bad" than weak and terrified
- the feeling that it is unsafe, or impossible to act, be or respond like a child
- a hard time solving problems with siblings and other children
- inability to concentrate, which can lead to school failure
- low self-esteem
- mixed feelings toward their parents and a lack of trust in all adults
- withdrawal into books or television
- few friends because of keeping peers at a distance to keep the family "secret"

The younger the child, the greater the threat to healthy development. As the child grows older, years of witnessing domestic violence take their toll. Witnessing violence is stressful. Older children are at risk for such problems as alcohol or drug abuse, physical conflict in their own relationships, anorexia, bulimia, and even suicide. Other at risk behaviour may include involvement with gangs, truancy, or dropping out of school.

Effects related to developmental stage include:

INFANTS: Fretful sleep, developmental slowness, lethargy, physical neglect, fearful reaction to a loud voice

TODDLERS: Frequent illness, severe shyness, low self esteem, hitting, biting, trouble in pre-school / day care.

SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN: Frequent illness, hitting, stealing, lying, nightmares, eating problems, repetitive self harm, poor school results, being "too" perfect, drug and / or alcohol abuse. The oldest child often becomes family "caretaker."



HOW TO HELP AN ASSAULTED WOMAN

- ◆ Know the facts about woman abuse
- ◆ Assure her that you believe her story
- ◆ Listen and let her talk about her feelings
- ◆ Do not judge or give advice. Talk to her about her options.
- ◆ Physical safety is the first priority. If you believe she is in danger, tell her. Help her plan an emergency exit.
- ◆ Respect her right to confidentiality
- ◆ Let her know you care and want to help
- ◆ Allow her to feel the way she does and support her decisions. Let her talk about the caring aspects of the relationship as well. Don't try to diminish her feelings about her partner. Don't criticize her for staying with him, but share information on how abuse increases over time without intervention.
- ◆ Give clear messages, including:
 - Violence is never okay or justifiable
 - Her safety and her children's safety are always the most important issues
 - Wife assault is a crime
 - She does not cause the abuse
 - She is not to blame for her partner's behaviour
 - She cannot change her partner's behaviour
 - Apologies and promises will not end the violence
 - She is not alone
 - She is not crazy
 - Abuse is not loss of control. it is a means of control
- ◆ Discuss how the violence affects the children
- ◆ Be encouraged that every time she reaches out for help she is gaining the emotional strength needed to make effective decisions. She may be too fearful and immobilized or confused to take any step immediately.

◆ Although police can be asked to accompany a woman going back home to retrieve personal belongings, encourage her to be prepared for the possibility of leaving home in a hurry. She should have necessary documents or photocopies ready, as well as important items such as:

- credit cards, cash, bank books
- passport, birth certificates, citizenship papers
- house keys
- medications
- children's favourite toy, clothing, etc.

An abused woman needs our support and encouragement in order to make choices that are right for her. However, there are some forms of advice that are not useful and even dangerous for her to hear:

- ◆ Don't tell her what to do, when to leave or when not to leave.
- ◆ Don't tell her to go back to the situation and try a little harder.
- ◆ Don't rescue her by trying to find quick solutions.
- ◆ Don't suggest you try to talk to her husband to straighten things out.
- ◆ Don't place yourself in danger by confronting the assaultive man.
- ◆ Don't tell her she should stay for the sake of the children.
- ◆ Never recommend joint family or marital counselling in situations of emotional or physical abuse. It is dangerous for the woman and will not lead to a resolution that is in her interest.
- ◆ Encourage separate counselling for the man and woman, if they want counselling.



FOR WOMEN TO THINK ABOUT...

YOU MAY BE BECOMING OR ALREADY ARE A VICTIM OF ABUSE IF YOU:

- Feel like you have to "walk on eggshells" to keep him from getting angry and are frightened by his temper.
- Feel you can't live without him.
- Stop seeing other friends or family, or give up activities you enjoy because he doesn't like them.
- Are afraid to tell him your worries and feelings about the relationship.
- Are often compliant because you are afraid to hurt his feelings; and have the urge to "rescue" him when he is troubled.
- Feel that you are the only one who can help him and that you should try to "reform" him.
- Find yourself apologizing to yourself or others for your partner's behaviour when you are treated badly.
- Stop expressing opinions if he doesn't agree with them.
- Stay because you feel he will kill himself if you leave.
- Believe that his jealousy is a sign of love.
- Have been kicked, hit, shoved, or had things thrown at you by him when he was jealous or angry.
- Believe the critical things he says to make you feel bad about yourself.
- Believe that there is something wrong with you if you don't enjoy the sexual things he makes you do.
- Believe in the traditional ideas of what a man and a woman should be and do--that the man makes the decisions and the woman pleases him.
- (for some people) Have been abused as a child or seen your mother abused.

IF YOU ARE ABUSED:

You are not alone and you are not to blame. You cannot control his violence, but there are ways you can make yourself safer:

- Call the police if you have been assaulted. Charging abusive males is a necessary step in reducing physical violence.
- Tell someone and keep a record of all incidents for evidence.
- Write down the details for yourself as soon as possible after the assault. Keep it in a safe place where he won't find it.
- Develop a safety plan. Memorize emergency numbers. Keep spare house and car keys handy. Know where you can stay in an emergency.
- Consider ending the relationship as soon as possible. Without intervention, his violence will increase in frequency and severity as time passes.
- Recognize that no one has the right to control you and that it is everyone's human right to live without fear.

FOR HELP CALL:

Assaulted Women's Helpline.....863 0511 (24 hr)
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre.....597 8808
Education Wife Assault.....968 3422

adapted from information from Interval House, Hamilton, Ontario



FOR MEN TO THINK ABOUT...

YOU MAY BE BECOMING OR ALREADY ARE AN ABUSIVE MAN IF YOU:

- Get jealous of anyone who gets close to your wife or girlfriend
- Criticize what your wife or girlfriend wears or does
- Sulk silently when you are upset
- Scare her by driving fast or doing other reckless things
- Become very angry about trivial things
- Have an explosive temper
- Are often depressed or withdrawn but won't talk about your feelings
- Become angry or violent when you drink alcohol or use drugs
- Have traditional ideas about what men and women should be and should do. For example, you believe that a man
 - ▶ should take care of all family matters
 - ▶ control his wife or girlfriend
 - ▶ control his wife or girlfriend's activities
 - ▶ choose his wife or girlfriend's friends
- Control where she goes, who she sees, and claim it is for her protection
- Threaten to hit her, her children, her friends, or her pets
- Have thrown or deliberately broken things
- Have ever hit her, no matter how sorry you are afterwards
- (for some people) Were physically or emotionally abused by a parent and/or have a father or stepfather who abuses/abused your mother

IF YOU ARE ABUSIVE:

You should get help and change your behaviour as soon as possible. Otherwise, you may destroy your relationship and/or seriously injure someone you care about.

Remember that:

- You need to take responsibility for your own actions. Your girlfriend or wife does not make you hit her.
- Your violence will increase if you don't take action to stop it.
- Blaming your violence on drugs, alcohol or sickness and apologizing after the abuse will not solve your problem.
- Physical violence and threats of violence are crimes. You will face fines or

- imprisonment, if you are convicted of assault.
- Many men have the same problem, and use violence or the threat of violence to control women's behaviour. You will be held responsible.
- It's never too late to change your behaviour with the support of your friends, your community, and the police.

adapted from information prepared by Interval House, Hamilton, Ontario; and the Southern California Coalition on Battered Women.

PREVENTION TIPS FOR MEN

- X Do not put pressure on the woman to have sex. You can have a successful social encounter without "scoring."
- X Do not assume you know what a woman wants and that she knows what you want. Ask her what she wants, and tell her what you want.
- ✓ Speak up if you feel you are getting a double message from a woman. If you are still confused, do not have sex with her.
- ✓ Keep in mind that alcohol and drugs impair your judgement.
- ✓ Know which behaviours constitute sexual assault.

Remember, sexual assault is a crime.

Source: North York Public Health Department

WHOM CAN I CALL FOR HELP?

- The White Ribbon Campaign.....596-1513**
- Parkdale Legal Clinic.....531-2411**
- Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse.....921-3151**
- Family Service Association**
- (Groups for Men Who Abuse their Female Partners).....927-8500**



BILL OF RIGHTS FOR ASSAULTED WOMEN *

- I have the right not to be abused.
- I have the right to anger over past beatings.
- I have the right to change the situation.
- I have the right to freedom from fear of abuse.
- I have the right to request and expect assistance from police or social agencies.
- I have the right to share my feelings and not be isolated from others.
- I have the right to want a better role model of communication for my children.
- I have the right to be treated like an adult.
- I have the right to leave the abusive environment.
- I have the right to privacy.
- I have the right to express my own thoughts and feelings.
- I have the right to develop my individual talents and abilities.
- I have the right to legally prosecute the abusing spouse.
- I have the right not to be perfect.

* Patricia G. Ball and Elizabeth Wyman, "Battered Wives and Powerlessness : What Can Counsellors Do?" quoted in Sinclair, D. Understanding Wife Assault, p.108.





AS AN EDUCATOR, WHAT CAN I DO?

Many students from violent homes and many abused women have expressed frustration in dealing with professionals and service providers, as they are too often met with well intentioned responses that in fact blame the victim and minimize the danger. As educators we must acknowledge that wife assault/woman abuse in the home or in dating relationships is not only a personal problem, but, an important social issue that we can and must respond to.

GENERALLY, AS EDUCATORS, WE CAN:

- Educate ourselves about the facts and the resources;*
- Work for change by putting forward the following values and incorporating them into our school curriculum and programs:
 - encourage co-operation rather than competition;
 - model the equality of men and women;
 - acknowledge and encourage the gentleness of men and the strength of women;
- Understand and teach that violence is always a choice and, therefore, other choices are possible;
- Encourage the hiring of a social worker or lifeskills instructor trained to respond to violence against women and children;
- Support the hiring of school administrators who are committed to non-violence, diversity and equity issues;
- Learn the necessary skills in order to recognize signs of abuse in students' behaviour.

SPECIFICALLY, IF YOU KNOW A STUDENT IN AN ABUSIVE HOME:

- Listen. Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
- Help them understand that they are not to blame for the violence.
- Let them know that no one has the right to assault/abuse another person.
- Tell the student that many others come from violent homes and that they have a right to tell someone and to seek help; this is not a private family matter but is a violation of Canadian law.
- Know and tell the students that there are safe places to go with their moms. Children, even adolescent boys, must be told not to endanger themselves by intervening personally on their mother's behalf. Help them to develop a safety plan for themselves and younger brothers and sisters and to know how to call for help for their mother.
- Let them know that their mother is not to blame for the violence. There are places where their father/mother's partner can go for help if he wants the violence to stop.

Our ultimate goal is that all people live lives free of violence. We are all responsible. And if each of us is willing to learn more about the issue and how to respond individually and collectively, there is hope...

IF YOU KNOW A FEMALE STUDENT WHO IS IN A VIOLENT DATING RELATIONSHIP:**

- Assure her that you believe her story.
- Tell her that she does not deserve to be hurt nor is she to blame for the abuse, regardless of what the argument was about that preceded the abuse.
- Do not give advice or judge. Talk with her about options and help her plan how to respond to a crisis.
- Find out what she wants to do about her relationship and support her no matter what she decides.
- Allow her to feel the way she does. Let her talk about the caring aspects of the relationship as well. Don't try to diminish her feelings about her boyfriend. Don't criticize her for staying with him, but share information on how abuse increases over time without intervention.
- Listen to an abuser. Support change in his behaviour. Don't be silent or ignore abusive comments about women.
- Help him understand that he is the only one responsible for the violence even if his girlfriend is responsible for other problems in the relationship. Violence is learned behaviour. It can be changed.
- Encourage him to seek help in a counselling program for batterers. The violence will not stop on its own.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

Education Wife Assault: 416 968 3422
TTY: 416 968 7335
Email: info@womanabuseprevention.com
Website: www.womanabuseprevention.com

* Women who are refugee, immigrant, and or Deaf or with a disability face additional barriers, trying to access support services and information. Know how accessible the service is before making a referral.

** Male students can also be abused in same sex or heterosexual relationships. The same guidelines apply.

MS/EWA/01

