



Men Abused by Women
in Intimate Relationships



Men abused by women: *it happens and it matters*

In 2004, it was reported that in the previous five years more than half a million men in Canada had a female partner who was violent toward them. The woman might have been a wife, an ex-wife or a common-law partner. This means about seven per cent of men in intimate relationships with women have experienced abuse or violence from their partners.¹



What is in this booklet

This booklet provides you with information about the abuse of men by their partners in intimate relationships. When you read this booklet, you will learn:

What is abuse

- Understand four major kinds of abuse and how they might look when a man's partner abuses him
- Know what to look for so you can recognize abuse in heterosexual relationships when the woman is the abuser

What you can do

- Know what you can do if you recognize yourself in these descriptions or if you are concerned about someone you know

Where to get help

- Know where to get help for yourself or for people you are concerned about

Definition of family violence*

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. It can include many forms of abuse including spouse abuse, senior abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and witnessing abuse of others in the family. Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and spiritual abuse.

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* This is Alberta Children's Services' definition of family violence. The definition has helped to focus Alberta's Strategy for the Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying.

So what is abuse?

A PATTERN OF CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Abuse in intimate relationships is a pattern of behaviour where one partner dominates, belittles or humiliates the other over months and years.

Abuse of men by their partners happens when the partner uses emotional, physical, sexual or intimidation tactics. She does it to control the man, get her own way and prevent him from leaving the relationship. The abused man is always adapting his behaviour to do what his partner wants, in the hopes of preventing further abuse.

The primary motive for abuse is to establish and maintain power and control over a partner. The abused partner resists the attempts to control him. In turn, the abusive woman takes additional steps to regain control over her partner.

Abuse in intimate relationships is not an isolated incident. Abuse happens over time. Typically, if abuse is allowed to continue, it becomes more frequent and more severe.

Abuse is always a choice. Whatever people's background or experience, they must take responsibility for their actions. No one has the right to abuse someone else, and no one deserves abuse.

CONTROL TACTICS: FOUR KINDS OF ABUSE

Often when people think about abuse, they think of emotional abuse, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. Abuse may also include intimidation tactics.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE TACTICS can happen without other abuse tactics involved. But when other abuse happens, emotional abuse is almost always present. Some men say it is harder to deal with emotional abuse than physical abuse. Emotional abuse includes:

Putdowns:

- Insults or humiliates her partner at home or in public
- Blames him
- Lies to him

Controlling finances:

- Withholds financial information from her partner
- Steals money from him
- Makes financial decisions that affect him without asking or telling him

Isolating her partner and restricting his freedoms:

- Controls her partner's contact with friends and family
- Isolates him from friends and family
- Treats him like a servant
- Monitors his phone calls
- Restricts his ability to get around
- Controls access to information or participation in organizations and groups

Spiritual abuse:

- Ridicules or insults her partner's spiritual beliefs
- Makes it difficult for the partner to be with others in his spiritual community

PHYSICAL ABUSE TACTICS include any activity that can cause physical pain or injury.

In an intimate relationship, physical abuse happens when the abusive person:

- Shoves, slaps, hits, kicks or bites
- Throws things
- Uses a weapon
- Intentionally interferes with basic daily requirements for food, shelter, medicine and sleep

“Physical abuse, the odd confrontation was two or three times. What I felt was emotional and mental abuse. There was never any threat that she would do me physical harm. She got angry enough a couple of times where there was physical; she hit me once and gave me a black eye, but I never felt it as a threat. This fear of failure is maybe more important to a man than the threat of physical violence.”¹

Most Canadians do not physically abuse their partners. However, a report that came out in 2004 shows it does happen. In the report, about eight per cent of women and seven per cent of men said their heterosexual partners had abused them in the past five years. Women who are abused are more likely to be beaten, choked or threatened with a weapon. Men who are abused are more likely to be slapped, kicked, bitten or hit, or have something thrown at them.²

Thirteen per cent of men abused by their female partners say the violence caused physical injury. Seven per cent of men who experienced violence feared for their lives.

SEXUAL ABUSE TACTICS

- Uses force or pressure to get her partner to have sex in a way he does not want
- Ridicules or criticizes his performance
- Withholds affection and sex to punish him for violating her rules

INTIMIDATION TACTICS are any words or actions the abusive partner uses to scare her partner.

For example:

Destroy property

- Throw or smash things
- Trash his clothes or other possessions
- Destroy keepsakes
- Break furniture or windows

Threaten

- Threaten to harm or kill him
- Threaten to harm or kill herself or children, family, friends or pets
- Threaten to lie to authorities to put his child custody or legal status at risk
- Create a sense that punishment is just around the corner

Stalk or harass

- Follow him after they have separated
- Show up at his workplace
- Go to his house and park outside
- Phone or send him mail repeatedly
- Phone or send mail to his family, friends or colleagues

Changing or leaving an abusive relationship: it's not that simple

WHY STAY IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

Whether or not there are children involved, a man may stay in an abusive situation because:

- He feels afraid or guilty
- He feels he is financially insecure
- He feels a sense of obligation to his female partner
- He wants to honour his religious convictions or cultural expectations
- His partner reminds him of religious convictions or cultural expectations

A man with children may stay in the relationship because:

- He doesn't want to lose access to his children
- He doesn't want to leave the children with his abusive partner
- He may not trust the courts to handle child custody fairly
- He doesn't want to be the one that "breaks up" the family



SOCIETY'S ATTITUDES CAN MAKE IT HARDER

Our society is slowly starting to recognize and study the abuse of men by their partners. Society's beliefs and attitudes about men have kept this kind of abuse hidden. For example:

- Men are supposed to protect women
- Men don't get pushed around by women
- Men are not supposed to hit back even when a woman is hitting them
- Men should be able to "handle" their women

Because of these beliefs, men who are abused by female partners may be slow to admit it. They may not want to tell anyone. Additionally, sometimes police and other professionals may not take the abuse seriously.

As a result, a man in an abusive relationship may have some of these feelings:

- Afraid to tell anyone
- Depressed or humiliated
- Afraid he has failed as a lover and partner
- Guilty about leaving her or scared of coping alone
- Furious she could do or say the things she did
- Confused because sometimes she acts loving and kind
- Frustrated and sad because he has tried everything
- Afraid of continued violence or harassment if he leaves
- Panicked he may lose his male identity if people know what has been going on
- Worried about his financial security
- Made to believe he deserved it

CHANGING OR LEAVING IS A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

It takes time to realize your relationship is abusive. It takes time to admit a person you love, someone you thought loved you, is willing to say and do things that harm you.

It takes time to find out if it is possible to keep the relationship but stop the abuse. If there are children involved, it may take time to figure out how to create a healthy, stable and loving environment for them.

It can be messy and slow to recognize, change or leave an abusive relationship. It seems like taking two steps forward and one step back. But many people have been able to move past abuse. They say it has been worth the effort to get their lives back.

An abusive environment harms children now and in their future.³

Sometimes people abused by their partners think their children do not know about the abuse or that the abuse does not harm the children. But children are harmed, even if they are not directly abused.

Being exposed to anger and violence affects children's brain development.

- Brain scans show that children in abusive environments use much of their brain to watch out for danger. Less of their brain is available for healthy growth and development
- This affects their physical, emotional and mental development
- It affects their ability to form healthy relationships
- It affects them even when the children are not consciously aware of the abuse in their home⁴

When a child is in a threatening environment over time, such as in a home where the adults are abusive, systems in the child's brain undergo changes. These changes result in emotional, behavioural, intellectual and physical symptoms.

All children in a threatening environment are affected by fear. They might:

- Feel anxious or panicky
- Have an increased heart rate — babies in violent or angry homes have faster heart rates even in their sleep
- Be very watchful and attentive all the time, as though they are on “red alert”

Because their brains are distracted by fear, they may:

- Find it hard to concentrate or pay attention
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Have difficulty learning

Children in a threatening environment use different ways to cope.

Some children react by becoming more aggressive. They might:

- Be defiant
- Act impulsive
- Have angry outbursts
- Act bossy or pushy
- Bully or hurt others

Sometimes these loud children do not appear to be affected. They look like they feel confident and in charge. But their aggressive behaviours grow out of fear expressed outwardly as anger.

Some children react by becoming quiet and withdrawn.

These children might:

- Try to stay safe by becoming “invisible”
- Go into their own fantasy world and tune out the world around them
- Be more obedient or passive than other children
- Be numb and disconnected from their own feelings
- Be detached from other people
- Have a hard time getting along with others
- Be depressed

Sometimes these quiet children do not look like they are affected by what is going on around them. They do not appear to react. However, this “unaffected” appearance is a danger sign. In the face of fear and feeling helpless, they have disconnected from their environment.

You may think that the abuse between adults in the home does not affect children, or that you can shield them from what is going on. That is not true. As long as children live in an abusive environment, the trauma will continue to affect their brains. They will not be able to heal.

There is hope.

Even if the trauma of living in an abusive home changes a child's brain in unhealthy ways, the brain can heal over time if the child has a safe, predictable and loving place to live.

If there are children in your household, take responsibility for their safety and well-being. Do this even if you are not their biological parent. The children did not choose the adults in their home. They deserve a healthy and safe environment, so they can grow to become healthy and flourishing adults.

Suggestions for things you can do to help the children are listed on page 7 of this booklet.

Suggestions for getting help are listed at the back of this booklet.

How can I tell if my relationship is healthy, unhealthy or abusive?

Look at the chart that follows. For each relationship factor, think about your relationship. Then ask yourself this question: Is my relationship most like the healthy, unhealthy or abusive relationship?

	HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP	UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP	ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP
Sharing Feelings	You feel safe and strong enough to tell your partner how you really feel.	You feel awkward telling your partner how you really feel.	You are afraid to tell your partner how you really feel because you fear getting put down or threatened.
Communicating	You respect and listen to each other even when you have differing opinions on a topic.	Your partner ignores you and does not respect your opinions when there is a difference of opinion.	Your partner treats you with disrespect and ignores or makes fun of your ideas and feelings.
Disagreements	You can have disagreements and still talk respectfully to each other. You resolve your disagreements.	Your disagreements often turn into fights.	You are afraid to disagree because you do not want to unleash your partner's anger and violence. The disagreement is an excuse for abuse.
Intimacy and Sex	Both of you can be honest about your feelings about physical affection and sex. Neither of you feels pressured to do anything you do not want to do.	You are embarrassed to say how you feel because you think your partner may not listen or care. You "go along" with some things.	Your partner ignores your needs and wants. Your partner pushes you into situations that make you uncomfortable, frighten or degrade you.
Trust	You trust each other. You are comfortable with your partner spending time with another woman.	Your partner feels jealous every time you talk to another woman. You feel jealous every time your partner talks to another man or woman.	Your partner accuses you of flirting or having an affair, and orders you not to talk to another woman.
Time Alone	You can each spend time alone and consider this a healthy part of your relationship.	You think there may be something wrong if you want to do things without your partner. Your partner tries to keep you to herself.	Your partner does not allow you to spend time doing things on your own. Your partner sees this as a challenge or threat to your relationship.
Violence	You and your partner take care not to speak harsh words or make mean comments. There is no physical violence in your relationship.	There have been a few incidents of emotional abuse or controlling behaviour in your relationship. There is no pattern of abuse or violence.	There is a pattern of increasing, ongoing abuse in your relationship: emotional, physical, sexual and/or intimidation.

If you are in an abusive relationship

NINE THINGS YOU CAN DO IF YOU ARE BEING ABUSED BY YOUR PARTNER

- 1. First, make sure you and the children are physically safe.**
 - If you are in immediate danger, call 911
 - Make a safety plan. See “Safety Plan” suggestions on page 8
- 2. Know you are not responsible** for the abuse. The abuse is the responsibility of the person who is abusive. You did not cause the abuse even if she would like you to think so.
- 3. Understand that the abuse and violence are not likely to stop.** In fact, abuse and violence usually become more frequent and more severe over time. When you are thinking about your options, be as realistic as you can in assessing what the risks are in your situation.
- 4. Tell someone** you trust about the abuse. Choose someone who will believe you. Secrecy gives the abuse more power. When you tell another person, you reduce the power of secrecy and gain some power to make the situation better. If the first person you tell does not seem to take you seriously, talk to someone else. Do not give up.
- 5. Find out more about abuse in relationships.** You are not alone. About seven per cent of Canadian men are abused by female partners. Other men have had this experience and lived through it. Eventually they created new and healthy lives for themselves. Once you start looking for help, you will meet people who understand your situation.
- 6. Find out what help is available** in or near your community. You do not have to do this alone. Contact information for other resources is listed at the back of this booklet.
- 7. Get professional help** from a qualified counsellor. Make sure the person understands what it is like for men to be abused by their partners. If the first counsellor is not a good fit for you, try someone else. People who work in the area of family violence may be able to help find an appropriate counsellor.
- 8. Look after yourself.** You are in a difficult situation that takes energy and strength. Make time to do some things that feel good. Half an hour of an activity you enjoy will give you energy to get through another day. Then you will find the strength to do what is necessary to protect yourself and your children.
- 9. Spend time with healthy people.** Even if they cannot help you directly, being with healthy people will remind you that most people are kind to one another and that many people have healthy and rewarding relationships. You can too.

SIX THINGS TO DO IF THERE ARE CHILDREN IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

- 1. Think of the safety and best interests of the children first.**
- 2. Get legal advice** about custody, access and maintenance issues.
- 3. Tell the children** that even though the adults in their home do not get along, the children are not to blame and the abuse is not their fault.
- 4. Do everything in your power to expose the children to healthy relationships,** and to environments that are safe, predictable and loving. Children need to know most adults are kind to one another and most homes are safe places.
- 5. Help the children connect with healthy adults** outside the immediate household. Find adults who care about the children’s well-being and whom the children can count on to be stable and predictable.
- 6. Help the children find ways to succeed.** Children who know they are good at something are stronger in themselves, even when they are in abusive environments.

Only you can decide what to do about your relationship. Whether you stay or leave is your decision. However, you do not have to do this alone. Whatever you decide to do, please get the help you need. The resources listed at the back of this booklet are a good place to start.

“During her periods she would get very violent. She would attack me and when we were young, fine, I just turned my back and let her pound me to get rid of her frustrations. But as the years went on it became more violent, and I couldn’t just ignore it because she was hurting me.”¹

SAFETY PLANNING

If your partner has ever been violent, the violence could happen again at any time. You will need a safety plan so you can get to a safe place quickly if necessary.

If you decide to leave the relationship, you need to know that separating is one of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship. Your abusive partner is losing control over you and will do everything possible to get it back. In this situation, there is an increased risk of violence, harassment, threats and increased emotional abuse. That does not mean you should stay in the abusive situation. It means you need to assess the risk and plan how to stay safe.

MAKE A SAFETY PLAN

- 1. Tell people you trust** that you are in an abusive relationship.
 - Talk to them about how they can help you be safe
 - Let them know about any custody or no-contact orders
 - You may want to keep the abuse private, but when people outside your home know about the abuse, they can watch for danger signs and help keep you safe
- 2. Plan where you can go** if you need to leave in a hurry.
 - Look for places that are open 24 hours where you can be safe while you call for help
 - If you plan to go to someone's home, arrange this ahead of time. That way if you arrive with no notice, they will know to let you in, lock the doors and ask questions later. Do NOT plan to go to the home of a friend or relative where the abuser will think to look. That might endanger all of you
 - Make sure you have the car keys and gas in the car, or bus tickets or another means of transportation
 - Be sure to check exactly how to get to where you plan to go
 - Have a back-up plan in case you are not able to get to the place you intended to go
- 3. Memorize emergency numbers** like the numbers for the police or taxi. Learn the phone numbers of trusted friends or relatives, so you can tell them where you are going. You may not have time to look up these numbers if you need to leave fast.
- 4. Find out about emergency protection orders**, restraining orders, peace bonds or other legal ways to stop your partner from contacting you. Your local police service or a Victim Services Unit can give you information.
- 5. Learn to erase phone numbers from call display**, so your partner will not know who called you or whom you called.
- 6. Pack a small emergency bag** and put it in a place where your partner will not find it. You could leave it with a trusted friend or in a place that only you know about. Include some things you will need, such as:
 - Cash
 - Health care cards
 - Important documents, like your driver's license and passport
 - Any prescription drugs
 - Debit or credit cards
 - Car keys
 - Copies of any no-contact orders
 - If you have children, whatever they will need for a few hours
- 7. If your former partner is stalking or harassing you:**
 - Report this to police. Stalking is a crime called criminal harassment
 - Keep a record. Write down what happens, including times and dates. The record of more than one incident will help to prove the harassment. "Criminal harassment" is defined as a crime in which repeated incidents occur over time
 - Tell key people (for example, co-workers, friends, your children's teachers) that your ex-partner is stalking or harassing you. Show them a picture of your ex-partner so they can watch out for her
 - You may need to arrange for a no-contact order of some kind (see point 4 above)
- 8. If you have children .**
 - Tell them exactly what they should do in an emergency
 - Tell them how they will know it is an emergency
 - Tell them exactly where they should go and what they should do when they get there

If you are concerned about a man you know

CLUES THAT A MAN MAY BE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

- 1. Look at the chart** about healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships on page 6.
What do you see, hear or feel when you are with the couple? In which category does their relationship fit?
- 2. Look at the list of behaviours** describing the different kinds of abuse tactics on page 2.
Have you seen these behaviours over time? If so, there may be abuse in the relationship.
- 3. Consider if there have been changes.** For example:
 - Has the person stopped coming to events he used to attend regularly?
 - Is the person withdrawing from friends and family?
 - Do you notice changes in his personality (for example, is he quieter, grouchier, more distracted or less energetic than usual)?
 - Is he on medication? (He may be depressed as a result of feeling helpless)
 - Are there any bruises or other physical injuries that do not match up with the story he tells about how he got the injuries?

Any of these conditions might show that the person is dealing with abuse.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

IF YOU SUSPECT THAT A MAN YOU KNOW IS IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

- 1. Understand that he may not understand this is abuse or may not want to talk about it.**

If he appears to be “in denial,” give him all the information you can about abuse in intimate relationships.

Remember that many abused men do not realize that the behaviour they are living with is abuse. It may take time before they even begin to understand that their relationship is abusive. Their increase in awareness and understanding is a process, not an event.

- 2. Find the right words** to open the door for conversation.

Here are some examples of things that abused men said were helpful to them:

- A supervisor took an employee aside and said, “I don’t know what’s going on with you at home, but I just want you to know that it isn’t all your fault, no matter what someone might be trying to tell you.”
- A male friend said, “I know you spend a lot of time trying to second guess and look after what your partner needs. How are you doing?”
- A female friend said, “I’ve been in an abusive situation, and I recognize the signs. (Say this only if it’s true.) Here are some things that I see and hear, that tell me you’re dealing with power and control tactics from your partner. (List what you see and hear) I know it can take a long time to figure out what to do, but I can tell you that you don’t deserve to be abused.”
- A man’s adult son said, “I know you’re my dad, but I don’t like what I’m seeing here. This is not right. What can I do to help?”

- 3. Offer to assist him in finding help.**

Once the abused man understands he is in an abusive relationship, encourage him to learn more. Support him in contacting community agencies. People in these organizations can help him assess the situation he faces. They can help him with safety planning and with finding other resources. The last page of this booklet provides a starting point for seeking help.

“There were only three incidents where I was hit. On two of them I was hit across the head with enough strength that it made my glasses fly off and in another incident I was hit in the back and my shirt was literally ripped off my back.”¹

IF A MAN TELLS YOU HE IS IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Six things you can do

If someone tells you that he is being abused, the following responses are helpful.

1. Listen fully. Listen quietly. Do not interrupt. Tell him you believe him.
2. Tell him the abuse is not his fault and he does not deserve to be abused.
3. Privately express your concern and ask, “How can I help?”
4. Respect his confidentiality.
5. Encourage him to make a safety plan.
6. Help him to find resources (if he wants help).

If the man does not want to leave his abusive partner, be patient. Understand that changing or leaving an abusive situation is not easy. Let the man know that you will be there no matter what he decides to do.

Three things not to do

1. Do not over-react. If you act too horrified or shocked, the man may stop talking.
2. Do not criticize or blame his abusive partner. If you do, he may feel forced to defend her. He may feel stupid for being in a relationship with her.
3. Do not give advice or suggest what the man should do. He may stop talking to you, especially if he does not want to take your suggestions.

IF YOU KNOW A WOMAN WHO ABUSES FAMILY MEMBERS

If you have any concern at all about talking to an abusive person, then don't do it. Trust your instincts. Confronting an abusive or violent person is dangerous. Be aware of the risks, and do not leave yourself open to harm.

However, if you know someone who acknowledges that she is abusive to her partner or children, and if she says she wants to change, here are some things you could say.

Abusive behaviour is learned

You could let her know that abusive behaviour is learned. It is not “automatic.” No matter what the circumstances, abusive behaviour is a choice. Some other women who have abused their partners or other family members have learned to change. She can too. If she wishes to make a choice to stop the abuse, she will have to make a commitment to change her behaviour.

Help is available

Encourage and support her in getting help or finding resources to stop the abusive behaviour. The “Get Help” section on this page provides a starting point for seeking resources.

Hold the abusive person accountable

Abusive behaviour is not caused by the partner, by stress, by addictions, by financial or work pressure, by health problems or by any other life issue. The abusive person makes a choice to belittle, control or dominate. She alone is responsible for these choices. The abusive person needs to understand this so she can make the mental shift to end abusive behaviour.

Get help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.

Visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca or call the 24 hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at **310-1818**.

Emergency protection orders, restraining orders and peace bonds are some of the legal ways to stop an abuser from contacting someone.

- The Wheatland Emergency Shelter in Strathmore accommodates abused men with or without children, phone **1-877-934-6634**
- The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence has a directory of services and programs for abused men in Canada. You can find the directory online at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/maleabus_e.html

¹ Reported in Tutty, L. (2005). Men Abused by Intimate Partners. In *Family Violence: It's Your Business, Community Resource Guide*. Edmonton, AB: Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Alberta Children's Services, 54. Sources included:

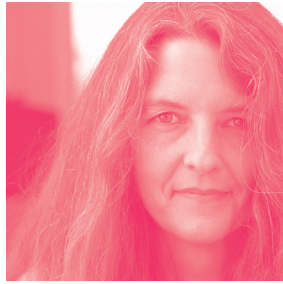
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³ Information adapted from Perry, B. (2005). The Destructive Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, and Facts about Exposure to Violence. In *Family Violence: It's Your Business, Community Resource Guide*. Edmonton, AB: Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Alberta Children's Services.

⁴ Bender, E. (2004). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Disorders Evident in Kids Who Witness Domestic Violence. *Psychiatric News*, 39 (11).



Alberta Children's Services
Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying
6th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2N2
Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818
www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca

Men Abused by Women in Intimate Relationships