

Supporting Individuals Experiencing Family Violence in our Community

A guide for the public

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Created by:

West Yellowhead Regional Family Violence & Sexual Assault Network



Adapted from: Strathcona County Family Support Services document
<https://www.strathcona.ca/files/files/fcs-family-violence-tool-kit.pdf>

What is family violence?

Family violence is any form of abuse or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have an intimate, dependent or trusting relationship. It is an abuse of power by one person to hurt and control someone who trusts and depends on them. It may include a single act of violence, or several acts forming a pattern of abuse using assaultive and controlling behaviour. This pattern of abuse may include:¹

- Emotional abuse
- Degrading language or insults
- Financial control
- Isolation or neglect from friends and family
- Religious/spiritual
- Physical conflict
- Psychological manipulation
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation
- Stalking
- Threats to harm children, family members, pets, and property

When children are exposed to abusive behaviour, whether directly (being abused themselves) or indirectly (witnessing the abuse), this can result in lasting, developmental damages for the child. The abuse that children witness or experience themselves has an impact on their brain chemistry and composition, and in certain cases, this can result in long-term social and health consequences such as development of high-risk behaviours, chronic health conditions, and early death.

A common characteristic of family violence is that the perpetrator of violence limits the victim's contact with friends, family, and other potential supports. It is likely that during this time of physical distancing and limited social contact, that the individuals experiencing violence will have less access to external supports such as faith-based supports, schools, family, and work colleagues. These individuals may also be unaware of the services currently being offered.

¹ Adapted Government of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/family-violence.html>

What can I do when someone I know is experiencing abuse?

Things to remember during this time:

If you are concerned that someone you know is experiencing family violence, there are a few simple things you can do to help:

1. Check in with the person and find out how they are doing.
2. Share messages of support and empathy when someone discloses fear or experiences family violence. Believe them, even if you have not seen it, and even if you know/care about the person harming them. How you respond to a disclosure of family violence will have a significant impact on their ability to reach out and trust others.
3. Beyond your supportive listening (see [Appendix I](#)), refer them to professional supports (see [Appendix II](#)). Do not take on the role of “protector” for someone in this situation. It is important to use experienced supports, as family violence can **quickly** escalate, particularly when the victim is contemplating leaving. Refer them to appropriate resources.
4. If the person you are concerned about is not ready to change the situation or leave, respect their decision, and assure them they can reach out for support at any time.
5. If the person IS ready to leave, encourage them to have someone present should they choose to tell the abuser they are leaving, or leave when the abuser is not present. This minimizes the risk of retaliation from the abusive partner.
6. It is important for anyone experiencing family violence to have a **safety plan** in place prior to leaving the home. A safety plan can include:
 - Having an agreed upon “code word or signal” that the victim can send to someone they trust who can call the police without the abuser knowing.
 - Saving money to set aside if you have to leave quickly.
 - Making copies of important documents (birth certificates, SIN numbers, health care cards, Court orders) and keeping them in a safe place or with someone outside the home that you can trust.

- Contact the RCMP, or the Yellowhead Women's Shelter to discuss a more thorough safety plan. (see [Appendix II](#) for family violence community supports).
7. Some forms of family violence require immediate attention:
- If someone is in immediate danger, call 911
 - Call the Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS) to get help if children are being neglected, abused, or sexually exploited. If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7.

From shelter services, to police, to social supports, there are resources to help people in our community through situations of family violence or conflict.

Now more than ever, we need to look out for one another. By supporting each other with strategies like supportive listening, we can build a safe, supportive, and connected community.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please refer to [Appendix II](#) for a list of helpful community resources.



Appendix I

What is supportive listening?

1. **Ask open-ended questions.** Questions that start with words like how, what, would and could. Try to avoid “why” questions, that can sometimes sound like you are blaming them for making the wrong choices.
2. **Let the other person drive the conversation.** It is perfectly natural to be curious, and helpful to ask open-ended questions, but do not try to force a survivor to talk about something just to satisfy your own curiosity. Focus on the issues that seem important to them. Use open-ended questions to gently try and stay on topic.
3. **Use Reflection.** Repeat back the words or emotions that you are hearing them say. If a survivor says, “I’ve just been feeling so exhausted,” you could respond with, “It sounds like you’re really tired”.
4. **Tie together the things you are hearing and provide a focus.** “You have mentioned a lot of things that sound like you felt you were unable to do what you wanted to do, maybe even powerless. How are you feeling about that?”
5. **Do not assume you know what they meant by something.** Ask clarifying questions such as “So how did you feel when that happened?” “Let’s go back for a minute so I can make sure that I fully understand...” Doing this demonstrates that you are listening, you are hearing, and that you are interested.
6. **Know the role that culture plays.** Do not assume that you know someone else’s culture. Avoid stereotyping or making assumptions about the persons culture.
7. **Use the same terms that the survivor is using.** If they say, “my boyfriend,” use the word boyfriend when reflecting back, even if you would normally say ‘partner.’ Try to avoid labels. Terms like survivor, victim, domestic violence, abuse, or abuse can have different meanings for different people. The best way to know which terms someone is comfortable with is to use the ones they are already using.
8. **Let them know you hear how they are feeling.** If the person you are supporting is blaming themselves or putting themselves down, it can be

difficult to hear. Use “I” statements to let them know that you do not blame them. An example of this could be, “I hear that you feel like this is your fault. I just want you to know that it’s not, but I hear that you feel that way right now.”

9. **Supportive listening is NOT giving advice.** It is not sharing your own experiences to the point that it pulls the focus off of them and on to you. It is not criticizing or judging them, and it is not forcing them into conversation or action.
10. **Simply listen.** If you are talking to someone in an abusive situation, they are already experiencing someone telling them how to think, feel, and behave. As concerned as you are for your friend or family member, the best thing you can do is listen, believe, give them the space to decide what they want to do, and then support them in getting there

Appendix II – Family Violence Community Supports

| Organization | Description | Phone Number |
|---|---|--|
| 911 Emergency Line | If you or someone you know is in immediate danger. | Text/Call 911 |
| 211 Alberta | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week. Call, Text or Chat 211 Alberta if you are unsure who to call or what service you need. | 211 |
| Family Violence Information Line | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week get help immediately in more than 170 languages. Webchat is available on the website. AADD website | 310-1818 |
| Abuse Helpline | If you suspect an adult or child is being abused or neglected, the provincial abuse helpline will connect you to resources, supports, services and referrals to address your concerns. Callers can remain anonymous. | 1-855-4HELPAB 1-855-443-5722 |
| Alberta Council of Women's Shelters | Provides support to end domestic violence and abuse. Find a shelter Canada wide: https://sheltersafe.ca/national/ | 1-866-331-3933 |
| Alberta SPCA | SPCA will care for pets, giving individuals that are going through challenging times the space and time to focus on accessing support. | 780-447-3600 |
| Alberta Supports Emergency Income Support | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week free help if you are facing an emergent need for food, medication, temporary shelter. | 1-866-644-5135 |
| AltView | The altView Foundation for Gender Variant and Sexual Minorities' provides resources and support to sexual minority and gender-variant persons. | 780-666-5428 |
| Child Abuse Hotline | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week. Support line for reporting children being neglected, abused or sexually exploited. If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages. | 1-800-387-5437 |
| Family and Community Support Services | Contact your local municipality for supportive resources and referrals. | |
| Health Services | Health care professionals are trained to assist you in situations of family violence. Talk to your doctor or another health care provider if you are experiencing family violence or family conflict that is causing you concern. | Visit your local hospital or medical clinic |
| Lila Helps | Trustworthy gender-based violence helpline and for almost every country in the world. Providing a safe, listening ear, to victims in crisis. Website https://lila.help/ | |
| Mamawichihitowin Domestic violence treatment program | Provides clinical therapy services to families and individuals experiencing the effects of familial sexual abuse. | 780-865-5189 |
| Mental Health Helpline | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week FREE confidential service that provides support, information and referrals to Albertans experiencing mental health concerns. | 1-877-303-2642 |
| Protection for Persons in Care | Protection for Persons in Care requires the reporting of abuse of adult clients receiving care in publicly funded facilities. | 1-888-357-9339 |
| Sexual Violence One Line | If you have experienced any form of sexual violence and need crisis support or if you need help finding sexual assault support services in Alberta. | Text/Call 1-866-403-8000 |
| Shelter Safe | Canada wide shelters: https://sheltersafe.ca/national/ | |
| Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre | 27 hr/day, 7 days/week. For women in crisis (with or without children). Offering safe, secure, short-term accommodation in a respectful and confidential manner. Offers crisis intervention to women, men and youth. | 1-800-467-4049 (toll free) 780-778-6209 (local) |
| Yellowhead Elder Abuse Response Network | If you are an older adult who is 55 years of age or over and are experiencing mistreatment, you can be referred to the program coordinator to explore possible solutions. | 780-865-6036 |
| Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women | 24 hr/day, 7 days/week. YES offers safe, short-term accommodation for women with or without children, confidential crisis line, outreach and public education program on gender-based violence prevention. | 1-800-661-0937 (toll free) 780-865-5133 (local) |