

Supporting Individuals Experiencing Family Violence in our Community

A guide for the public

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

COVID 19 and Family Violence

Worldwide, reports continue to suggest that incidents of family violence are increasing in number and frequency due to isolation conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ As Canadians are asked to stay home and avoid social gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals experiencing family violence are living with a threat as many are isolated at home with their abusers.

What is family violence?

Family violence is the attempts by one person in an intimate relationship to dominate and control the other. Family violence and abuse are used to gain and maintain total control over the other person. 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:²

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

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 New York Times (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

² Adapted from Edmonton Police Services (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.edmontonpolice.ca/domesticviolence>

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 of 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, Hinton Victim Services, or the Yellowhead Women’s Shelter to discuss a more thorough safety plan. (see Appendix II for agency contact information).**
7. Some forms of family violence require immediate attention:
- If someone is in immediate danger, call 911
 - If you are concerned for someone’s safety call the Hinton RCMP detachment 24 hr. report line at 780-865-5544 or 780-865-2455 Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 pm.
 - 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. Even though we are physically distancing, we are not alone. 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

<p>Alberta Supports (Province of Alberta)</p>	<p>Office hours: Monday to Friday Phone: 780-865-8273 or 1-877-644-9992 8:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Closed 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.</p>	<p>Alberta Supports can provide a variety of supports for Albertans in situations of family violence, including emergency funding for individuals escaping family violence situations. https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-get-help.aspx Due to COVID-19, Alberta Supports Centres have suspended in-person services until further notice. If you are currently receiving benefits or services and need assistance, call your caseworker or local office from Monday to Friday, between 8:15 am to 4:30 pm. For all other enquiries, call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1-877-644-9992</p>
<p>Alberta Family Violence Information Line</p>	<p>Call 310-1818 to speak to someone about family violence. 24 hrs/day, 7 days/week</p>	<p>On-line chat services are also available through the Family Violence Information Line. Go to https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx to begin a safe and confidential on-line chat about family violence and how to access services.</p>
<p>Alberta 211</p>	<p>Call 211 24 hr./day, 7 days/week</p>	<p>Alberta 211 is a free helpline that connects you to community and social services in your area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in over 150 languages. You can call 211 or text 211 for confidential inquiries and referrals. https://ab.211.ca/</p>
<p>Hinton RCMP Detachment</p>	<p>111 Civic Centre Road Phone: 780-865-2455 (Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Phone: 780-865-5544 (24 hr. non-emergency report line)</p>	<p>If you suspect someone is experiencing any type of family violence or you are a victim of family violence...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call 9-1-1 if they/you are in immediate danger • Report known or suspected child abuse or neglect to the local police or child protection agency, as required by law • Support, believe and trust them • Reassure them that what they have been through is not their fault • If there is no immediate danger, encourage them to contact the police • Ensure that they have a place to stay • Be patient and listen openly and carefully <p>https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cycp-cpcj/violence/fv-vf/index-eng.htm</p>
<p>Hinton Friendship Centre</p>	<p>965 Switzer Drive Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Phone: 865-5189</p>	<p>Mamowichitowin Program (Community Wellness Program) provides clinical therapy services to families and individuals experiencing the effects of familial sexual abuse and other forms of violence resulting from multi-generational trauma.</p>

		<p>The West Yellowhead Domestic Violence Program provides treatment services to men who are involved in the legal system or mandated by the courts to attend treatment due to spousal violence. In appropriate circumstances, referrals may also be made by Child Protection Services. The treatment will involve an individual risk assessment, on-going collaboration with community partners, and if deemed appropriate group treatment. As well, the program will conduct partner safety checks during the client's involvement with the program, approximately three times over the duration of treatment.</p> <p>A referral form for this domestic violence programming can be accessed by calling the Hinton Friendship Centre. https://anfca.com/friendship-centres/hinton/</p>
Health Services	<p>Hinton General Hospital 1280 Switzer Drive 24 hr/7 days/week 780-865-3333</p> <p>Hinton Valley Medical Clinic 102 Allen Cove 780-865-3338</p>	<p>If you or someone you know is in danger and in need of immediate assistance, call 911</p> <p>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. http://www.hintonmedical.com/</p>
Hinton Employment and Learning Place (HELP)	Office hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 3:30 p.m. 110 Brewster Drive	Unemployment services. Lunches and extra food always available. Resource Room includes free washer and dryer, a safe place to relax with computer, tv, wheelchair accessible showers, kitchenette. A safe space to talk with someone. https://hintonhelp.ca/
Hinton Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)	Office hours: Monday to Friday, 8:a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	FCSS is a preventative social services organization offering a number of programs and services for individuals and families of all ages, with a focus on confidential, supportive listening and appropriate community referrals for clients. https://www.hinton.ca/283/Family-and-Community-Support-Services

<p>Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women</p>	<p>Phone: 1-800-661-0937 (toll free) Phone: 780-865-5133 (local)</p>	<p>If you or someone you know is in danger or in need of immediate assistance, call 911. The Yellowhead Emergency Shelter (YES) offers confidential crisis line and family violence support 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. YES offers short-term, safe accommodation for women with or without children as well as other people in crisis. They also offer family violence support through their Outreach Support Worker and may be able to provide personal necessities such as food and clothing. https://acws.ca/shelters/yellowhead-emergency-shelter/</p>
<p>Yellowhead Elder Abuse Response Network</p>	<p>In Hinton call your local FCSS office Phone: 780-865-6036 Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. You can also access support and referral by calling 211.</p>	<p>If you or someone you know is in danger or in need of immediate assistance, call 911. The Yellowhead Elder Abuse Response Network is a group of organizations and agencies working together to address elder abuse in the Yellowhead, Edson, and Hinton region. 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.</p>