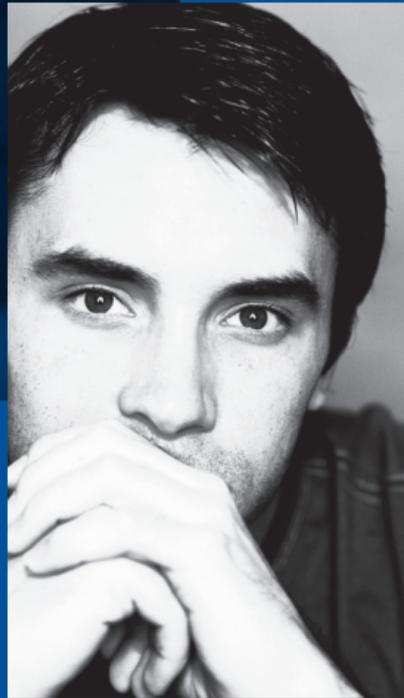


# RCMP



ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



*It can  
be stopped*



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada

# What is intimate partner violence and abuse?

Intimate partner violence and abuse is an abuse of power that includes a **wide range of threats and acts**:

**Physical violence** that may involve a threat with a fist or object; being pushed or shoved in a way that could result in injury; being slapped, hit or beaten; being hit or attacked with an object. There may be no obvious physical injuries, or there may be bruises, cuts, broken bones, internal injuries, disfigurement, disablement and even death.

**Sexual assault** may be part of a physical attack. Sexual acts within a relationship must take place with consent. There is no "right" to sexual relations.

**Emotional abuse** that can include threats and intimidation, demeaning and degrading verbal and/or body language, control and isolation, subordination and humiliation. Victims may suffer serious loss of self-esteem and experience feelings of shame, anxiety, hopelessness, depression and terror.

***Violence and/or abuse by an intimate partner is not a crime of passion and it is not a private matter.***

Intimate partner violence and abuse can be committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, a current or former common-law partner, a current or former girlfriend or boyfriend or a person in a dating relationship. The victim may think that she or he somehow provoked the abuse but the abuser is responsible for his or her own behaviour.

An abusive relationship is often a confusing mix of love, fear, dependency, intimidation, guilt and

hope. There is a shared life involving family, finances and a home. Victims of violence and abuse usually return to the relationship many times before leaving it.

To harm, or threaten to harm, another person is against the law under the *Criminal Code* of Canada regardless of the relationship between the two parties.

An effective legal response to intimate partner violence and abuse requires coordination by all parts of the criminal justice system. The *Criminal Code* and the *Canada Evidence Act* provide protection for victims as well as sanctions for offenders. Prosecution policies and guidelines ensure that charges proceed in court, however, the police are usually the first step in the legal process and the major point of contact in intimate partner assault cases.

When called to an incident of intimate partner violence and abuse, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are responsible for restoring order, protecting victims, investigating and gathering evidence. This may involve arresting or

Relationship abuse is tragically common. It is also very complex. How can you bring her flowers one day and hit her the next? Why does she stay? How can she leave? What happens when that safe place called home becomes a prison or war zone? What about the children? How does society step into these private, personal spaces and help make a difference? Let's find the answers — because spousal and partner abuse can be stopped.

taking into custody the perpetrator of the violence or abuse. If the investigation finds reasonable and probable grounds that a crime has been committed, appropriate criminal charges can be laid.

Even if criminal charges are not laid, an individual can apply for a peace bond or restraining order to prohibit their partner from threatening or harassing them further.

## *The roots of intimate partner violence and abuse.*

Intimate partner violence and abuse is rooted in a power imbalance between individuals, within families and in society. Basically, when one person is controlled and/or considered less worthy than another one – because they are a vulnerable person or part of a vulnerable population – there is the potential for abuse.

What makes intimate partner violence and abuse occur in one relationship and not another? According to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, we know that partners in violent and abusive relationships have often experienced family violence themselves as children. There are also known factors that increase the risk of partner abuse, especially the risk of serious abuse:

- Men who have witnessed violence by their fathers toward their mothers inflict more severe and repeated violence in their own relationships than men whose fathers were not violent.
- Alcohol is a prominent but not a causal factor in relationship abuse. In just over half of all violent incidents, the violent partner was drinking.

- Women are at greater risk of severe violence or even of being murdered just after they leave their husbands or partners.
- The risk of being killed by a spouse or partner is eight times higher for women in common-law relationships than in registered marriages.

## *Who experiences relationship abuse?*

Intimate partner violence and abuse is pervasive: no one is immune. It affects people of all ages, rich and poor, rural and urban, from every cultural and educational background. The majority of abusers are men and the majority of victims are women. Serious abuse is most often committed by men against women and children.

However, men are also victims of intimate partner violence and abuse. The rate is significantly lower than among women and the severity of abuse, especially homicide, often less. We are just beginning to learn more about the abuse of adult men.

There are other groups, **such as same sex intimate partners**, for which the violence and abuse needs more recognition and remedies. Since these groups may already be stigmatized in society, it can be difficult for either partner to reach out for appropriate help and support. Disabled and dependent persons are also particularly vulnerable in abusive situations. Aboriginal women and men experience higher rates of spousal violence than the general population.

New Canadians should know that landed immigrants will not be deported if they leave a partner because of abuse, even if that partner is their sponsor. (Immigrants

without legal status should get legal advice.)

Children are often victims of intimate partner abuse. Estimates are that in 30 to 40% of reported cases where the partner is abused, so are the children. However, there is a growing understanding that simply witnessing intimate partner violence in their home can affect children the same way as abuse directed at them. (Ask for the RCMP's booklet *Where Does It Hurt? The Effects of Family Violence on Children*.) What every person involved in an abusive relationship should know is that the RCMP will investigate all incidents of violence and abuse, regardless of sex, ethnicity, background or lifestyle.

## *Do you have a safety plan?*

Safety plans help you reduce or eliminate the risks that you and your children face by an abuser. Creating a safety plan will help you and your children get away from potential risks safely.

Safety planning should include:

- letting someone you trust know about the abuse even if you do not report it to the police;
- creating a code word with friends or family that lets them know to call for help when leaving is not an option;
- having one safe location to keep your identification, important documents (passport, Social Insurance Number), bank cards, credit cards, keys and cell phone that you can grab quickly in an emergency;
- having a physical plan to get out of your house in an emergency and a place to go, including the nearest shelter if necessary, once you have left the abusive situation; and
- practicing your safety plan with your children to keep them safe as well.

If you have left the abuser and the situation is still volatile, make sure that the school, day care, and police have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive partner.

## *Getting help*

The facts show that partner assault has declined in recent years. That is proof that relationship abuse can be stopped; it can be prevented. Changing attitudes, services for victims, treatment programs for violent men, stronger laws and pro-arrest policies are all making a difference. The first step for anyone in, or close to, an abusive relationship is to get help.

## *Help for the Abused*

In an emergency, call the police. Seek medical attention (injuries may be internal as well as external). In a crisis, call a women's shelter, crisis line, or counseling agency. Talk to your family doctor or community health center. Tell someone you trust, such as a friend or relative. Believe in yourself. You are not to blame.

## *Help for the Abuser*

If you abuse your partner, get help now. In most cases, abusive behaviour is learned as a child. It is also often accompanied by low self-esteem, frustration and guilt. You can change. You can take responsibility for your actions and seek counseling. The best way to start is through a family doctor or social service agency. Abusive behaviour often goes hand in hand with alcohol or drug abuse and you may need to address these problems as well.

## *Help for the Witness*

If you believe someone you know is being abused, do not turn a blind eye. Call the police in an emergency; do not attempt to intervene at risk to yourself. Listen to the affected person, whether abused or abuser. They may be asking for help. Offer support and refrain from judgment. Ask how you can be of help. Do not take over. Help the person explore their options. Tell him/her it is dangerous to do nothing about the abuse.

## *Community involvement and responsibility*

All forms of violence and abuse are serious criminal matters with a huge impact on society. As the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence states, *"Health costs for injuries and chronic health problems caused by abuse amount to about a billion dollars every year. We also pay a social cost in the form of children too traumatized to learn or develop normally, adult victims unable to function to their full potential, and diminished quality of family and community life"*.

Intimate partner violence and abuse flourishes in an environment where the misuse of power against the vulnerable or less powerful is tolerated. That environment may be behind closed doors or in the larger community. That is why we all need to work to prevent violence and to build a society where abuse of power is not tolerated. By seeing intimate partner violence and abuse for what it is – a crime – we can all take responsibility and work together as a community to stop the violence.

## *Help is available*

### Contacts and Resources

- crisis line
- abuse counseling
- women's groups
- immigrant and ethno-cultural groups
- Aboriginal groups
- women's shelters
- women's resource centres
- community health centres
- family doctor
- police
- RCMP victim services
- legal aid

For more information and resources on family and relationship violence, please visit:

<http://www.rcmp.ca/cp-pc/index-eng.htm> to view our other brochures:

- Dating Violence - Say NO!
- Effects of Family Violence on Children - Where does it Hurt?
- Criminal Harassment – Stalking: It's not love

These brochures can also be ordered at a cost from St. Joseph Corporation. For ordering information, contact them at their toll free number: 1-888-562-5561.