Women Abused by Their Partners

Who this is for

This fact sheet is for you if:

- You are a woman who is afraid for your safety because your male partner is mistreating you.
- You are wondering if your partner’s actions are abuse.

In this fact sheet, the word partner means husband, common-law partner, or ex-partner who is male.

What abuse means

Abuse in relationships includes behaviour ranging from threats to physical or sexual assault. It may also include financial, emotional, and verbal actions that are harmful.

A male abuser uses threats and violence to gain power and control over his partner and often blames the abuse on her. Remember that abuse is the abuser’s fault. Abuse against you is not your fault.

Abuse can be physical, emotional or verbal, psychological, sexual, and/or financial. For example:

- Physical abuse can be stopping you from leaving your home; breaking your things, damaging property, or threatening to damage something you value; threatening or hurting you with a weapon or any object; and/or shoving, slapping, choking, punching, or kicking you.
- Emotional or verbal abuse can be humiliating you, yelling at you, insulting you, or calling you names; constantly criticizing you and blaming you for everything; preventing you from contacting friends and family; threatening to have you deported; and/or accusing you of having or wanting to have sex with others.
- Psychological abuse can be controlling and limiting what you do, where you go, or who you see; opening and reading your mail or other private papers; following or watching you wherever you are; repeatedly phoning and/or emailing you; and/or threatening to hurt you, your children, someone you know, or a pet.
- Sexual abuse can be forcing you into sexual activity when you do not want it; forcing you to perform sexual acts that make you uncomfortable or hurt you; and/or injuring sexual parts of your body without your consent.
- Financial abuse can be controlling the money in your household and not letting you have any; making all the money decisions; not letting you use bank accounts and credit cards; refusing to let you get a job or causing you to lose your job; and/or running up debts in your name.

Abuse can also be emotional, physical, or sexual harm to your children. For example, abuse happens if your partner threatens to kidnap your children or uses custody and access issues to make you afraid.

The abuse could continue even after you leave your abusive partner. For example, your abuser may threaten to take you to court to pressure you to do what he wants. Or he may keep taking or trying to take you to court and/or not pay child support as ordered.

Abuse that is against the law

Certain types of abuse are more harmful than others and are against the law — these are crimes. Assault and criminal harassment (sometimes called stalking) are examples of abuse that are crimes.

- Assault is the most common type of crime an abuser is charged with. Assault can be physical or sexual. Physical assault is when your partner hits or hurts you, or threatens to hit or hurt you, and you believe that can and will happen. Sexual assault is when anything sexual happens to you without your agreement, including unwanted kissing, sexual touching, and forced intercourse (rape).
- Criminal harassment or stalking is when someone forces unwanted and continued attention on you. It is a pattern of threats and actions that makes you afraid for your safety and your children's safety. It is against the law for your partner to contact you again and again by phone and/or email, follow you, threaten you, or threaten to destroy your property.

Why you might stay

There are many reasons why someone stays with an abusive partner. You may be staying for one or more of these reasons:

- You may be a victim of a “cycle of violence” — a repeating pattern of violence in an abusive relationship. It sometimes begins with tension that slowly builds until a violent event happens. After the violent event, your partner may be sorry, may promise that it will not happen again, and may be loving and attentive. This may convince you and your partner that the abuse will end. But this pattern of abuse often occurs again.
- You feel you are financially dependent on the abuser, especially if you suffer from a disability.
- You fear for your children's safety.
- You are afraid of losing your home.
- You think that no one will believe the abuse happened.
- You have no social supports because you are isolated from your family and friends.
- You do not know about your legal rights or support services that can help you.
- You are afraid of losing your immigration status.
- You have difficulty speaking English and think you will not be understood.
- You feel isolated and pressured to stay because of problems with language, racism, family or community pressures, or because you are a newcomer to Canada.

You can get help

Because you are in an abusive relationship, you may feel ashamed, afraid, and alone. Abuse in relationships is not a private family matter. You can get help for yourself and your children, whether you want to stay in the relationship or leave. Support services and trained people throughout BC can help you wherever you live.
Help from the police

You and your children have the right to be safe. If you are being assaulted or criminally harassed, call 911 or the emergency police or RCMP number listed inside the front cover of your phone book. If you do not speak English, you can ask 911 for an interpreter. Police can help when abuse is happening or after it has happened.

To help the police with your case, make notes about every time you are assaulted, threatened, or feel unsafe. Include the following information in your notes:

- What happened
- The date and time of the abuse
- Where the abuse happened
- How you or your children were hurt
- Who else saw what happened

Other help

- Emergency shelters, or safe houses, are where you and your children can go for immediate safety. Transition houses, also called second-stage housing, are where you and your children can stay when you leave an abusive relationship. To find the nearest safe house or transition house, call VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808 (no charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week).
- Advocates, settlement workers, and victim service workers provide free legal information and emotional support. To find an advocate, see the PovNet website at www.povnet.org (click “Find an Advocate”). To find a victim service worker, call VictimLink BC or see the website at www.victimlinkbc.ca.
- Income assistance (welfare) can provide you with emergency money if you have no money. For information, call the Ministry of Social Development at 1-866-866-0800 (no charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week).
- Community services provide support, counselling, and information. Some offer services specifically to newcomers; people with disabilities; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered partners. Check your local phone book for contact information, or the Directory of Victim Services in BC at www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/directory/index.htm.

Legal help

- If you cannot pay for a lawyer, the Legal Services Society (legal aid) may provide a free lawyer. Call the Provincial Call Centre at 604-408-2172 (in Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-577-2525 (no charge, elsewhere in BC). Legal aid also offers free, brief legal advice through its Family LawLINE (same phone numbers) and family duty counsel (lawyers) at courts. See the legal aid website at www.legalaid.bc.ca or, for family law information, see www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca.
- If you can pay for a lawyer, call the Lawyer Referral Service at 604-687-3221 (in Greater Vancouver) or 1-800-663-1919 (no charge, elsewhere in BC) to get the name of a lawyer you can meet with to discuss your legal problem for $25 plus taxes for the first half hour.
- If you are Aboriginal, you may be able to get legal help from your local friendship centre, your band’s social development office, and/or your nation’s child and family services office. Call VictimLink BC for the name of a Native courtworker near where you live to help you.

More information

For more information about getting legal and other help, see the Legal Services Society booklet Surviving Relationship Violence and Abuse at www.legalaid.bc.ca/publications (click “Abuse & family violence”).

The Legal Services Society website provides links to brochures about abuse in same-sex relationships at www.legalaid.bc.ca/publications/subject.php?sub=13.

This fact sheet explains the law in general. It is not intended to give you legal advice on your particular problem. This fact sheet is one of a series produced by the Legal Services Society, BC. Other fact sheets in this series:

- What Is Abuse?
- Men Abused by Their Partners
- If Your Sponsor Abuses You
- Safety Planning
- Getting Help from the Police or RCMP
- The Criminal Court Process
- Protection Orders
- Custody, Guardianship, and Access
- What to Do About Money
- Staying in the Family Home on Reserve

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