

SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

# TAKE A STAND

**A COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE**

Learn how YOU CAN SUPPORT a victim of family violence and abuse.

**JOIN US.**



# RECOGNIZE

RESPOND

REFER

**Offering non-judgmental, compassionate support is a powerful way to help end violence and make positive change in our community.**

Studies show that with the appropriate education and training, informal supporters and bystanders increase their capacity and confidence, and get involved supporting victims more often. This can make all the difference in the world.

The majority of victims of violence turn to someone they know first for help, as opposed to a Shelter, police or some other formal service. How these family members, friends, neighbours or co-workers respond, is incredibly important in shaping what the victim does next. These reactions, or “social responses” as they are known, can have very positive or very negative impacts for the victim.

Through the Take A Stand initiative, the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter educates community members to effectively support victims of violence and abuse. It empowers Calgarians to better support their family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbours who may be experiencing family violence and abuse.

Presentations are offered to organizations and community groups which help people learn how to identify family violence and abuse in all its forms, ways to respond compassionately to victims and how to connect them with resources.

This is an important means of violence prevention of which we can all be a part. Together, we **CAN** all **Take A Stand** and make a difference.

# TYPES of Abuse and Some Common Indicators\*

## Emotional, Psychological and Verbal Abuse



Name calling; Belittling; Constant criticism

Putting down her family/friends

Making Threats

Abusing/neglecting kids and not letting her intervene; telling her she's a bad mother

Not speaking to her for days at a time

Stalking, harassing in person or via technology

Making her do something humiliating (i.e. begging for forgiveness, having to ask permission to use the car, use a bank card, buy groceries, etc.)

Turning others against her

Making rules about what she can say, do, wear, who to talk to

Trying to stop her from making money

Trying to make her hand over money

Making her account for every dollar spent

Forcing the family to live in poverty when money is available

Racking up debt in her name, to impact her credit rating



## Financial Abuse

\* Please note this not a comprehensive list, many other examples exist.

## Isolation and Social



Stopping her from having access to family/friends.

Using jealousy to justify questioning and controlling her movements and activities.

Listening to her phone calls, or checking text messages, monitoring mileage on car, calling/texting/emailing repeatedly.

Putting her down in front of others.

Trying to keep her from doing things (i.e. job, school).

Creating a “scene” in public situations to get her to stop wanting to attend public/social activities.

Slapping, hitting, kicking, biting or punching.

Pushing, grabbing, throwing or shoving.

Preventing her from leaving a room.

Locking her in or out of the home.

Using a gun, knife or other weapon.



## Physical





## Sexualized

Physically and/or emotionally pressuring her and/or forcing her to have sex when she doesn't want to.

Emotionally pressuring her to have sex with other people, animals or objects.

Demanding she wear more (or less) provocative clothing.

Making degrading sexual comments.

Making threats if she doesn't comply with sex.

Forcing her to have sex for money or pornography.

Threatening to expose intimate details or photos.

Having sex with her while she is asleep or unconscious.

Attacking/ridiculing her belief system and/or culture.

Attempting to stop her from practicing or participating in spiritual practices.

Using spirituality or religion as a form of control.

Attempting to force her to accept spiritual beliefs or engage in spiritual practices.

Using cultural and/or religious grounds to justify violence.

Maiming and/or killing the victim to "restore honour to the family."

Rejecting and shunning victim in an attempt to control their behaviour.



## Cultural/Spiritual

# BARRIERS

## to Leaving that Victims Face

There are many reasons why women stay and even those who leave may return. Each of these barriers are real, legitimate concerns. Her fears have merit and are based on actual risk. Her hope for a happy family when he can be genuinely remorseful is a powerful motivator. As supporters, we are more helpful if we respect the valid challenges victims face in deciding whether to leave or stay. Rather than focusing on why she stays, a better question is: Why doesn't he stop? We must also consider the role perpetrators play in deliberately creating barriers like these and others.

### Fear

That her abusive partner will harm her or her children if they leave.

That she will be unable to support herself and/or her children.

That she may lose custody of her children.

### Guilt

Perpetrators may be relentless in blaming her for “breaking up the family”.

Repeatedly being told/coerced into believing the abuse is her fault.

### Social

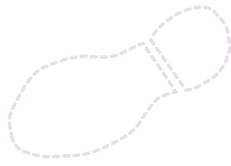
Societal beliefs that normalize violence.

Messages that pathologize and blame victims for their circumstances and excuse the perpetrator.

Social Responses to victims are often very negative and judgmental.

### Systemic

Many systems hold the victim accountable for creating safety, and do not hold the perpetrator accountable for the abuse and for stopping it.



## Lack of Support

Victims are expected to leave everything behind in order to be safe. There are few supports for starting over.

People often do not believe her, think she's exaggerating or is being "dramatic".

## Hope

People may not help her or may not know how to help her.

Her partner may be very remorseful and make a commitment to change.

Her partner may give explanations for the abuse i.e. stress, accident, drinking, etc.

## Love

Because she still loves him—not the abusive behavior. The kids may love him.

Partner is loving and respectful between the incidences of abuse.

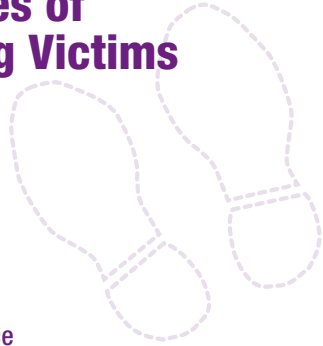


*Adapted from Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan*

# RESPOND

RECOGNIZE  
REFER

## 5 Principles of Supporting Victims



### Naming the Violence

When the victim is talking about her experience of abuse, it is important to pay close attention to the violence and abuse she's experienced. Victims find it helpful when supporters notice the violence they are experiencing, and when others listen carefully when they talk about being scared of their partners.

They do not find it helpful when others minimize the abuse and fail to notice the extent to which their partner is really hurting and scaring them.



### Being clear that the one who perpetrates abuse is the one who is responsible

Victims are usually clear that the abuse is not their fault, and that their partners are responsible for their abusive behaviour. They find it helpful when they have conversations with supporters who are also clear that the abusive person is the one responsible.







### **Honouring the victim's resistance to violence**

Victims always resist being treated badly. Alongside each story of abuse is an equal story of the victim's resistance to the abuse. Victims appreciate being asked and attention being paid to all they have done to resist their partner's abuse, try to protect themselves and/or their children, or to stand up for their dignity and integrity. It is important to notice resistance even when victims have resisted in quiet ways that might not get noticed. Victim's resistance is often subtle because often it is not safe for them to resist directly. Victims feel disrespected if others assume they have done nothing in the face of abuse.



### **Challenging the victim blaming messages the victim has received from others**

Many victims receive messages from others that suggest it is their fault that their partner is abusive to them. They get the message that they are damaged or sick in some way, or there is something wrong with them because they are with an abusive partner.

For example, they may be told they are not strong enough, or that they picked an abusive partner "because abuse is all they know from an abusive childhood." It is really important to listen to the stories victims tell. Listen carefully, it becomes clear that victims are not to blame. Challenging victim-blaming messages they may have received can be really helpful.



### **Allowing the victim the right to judge their own choices**

While we always seek to challenge victim-blaming messages, and work hard to make it clear that the perpetrator always had a better choice than to abuse another person, we have also found that it is helpful to allow victims the space to talk about their regrets if they wish. Like all of us, victims often feel they have made poor choices, and that they could have done better.

Allowing victims the space to judge their own decisions helps them view their situation in a more balanced and objective way, to explore the dilemma and difficulties they face, and explore the options that seem the most reasonable to them given their partner's abusive behaviour and their personal situations.

# SOCIAL Responses

Social Responses are the collective reactions (in words, behaviours and attitudes) that others have towards victims.

Social Responses come from informal supporters (i.e. family members, friends, co-workers, neighbours, etc.) and from formal supporters (i.e. police, healthcare professionals, counsellors, shelters, etc.).

## Social Responses have tremendous impact!

Victims who receive **POSITIVE** social responses:

Tend to recover more quickly and fully.

Are more likely to work with authorities.

Are more likely to report violence in future.

Are more likely to access safety services and supports.

Victims who receive **NEGATIVE** social responses:

Are less likely to cooperate with authorities.

Are less likely to disclose violence again.

Are more likely to receive diagnosis of mental disorder.

Are less likely to access protective measures.

**Some ways to respond to victims of family violence and abuse that MAY be helpful:**

Believe the victim.

Be compassionate (empathy not pity), non-judgmental and respectful of their choices.

Be clear that it's not the victim's fault.

"I'm sorry this is happening to you."

"You don't deserve this, it's not your fault."

"I'm concerned for you."

"It sounds like you're doing the best you can in a difficult situation."

"I'm here to listen and will support your decisions."

**Some negative responses that are NOT helpful:**

Express disbelief or imply the victim is exaggerating or isn't being truthful.

Judgmental and/or victim-blaming about her situation and her choices.

Tell her what she "has", "should" or "needs" to do.

"You need to leave him."

"You have to call the police."

"You need marriage counselling."

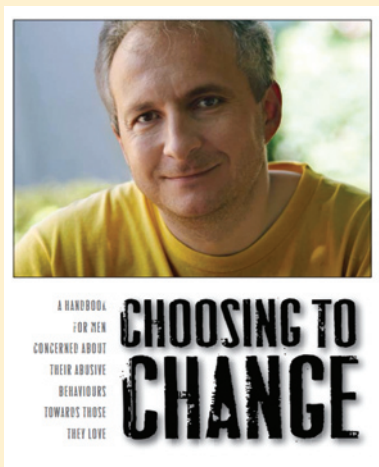
"Really? He seems like such a nice guy."

"If that's true, why are you still with him?"

"What do you do to make him so angry?"

# RESPONDING

## to Perpetrators



Please refer to our handbook, "Choosing to Change: A handbook for men concerned about their abusive behaviours towards those they love".

Visit:  
[CalgaryWomensShelter.com](http://CalgaryWomensShelter.com)  
and/or  
[MCSCalgary.com](http://MCSCalgary.com)

The perpetrator is the only one responsible for the violence and abuse. Only he can stop the abuse to keep the victim safe.

Trust your own instincts when deciding if you will address the abuse with the perpetrator. If you feel safe to be available to the perpetrator as someone who can listen in a non-judgmental way, this may be helpful. If you do not feel safe, do not feel obligated to intervene with the perpetrator.

If you do feel safe addressing a perpetrator, do not disclose that a victim has confided in you. Respect the victim's confidentiality and only address things you have personally witnessed.

If you do feel safe addressing a perpetrator, don't be judgmental.

Avoid making personal criticisms or observations about what kind of a person they are.

Do not get in the middle of a physical assault. Call 911.

Document as many details as you can in writing as soon as possible.

It is upsetting to witness violence against women. You can call our

**24-Hour Family Violence Helpline at (403) 234-SAFE (7233)**

for support and discuss how to handle a particular situation. Since each situation is so different and family violence and abuse is complex, it can be helpful to get support for yourself.

# CONCERNS

## You May Have About Getting Involved

### Points of Concern

You feel like it's none of your business.

You don't know what to say.

You might make things worse.

You think it's likely not serious enough to get involved.

It will resolve on its own.

You might offend the person if you're wrong in thinking they're a victim.

You're afraid it'll be unsafe for you/your family or the victim.

### Points to Consider

Family violence and abuse is a community issue. It is everyone's business. We all have a role to play in helping to end it.

Saying you care and you're concerned for them is a good start. Don't tell them what they "should" or "have" to do. See the Social Responses section on pages 10-11.

Saying/doing nothing might make things worse. You might help improve things and are at least offering compassion.

Victims often feel very alone and appreciate non-judgmental support. They may be minimizing what is happening, it could be more serious than you think.

Abuse escalates over time and does not go away on its own.

Showing you think there is nothing shameful about being a victim and asking in a sensitive way, rarely leads to offence. If they do get offended you can apologize and say you're here if they ever need you in the future.

Speak to the victim in confidence when the time is right and you have privacy. Call our 24-Hour Family Violence Helpline if you are unsure.

*Adapted from the Neighbours, Friends and Family Campaign*



# REFER

RECOGNIZE  
RESPOND

## Programs and Services provided by the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter

### 24-Hour Family Violence Helpline

Professionally trained counsellors available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year to provide counselling, safety planning, information and support; Everyone is welcome to call **(403) 234-SAFE (7233)** or **1 (866) 606-7233**.

### Community Services Counselling Program

Counselling, emotional and practical support for women experiencing family violence and abuse, who are unable or choose not to enter the Emergency Shelter; Counselling takes place in safe locations in the community.

### Emergency Shelter

Safe and secure accommodation for women and children fleeing family violence and abuse; providing nutritious meals, basic essential items, counselling, referral services and support.

### Child and Adolescent Services

Compassionate, interactive age appropriate activities and counselling for children and families in the Emergency Shelter and the community.

### Court Program

Helping women experiencing family violence and abuse navigate their way through the complex legal system.



### **Men's Counselling Service**

Offers non-judgmental individual and/or group counselling and support to men who are concerned that their anger and abusive behaviours are negatively impacting their family members. Visit the Men's Counselling Service website: [MCScalgary.com](http://MCScalgary.com).

### **Healthy Relationships Program**

A school and community-based program which provides prevention and early intervention, group and individual counselling to youth.

### **Take A Stand – A Community Capacity Building Initiative**

Educates and empowers community members to effectively support victims. Presentations are offered to organizations and community groups which help people learn how to identify family violence and abuse in all its forms, ways to respond compassionately to victims and how to connect them with resources.

**If you are interested in booking a Take A Stand presentation for your organization or workplace:**

**(403) 290-1552 Ext. 426**

**[takeastand@cwes.ca](mailto:takeastand@cwes.ca)**

For more information about these programs and services:

**[CalgaryWomensShelter.com](http://CalgaryWomensShelter.com)**

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**General Inquiries - Administration:**  
(403) 290-1552

**[CalgaryWomensShelter.com](http://CalgaryWomensShelter.com)**

**[info@cwes.ca](mailto:info@cwes.ca)**