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Abuse and Domestic Violence

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Summary: Abuse is behaviour used to intimidate, isolate, dominate or control another person. If you are being abused, know that abuse is never your fault, and it is never justified. Things don't have to be this way. Help is available, whether through speaking with your physician, or calling a telephone crisis line, or a woman's shelter.

What is Abuse and Domestic Violence?

Abuse is behaviour used to intimidate, isolate, dominate or control another person. It may be a pattern of behaviour or it may be a single incident. Abusive behaviour might involve acts or words or even neglect.

Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial:

- **Physical abuse is when someone hurts you physically in any way.** It includes hitting, kicking, slapping, pinching, cutting, stabbing, and shooting. All of these examples are **assault**, which is a crime in Canada and the United States.
- **Sexual touching or sexual activity is abuse** if you do not consent or if you are too young to consent - this is also a crime in both Canada and the United States. It does not matter if you are dating someone, living with someone or married to someone; if you do not consent, or if you are too young to consent, it is a crime.
- **Emotional or psychological abuse** is when someone purposely does things to make you feel bad about yourself. It includes threats to hurt you or loved ones; constant insults or put downs; hurting your children, your pets or threatening to do so; driving dangerously with you in the car; isolating you from friends and family. Stalking is when someone just won't leave you alone. Stalking behaviours include when someone follows, watches or tracks where you go; leaves threatening messages; harasses you with too many messages; calling you over and over again, and hangs up with no answer; sends gifts you do not want.
- **Financial abuse** is whenever someone takes advantage of your money. It includes: taking your pay cheque or money without permission; Keeping your money so that you cannot pay for things you or your children need, such as food, shelter or medical treatment; making you sign documents to sell your house or to change your will. **These are crimes in Canada.**

Bullying is a form of abuse that can happen in a relationship or in a family. It may be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, or a combination. Some forms of bullying may be crimes.

Some examples of bullying may be:

- Hitting, kicking, pushing or shoving
- Taking your money and other possessions
- Making threats or acting in an intimidating way
- Constantly teasing you or calling you names

- Spreading hurtful rumours
- Ignoring you and making you feel left out

There are other forms of abuse that may not be crimes, but even so, they are hurtful and they might lead to criminal forms of abuse.

Some examples are:

- Humiliating you or making you feel worthless
- Insulting, ignoring or neglecting you
- Constantly yelling at you
- Calling you names
- Not letting you have money that you need
- Ridiculing your religious or spiritual beliefs or preventing you from practising your religion
- Deciding what you can and can't do, where you can go, what you can wear, and who you can be with
- Forcing you to marry someone you don't want to marry

* **Domestic violence** is abuse which happens in a relationship. Just as with abuse, aggression can take many forms, such as:

- Physical: When your partner hits, kicks, punches or hurts you physically in any way.
- Emotional: When your partner controls you by saying or doing things which may you feel down about yourself.
- Sexual: Making someone do sexual things that they do not want to, including rape.

It Doesn't Have to Happen Regularly

Abuse or aggression does not have to happen regularly. It can happen just once in a while. And after an abuse happens, the other person may go out of his/her way in being nice and promising that it won't happen it again... But unfortunately, the abuse usually does happen again...

Abuse Can Start at Any Time

The abuse also doesn't have to start off at the beginning of the relationship. Usually the abuser is sweet and charming in the beginning. But over time, the abuser may show subtle signs of controlling the other person, such as by needing to know the other person's whereabouts, or by being extremely jealous.

Abuse is always wrong

You have a right to safety, respect, and a life free from harm by others. Abuse and domestic violence is not only wrong but is also against the law.

And although abusers are often very good at blaming their victims for the abuse, the abuse is always the abuser's responsibility. It is NEVER your fault.

Myths and Facts about Abuse

Unfortunately, guilt and shame often keeps victims in an abusive relationship; it stops them from getting help from themselves.

Myth: I deserve it. I'm not a perfect person myself.
Fact: It is true; maybe you aren't a perfect person yourself, but there nothing you do deserves abuse.

Myth: If I stay, I can help him/her to work it out.
Fact: You are a partner, not a therapist. And the longer you stay in an abusive relationship, the less motivation the other person has to change. If you really want to change the abuser's behaviours, then get out of the relationship.

Myth: We have to stay together for the kids.
Fact: If you really care about your kids, the best thing you can possibly do is get out of an abusive relationship. If you stay together in an abusive relationship, then you increase the chance that you or your kids will get seriously harmed at some point. Furthermore, your kids will only learn that abusive relationships are normal, which will make it more likely that your kids will have abusive relationships when they grow up. If your boys are watching their father be abusive, then it is more likely that they will grow up to be abusers. If your girls are watching their mother be abused, then it is more likely they will be abused when they grow up.

Supporting Someone Who is Being Abused

My friend is in an abusive relationship... How can I help?

Do's

- Learn everything you can about abuse
- Let your friend know that you believe them, and that you are there for them
- Listen to them and let them talk and ventilate
- Ask your friend if they want your advice, and only give advice if you have permission to
- Send them the following key messages
    - Its not their fault for the abuse and that they aren't to blame
    - That they only has the power to change their own behaviour, not that of their partner
    - That they is not alone.
- Help your friend by researching local resources, e.g. women's shelters, abuse hotlines, etc.
- Offer to help them come up with an emergency plan
- Offer to help by babysitting their children or by driving them to any appointments that are needed

Don'ts

- Don't judge
- Don't confront or talk to their partner
- Don't tell them to go into the situation to try to work things out
- Don't tell them to stay for the sake out of the children

What About the Children If I Decide to Leave?

If you leave an abusive situation, you can still apply for custody of your children.

If you think your children might be in danger, contact the police and ask them to escort you and your children to a shelter or a location where you will be safe. The place that you decide to go must be within the same province or territory in which you are living until custody is decided by a judge.

If you have time, before leaving your home, you should also speak with a lawyer about the best way to protect yourself and your children. A lawyer can help you apply to the court for a custody or parenting order*.

If you are worried about your children's safety, your lawyer can ask the judge for an order that would allow your spouse to have only supervised visits with the children, or in very rare cases, no contact at all. The judge will base their decision on what is best for the children. Keep in mind that it is rare for a judge to order no contact between a child and a parent. The other parent will likely be able to visit the children but the judge may order supervised visits with another person present, such as a social worker. If your children will be visiting the other parent, you may want to arrange for someone else to be there for the pickups and returns to prevent any problems.

Your safety and the safety of your children come first. Do not stay in a dangerous situation because you are worried about how you will support your children on your own. Shelters can provide you and your children with short-term help while you look for housing and long-term support. Your lawyer can also help you ask the judge to order the other parent to pay financial support for you and your children.

Tell your lawyer if you think the other parent or someone else will try to take the children out of the country. If you ask, the judge may order that the children's passports be kept by the court. If your children are Canadian citizens, call Passport Canada tollfree at 1-800-567-6868 or TTY services at 1-866-255-7655. Ask them to put the children's names on a list so that you can be called if anyone tries to get a passport for them. If your children have citizenship in another country, contact that embassy or consulate to ask them to refuse passports for your children. More information on international child abductions can be found at this site: http://www.voyage.gc.ca/faq/child-abductions_enlevementsenfants-eng.asp

If you have a custody or parenting order, it is a good idea to keep a copy with you in case there is a problem. You can also give a copy to your children's school or daycare.

Setting Up an Emergency Plan

- Contact a domestic violence hotline or woman's shelter, who can help with all of the practical help and advice that you need.
- Set up a separate bank account.
- Give important papers to a trusted friend or family member.

Things to take with you if you leave

In an emergency, leave as quickly as possible. Do not stop to collect the things on this list-just go. But if you do have time to prepare, try to take as many of these things as you can.

- Driver's licence and car keys
- Important documents, such as birth certificates, passports,
- Citizenship papers, immigration papers, child custody papers,
- Court orders (such as a peace bond), health cards, your social
- Insurance card, and your spouse's or partner's social insurance number
- Money, credit cards
- Cheque book, bank book, savings bonds
- Personal telephone and address book
- Medicine
- House keys
- Children's favourite toys
- Clothing for a few days
- Valuable jewellery

If you are thinking about leaving, it might be a good idea to collect some of these things in advance and put them together in a safe place, in case you decide to leave quickly.

Where to Get Help

There are many different places where you can get help if you are being abused, or even if you aren't sure if you are being abused.

Places include:

- **People I trust:** Who are the people that you trust? Family, friends, others?
- **In case of emergency:** If you need urgent medical help, or if you are in immediate danger. In North America, you can call 911 or dial 0 for the operator.
- **Police**: Can help if you feel physically threatened by a (ex)-partner, or are being stalked. Police can help you obtain restraining orders, or peace bonds, which keep the other person from contacting you, going to certain places or having access to firearms and ammunition.
- **Women's shelters.** To find a nearby shelter in your area, contact Shelternet at http://www.shelternet.ca
- **Hospital emergency rooms:** Which hospitals are closest to you? If you have injuries, the emergency room can help you with injuries, as well as help you in finding local services.

- **Your physician:** You should definitely tell your doctor about your abuse, because your doctor can help you 1) find out where to get help in your area, and 2) if you have any physical injuries (such as bruises), your doctor can help with those, as well as make sure that they are documented.
- **Counselling services:**
  - Children and youth can call the Kids Help Phone for free, bilingual phone and web counseling, 24-hrs a day, 365 days a year
  - Contact your Employee Asssistance Program (EAP) to see what counseling benefits you have.
  - The Canadian Register for Health Service Providers in Psychology website has listings of psychologists and psychological associates across the country.
  - The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence has a variety of national directories:
  - http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/help-aide-eng.php
- **Information / helplines and crisis lines:** Helplines are a free service that you call by telephone. You can get advice without having to give your name or phone number. They can give advice, as well as give you places to get more help. Look in a telephone to find a helpline in your area.
  - In Canada, you can call 211.
  - In the USA, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 / 1-800-787-3224 (TTY For The Deaf)
- **Legal services:** Can help if you need legal assistance for custody or divorce issues.
  - Lawyer Referral Services: The Canadian Bar Association offers a Lawyer Referral Service to help you find a lawyer in your area. http://www.cba.org/cba/info/faq/referral.aspx
  - Legal Aid Program: Helps those who are unable to afford legal services. Link http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/pb-dgp/arr-ente/lap-paj.html
  - For more information about legal issues related to violence against women, contact the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) http://www.owjn.org/

Special Thanks to the Department of Justice

Special thanks to the Department of Justice for permission to adapt content from their information booklet, Abuse is Wrong. The full booklet is available here:
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/fem-abus-wrg-eng.pdf

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Additional contributions are from members of the eMentalHealth.ca Team and Editorial Board.

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