



## HELPING MY CHILD

a guide to supporting  
children exposed to  
domestic violence



An agency of the Provincial  
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**MENTAL  
HEALTH  
PROGRAMS**



**VANCOUVER  
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This guide is the first of a three-part series intended to help mothers, caregivers, and service providers support children who are living with, or have lived with, domestic violence.

The other guides in the series are:

**2. Kids helping kids: a guide for children exposed to domestic violence.**

**3. Interventions with children exposed to domestic violence: a guide for professionals.**

Guides in this series can be downloaded free of charge from the website of BC/YSTH <http://www.bcysth.ca>.

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## Welcome

This guide is for mothers who are targets of violence in a relationship. Our goal is to support you so that you can support your children. Although there are some references to teens, the guide is directed, in particular, to children of 12 years and younger.

Some parts of the guide may also be useful to other caregivers, such as step-parents, foster parents, or male caregivers who have been abused by their partner.

The guide may also help in the care and support of children who have been abused but have not been exposed to partner violence.

**This guide is the first of a three-part series intended to help mothers, caregivers, and service providers support children who are living with, or have lived with, domestic violence. Many of these children are living with their mothers. The mothers have been, or are being, abused by their partners.**

## We will focus on your well-being and safety

We want to offer ideas on how to care for and support children who are aware of the abuse and may have been abused themselves.

- If you are a mother of children exposed to violence in the home, your own safety and comfort is essential for the security and happiness of your child or children.
- Although your children's needs are different from your own, your children's well-being is affected if the home is unsafe, or if there is much tension and distress.
- Looking after yourself helps you look after your children's needs too.

## What you find in this guide

- First, this guide looks at what abuse is and what impact it has on mothers and children.
- Second, the guide looks at what you can do to keep yourself safe and help your children.
- The guide provides useful resources for support and information.

Remember: You do not have to do everything at once. Take it one step at a time. The fact that you are working on safety for yourself and your children is a sign of your courage and strength.



# 1

# What is abuse?

## THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT

- what abuse is
- how the abuser wants power and control
- when abuse is a crime
- how the abuse has an impact on children

## Types of abuse

The majority of cases of violence within relationships are committed by men against women. For this reason, it is often called “woman abuse.”

Many people think that “abuse” or “violence” means physical abuse or threats of hurting someone, or sexual abuse. In fact, abuse by a partner can include other forms of abuse, such as emotional or psychological abuse, verbal abuse, and financial abuse.

### EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- hurting pets, damaging property
- using children to hurt or control you
- playing mind games, giving you the silent treatment, using jealousy, sarcasm, and threats
- making humiliating comments about your culture, religious beliefs, level of education, or disability
- being extremely possessive; refusing to let you see friends or relatives
- threatening to withdraw sponsorship or to get you deported

### VERBAL ABUSE

- swearing, yelling
- using put-downs; name-calling

### FINANCIAL ABUSE

- hiding money





- controlling all money and purchases
- spending money on himself, while you and the children go short of food, clothing etc.

## The abuser wants power and control

In all these types of abuse, one person in a relationship is using abuse to gain power and control over the other person.

Abusers may view themselves as central, superior and deserving. Their needs come first; they want their own way.

Women who are abused by their partners may believe they are somehow responsible for the abuse. They may be critical of the way they cope. For example, a woman may think she is “not assertive enough” when in fact her experience of the abuse has shown her it is unsafe to express her own opinions.

Many women who have been abused by their partners have told us that they find the emotional/psychological abuse even more difficult and hurtful than physical abuse.

## Assault and harassment are against the law

Criminal assault includes physical abuse or threats of physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Criminal harassment includes stalking, threatening harm, and threatening to destroy property or harm pets.

Statistics about partner violence tend to include only physical abuse, sexual abuse and threats of abuse (sometimes these crimes are called “spousal assault”). Most books, articles, manuals, and pamphlets are directed primarily at these illegal types of partner violence.

## Children are affected by the abuse

Children who see, hear, or find out about the abuse are affected by it. Their health, behaviour, emotional development, social relationships and school performance can suffer. In addition, they are being given a negative example of adult relationships that they may go on to repeat when they grow up. Mental health problems may also show up later in life.



## 2

# How violence affects women

### THE CHAPTER LOOKS AT

- how many women are abused by their partners
- how the “cycle of violence” can work
- how abuse is often kept secret
- how abuse can affect a woman’s health

### You are not alone: the statistics

If you are being abused you are not alone. Canadian and American studies show that 25-30% of women are physically assaulted by a husband, partner or boyfriend sometime during their lives. In British Columbia, 10% of women reported assault by a partner during a 5-year period.

Often women experience several types of abuse together. For instance women may be hit, threatened, sworn at, put down, called names, kept away from relatives and friends, told how to dress and behave, and not allowed to have any money.

### In some relationships there is a “cycle of violence”

In some relationships there is a “cycle of violence” that can be confusing. The “cycle of violence” refers to a build up of tension, followed by an explosion of violence, and then a “honeymoon” period. In the honeymoon period abusers may say they are sorry and that they’ll never do it again. They may be very loving and helpful.

You may be taken in by this honeymoon period and believe that your partner has changed for good. But then the tension starts to build up again. Your partner may start to be irritable and sarcastic, and you begin to feel tense and upset.

Other relationships have a different pattern. In some the violence is almost constant; in others there is only an occasional violent incident.

What women survivors tell us is that no matter how often or how serious the actual incidents are, it is the ongoing pattern of repeated abuse that keeps women terrified and worn down.



Many women describe the so-called honeymoon phase as the most difficult because their partner's promises to change or get help give the women hope. But the honeymoon isn't really a honeymoon – it only describes some of the strategies that abusers use to persuade their partners to stay.

During the tension phase many women describe “walking on eggshells” as they try to “keep the peace” and try to “get everything right” to avoid more abuse and more danger.

## Partner violence is often a family secret

Abusers sometimes seem charming in public; no one realizes what they are like at home. Your abuser may forbid you to see family or relatives, or may use manipulative tactics to prevent contact with friends and relatives. You feel isolated and alone. Your partner's behaviour may make it impossible for you to have a career or job.

## The violence may make parenting difficult

The threats of abuse and constant criticism may undermine your authority and make it hard for you to be an effective parent. As a result, you may find yourself being too lenient with the children, or getting very angry with them.

- Your partner may allow the children to be disrespectful or rude to you, and encourage them not to listen to you.
- He may give in to them constantly, buy them toys, and shower them with attention.
- Or your partner may be angry, critical, or even abusive towards the children.
- He may demand that his needs always come first or that you should pay no attention to the children when he is at home.

These factors, plus being exposed to the violence towards you, may make the children upset and their behaviour difficult to manage.

## How the impact of abuse can affect women's health

Women report that the impact of abuse can cause health problems and affect how they cope.

Although every woman is affected differently by abuse, you may:

- lose confidence in yourself, feel powerless and unable to make decisions

## Clara's story

Nobody in the office realized that Clara was being abused, and admired her handsome husband Rick. Sometimes he sent her flowers, or arrived to take her out for dinner. She always left work promptly, refusing to join after-work activities.

When she arrived one day with a black eye, her co-workers readily accepted her explanation that she'd accidentally banged into a kitchen cupboard. Even though Clara appeared thin, pale, tense, and preoccupied, she always told people that she was "fine, thank you."

Usually Clara hurried home from work to prepare food that Rick liked and waited anxiously to see what mood he was in when he got home. She had little time or energy to devote to her three children, and felt frustrated and angry when they were whiny and demanding. She often felt guilty and thought that she was useless as a wife, as a mother, and as a secretary.

- feel ugly, uninteresting, and think nobody likes you
- have problems with your memory and concentration
- feel numb, empty, and out of touch with your feelings
- feel depressed, sad, and guilty; have suicidal thoughts
- feel tense, anxious, fearful and upset; have panic attacks
- feel angry, irritable, and cranky most of the day
- find yourself turning to alcohol or drugs to make you feel better
- have headaches, stomach aches, vomiting, or diarrhoea
- develop sexual problems, bladder infections, or other genito-urinary problems
- lose your appetite, have poor sleep, low energy, and constant fatigue
- develop high blood pressure, palpitations, or other heart problems
- get frequent infections such as colds or the flu
- get skin rashes or have hair falling out.



### 3

## How violence hurts children

### THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT:

- how children experience the abuse
- what children learn from the abuse
- how children react: as babies, toddlers, preschoolers, elementary school-aged children, young teens, and late teens.

### How children are exposed to abuse

Children may be hit, sworn at, called names, threatened, and have their belongings damaged or their pets hurt. Or they may see, hear, or be aware of their mother being abused. Research has shown that both can be equally damaging to children.

Sometimes we talk about children who witness abuse. But witnessing goes way beyond just seeing the abuse. For instance, children may:

- see bruises on their mother
- hear fighting, shouting, thuds, and things getting broken during the night

The next day their mother may be pale, shaky, and tearful, lying in bed staring at the ceiling. The children may go without breakfast, have no lunch for school, and spend the day worrying about what they will find when they get home.

Later their father may try to convince them that the abuse was their mother's fault. Or the children may assume it was their fault.

Children may think that something they did or didn't do caused the fight, or that they should have been able to stop the fighting, to prevent their mother getting hurt.

This is not a healthy environment for a child. Children depend on their parents to meet their emotional and physical needs.

When a partner is abusive, the children's needs may be neglected.



## Len's story

Len was terrified when his father began to hit his mother. He tried to step between them, but his father yelled at him to go upstairs.

Len did what he was told, but he could hear his mother sobbing and begging his father to stop. Later his father dragged Len out from under his bed and told him, "It's all your fault; that's why we were fighting; you didn't do your homework."

Children learn many things by watching their parents. These include communicating feelings, solving problems, coping with frustration, being respectful, and having consideration for others.

Although some children in violent homes appear unaffected by the violence and have no mental health problems, their experiences may influence their beliefs and attitudes.

## When children see their mother being abused

They may learn that:

- It's OK to use violence.
- Violence is a way to get what you want.
- Violence is a way to solve problems.
- You can gain power and control over others by using violence.
- Abuse is a normal part of relationships.
- Any distressing feeling can be expressed as violence.
- Men are more important and more powerful than women.
- Women don't deserve respect.

Children who are exposed to abuse may be more likely to be abusive or abused when they are adults.

The effect on a child depends on:

- the severity of the abuse
- how often it happens
- how long it has gone on



## Charlene's story

Charlene's father stopped hitting her mother after he attended an anger management course. But his emotional and verbal abuse continued. He was always rude and disrespectful, calling her mother names and ordering her to wait on him.

When Charlene's mother asked him to help with the children's behaviour, he claimed that he needed a "time-out" and went off to see friends or go to a movie.

Like her father, Charlene ignored her mother's requests, ordered her mother to bring her food, and called her a "pig." Charlene hit and spat at her mother when she tried to put her in her room.

- whether the child is being abused as well
- whether the child already has some health or mental health problems

Other important factors include:

- the amount of support available to the child from parents, relatives, neighbours, friends, teachers and coaches
- whether the child is exposed to more violence in the community
- whether the child is exposed to violence on the TV and videogames
- whether the child has other stresses at home and school

## Children's reactions depend on their age and stage of development

### INFANTS

In the first year of life babies depend on their parents/caregivers to provide food, toileting, shelter, warmth and protection.

Babies need to be held, talked to, and played with. They thrive on structure and routines. They develop an emotional bond or attachment to familiar adults and to brothers and sisters.

By the second half of their first year, many babies get very distressed if a familiar person is not available. This is called separation anxiety.

Many people think that woman abuse has no impact on a baby. But it can have profound and long-lasting effects.



### **Parmajeet's story**

Parmajeet's husband threatened to kill her and their baby if she tried to leave. He insisted that the baby be left in the basement if she cried. Parmajeet was depressed, had no energy, cried frequently, and had little breast milk. The baby lost weight, cried and fussed constantly, and did not show any interest in being picked up.

Parmajeet was too scared to tell the doctor what was happening at home, so he admitted the baby to the hospital for assessment. In the safety of the hospital, the baby began to gain weight and Parmajeet told a nurse about the violence at home.

With the help of a multicultural worker, Parmajeet and the baby went to a transition house.

When a woman is being abused and has a baby:

- She may be upset, preoccupied and fearful. She may even feel terrified and helpless.
- She may be unable to give the baby as much care and attention as she would like. The tension and stress in the household may affect the baby. The baby may react by crying excessively, eating or sleeping poorly, developing slowly, getting sick often, or being very fearful with loud noises.

### **TODDLERS**

Between the ages of one and three, toddlers are developing and learning very fast. Like babies, they still depend on their parents/caregivers to provide food, warmth, shelter and protection, and thrive on structure and routines. They have learned to crawl or walk and have no sense of danger. Someone must be supervising them at all times.

Living with an active toddler can be very hard work.

With help from parents, toddlers gradually learn what is acceptable behaviour, to use the toilet, to feed themselves, and to communicate with words rather than crying or pointing. They learn by imitating their parents and older brothers and sisters, by being praised for their accomplishments, by looking at picture books and TV programs, by responding to their parent's directions, and by trial and error on their own.

Some toddlers go to daycare or preschool where they begin to learn how to interact with other children. Toddlers tend to play "in parallel," next to rather than





### **Tommy's story**

Tommy clung to his mother and wailed for at least an hour when she left him at daycare. He did not want to play, hid under a table, and tried to hit staff or other children when they approached him. He liked Ingrid, a quiet, gentle, patient worker. He would sit on her knee, sucking his thumb. Once he told her, "Mommy – hurt."

with another child. Toddlers are "egocentric." This means that they think that they are most important and at the centre of everything. This explains why they don't feel the need to share toys, and have little understanding of other people's feelings. (Some people think that abusers are still stuck at this stage!)

When a woman is being abused and has a toddler:

- The toddler may react by imitating the abusive behaviour that they are witnessing. This can include hitting and biting, hurting pets, screaming and yelling, and breaking toys. The toddler may be mimicking the abuser's disrespectful attitude. If left alone toddlers may hurt themselves or others.
- The toddler may react to the tension in the home by whining, clinging, crying, having eating or sleeping problems, or withdrawing.
- Toddlers sometimes try to comfort themselves by rocking, sucking their thumbs, or touching their private parts.
- Sometimes the stress causes the child to get sick more often.

### **PRESCHOOLERS**

Children between the age of three and five are still very dependent on their parents.

Their parents care for them, give them hugs and encouragement, keep them safe, supervise their play, guide their interactions with other children, and help them learn the skills that they will need when they go to school.

Parents are still playing a major role in shaping preschoolers' behaviour by modelling, praising, encouraging, giving simple instructions, setting limits, and having basic rules.

Children in this age group are able to speak and make others aware of their needs. They are or are about to be toilet trained. They are learning the meaning



## Inez's story

Daycare workers thought that four-year-old Inez was adorable. She was polite, cooperative and obedient, and helped to look after the younger children. Her three-year-old brother Antonio, on the other hand, was aggressive, angry and disrespectful. He teased and tormented the younger children.

Until they took some training about children exposed to partner violence, the workers did not understand how these children could come from the same family.

of right and wrong and how to control their impulses. They are aware of some basic feelings such as being angry, sad, and happy. They are beginning to be able to play cooperatively with peers, to take turns and to share.

When a woman is being abused and has a preschooler:

- The preschooler may become excessively compliant and pleasing. Or preschoolers may react to the tension and unhappiness with eating or sleeping problems, or by clinging and separation anxiety. Or they may try to comfort themselves with habits such as thumb-sucking or masturbation.
- A preschooler may mimic the abuse by hitting, being cruel to animals, breaking toys and other items, fighting with other children, being defiant, swearing, name-calling and yelling.
- Sometimes distressed preschoolers lose the skills that they have gained. For example, they start to wet the bed again or go back to eating with their fingers.
- In preschool or daycare the child may seem unhappy or angry, may defy staff and have problems getting on with other children.

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Between the ages of six and twelve, children are increasingly exposed to experiences and expectations outside the family. Parents, however, are still their main source of affection, protection, supervision and guidance.

Like younger children, elementary school-aged children need a positive, supportive, caring relationship with their parent or parents.

They need to learn socially appropriate behaviour, to follow rules, to organize themselves, and to control their impulses, moods and expression of feelings. They need to learn how to develop trusting, caring, respectful relationships with others.



## **Johnny's story**

Mrs. T., the grade 5 teacher, thought that Johnny had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and that he might need medication. Johnny was restless, couldn't sit still, couldn't concentrate, didn't listen to Mrs. T.'s directions, didn't finish his school work, and forgot his homework.

She set up a meeting with Johnny's mother. She found out that Johnny had done very well in his early grades, and that the family was afraid that Johnny's violent step-father would find out where they were living.

Mrs. T. realized that Johnny did not have ADHD. He was reacting to the violence he had witnessed, and was worried that his mother would get hurt while he was in school.

Mrs. T. arranged for Johnny to get some extra help and support in school. She told Johnny's mother that the school would not give out information about the children. She gave her a Victim Link wallet card and explained that she could call for help in finding resources for the family.

Parents need to model, teach and guide – not to force children to be obedient. Effective discipline is very important. It should consist of giving praise and positive reinforcement to increase wanted behaviour and using consequences or removal of privileges to end undesired behaviour. Household rules and reasonable limits are necessary.

When a woman is being abused and has an elementary school-aged child:

- Her parenting may face many obstacles. These can include her struggle to cope with the violence and her partner's unwillingness to cooperate in respectful and child-centred parenting.
- The child may model abusive behaviour by being aggressive, bullying, fighting with other children, destroying property, swearing, yelling, name-calling, being defiant, insisting on getting their own way, and showing disrespect for females.
- The child may be caught up in the fear, anxiety, and tension at home and react with anxiety, withdrawal, lack of confidence, depression, and eating and sleeping problems.
- The child may complain of frequent sickness.



- Anxiety or worry about the violence at home may affect the child's ability to do school work.
- The child may try to escape the difficulties at home or react to the lack of supervision and limits by running away, getting involved in delinquent behaviour with other children, or by trying out drugs or alcohol.
- Some children, mainly girls, who are fearful of the abuser's violence and sympathetic to their mother's plight, will be compliant, pleasing and self-effacing, often trying to help out their mother and younger children.

### **EARLY TEENS**

Children of twelve to fifteen continue to need parental attention, support, encouragement, protection, supervision and guidance. They need firm limits and expectations that are applied consistently. They should not be allowed to play one parent against the other.

Their parents' interaction with each other sets an important example for how teens will behave in dating relationships.

Despite their involvement with friends and teenage activities, these young adolescents are still very vulnerable to difficulties arising from their mother's abuse.

### **Isolda's story**

Isolda was only twelve but looked sixteen. Up to three years ago she'd been the only child with her single parent mother, Linda. They'd had lots of fun together. Then Linda met, married, and had a child with Jack. Linda gave up her job as a legal secretary.

Things changed drastically. Jack criticized and swore at Linda and Isolda. He gave Linda no money, would not let her go back to work, refused to let her drive his car, and made her break off contact with her friends and family.

Finally Linda left him and moved into a small apartment with the two children. She was depressed. The baby cried constantly and Isolda felt that nobody cared for her. She stopped going to school and got involved with a gang. Soon she was having sex with a 20-year-old, using and selling cocaine, stealing, and taking part in fights with rival gangs. The gang members told her that they were her family now.



When a woman is being abused and has an early teen:

- She may be struggling with issues from the abuse and her partner's behaviour and lack of cooperation. The teen may not receive supportive parenting.
- The mother may find that her child is repeating the abuse by being an abuser or victim in a dating relationship.
- The young teen may respond in a variety of ways that include bullying other children, showing disrespect for females, being involved in delinquent behaviour, abusing drugs or alcohol, dropping out of school, running away, living on the streets, or becoming a prostitute
- The young teen may react to the tension, anxiety, lack of parental support and periodic violence with anxiety, withdrawal, poor self-esteem, depression, suicide attempts, eating and sleeping problems or frequent complaints of sickness.

#### **LATER TEENS**

Typical teens of sixteen and more are moving towards adulthood. They are more serious about "What I want to do when I grow up." At the same time, they may have many doubts and fears about joining the adult world. They are becoming more clear about who they are as a person, are less involved with parents and more involved with their own friends and activities.

#### **Fu Man's story**

Fu Man was a model youngster. He was always on the honour roll, polite and respectful to teachers, popular with other children, and a talented musician. His mother and her partner were the envy of other parents in the community.

In grade 10 his grades began to slip, but he managed to pull them up again. In grade 11 he couldn't concentrate, had no energy, withdrew from his friends, dropped out of band, and was angry and irritable with his younger sister.

He started to miss classes, and then full days of school. He was called to the office of a school counsellor.

Fu Man appeared very depressed and said he'd thought of suicide. He disclosed worries and fears about his mother's abuse by her partner, and guilt that he had failed to stop the abuse, despite many attempts.



When a woman is being abused and has a late teen:

- The teen may resolve never to be abusive, or may already be involved in an abusive relationship.
- The teen may challenge the abusive parent or even fight with him.
- The teen may be helpful and protective, or abusive and disrespectful, to the mother.
- The teen may respond in a variety of ways that include:
  - being involved in delinquent behaviour
  - abusing drugs or alcohol
  - dropping out of school, running away, living on the streets, or becoming a prostitute
  - being a model teen who does well in school and is kind and helpful
  - having mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders



## 4

# Protecting yourself and your children

### THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT

- your safety: always the first priority
- obstacles you may face if you decide to leave
- getting help with particular challenges
- managing stress and taking care of yourself
- taking legal action
- what to expect if you leave an abusive relationship

### Your safety: always the first priority

This refers particularly to relationships where your partner is physically or sexually abusive or threatens you with harm.

- Even if you have left your partner, you may still have to deal with abusive behaviour.
- You need to remember that you can't control your partner's behaviour. But there are steps that you can take that will increase your safety.
- Any woman who is abused by her partner is constantly assessing the risks she faces. She develops ways to try to protect herself and her children, which she uses and adapts on a daily basis.
- You have probably already done a number of things to try to keep you and the children safe. The things you do to keep safe are your safety plan, even though you may not have used the term, "safety plan."
- Each woman's safety plan is unique to her and her situation. Many women find it helpful to actually make a safety plan because it is difficult in a crisis to think clearly and make safe decisions.
- There is an outline for a safety plan in the Resources section. You could use this outline to develop your own safety plan.
- Try to get help with developing your safety plan. The section in chapter 7, "Finding information and support in your community" has suggestions of who might help.



## You've decided you want to leave. What are the obstacles?

When you decide to leave an abusive partner it may take many months before you can carry out your plan. Roadblocks may include:

- Your partner threatens to abduct the children if you leave.
- Your partner threatens to harm you or your children if you leave.
- Your partner threatens to have you deported if you leave.
- Your partner threatens to get custody of the children if you leave.
- Your partner has threatened to kill himself.
- Your partner limits or won't allow access to phone, car, bus fare, money, friends, relatives.
- Your partner stops you getting a job or taking further education or training.
- You can't afford to speak to lawyer.
- You can't get legal aid.
- You don't have the money to get another place to live.
- You can't get welfare until you have actually left and are living somewhere else.
- Transition house is full.
- There are long waiting lists for employment counselling or training.
- There are no jobs.
- The children don't want to leave.
- You don't know where to get support, or are afraid to try to get help.

These roadblocks are not your fault! Chapters 7 and 8 provide ideas about how to overcome them.

### **USEFUL TIPS**

- Many women recognize that they need a lot of support to leave an abusive relationship. Having a supportive friend, family member, counsellor or advocate can be the key. They can help you to leave and to have the necessary legal, financial, and practical supports in place for you and your children.
- Remember that you don't need to do everything at once. Deciding to leave and then planning how to do it can be a long process. Just take it step by step.





- If you start looking for helpful people before you are ready to leave, you'll have people you are comfortable with. That way, if there is a crisis, you won't have to deal with whoever is available at the time.

## If you have a disability

Studies have shown that women and children with disabilities face particular challenges:

- Women and children with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of violence as women and children who do not have disabilities. There is an even higher rate of violence towards women and children with multiple disabilities.
- In custody and access proceedings, a judge may decide that a drunken or abusive father is a better parent than a woman with a disability.
- More than half of Canadian women with disabilities are poor or very poor.
- 75% of women with disabilities are unemployed.

### USEFUL TIPS

- You can get help with disability and health benefits, subsidized housing, home owner grants, and gas tax rebates from BC Coalition of People with Disabilities.  
Telephone: 604-875-1088  
Toll free: 1-877-232-7400  
TTY: 604-875-8835
- If you live in or near Victoria, contact Action Committee of People with Disabilities.  
Telephone: 250-383-4105  
E-mail: [acpd@actioncommittee.ca](mailto:acpd@actioncommittee.ca)
- If you are not eligible for disability benefits under a private plan or Employment Insurance, you can apply for Persons with Disabilities benefits from the Ministry of Human Resources.
- For more resources and ideas see the website of DAWN Canada – the DisAbled Women's Network.  
Website: <http://www.dawncanada.net>

## If you are an immigrant or member of a visible minority group

You may:

- know that your culture would not accept you if you left your husband

- be afraid of being judged or of having the abuse blamed on you
- be afraid of being isolated, with no support network
- believe that children of divorce are stigmatized and may not be able to find a suitable marriage partner
- worry about your ability to handle being a single parent mother
- be unable to find employment that uses your skills and experience
- have difficulties with language
- feel you are not treated with respect by service providers
- find that things you took for granted in your own culture are not acceptable in Canada
- have not yet found a level of comfort with Canadian society
- feel that your children are growing away from you and that their Canadian friends are a bad influence

#### **USEFUL TIPS**

- Contact a multicultural service agency. See the groups mentioned in the section “Finding and using an advocate,” in Chapter 8.
- Neighbourhood houses may have settlement workers who can help you find resources.
- Talk to another woman who shares the same language/culture but has lived in Canada much longer.
- Take English Language classes to help you communicate with banks, stores, your children’s teachers, possible employers, and services that you need.

### **If you are a landed immigrant, sponsored by your husband**

Remember that laws in Canada may be different from laws in your own country.

In Canada:

- A husband does not have the right to hit his wife or children.
- A husband does not own his wife and children.
- Your husband cannot deport you. (The Canadian government is the only one with that authority.)
- If your husband abuses you, you do not have to stay with him.



- If you decide to leave your husband, you can take your children with you. Make sure you take all your immigration documents. Also take your children's immigration documents (if they were born outside Canada).
- You may qualify for welfare when you leave, even if your husband promised Immigration that he would support you. You need to get a letter from Immigration stating that the sponsorship agreement has been broken.
- If you can't get welfare and are not able to support yourself and your children, seek help from a women's support worker in a multicultural agency.
- For information on the law and abused women, see the website:  
<http://www.rosenet-ca.org>.

## If you are not a Canadian citizen and not a landed immigrant

You may be facing a refugee or deportation hearing if you leave your husband. It is important to get legal help.

- If you leave, find a lawyer to represent you.
- If you cannot afford a lawyer, you may be able to get legal aid. Contact Legal Services Society.  
Telephone: 604-408-2172  
Toll free: 1-866-577-2525  
Website: <http://www.lss.bc.ca>
- If you are in Canada as a visitor or on a student visa, it is difficult to qualify for legal aid. Get the support of an advocate such as a woman's support worker at a multicultural agency.
- If your husband alone received refugee status, you may have to prove your own status as a refugee if you separate.

## If you are an Aboriginal woman

You may:

- be living in an urban area far from your own band
- find that your family, friends or community are unhelpful and don't take your abuse seriously
- feel that you would like services from providers that understand your culture and spiritual beliefs



- have had experiences where you felt discriminated against because you are Aboriginal

**ABORIGINAL WOMEN HAVE FOUND IT HELPFUL TO:**

- Connect with other Aboriginal women to get information and support. Contact one of the following:
  - Aboriginal friendship centre. These are located in many areas of the province. For a list, see the website: <http://www.bcaafc.com/contact/index.html>.
  - Pacific Association of First Nations Women, 204-96 E Broadway, Vancouver BC V6T 4N9. Assists Aboriginal women and their families with health, education and social services issues.  
Telephone: 604-873-1833  
E-mail: [pafnw@telus.net](mailto:pafnw@telus.net)
  - Aboriginal Mother Centre Society, 208-2019 Dundas St, Vancouver BC V5L 1J5. Child-friendly setting where mothers can gather. Also has services such as free counselling and a 12-week traditional parenting skills program. Includes a meal program and donated toys, clothing, and household goods.  
Telephone: 604-253-6263  
E-mail: [amc@amcs.ca](mailto:amc@amcs.ca)  
Website: <http://www.amcs.ca>

Use services that are for Aboriginal people:

- Counselling services on reservations, or available through Aboriginal Friendship Centres.
- Vancouver Native Health Society, 449 East Hastings St, Vancouver BC. Offers a number of services including: Aboriginal Head Start Program; Upgrading Skills; Residential School Healing Centre; Walk-In Clinic; Safe House for Youth; Positive Outlook Program for HIV/AIDS; Aboriginal Diabetes Awareness Prevention and Teaching.  
Telephone: 604-254-9949  
E-mail: [vnhs@shawbiz.ca](mailto:vnhs@shawbiz.ca)  
Website: <http://www.vnhs.net>
- Hey-Way'-Noqu' Healing Circle. Alcohol and Drug Counselling Program, 640 Oxford St, Vancouver BC V5K 3X7.



Telephone: 604-874-1831

E-mail: [heywaynoqu@telus.net](mailto:heywaynoqu@telus.net)

- ▶ Helping Spirit Lodge Society, 3965 Dumfries St, Vancouver.  
Offers transition house and second stage housing for women, and a pre-employment program with life-skills training.  
Telephone: 604-872-6649
- ▶ Explore Aboriginal customs such as sweat lodges and healing circles.
- ▶ Make sure they have advocates or support people when meeting with service providers.

## If you live in a rural area

You may have difficulties that interfere with finding resources and/or planning to leave.

- Public transportation may not exist.
- Services may be inadequate or non-existent.
- It may be hard to reach friends and family.
- Privacy is hard to maintain in small communities so you may be afraid to contact services. You or your family may know the service providers and meet them on a day-to-day basis.
- Blaming of victims or denial of the existence of abuse is more common in rural communities and small towns.
- You may be fearful of leaving the abusive relationship because of the difficulties of obtaining financial assistance, lack of services, fears of retaliation, and fears that your children will be apprehended.

### **USEFUL TIPS**

- Contact your nearest transition house or women's centre, if there is one available.
- Contact Victim Link for information about resources. Telephone: 1-800-563-0808. See Chapter 7 for details.
- Try to find a neighbour who can assist you in emergency situations.
- For more suggestions see chapter 7, Getting help for you and your children.



## If you are poor/on social assistance (welfare)

Cutbacks in financial support and other services make it very difficult for poor women to find services and/or to consider leaving an abusive relationship. There have been cutbacks to:

- victim assistance programs
- legal aid
- welfare (Mothers of young children have to look for work earlier and there are time limits on getting welfare.)
- childcare (There are fewer childcare spaces and less childcare subsidy.)

### USEFUL TIPS

- If there is a women's centre in your area, you can get information and support. They can usually direct you to women's services, sources of free food, and free or very inexpensive clothing.
- Some areas have food banks.
- If you live in Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre offers help with welfare applications and low-cost housing applications, referrals to transition houses and emergency housing, counselling, drop-in, and food programs.
- If you have access to the Internet, go to <http://www.povnet.org> for help in finding an advocate.

## If you are in a same-sex relationship

Women in same-sex relationships may experience violence from their female partners, male ex-partners, or the fathers of their children.

- Abuse within same-sex relationships can be complex because the power and control dynamics are not the same as in heterosexual relationships.
- You may fear that you will not be believed if you disclose the abuse, or that you will risk losing custody of your children.
- Accessing support services to protect yourself and your children can be difficult. You may encounter homophobia.
- You may feel that you need to lie about the abuser's gender in order to access services or that accessing services will mean you "come out," which is a major life decision.



- You may have pooled your earnings and assets with your partner, without the necessary legal protection. You may be afraid that you will lose everything you put into the relationship, including your home.

#### **USEFUL TIPS**

Contact the LGTB Centre (“The Centre”). The Centre provides information, referrals, and peer support for lesbian, gay, trans and bisexual people.

Telephone: 604- 684-6869 (7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.)

Toll-free: 1-800-566-1170 (7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.)

Website: <http://www.lgtbcentrevancouver.com>

## **Stress management and self-care**

While you decide what to do next, you must look after yourself and stay as healthy and calm as possible. Mothers in families usually put their own health and emotional needs last.

Safety concerns for you and your children come first and may conflict with your ability and desire to have a healthy lifestyle. While getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly can help you to cope, it may not be possible for you to do this. Your partner may keep you awake or wake you up during the night. You may not have control over the family’s food budget, or you may feel you have to buy only the food your partner wants. He may not allow you out of the home to exercise.

One way that women try to maintain a safe place for their children is to put the needs and demands of their partner first. While this can be a wise decision for your safety and the safety of your children, you may feel exhausted and overwhelmed trying to anticipate and meet your partner’s needs and demands.

You may have learned that trying to meet your own needs has put you at risk with your partner because he insists on being at the centre of the relationship. You may already have your own strategies for managing. Here are some additional ideas:

- Have regular physical check-ups.
- Have your own private space somewhere in your home, however small.
- Take time alone for yourself if you can.
- Visit and talk with supportive friends and relatives.
- Talk about the effects of your partner’s abuse with people you can trust.



- Learn about stress management techniques such as meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and relaxation exercises. Get information from your local library, community centre or the Internet.
- Tape an exercise program on TV, and exercise at home when you have time.
- For more ideas see the Shelnernet Safety Plan in the Resources section.

## Taking legal action

It is against the law for your partner to hurt you or threaten to hurt you. Stalking you and damaging your property are also against the law.

- If you report the incident to the police, they will investigate. They may arrest your partner and charge him with assault.
- You can ask the police to escort you to a safe place such as a transition house or a relative or friend's home.
- Tell the police if you fear for your safety or the safety of your children.
- Tell the police if you want a court order to keep your partner away from you and your children.
- Ask the police to refer you to a community-based victim support worker.
- If you possibly can, take the children with you when you leave your home. If you leave them with your partner for any length of time, it looks as if you approve of them living with him.

See chapter 8, Getting help from the legal system, for more details.

## If you leave a violent relationship

Things will be better, but you may have lots of new stresses:

- Your abuser will probably find ways to continue to abuse you. The abuse sometimes increases after you leave. He may:
  - Abuse or bad-mouth you during visits with children.
  - Tell the children that it's your fault.
  - Tell the children that you are crazy.
  - Use the children, or the pick-up time, to spy on you.
  - Not bring the children back on time.
  - Not feed or care for the children properly.



- ▶ Refuse to pay child support, not pay on time, or give the wrong amount.
- ▶ Follow you; spy on you; leave threatening notes, voice mails or e-mails; destroy your property; call you when you don't want him to.
- Children's behaviour may be frustrating and hard to cope with. For instance, they may be upset, whiny and tearful, or angry, demanding and defiant. Remember that they may:
  - ▶ Be missing their home, pets, toys, and friends.
  - ▶ Be worried about a new school.
  - ▶ Not understand why you left.
  - ▶ Be affected by how upset you are.
  - ▶ Miss their dad.
  - ▶ Have witnessed a lot of anger and disrespectful behaviour.
  - ▶ Feel sad, afraid, hurt, and want attention.
  - ▶ Be afraid of sleeping alone.

To be safe and comfortable you may need to:

- Arrange for children to be picked up in a different location for access visits with their father.
- Arrange for their father to wait outside or in the lobby of your apartment building. He should not come up to your apartment or to a place where there is only one exit.
- Have someone else take them to their father and pick them up.
- Talk to your ex-partner calmly, but only about necessary matters related to the children.
- Tell your children not to tell their father of their new address or telephone number.
- Tell the school, library, community centre and any other agencies or government departments that ask for your address that they must not give the children's father your new address.
- Get call blocking on the telephone.
- If your abuser has been granted unsupervised visits with your children, you may need to problem-solve with them about:
  - ▶ what to do if their father is intoxicated
  - ▶ how to deal with kidnapping attempts
  - ▶ how to keep safe during violent incidents



## 5

# What children need to know

### THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT

- what your children need to hear from you about the abuse
- what your children need to hear from your partner about the abuse
- what to do if your partner won't tell the children what they need to hear

### It is important to talk with the children

It is very important to talk with children who have seen, heard, or been affected by the abuse. Young children, especially preschoolers, are likely to think that they caused the abuse.

This is even more likely in a tense and scary home where you are afraid to talk about the abuse, or don't know how to talk about your partner's abuse without putting you or your children at further risk.

#### WHAT YOU CAN SAY

Children need to get very clear messages from you that their safety is important to you and that you will listen to them. Here are some things you can tell them:

- Violence is never OK.
- I'm sorry that you heard /saw/ are aware of it.
- You didn't cause it; it's not your fault.
- There was nothing you could do to stop it or prevent it.
- It must be very scary for you.
- Tell me how you feel about it.
- No kid deserves to have violence in their family.
- I will do my best to keep you safe.
- We need to talk about your safety plan.

#### WHAT YOUR PARTNER CAN SAY

If possible, the children need to hear from your partner:



- My behaviour was not OK. Violence is never OK.
- I'm sorry that you heard/saw/are aware of it.
- It's not your fault; it's not your mother's fault.
- You must have been scared.
- You can tell me how you felt about it.
- It's OK if you're mad at me, scared of me, or sad. I would be too. I'm very sorry it happened.
- No kid deserves violence in their family.
- I am getting help so that we can all be safe.

#### **WHAT IF THE ABUSER WON'T TALK TO THE CHILDREN LIKE THIS?**

If the abuser won't talk to the children like this, it's very important to tell the children that his behaviour is not OK.

Try not to call him names, or tell the children that he is an evil person. This can be very confusing to children, especially if the abuser is their father or step-father.

The children may need to know from you that it's OK to like some things about the abuser. And they need to understand that people can have positive and negative sides to them.

Most important, they need to know that his abuse is unacceptable even if you are staying in the relationship. It is easy for children to misinterpret your staying as meaning that you accept, or even deserve, the abuse.

Remind yourself that you and your children are unsafe because of your partner's actions. You have not caused this situation and you have not put your children at risk. When you talk to your children, it is OK to say this. It will help them see that they are not responsible for the abuse either. They need to realize that each person is responsible for the choices they make about their own behaviour.

Avoid using your children for emotional support. They need to be kids, not take on adult worries. Protect them from information that they don't need to know. Talk to your friends, support people or counsellors about your own abuse and how you feel about it.

Sometimes it's easiest to start talking with your children about the abuse and their feelings about it by using a storybook. Look in the **Resources** section of this guide. You can also use the second guide in this series, **Kids Helping Kids**.



## 6

# Living with children exposed to violence in their home

Living in a violent home can have long-lasting effects on children. Some children are affected more than others. But all children tend to be influenced by, and often copy, the behaviour of adults in their household.

It is likely that you, as their mother, are trying to cope with the children's difficult behaviour. They may be copying the abuser and may be aggressive, demanding and self-centred. Or, perhaps scared by the violence, they may be timid, whiny and withdrawn. Or they may have other difficulties.

You may feel burned-out, angry, frustrated and resentful about having to cope with a difficult bunch of children. And you may be living with the constant anticipation of further abuse.

They are reacting to what is going on, or has gone on in the past, at home. They may feel angry, insecure, vulnerable or sad.

## You can have a positive influence

Focusing on children's emotional needs may help you see where they are hurting, what they need, and what you can do. All is not lost. Even if you are being abused or have been abused in the past, you can have a positive influence on your children's lives.

It is very important to remember that all children are not the same. Some children are thousands of times harder to bring up than others. Some children, right from the beginning, are very active, have a short attention span, have short fuses, don't like changes, get frustrated easily, and have mood swings. This kind of child is much more likely to have temper tantrums or be defiant.

Also remind yourself that children, particularly school-aged children, are influenced by many experiences and interactions. School, siblings, friends, neighbours, the community, TV, and videogames all play a role.

Blaming yourself for your child's behaviour is not only untrue, it is extremely unhelpful. There are positive things you can do.



### **Roseanna's story**

Shortly after Roseanna left Enrique she went back to work. Although she was tired and very busy, she knew that the three children needed the love and attention that they had missed.

She gave each child 15 minutes "Special Time" at bedtime. They could choose any quiet activity. The other children could not interrupt during this time. She sat with an arm around 11-year-old Luc while he talked about his worries. Paul, aged 8, liked to show her what he was doing on the "Neopets" website, or lie with his head on her lap and talk about school or friends. Julie, aged 5, wanted to sit on her lap, cuddle, and be read a story.

## **Can parents help their children grow up without emotional problems?**

Research and experience has shown that there are some general principles about what children need so that they grow up well adjusted.

There are many factors that influence how children turn out. Parents may have little or no influence over some of these factors. They include children's experiences in school, with other children and adults in the community, accidents, trauma outside the home, and illnesses.

Each child is an individual with their own personality. Some children are shy or slow to adapt to new situations. They are more likely to have difficulties with changes of home and school.

The following suggestions about children's emotional needs may help you look at what you are already doing and what might need extra attention.

### **CHILDREN NEED AFFECTION**

This includes nurturing, caring, comforting, encouragement, and support. Living in an abusive situation, your children may have lacked attention, felt insecure or even rejected.

- You may need to make an extra effort to show your children that you love them. Spend extra time with them; give them cuddles.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and worries.
- Praise them for their successes, however small.



## **Dagmar's story**

Bernard's drug addiction and alcohol abuse often left the family without rent or food money. It also meant the family had to move frequently. His violent rages terrified his common-law wife, Dagmar, and made her afraid for the safety of her baby daughter, Violet. Dagmar sometimes left the baby with her mother or with friends.

After several chaotic years Dagmar left Bernard and settled in her parent's basement. Violet, aged 4, was extremely shy and fearful, clung to her mother, and insisted on sleeping with her. Dagmar's mother helped her set up routines to reassure Violet that she was safe.

- Babies and young children who have been exposed to woman abuse may need lots of extra holding and comforting.
- If children have nightmares or are afraid of the dark, aim for a soothing bedtime routine. Consider using a nightlight, or leave the bedroom door open, or keep a baby monitor working in reverse so that the child can hear familiar sounds. Some fearful children will need to sleep in your bed temporarily or, if they are older, be allowed to sleep on the floor in your bedroom.

### **CHILDREN NEED STABILITY**

For a child this includes knowing that their parent or parents will always be there, will always be available, and that they can trust them and rely on them. Ideally, it also includes knowing that their family, their home, and the community will not change.

Children exposed to woman abuse often view the world as scary and unpredictable. They may think that there are no adults that they can trust and rely on.

- You may want to work on building or improving the trust between you and your children.
- Reassure them that you will do your best to be there for them.
- Let them know where you are and when to expect you home.
- It helps them to know what to expect at home. Try to have routines for mealtimes, bedtimes, wake-up, homework, and self-care such as teeth cleaning and showering. Of course, if you are still living with an abusive partner, this will depend on what your partner demands of you and the children.



## **CHILDREN NEED GUIDANCE**

This includes but is not limited to discipline. Remember that you are an important model for your child, and that your child will be watching and learning from your behaviour.

- Don't fall into the trap of giving mixed messages to kids, "Do as I say, but not as I do." For instance, if you swear a lot, you'll need to stop this if you expect your children not to swear.
- Encourage children's positive behaviour. Use consequences such as time-outs and removal of privileges for negative behaviour.
- Never hit the children for punishment. If you spank your child rather than using non-violent methods of discipline such as time-outs, you may be encouraging the child to hit others.
- If you feel a need to spank your child, take a time-out for yourself if you can. A few minutes alone will give you time to calm down. Then deal with your child.
- If you're feeling guilty about your children having been exposed to violence, you may be tempted to make it up to them by not disciplining them and not expecting them to do their usual chores. This is likely to be a mistake, as children need structure and limits. They need to know that a parent is in charge and that there are some rules and regulations. This makes them feel safe. Have a clear set of basic household rules, for instance:
  - No hitting, shoving or pushing.

### **Sharon's story**

Sharon realized that her husband's occasional, unpredictable violence towards her, the tension in the home, and his irritability with the children were causing difficulties.

The children were defiant. They didn't want to eat the meals she prepared, and often resisted going to school. In addition, the 9-year-old was anxious, bit his nails, and wet the bed. The 7-year-old had nightmares, and the 5-year-old was clingy, cried and whined frequently, and sometimes went back to baby talk.

With the help of a counsellor she and the children developed a set of household rules and posted them on the fridge. Each child had some chores.

Sharon concentrated on praising the children for positive behaviour. She talked with them about the violence, said that she'd try to keep them safe, and helped them make safety plans.



## Kevin's story

Fifteen-year-old Kevin was demanding and aggressive. He often tormented his younger sister. "He's just like his father...what can I do?" thought Bernadette, his mother.

Bernadette talked with friends and realized that she had to be firm. She made it clear that violence was unacceptable, and that he should treat other members of the family with respect. When Kevin wanted permission to go out late at night on a school day, she refused. He tried to shove her aside, and then hit her, knocking her down.

Bernadette called the police and Kevin was charged with assault. He was put on probation with several strict conditions.

After that, family relationships gradually improved. Bernadette realized that she'd been letting Kevin get away with things before she put her foot down. Because Kevin's father had been so hard on him, she'd tended to try to make up for this. But it hadn't helped Kevin be responsible and respectful to others.

- ▶ No swearing.
- ▶ Treat everyone with respect.
- ▶ Take turns when talking.
- ▶ Let Mom know where you'll be after school.
- ▶ Get to school on time.
- ▶ Come home in time for meals.
- Your expectations need to be based on the child's age and stage of development.
- Try to find time, whenever possible, to check with them about their concerns, fears, worries and needs.

### **CHILDREN NEED TO BE SAFE AND PROTECTED**

Babies and toddlers have no ability to keep themselves safe. They need to be cared for by a parent, and need constant supervision so that they do not hurt themselves. As children grow older they begin to understand danger. For example, they become aware of the dangers of dashing into the street. Parents teach children not to interact with strangers.





Here are some basic principles of what children need to be safe and protected:

- Household rules such as “no hitting” and supervision of play ensure that children do not get hurt by friends or brothers and sisters.
- Non-violent methods of discipline such as use of time-outs, star charts, and giving consequences avoid exposing children to hurtful punishment.
- Older children and young teens need guidance about keeping themselves safe, including sex education. Parents usually allow older children and young teens more freedom, but insist on a curfew time and regular updates about where they are in the community.
- Many of the principles under “children need stability” and “children need guidance” help children feel safe and secure.

If you are in an abusive relationship, both you and your children may be confused about safety and the meaning of keeping safe. You may find yourself worrying a great deal about the children’s safety, and being too protective of them. Or you may avoid the topic, because you feel bad about the violence, or about staying in the relationship. These ideas may help:

- Make sure your children know that violence and abuse are not OK.
- Let them know that their safety is important to you and that you will try to ensure they are safe.
- Help them with their safety plan.
- Have a safety plan yourself.

### **CHILDREN NEED STIMULATION TO LEARN**

Children need help with learning and using their abilities. This includes helping your toddler learn to talk by naming things they see, reading picture books to preschoolers and letting them experiment with drawing, colouring and cutting.

### **Yasmeen’s story**

Yasmeen’s husband insisted that all the family speak their native language and follow their cultural traditions. As a result, Yasmeen’s English did not improve, and she was unable to help her children with their homework projects.

A friend told her about the local library and community centre. Her husband agreed that the children needed help with their education, so Yasmeen borrowed books from the library. She and the children read them together. They also watched educational programs on the TV.



Older children need to learn about the world around them and what is expected of them.

- Children learn from educational books, movies, TV programs and videogames.
- They need encouragement and help with homework and school projects.
- If you live in a larger community you may be able to take them to parks, libraries, community centres or museums.
- There are often free experiences that will broaden children's awareness of the world. Children living in a violent home may have missed out on some of these experiences, so build them back in if you can.
- Providing stimulation can be challenging if you live in a very small isolated community and children are home-schooled. You may be able to help them enjoy learning and find creative ways to do their assignments and projects.
- Find out what your child is interested in and encourage this.

## Dealing with children's anger

This is likely to be one of the most frustrating issues for you. It may lead to your getting angry or saying things to your child that you don't mean, such as, "You're just like your father" or, "I wish you'd never been born."

If you live (or have lived) with a violent partner, you may feel upset or angry. This is normal. Showing children how to be angry without hurting, threatening, or bad-mouthing someone provides children with an example of how to manage these feelings in a respectful way.

When kids are angry, try these steps:

- Calm yourself first if necessary:
- Take deep breaths.
  - Think calming thoughts.
  - Perhaps leave the room for a few minutes.
  - Remind yourself, "they're just kids" and, "they're not doing this deliberately to bug me."
- Accept their feelings. You can say, "You are really angry." But tell them that it's not OK to hit/swear at/be disrespectful to others.
- Be sure that you are respectful yourself. Always remember that you are an important model for your children.



- If they continue to hit/swear, send them to another room to cool off. If you're afraid they're so angry that they might hurt themselves or destroy property, insist that they sit quietly where you can see them. You may need to hold a younger child.
- Go off to another room yourself. Stop any interaction until they are calm. Don't choose this option if children are getting hurt or property destroyed.
- When they are calm, problem-solve with them about other ways to handle the issue.

### **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO MANAGE THEIR ANGER**

Teach your children how to communicate anger without being disrespectful. You can show them how to use "I statements." For instance: "When you take my doll without permission, I feel angry/hurt/sad."

They can also learn other ways to express angry feelings. Examples: scribbling on or tearing up paper or old phone books, doing push-ups, skipping, running round the block, talking, writing or drawing about their feelings.

With young children who are angry, diversion may be best. Try to shift a toddler or preschooler's attention away from what they are mad at. Give them something else to do.

### **Meng's story**

Meng had been a quiet and obedient child. When her family immigrated to Canada she was intimidated by Canadian children, who seemed noisy and often did not respect their parents.

Meng married young, to an older man. After the first child was born her husband became angry and irritable. He wanted Meng's attention and resented the time she spent with the children. He told her she was a useless wife and mother, and criticized everything she did. Sometimes he hit her.

When her second child became defiant, had temper tantrums and called her names, Meng was horrified and scared. She didn't know what to do.

With the help of a Children Who Witness Abuse counsellor, she realized that her husband's behaviour was influencing the children. The children attended a Children Who Witness Abuse group and Meng talked to a counsellor. The children learned about safe ways of expressing anger, and Meng was able to use these ideas at home.



## 7

# Getting help for you and your children

### THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT

- where you can find help in your community
- what services are available from the Children Who Witness Abuse program
- what help medical/health professionals may be able to provide
- what services are available from the Ministry of Child and Family Development
- what help your children’s school may be able to provide

## Finding information and support in your community

There are information and referral services across the province.

- Look under “Community Services” in your local phone book.
- Vancouver Information Services provide information on services in the Lower Mainland, and can also direct you to your local information and referral service.  
Telephone: 604-875-6381  
TTY: 604-875-0885
- Victim Link is a province-wide, 24-hour, toll-free service for victims of family and sexual violence. It is staffed by counsellors. They provide listening, immediate crisis support, problem solving, and basic legal information. They can refer you to agencies and services that can help.  
Telephone: 1-800-563-0808  
TTY: 604-875-0885  
Collect calls: Telus Relay at 711
- For information and support in French, contact Réseau-Femmes Columbie-Britannique: Inform’Elles.  
Telephone: 604-736-6974  
Toll free 1-888-800-7322  
Website: <http://reseaufemmes.bc.ca>
- You can contact your local transition house, women’s centre, Stopping the Violence Counselling Program, or Children who Witness Abuse Program. There



may be multicultural programs, and resources for Aboriginal women and women with disabilities. Ask Victim Link for the numbers to call.

**IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES:**

- Your nearest transition house is the best place to get information and support. Some take crisis calls on a 24-hour basis.
- The local community health nurse may also be helpful.
- You may get help from your family doctor, First Nations band counsellor, priest or other spiritual leader. But if they don't believe you or seem critical or judgmental, avoid them.
- If you have access to a computer and Internet service, you can get lots of helpful information. Local libraries often have computers with Internet service available free of charge.

**IN VERY SMALL ISOLATED COMMUNITIES:**

- Contact your local transition house if possible. Rural transition houses try to provide information and support to isolated women and act as a safety net. Ask staff to help you make a safety plan for you and your children.
- Try to arrange for family and friends to check up on you.
- Reach out to police, probation or victim service workers when they visit the community.
- Your children's school may be a contact point.

## Getting help from a Children Who Witness Abuse program

Contact with other children who have been exposed to violence in the home and with experienced counsellors may make a great deal of difference.

Children Who Witness Abuse (CWWA) is a program that operates in many communities throughout BC. You can get information about the program from your local transition house or by calling the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

Telephone: 604-669-6943; 1-800-661-1040 (toll free)

E-mail: [cwwa@bcysth.ca](mailto:cwwa@bcysth.ca)

In the CWWA program, a counsellor will interview you and the children. After the interview, children may join a group of other children in the same age range, or may have one-to-one counselling.



Sometimes the counsellor may decide that you and your children need more assistance than a CWWA program can offer. With your permission, she may refer you to services that are best suited for your situation.

The details of any counselling or group counselling are kept confidential. There are some limits to this confidentiality. If the counsellor learns that one or more of your children has suffered physical or sexual abuse, she is bound by law to report this to the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD).

CWWA groups for children usually meet for 10 sessions. Children in a group will be in a similar age range.

Topics and how they are dealt with vary with the age of the children but usually include:

- educating the children about partner violence
- emphasizing that children are never to blame for the violence
- providing prevention education on sexual abuse and dating violence
- helping children develop their own safety plan
- helping them identify and express feelings
- increasing their self-esteem and assertiveness
- teaching them relaxation and anger management skills
- building their problem-solving and communication skills


At the same time, mothers receive support from a counsellor. In some programs, mothers also meet for 10 sessions to work on similar issues and learn about basic child development and parenting skills.

Children in one-to-one counselling are usually those who have more extensive difficulties with behaviour or emotions and who might not benefit from, or be ready for, a group experience.

It's helpful for children to talk about their worries and fears with someone outside the family. With younger children, the counsellor may use puppets, a sand-tray, clay, drawing and painting, or other play material to help them feel comfortable and be able to communicate their difficulties.

The counsellor will help the child work on problems and difficulties. These may include:

- coping with anxiety, learning stress management

- 
- working on the after-effects of trauma
  - learning ways of countering obsessions and compulsions
  - learning ways of arguing against the negative thoughts that contribute to depression
  - learning how to get on with other children
  - learning self-control and anger management
  - using appropriate behaviour
  - building self-esteem
  - developing communication skills

Sometimes the counsellor will recommend family sessions. The counsellor's aim will be to help all the family members cooperate in making the family work better. Or a case conference may be arranged with the child's school or other agencies. School counsellors or teachers may play an important part in the treatment plan. Wherever the treatment takes place, as a parent you will be given helpful suggestions about managing the child's behaviour or emotional difficulties.

## Getting help from medical/health professionals

Your family doctor, paediatrician, community health nurse, or hospital staff may be able to help you and your children.

- Some medical professionals lack an understanding of woman abuse and its effect on children. You may feel comfortable giving them a copy of the third guide in this series, *Interventions with children exposed to domestic violence*. It will help them understand what you are going through and what you need. See the inside front page of this guide for how to obtain a copy.
- Telling your doctor about your abuse does not mean that it will be reported. Doctors are required by law to report the physical or sexual abuse and neglect of children, but do not have to report the abuse of an adult.
- Except when children are being abused or neglected, doctors and other health professionals are bound by rules of confidentiality. You can talk to your doctor without worrying that relatives or other members of the community will get to know about it.
- Telling your doctor about your abuse may help the doctor understand difficulties that you and the children are having.



- Some children have health or mental health problems that may be related to their exposure to the abuse. They need help from a doctor or other health professional. These problems include:
  - slow development
  - eating and sleeping problems
  - refusal to go to school
  - aggressive behaviour, fire-setting, destruction of property
  - depression, withdrawal, loss of interest, low energy, poor concentration
  - anxiety, nervousness, panic attacks, nightmares
  - suicidal or homicidal behaviour
  - loss of contact with reality (The child may seem to be hearing voices or seeing things that are not there, or may have bizarre speech and behaviour.)

Your doctor may refer your child to a specialist, a hospital or clinic, or another resource or agency such as the Child and Youth Mental Health Team of the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD).

A community health nurse visits homes where there is a new baby. At other times they can be contacted at your local health unit. In addition to giving practical advice, health nurses are very knowledgeable about local resources.

## Getting help from the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD)

The MCFD has resources that may be useful to you when your children have been exposed to violence.

- If you have a simple request, MCFD staff will make a referral to a community agency that can offer counselling or support to you and your children.
- MCFD workers can apply to a judge for a “Section 28 order.” This is similar to a restraining order or a no contact order that can keep an abusive partner away from you and your children. (See Chapter 8 for more about judge’s orders.)
- If you have access to the Internet, visit the family law website of the Legal Services Society, <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca>. Go to “Family law A-Z.” From the subject list, select “child protection.” This takes you to an online guide: Keeping our children safe: child protection in BC. Click on the option, “If you ask the Ministry for help.” If you do not have access to the Internet, ask an advocate to do this and to download the information for you.





### **COUNSELLING FOR CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

MCFD provides mental health counselling through Child and Youth Mental Health Teams for:

- children with severe depression or anxiety
- children who are suicidal or who injure themselves
- children who are a danger to others
- children who have lost touch with reality (They may be hearing voices or seeing things that are not there. They may laugh or talk to themselves. Their speech may make no sense. They may be aggressive or threatening.)

### **AGREEMENTS ABOUT TEMPORARY, VOLUNTARY FOSTER CARE**

Temporary foster care can be helpful to children and their mothers. Children can settle down in a neutral environment, reassured by frequent visits from their mom. Their mother has time to do what she needs about her situation.

MCFD may offer you a Family Support Service Agreement. Under this agreement, the ministry can provide services that include counselling, parenting support programs, and respite care for your children. Respite care means that your children may be looked after by foster parents for up to six days a month. How much you pay for respite care depends on your income. You sign a Family Support Service Agreement with the Ministry.

### **Connie's story**

Connie grew up with parents who had both been taken from their families and put in Indian Residential Schools from age 6 to 18. They were both alcoholics. As a child Connie suffered neglect and abuse.

As a mother of five children, now all living with her, Connie says that her own healing did not start until her children were apprehended. She was severely drug addicted at the time and living with an extremely abusive partner.

Connie went to a drug treatment program and to counselling about her own abuse. She took upgrading, and got a job in a treatment program for addicted youth. She had regular contact with all her children and a good relationship with their foster parents. After several years the children were gradually returned to Connie's care.



MCFD may offer a Voluntary Care Agreement. Under this agreement, the ministry can place your children in foster care on a voluntary and temporary basis. In this case, you sign a Voluntary Care Agreement with the ministry.

Before you enter into any written agreement with MCFD:

- Ask the MCFD social worker to explain what help is available and what the differences are between types of agreements.
- Agree only to what you know is helpful. Be very clear about the time limits.
- Contact an advocate or lawyer before you sign any agreement. An agreement is a legal document.

### **IF MCFD SAYS THERE ARE CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS**

MCFD staff are obliged by law to investigate any reports of abuse or neglect of children.

Contact a lawyer or advocate immediately if MCFD says that there are child protection concerns and opens a “protective” file. See “If you can afford a lawyer” and “If you cannot afford a lawyer” in Chapter 8. Also see “Finding and using an advocate” in Chapter 8.

As a parent, you are likely to feel anxious and fearful about meeting with a child protection worker. Here are a few ideas for getting help and support.

- Take an advocate or support person with you when you go to meet the MCFD child protection worker.
- Explain to the child protection worker what you are doing to protect your children.
- Tell the child protection worker what resources your family needs.
- If a child protection report needs to be made, make it yourself with the help of an advocate/support person, or participate in the call if you can.

### **IF YOUR CHILD IS IN A FOSTER HOME**

- If your child is in a foster home, request frequent visits.
- If your child is in a foster home and the worker has a list of things you’ve got to do before the child is returned (for example: get your own place, take a parenting program, go to a therapist, take a training course, get a job) make sure the worker gives you a written list. If you and your advocate/support person think that the expectations are unrealistic or that there isn’t enough time for you to do all the things, insist that the worker revise the list.



## Getting help from your child's school

School staff can be extremely supportive and provide assistance for your child. They need to know about the family situation. Children who are tense, unhappy, or worried about their mother's safety at home are likely to have trouble concentrating on their school work.

The children's unhappiness and anger may spill over onto other children. For example, they may get into fights and arguments in the playground.

Instead of resenting a child's difficult behaviour or inability to complete their schoolwork, teachers and counsellors can understand where the problems are coming from.

You can:

- Tell school staff if you or your children are in danger from your abuser.
- Remind school staff that they should not give out any information about the children.
- Advise the school of any changes in routine, such as a change in your work hours.
- Tell school staff if you have a restraining order or a peace bond instructing your abuser to stay away from the children. They will probably want a copy. Schools should enforce the order by calling the police if necessary.

Ensure that the bus company is aware of any possible problems or of a restraining order or peace bond if there is one.

These days many teachers and school counsellors are overworked, but here are some things they may be able to do:

- Set up regular sessions for your child with a school counsellor in a private area of the school.
- Allow a tense or upset child to leave class to go to the nurse's office or the principal's office for some quiet time.
- Adjust expectations for schoolwork and homework.
- Find ways to help a child's classmates be supportive without telling them about the family's private problems.

With your permission, teachers and school counsellors may be able to cooperate with other counsellors and support persons working with your family. They can work with you on a safety plan to try to keep your children safe and help with any problems.



## 8

# Getting help from the legal system

### THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT:

- what the legal system may be able to provide to help keep you and your children safe
- how to get legal help if you can afford a lawyer and if you cannot afford a lawyer
- what to consider if you apply for custody
- how to find and use an advocate
- how to use the Internet to find legal information

You may:

- want help to keep the abuser away from the family
- need to get or keep legal custody of your children
- be scared that your ex-partner will take the kids to another province
- be afraid that the children are being abused during access visits with their father, and want the access visits stopped or supervised

Ideally you need help from a lawyer, but with the cutbacks to resources and legal aid, many people have to do their own legal work.

## Protection orders

These orders direct your abuser to have no contact with you, and sometimes no contact with your children as well. Two kinds of protection orders are a no contact order and a peace bond.

### NO CONTACT ORDER

If the abuser:

- has assaulted you, threatened to assault you, stalked you, or damaged your property,

and

- has been charged with a criminal offence,

you can ask police to help you get a no contact order as part of bail or probation conditions.



### **PEACE BOND**

If the abuser has not been charged, you can apply for a peace bond at a Provincial Court.

A victim support worker or transition house worker can help you with this. You will have to make a written statement about the abuse you have suffered and why you are afraid of your abuser.

### **RESTRAINING ORDER**

This has similar provisions to a peace bond or no contact order.

- If you are separating or divorcing your husband, you can ask for a restraining order during the proceedings.
- If you are already divorced or separated, you can ask your lawyer, family justice counsellor, police, counsellor or support person to help you get a restraining order.

### **For more information**

*For Your Protection: Peace Bonds and Restraining Orders* is a brochure by Victim Services and Community Programs Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. To obtain a free print copy, call Victim Link: 1-800-563-0808.

This brochure is online at:

[http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victim\\_services/publications/index.htm](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victim_services/publications/index.htm)

## **Keep police informed**

If you are living with an abusive partner, or believe that you are in danger from an ex-partner, make sure the local police know about your situation.

If you have an order, ask local police to check that it is registered with the Protection Order Registry. The Protection Order Registry is a confidential database containing all protection orders issued in British Columbia. The police have 24-hour access to the Protection Order Registry.

## **If your partner is not present during the court proceedings**

If your partner is not at the court proceedings, the court system will serve him with the order. If they can't find him, they may deliver the order to a relative, or pin it to his door. Occasionally, when the abuser has moved, has no relatives and



can't be found, he may not know about the order until police pick him up for breaking it.

## If you can afford a lawyer

If you can afford a lawyer, try to get someone who is recommended by other women with similar problems, or by professionals working with families exposed to violence.

Or you can try the province-wide lawyer referral service. You tell them what type of problem you are having and they give you the name of a lawyer. Call:

In the Lower Mainland: 604-687-3221

Outside the Lower Mainland: 1-800-663-1919 (toll free)

The lawyer you see on the lawyer referral service will give you an initial interview of up to 30 minutes for \$10. Make notes ahead of time so you can make best use of the time. The lawyer will give you his/her opinion about your problem, what could be done, how long it would take, and what it would cost you. At this point you may decide to go ahead and hire the lawyer. But if you're not satisfied, you can make another appointment through the lawyer referral service to interview another lawyer.

## If you can't afford a lawyer, try to get legal aid

You may qualify for legal aid. (If you have Internet access, go to <http://www.lss.bc.ca> and click on "legal aid.")

Legal aid will cover your case

IF:

- The Ministry of Child and Family Development has taken, or threatens to take, your child away from you.
- You need a restraining order or a change to your custody and access order because you or your children are likely to be physically abused.
- The other parent is threatening to take your child or children out of the province.
- You need an order for supervised access because your children are at risk.

You may also be eligible for legal aid



IF:

- You cannot represent yourself due to a serious condition or disability and your family matter must be resolved to avoid further harm.
- There are references in your court documents to past sexual, physical, or emotional abuse and the offending parent or partner is back in the community.
- The parent with access has kidnapped your child and there is an existing custody order or separation agreement.
- You are the respondent in a maintenance enforcement committal proceeding and will be sent to jail as a result of your failure to pay maintenance.
- There has been a complete denial of access for three months or more in breach of a court order or separation agreement.
- There are other unusual or extenuating circumstances.

AND:

- Your case is approved by the Legal Services Society.

#### **WHERE TO APPLY FOR LEGAL AID**

You can apply at your nearest legal aid office. If your area does not have a legal aid office or you can't get to the office, you can apply over the phone by calling the Legal Services Society. Call:

**In the Lower Mainland: 604-408-2172**

**Outside the Lower Mainland: 1-866-577-2525 (toll free)**

When you call, be ready to give information about your income, your assets, and the legal problem.

If your application is turned down, don't give up. Ask for a review of the decision.

### **If you can't afford a lawyer and don't qualify for legal aid**

You will have to represent yourself in court. You and your advocate/support person can prepare for this together. There is some help available.

- **Law Line** is a legal information telephone service provided by the Legal Services Society.

In the Lower Mainland: 604-408-2172

Outside the Lower Mainland: 1-866-577-2525 (toll free)


Lawyers and paralegals answer questions and provide:



- ▶ information about website and print materials that can help you with your legal problem
  - ▶ referral to other services, agencies or programs that can help
  - ▶ legal advice that can include written opinions and advice, correspondence, and help with legal documents (The lawyers cannot represent you in court.)
  - **Law Link** is a website that links you to the information and tools you need to resolve your legal problems. The links are grouped by the type of legal information they offer.  
Website: <http://www.lawlink.bc.ca>  
Click on “Family”
  - **Dial-A-Law** has pre-recorded taped messages about various topics such as Family Violence (tape 155) and Custody and Access (tape 142).  
In the Lower Mainland: 604-687-4680  
Outside the Lower Mainland: 1-800-565-5297 (toll free)  
Many of the tapes are available on the Dial-A-Law website:  
[http://www.bccba.org/Guest\\_Lounge/dial-a-law.asp](http://www.bccba.org/Guest_Lounge/dial-a-law.asp)
  - **Family Justice Counsellors** work in Family Justice Centres located across the province.  
In the Lower Mainland: 604-660-2421  
In Victoria: 250-387-6121  
Elsewhere in BC: 1-800-663-7867 (toll free)  
Family justice counsellors work with both parents and can help with:
    - ▶ information and referral
    - ▶ help filling out Family Court forms
    - ▶ help planning a separation agreement
  - **Family Duty Counsel (family lawyers) are available in some provincial courts** on a drop-in basis. They give advice and can speak for you in court on simple matters. Call your local Provincial Court to see if a Family Duty Counsel is available.
  - **Volunteer lawyers** give information and advice to low income people. They tell you what to expect in court. They do not represent you in court.
- The Salvation Army BC Pro Bono Program** has legal clinics in communities around BC.

Telephone: 604-872-7681  
E-mail: [contact@probono.ca](mailto:contact@probono.ca)  
Website: <http://www.probono.ca>





**Western Canada Society to Access Justice** (“Access Justice”) currently has clinics in the Lower Mainland and is opening clinics around the province.

Telephone: 604-878-7400

Website: <http://www.accessjustice.ca>

- **Legal Services Society** provides legal aid for those who qualify and also extensive education and information programs for the public. You may find the following sources of information useful:

**Fact sheets** in Chinese, English, Farsi, Punjabi, and Spanish are available from the Public Legal Education Program, 1500 West Pender, Vancouver BC V6E 4G1. Telephone: 604-601-6114.

- ▶ If You are an Immigrant Sponsored by Your Husband
- ▶ Taking Legal Action
- ▶ Custody and Access
- ▶ Peace Bonds, Restraining Orders and No-Contact Orders
- ▶ Can You Stay in the Family Home on Reserve? (English only)

**Legal Services Society family law website:** <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca>

Here you can find self-help materials, information about family law including child protection, publications and links.

## Should you apply for legal custody of your children?

If you leave an abusive relationship take the children with you.

If you leave them with your partner, judges will assume that they are safe with him and are more likely to give him custody of them.

Sometimes it’s not easy to decide whether you should apply for custody or not, as applying for custody can lead to more violence or to a custody battle in the courts. Here are some ideas:

- Get legal information before you leave or immediately after you have left. Contact the lawyer referral service, a legal aid staff lawyer, or the Law Line.
- Discuss the possibility of applying for a civil restraining and possession order with the lawyer. This will order your partner to leave the house.
- Alternatively you might consider getting a peace bond.
- Check out each move you make with your lawyer, the Law Line, or a family justice counsellor (but remember that the family justice counsellor works with both parents).



- Make sure that any protection orders are registered with the Protection Order Registry.
- Keep the local police informed if your partner is physically abusive or has threatened abuse.

## Finding and using an advocate

An advocate is a person who sticks up for you, believes you, supports you, and helps you get what you need from all the professionals and agencies you deal with.

An advocate will come with you to meetings with lawyers, counsellors, social workers, child protection workers, medical professionals and school staff. If you go to court, your advocate should be with you. Ideally an advocate has some knowledge about how these various systems work.

Sometimes a relative or friend is able to be an advocate. Or someone you work with, or have met at your church or place of worship may be an advocate.

In these times of cutbacks, it can be hard to find an advocate in the community. Women's centres, transition houses, battered women's support services, and victim assistance programs may be helpful. Here are some ideas about where to look for an advocate:

### FINDING AN ADVOCATE IN THE LOWER MAINLAND

- **Battered Women's Support Services** provides information, support, advocacy, counselling, referrals and support groups. The Legal Advocacy Program provides information, support, and a support person in court.  
Telephone: 604-687-1867
- **The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre** provides information, counselling, support, crisis intervention and legal and mental health advocacy to women who live in the area.  
Telephone: 604-681-8480
- **Vancouver Status of Women** makes resource and referral information available.  
Telephone: 604-255-3998.
- **The Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society** offers advocacy and culturally sensitive family support services.  
Telephone: 604-872-6723.

- **There are many programs for immigrants, including:**

**Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society** provides culturally sensitive support, counselling, and advocacy to immigrant and visible minority women who are experiencing family violence.  
Telephone: 604-436-1025

**The South Asian Women's Centre** gives multilingual and culturally sensitive support, information and referral.  
Telephone: 604-325-6637

**MOSAIC Settlement and Family Programs** has bilingual counsellors who provide orientation, information, referral, counselling and advocacy.  
Telephone: 604-254-9626

**SUCCESS (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services)** assists immigrants; offers family and youth counselling.  
Telephone: 604-684-1628

**CHIMO (Richmond) Multicultural Outreach Program** provides support to women experiencing violence.  
Telephone: 604-270-4949

**Surrey/Delta Immigrant Services Society** offers multilingual social services including women's programs.  
Telephone: 604-597-0205

For more suggestions contact Vancouver Information Services.  
Telephone: 604-875-6381

#### **FINDING AN ADVOCATE IN OTHER PARTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

To find an advocate outside the Lower Mainland, call:

- **Victim Link**  
Telephone: 1-800-563-0808  
TTY: 604-875-0885  
Collect calls: Telus Relay at 711
- For information and support in French, contact **Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique: Inform'Elles.**  
Telephone: 604-736-6974  
Toll free 1-888-800-7322  
Website: <http://reseaufemmes.bc.ca>
- Call your local transition house for suggestions.



- **Women Against Violence against Women (WAVAW)** includes advocacy in its services to women who have been sexually assaulted.  
Telephone: 604-253-6344  
Toll free: 1-877-392-7583
- **PovNet** is an online service with a focus on housing and welfare issues. It provides a service for finding an advocate for these issues in locations across the province.  
Website: <http://www.povnet.org>. Click on “Find an advocate.”
- **BC Coalition of People with Disabilities**, Advocacy Access program helps people with disabilities get a range of benefits, homeowner grants, gas tax rebates, and subsidized housing.  
Telephone: 604-875-1088  
Toll free: 1-877-232-7400  
TTY: 604-875-8835  
Website: <http://www.bccpd.bc.ca/advoacc.html>

#### **WORKING WITH AN ADVOCATE**

When you have found someone who is willing to be your advocate, you need to spend time together. The advocate will want to know what you need for yourself and your children: Do you need housing? Job training? Financial assistance? A restraining order? Custody of your children? Limitations to their father’s access? Help with children’s behaviour? Daycare or preschool? After school care? Medical or counselling referral? Help with your child’s school problems? Support while seeing social workers or child protection workers?

The advocate also needs to know:

- the basic details of the abuse you suffered
- details about your household, your children, their school, your friends and relatives
- how the abuse has affected you and your children
- what other problems and stresses you and your children are facing
- what your current relationship is with the abuser
- what you’ve tried already
- what has worked and what hasn’t



## Using the Internet to get information about woman abuse and related issues

Free use of the Internet is available at public libraries, community centres, and some women's centres. Or it may be available from friends and family.

If you are using a home computer you may not want your partner to know. Do you need to hide your tracks on-line? Please see the next page for more information.

There are many useful websites, including:

- Aboriginal Canada Portal: <http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca>
- BC Institute Against Family Violence: <http://www.bcifv.org>
- BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs: <http://www.endingviolence.org>
- BC Ministry of Attorney General Family Justice: <http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/family-justice>
- BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses: <http://www.bcysth.ca>
- Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness: <http://www.abusercovery.net>
- Canadian Health Network- frequently asked questions about family violence: <http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/violence.html>. Go to “frequently asked questions.”
- Child Find Canada: <http://www.childfind.ca>
- Directory of Services for the Lower Mainland. The Redbook Online: <http://www2.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/redbook>
- DisAbled Women's Network Canada: <http://www.dawncanada.net>
- Education Wife Assault : <http://www.womanabuseprevention.com>
- Hot Peach Pages: <http://www.hotpeachpages.org>
- Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services: Go to <http://www.gov.bc.ca> and follow the links.
- Missing Children Society of Canada: <http://www.mcsc.ca>
- National Clearing House on Family Violence: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn>
- U.S. National Center for Children Exposed to Violence: <http://www.nccev.org>



### **DO YOU NEED TO HIDE YOUR TRACKS ON-LINE?**

If you are using a home computer, you may want to hide some of your activities from your partner.

- E-mail: Always delete sensitive messages and empty the “Deleted Items” or “Trash” box.
- Chat/Discussion groups: If you have a Disable/Enable button you can get rid of the log that records conversations. Make sure that it is disabled each time you go on the chat or discussion groups.
- Sites visited: See detailed instructions for hiding information about the Internet sites you have searched at <http://www.shelternet.ca>

# Resources

## Safety Plan

Making a safety plan involves identifying the steps you can take to increase your safety and helps prepare you and your children in advance for the possibility of further violence.

Shelternet (<http://www.shelternet.ca>) provides the following detailed outline of a safety plan.

Ask a community-based victim service worker or a transition house worker to help you fill in the details of your safety plan.

### MY PERSONAL SAFETY PLAN

- While I do not have control over my abuser's violence, I can make myself and my children safer by planning actions that will help us deal with the abuse.
- I will use this plan as a guide and reminder to help me find ways to be safe. If I am concerned that my abuser will find a printout, I will write the points I believe apply to me on a separate piece of paper and hide it in a safe place.
- I will review and update this plan on a regular basis so that I can be ready in case my situation changes.

### WHAT I CAN DO BEFORE A VIOLENT INCIDENT

If I believe my partner will be violent, there are a number of things I can think about in advance. I can prepare to leave by doing some of the following things:

- I will keep a suitcase, box or bag \_\_\_\_\_ where I can get to it quickly and easily. In it, I will keep as many of the following that I can:
  - An extra set of keys for the apartment, house or vehicle
  - Small bank notes and change for taxis and telephone calls
  - Identification papers – passport, social insurance card, birth certificates, immigration papers, citizenship card, status card
  - Driver's licence and registration
  - Health Care cards and children's immunization records
  - Divorce and custody papers
  - Restraining orders, peace bonds and any other orders



- Bank books, cheque book, credit cards, mortgage or loan papers
- Lease/rental agreement, property deed, business or your partnership agreements, rent or mortgage payment receipts
- Address book
- Photograph of my (ex) partner to help identify him or her
- A list of other items I can pick up later

**In case I have to leave suddenly:**

- I can keep my purse, wallet, personal identification, keys and other emergency items \_\_\_\_\_
- I can open a separate bank account in my name at \_\_\_\_\_  
I will request that any bank statements be sent to \_\_\_\_\_  
so my abuser doesn't see them.
- I can also check how much money is in our joint account in case I need to remove half the money quickly. If my abuser knows my account or PIN number I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I can help my children escape by telling them \_\_\_\_\_  
  
I will teach them the number of the local police \_\_\_\_\_  
and other emergency numbers such as \_\_\_\_\_
- I will review my safety plan every \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT I CAN DO DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT**

I must be able to think and act quickly in order to keep myself and my children safe during a violent episode. Here are some of the things I can do to increase my safety:

- I can make sure I can grab my clothes and/or my children's clothes quickly by \_\_\_\_\_. If my abuser asks me what I am doing I will tell him/her \_\_\_\_\_





- I trust \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to tell them about my situation. I will use the code word \_\_\_\_\_ to let them know I am in danger and to contact police immediately.
- I can use the code word \_\_\_\_\_ with my children so that they can protect themselves during a violent incident.
- I will look in each room and figure out the best way to escape. I will try to stay out of places such as the bathroom and the kitchen if there is no outside exit. I will also try to avoid places where guns and knives are kept.
- On the main floor, the best way to get out is \_\_\_\_\_
- On the second floor, the best way to get out is \_\_\_\_\_
- In the basement, the best way to get out is \_\_\_\_\_
- I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very dangerous I should consider \_\_\_\_\_ to calm down my abuser. I will remember that my first priority is to keep myself and my children safe.
- I will review and revise this safety plan every \_\_\_\_\_

### **MY CHILDREN'S SAFETY**

- I know that the best thing my children can do for me during a violent episode is to get away and protect themselves. I can tell them to \_\_\_\_\_ if they see me being abused.
- I can teach them to pick a safe room like \_\_\_\_\_, preferably with a lock and access to a telephone. It is important to me and to them that they get out of the room where the abuse is occurring as soon as possible.



- I can tell them their most important job is to keep themselves safe. I will explain it to them using these words

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- I will teach them how to call for help. If they cannot safely get to a telephone in my home, I will talk to them about using our neighbour's

\_\_\_\_\_ phone or the nearest payphone, which is located at

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- I will make sure they know that they don't need money to dial an emergency number. If I have a cell phone, I will teach them how to dial 9-1-1 or other emergency number.
- I will make sure they know their name and address if they need help. If we live in the country, I will teach them their address, including concession and lot number and a description of where we live.
- I can rehearse what my children will say when they call for help. For instance we can practice how to contact the police like this:
  - Dial 911
  - An operator will answer:
    - "Police, Fire, Ambulance"
  - Your child says:
    - Police
  - Then your child says:
    - My name is \_\_\_\_\_
    - I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old
    - I need help. Send the police.
    - Someone is hurting my mom.
    - The address here is \_\_\_\_\_
    - The phone number here is \_\_\_\_\_
- I will teach my children to leave the phone off the hook after they have finished talking. The police may call the number back if they hang up, which could create a dangerous situation for me and my child/children.



- I can also tell my children about Neighbourhood Block Parents program and how to use it. The nearest Block Parent lives at \_\_\_\_\_

- I will pick a safe place such as \_\_\_\_\_ to meet my children outside our home after the situation is safe for me and for them (so we can easily find each other). I will teach my children the safest route to the planned place of safety for them.

- We will review and revise our safety plan every \_\_\_\_\_

#### **WHAT I CAN DO WHEN I AM LIVING IN A NEW PLACE**

- I can increase security by \_\_\_\_\_  
I may want to change the locks and put bars on the windows if I think my (ex) partner has a key.

- I will talk to my children and tell them to \_\_\_\_\_

if my (ex) partner shows up.

- I will teach my children how to dial police or ambulance numbers. In my area, the number for police is \_\_\_\_\_

- I will keep copies of any court orders with me at all times.  
I will give copies of these orders to (school, daycare, police)

\_\_\_\_\_ and tell them to call me if they see my (ex) partner. I will give these people copies of (ex) partner's photograph so that they can recognize him/her.

- I can install a peephole my children can use. I will tell them to \_\_\_\_\_ if my abuser shows up.

- I can get these features installed on my telephone (call blocking, call display, unpublished number, and speed dial) \_\_\_\_\_ to increase my safety.

- I can block e-mail messages from my (ex) partner or switch Internet service providers. If my abuser can access my Internet password I can \_\_\_\_\_



- I can have the emergency numbers in my area ready by writing them out:

Police \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital \_\_\_\_\_

Transition House \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis Line \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Services \_\_\_\_\_

Other services \_\_\_\_\_

- I can install fire detectors and extinguishers on each floor. I will put them

\_\_\_\_\_

- Here are some other things I can do to increase my safety

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **SAFETY IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD**

- I will tell \_\_\_\_\_ to call police if they hear a fight in my home.

- I will tell \_\_\_\_\_ who can and cannot pick up my children.

- I can ask \_\_\_\_\_ to look after my children in an emergency situation.

- I can ask \_\_\_\_\_ to keep my emergency escape plan items at their house.

- I can switch banks, grocery stores and other services so that I can avoid running into my abuser. I can go to \_\_\_\_\_ at different times than I did when I was with my partner.

- I may want to change my doctor, dentist or other professional services if I think my (ex) partner may track me down there. I will explain my situation to

\_\_\_\_\_

- I can make sure my name is not on my mailbox or in an apartment directory.



### **How I can increase my safety at work**

- I can report to the police any violations of the conditions of a court order. If the police officer will not help me, I can report the breach to the Chief of Police in the area where the court order was violated. I can get a copy of my partner's court order from the court offices located at \_\_\_\_\_ and keep it with me at all times.
- If my partner destroys the order, I can get another copy at \_\_\_\_\_
- If I move to another town or district, I will notify the local police of the court order, my new location, and my partner's history of violent behaviour. I will do the same thing if I often visit other cities/towns/countries. The numbers I need to call are \_\_\_\_\_
- I will tell the following people (boss, religious leader, close friend, counsellor) \_\_\_\_\_ about the order, including all the conditions on the order.

### **Taking care of my emotional well-being**

I realize that I have been through a lot and I may be feeling exhausted and emotionally drained. I know that building a new life free of violence takes a great deal of courage and requires a lot of energy.

Here are some things I can do to take care of my health. I may choose as many of these options as I feel comfortable doing:

- Attend as many counselling sessions as I can.
- Become involved in community activities to reduce feeling isolated.
- Take a part-time job to reduce isolation and to improve my finances.
- Enroll in school to increase my skills.
- Join support groups of other women to gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people.
- Take time for myself to read, meditate, play music, etc.
- Spend time with other people who make me feel good and provide support.
- Take part in social activities, e.g. movie, dinner, exercise.



- Take care of my sleep and nutritional needs.
- Keep a personal journal to write about my feelings, especially when I am feeling low or vulnerable. I will keep it in a safe place.
- Take time to prepare myself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with my partner, meeting with lawyers, or attending court.
- Try not to overbook myself – limit myself to one appointment per day to reduce stress.
- Be creative and do whatever makes me feel good.
- Write something positive about myself every day – my own personal affirmation.
- I will not find comfort in excessive use of alcohol or food – it only serves to increase my depression.
- Avoid excessive shopping and impulse buying.
- Join a health club or start an exercise program. It will increase my energy level and sense of well-being.
- It's OK to feel angry, but find positive and constructive ways to express my anger.
- Remember that I am the most important person to take care of right now.
- I will review and revise the sections of the safety plan that apply to me every \_\_\_\_\_ to make sure I am on track.

**SAFETY FOR WOMEN IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES  
(RURAL WOMEN, WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, IMMIGRANT WOMEN)**

- If I am concerned that my partner will track me down by long-distance telephone records I will (use phone card, payphone, cell phone, neighbour's phone) \_\_\_\_\_
- If I cannot leave the home because of my disabilities, I will contact \_\_\_\_\_ to make arrangements for transportation when my partner is not there.
- I do not feel comfortable speaking English, so I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ to translate or help me find someone to talk to me in another language.



- I can ask \_\_\_\_\_ if I'm concerned about my animals' welfare should I leave.

Here are some other things I can do to feel safe

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## Resources for children and teens

Contact details for publishers are at the end of this section.

### WORKBOOKS FOR KIDS

**A Volcano in My Tummy.** Contains activities to help children understand and gain skills about anger and self-esteem. Designed for children ages 6-15.

Eliane Whitehouse and Warwick Pudney, 1996. (Odin Books, \$15.95 or Source Resource, \$24)

**An Elephant in the Living Room.** A workbook and storybook for children who are living in families where drinking is a problem. Designed for children ages 7 through to early adolescence. Jill Hastings and Marion Typpo, 1984. (Chapters, \$9.95)\*

**Back on Track.** Self-help workbook for boys dealing with sexual abuse. Designed for boys 10 years old and up. Leslie Wright, 1997. (Odin Books, \$23.95)

**Energizers and Icebreakers – Book 1 and 2.** Books containing activities, which instill motivation and help with “getting to know you”. Designed for all ages. Elizabeth Sabrinsky, 1998. (Odin Books, \$15.95 each)

**I Wish the Hitting Would Stop.** A 28-page workbook for children who have experienced violence in their home. Designed for children ages 6-14. Susan Patterson, 1990. (Source Resource, \$6)\*

**Living with My Family.** A 32-page workbook for children who have witnessed abuse in their homes. Designed for children ages 5-14. Wendy Deaton and Kendall Johnson, 1991. (Source Resource, \$16)\*

**Push and Shove: Bully and Victim Activity Book.** Involves children through simple and easy to understand stories and activities. Designed for younger children. Jim and Joan Boulden, 1994. (Odin Books, \$9.95)

\* Available on loan from BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

### BOOKS FOR KIDS – AVAILABLE FROM MOST LIBRARIES

**A Terrible Thing Happened.** After seeing a terrible thing, Sherman tried to forget about it. But he was nervous, had stomach aches, and felt angry. Talking with a counsellor helped. Helpful suggestions and resources for parents follow in an afterword. Age 6-12. Margaret M. Holmes, 2000. (Chapters, \$14.95)





**Clover's Secret.** In this fantasy story Clover and Micky become friends and fly together. Clover is shy and unsure of herself. Micky finds out about the violence in Clover's home. Age 5-10. Christine Winn and David Walsh, 1996.  
(Source Resource, \$22)

**Dealing With Bullying.** A conflict resolution book that deals with bullying, insults, threats, fighting, intimidation, and feelings. Designed for elementary school age children. Marianne Johnston, 1996. (PowerKids Press, \$18.95US)

**Don't Feed the Monster on Tuesdays!** A story dealing with self-esteem issues. Designed for children ages 6-10. Adolph Moser, 1991.  
(Odin Books, \$26.95 or Source Resource, \$30)

**Don't Rant and Rave on Wednesdays!** A story dealing with anger and anger solutions. Designed for children ages 6-10. Adolph Moser, 1994.  
(Odin Books, \$26.95 or Source Resource, \$30)

**Eggbert, the Slightly Cracked Egg.** A story expressing that being different is okay. Designed for elementary school aged children. Tom Ross and Rex Barron, 1997.  
(Odin Books, \$9.50)

**Hands are Not for Hitting.** This book tells kids that using hands for hitting is not OK. There are many good things that hands can do, such as helping and comforting. Age 4-10. Martine Agassi, 2000. (Odin Books, \$18.95)

**Hear My Roar.** In this bear family, the father bear is abusive to the mother and child. The young bear starts to copy the father bear's behaviour. The family doctor talks to mother and child. He tells them the violence is not their fault and helps them with a safety plan. Age 5-12. Dr Ty Hochban and Vladyana Krykorka, 1994.  
(Odin Books, \$9.95)

**I Can't Wait.** A book dealing with problem solving. Designed for children ages 3-12. Elizabeth Crary, 1982. (Odin Books, \$9.95)

**I Like Me.** A storybook dealing with self-esteem issues. Designed for children ages 3-8. Nancy Carlson, 1990. (Odin Books, \$8.99)\*

**I Love My Dad But...** Colouring book. This little book can help a child with sad, angry and scared feelings about the abuse. It tells children that they have the right to be safe and happy, and that they are not to blame for the violence. Age 5-12. Leslie Wright, 1991. (Odin Books, \$5.95)



**I'm Frustrated; I'm Mad; I'm Proud – Dealing with Feelings Series.** Designed for elementary school aged children. Elizabeth Crary, 1979.

(Source Resource, \$15 each)\*

**Josh's Smiley Faces.** Josh throws toys, breaks things, and even hits his little brother. His mom uses a chart of smiley faces to help him to get his angry feelings out. Josh learns to express other feelings as well, and starts to feel better and get on better with others. There is a “note to parents” from a psychologist about anger and the use of rewards to influence behaviour. Age 4-10.

Gina Ditta-Donahue, 2003. (Chapters, \$13.95)

**Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore.** A book dealing with separation and divorce. Designed for children ages 3-10. Kathy Stinson, 1997.

(Annick Press, \$10.95)

**Mommy and Daddy Are Fighting.** A book about parents fighting, which creates discussion with children about arguments and family violence. Designed for children ages 3-10. Susan Paris, 1986. (Odin Books, \$13.95)

**My Mother is Weird.** A book about a mom having a bad day and how her daughter makes her feel better. Designed for children ages 4-10.

Rachna Gilmore, 1988. (Ragweed Press; \$7.95)

**Something is Wrong at My House.** In this book about parents fighting, a boy feels afraid, angry, and lonely. He finds ways to let angry feelings out without hitting. His teacher listens and gives some suggestions when he tells her about his father hitting his mother. Age 6-12. Diane Davis and Marina Megale, 1984.

(Odin Books, \$8.95)

**When Mommy Got Hurt.** This book for younger children stresses that violence is wrong; it's not the kid's fault; it happens in many homes, and it's OK to talk about it. Age 4-7. Ilene Lee, Kathy Sylvester, 1997. (Kidsrights, \$5.95 US)

\* Available on loan from BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

#### **WEBSITES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS**

“Just for kids” and “Kid's picture gallery” on Shelternet: <http://www.shelternet.ca>

Australian website about family violence for teenagers:

<http://www.burstingthebubble.com>



## **PUBLISHER DETAILS**

### **Odin Books**

1110 West Broadway,

Vancouver, BC V5H 1G5

Telephone: 604-739-8804; 1-800-223-6346 (toll free)

Fax 604-739-8874

Email: [staff@odinbooks.ca](mailto:staff@odinbooks.ca)

Website: <http://www.odinbooks.ca>

### **Source Resource**

998 Bloor Street West, PO Box 10546

Toronto, Ontario M6H 4H9

Telephone: 416-654-2000; 888-413-3339 (toll free)

Fax: 416-653-2139

Email: [info@sourceresource.com](mailto:info@sourceresource.com)

Website: <http://www.sourceresource.com>

### **Kidsrights**

10100 Park Cedar Drive

Charlotte North Carolina, USA 28210

### **PowerKids Press**

Rosen Publishing Group

29 East 21st Street

New York, NY, USA 10010



**Helping My Child** is a guide for mothers who are targets of violence in a relationship. Our goal is to support you so that you can support your children.

This guide is designed to help you understand abuse, how it affects you and hurts your children, how to protect yourself and your children and how to find the help you need.

**Helping My Child: A Guide to Supporting Children Exposed to Domestic Violence** is the first in a three-part series intended to help mothers, caregivers, service providers and children.

The other booklets are:

- Interventions with Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Guide for Professionals
- Kids Helping Kids: A Guide for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

All three publications are available at no cost online at: [www.bcysth.ca](http://www.bcysth.ca) or can be ordered from

BC/YSTH  
507-475 Howe Street  
Vancouver BC, V6C 2B3  
604-669-6943