

# *Learning to* **Listen**



# *Learning to* **Help**



## *Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children*

Linda L. Baker & Alison J. Cunningham

*the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System*

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## WHY LEARN ABOUT WOMAN ABUSE & ITS EFFECTS ON CHILDREN?

*Many of us  
work with people*

If your professional or volunteer role finds you in social service settings, employment agencies, classrooms, recreation facilities, health care settings, law enforcement agencies, correctional institutions, courthouses, veterinary practices, dental offices, law firms, legal clinics, or any place you meet people -- you will meet women who are in, or have recently left, abusive intimate relationships. Many of these women have children.

A sensitive and respectful response to abused women and their children requires an understanding of the issue and being prepared to provide support.

### ...Learning to Listen

The first step is to listen, respectfully and without judgment. Woman abuse and child maltreatment are illegal and hidden behind closed doors. They can be found in any neighbourhood. Those affected have many reasons to keep it secret, including fear, self-blame, embarrassment and concern for legal consequences such as deportation. Knowing the signs and patterns helps you listen with an ear to understanding.

### Learning to Help...

You can help. Respect a woman's choices, know the resources in your community, make appropriate referrals, and observe her privacy (as long as no child is at risk).

***You cannot keep a confidence if you believe a child is at risk of harm. Know your legal responsibility to report child abuse (see page 27)***

***Children who live in a home with woman abuse are affected, whether they see it, hear it, see the aftermath, or are told about it***

### *Special Features of this Guide*

These symbols highlight important points or direct you to further information.



***Of special note: this is an important point***

***A web site with more information***



***Google***

***Use the Internet to explore this topic***

***A document with more information***



## WHAT IS WOMEN ABUSE?

# Woman abuse does not always involve physical violence

The spectrum of abuse ranges from insults through to life-threatening injuries and even murder. The goal of the abuser is to use physical, economic or other power to be in control and to put the woman in a position of powerlessness. Woman abuse can take one, two or more of these forms...

### emotional abuse

Demeaning comments, insults, taunts about being useless, lazy, fat, ugly, or stupid, dictating how she dresses, threats of suicide, threats of taking the children, surveillance, baseless jealousy, cutting her off from family or friends, abusing pets, destroying sentimental or valued possessions.

### economic abuse

Withholding money, taking her money, spending frivolously while the children do without necessities, making all major purchases, denying access to bank accounts, preventing her from taking or keeping a job.

### sexual abuse

Forced sex, distasteful or painful sexual activity, exposure to AIDS or other sexually-transmitted diseases, refusal to use or permit her to use birth control.

### spiritual abuse

Ridicule or punishment for holding a religious or cultural belief, forbidding practice of a person's religion or forcing adherence to different practices.

### physical abuse

Slapping, punching, kicking, shoving, choking, burning, biting, pushing down stairs, stabbing or slashing with a knife, shooting, hitting with an object.

***While all forms of abuse are hurtful, some forms of woman abuse are criminal offences and others are not***



Liz Hart & Wanda Jamieson (2002). *Woman Abuse: Overview Paper*. Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family violence

## GLOSSARY

*You will see these terms  
used throughout the handbook*

*When we  
use these  
terms,  
here is what  
we mean.*

### assault

An offence contained in the Criminal Code of Canada.

### child exposure to woman abuse

Seeing, hearing, being told about, or seeing the aftermath of a mother's abuse by her intimate partner. Some children see a father taken away by police.

### child maltreatment

Also called "child abuse," a term that can mean physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and/or physical or emotional neglect and/or denial of medical care.



See also the Abuse of Children Wheel at [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

### coping strategy

A way to cope with an emotionally painful situation.

### healthy, equal relationship

A relationship characterized by mutual respect, trust, support, open communication, and shared responsibility, with calm negotiation and fairness in problem solving and conflict resolution.

### power and control

A pattern of behaviour involving coercion, threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, using male privilege, minimization of the seriousness of abusive behaviour, denial of harm, etc.

### woman abuse

A pattern of male behaviour characterized by power and control tactics against a woman that may, or may not, involve physical assault.

*Statistics  
Canada  
estimates  
that children  
have seen  
violence or  
threats in  
37% of  
households  
where there is  
spousal  
violence<sup>8</sup>*

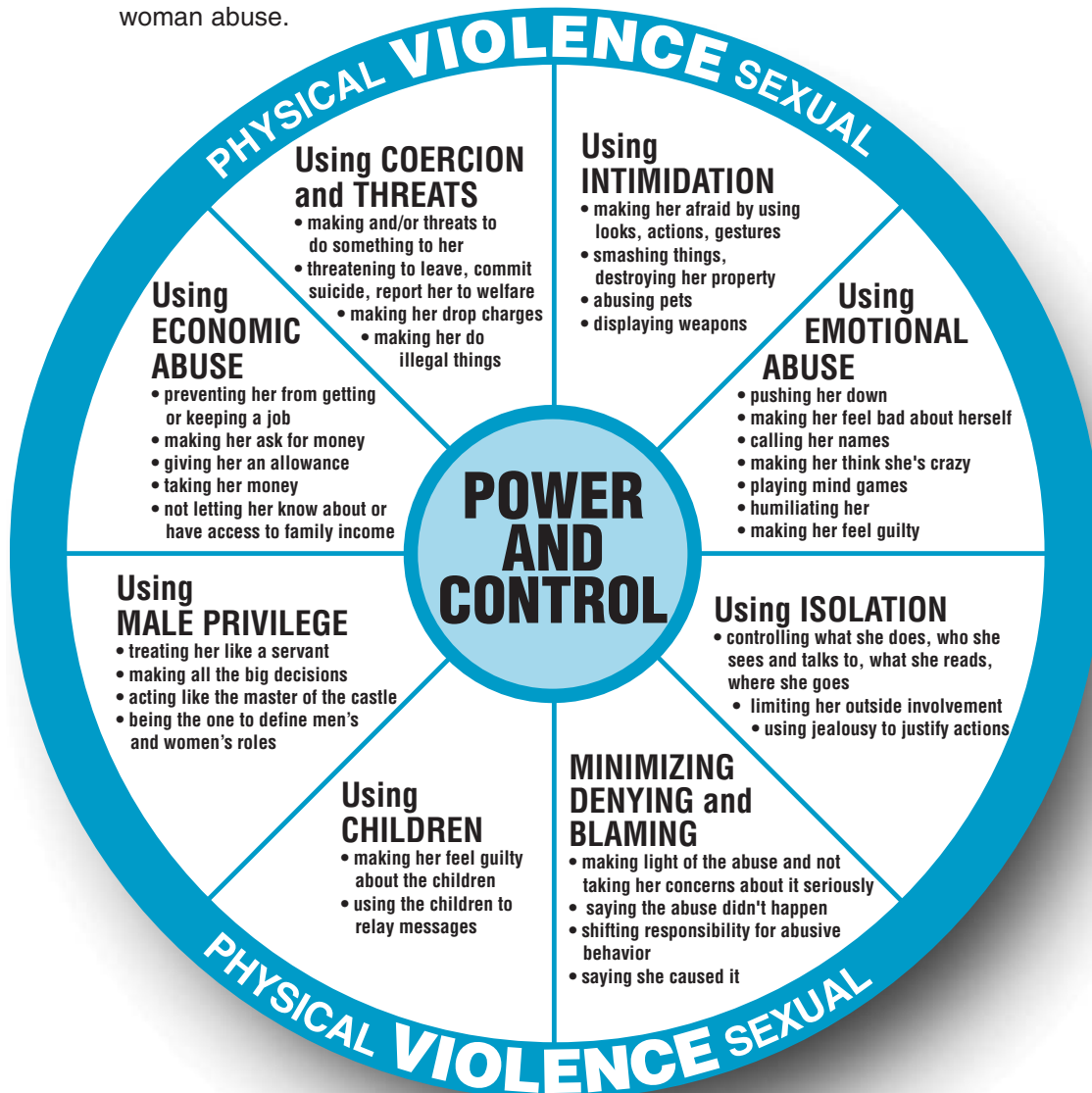




## POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

*Woman abuse does not always involve physical violence*

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project counsels men with a pattern of abusing their female partners. Their model shows how power and control tactics are the hallmarks of woman abuse.



Developed by  
the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

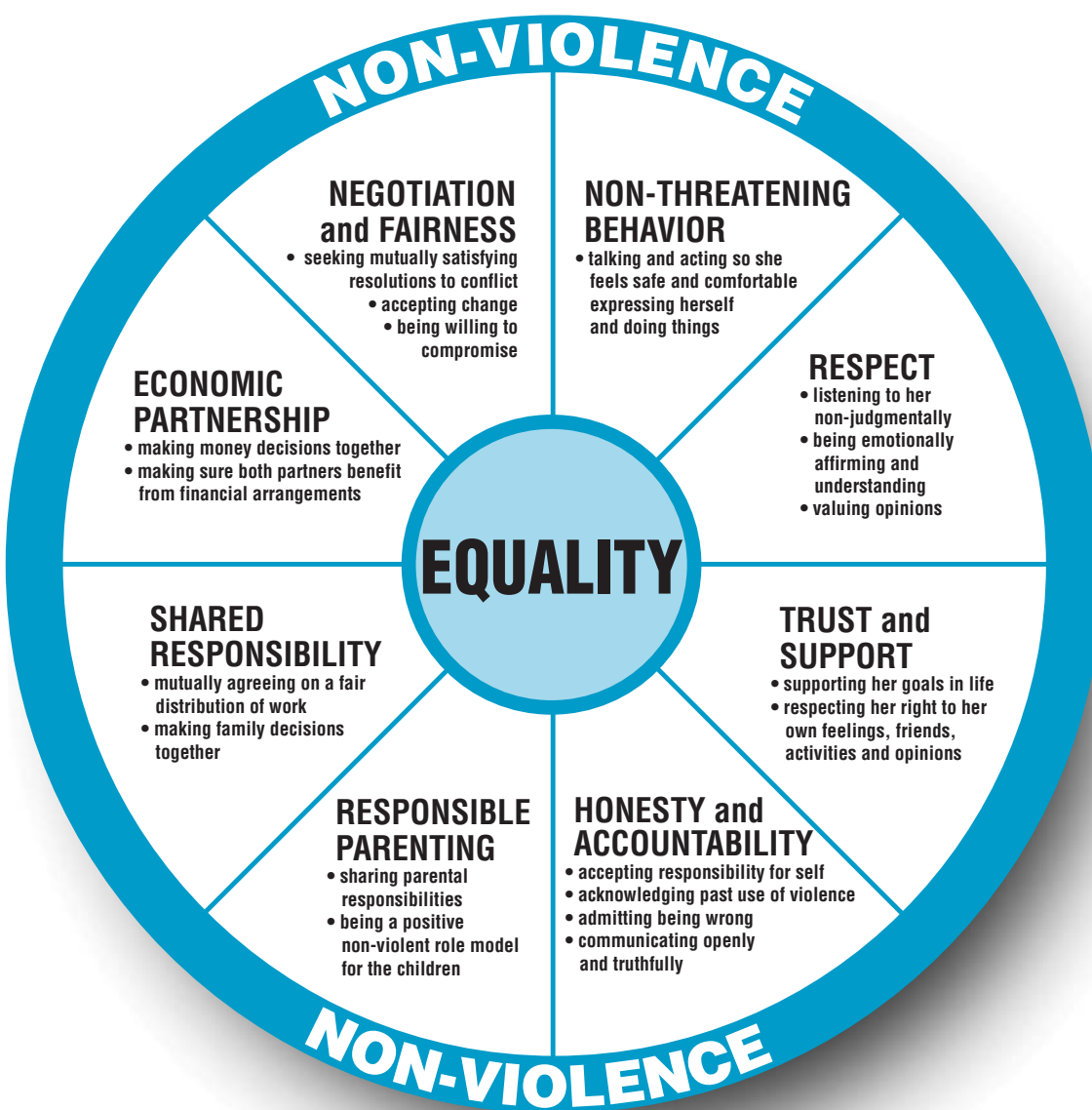


Find the *Lesbian/Gay Power and Control Wheel* and also *the Creator Wheel* (Mending the Sacred Hoop) for Aboriginal communities

## THE EQUALITY WHEEL

*Equality is the opposite to power and control*

This model also from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project describes a healthy, equal relationship.



The Ontario Women's Directorate has "tip sheets" to encourage healthy, equal relationships: [www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)

# FACTS & FIGURES

## *Abuse in the home is hidden behind closed doors*

That makes it difficult to get an accurate statistical picture.

### *How do we learn about violence in intimate relationships?*

- anonymous telephone surveys of the general population
- review of cases reported to or discovered by the police
- review of cases where women were murdered by an intimate partner
- talking with women who are experiencing or have survived woman abuse

### General Social Survey<sup>18</sup>

The GSS is an anonymous telephone survey. In 1999, and again in 2004, surveyors asked randomly chosen adults (over 15) about any “spousal violence” in the last five years, incidents ranging from threats to hit through to being beaten. In the 1999 survey:

**8%** of women who are or have been in a (heterosexual) relationship in the previous five years reported at least one incident within those five years at the hands of a current and/or former partner

**40%** of these women reported some form of physical injury

**38%** had feared for their lives

*While the GSS did not address this subject, violence can also occur in same-sex relationships*



Each year, Statistics Canada releases a document called *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*. Results of the 1999 GSS are in the 2000 edition. In 2005, the results of the 2004 GSS will be described there.

[find it at [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)]



## What do police statistics show?

- in 2002, 85% of victims of “spousal” assault known to the police were female<sup>17</sup>

### How many women go to shelters?

- each day, about 1,000 women live in an Ontario shelter because of abuse<sup>5</sup>

### How many women are murdered by intimate partners?

- in 2002, 67 women and 16 men were killed by a current or former “spouse” in Canada<sup>17</sup>



Learn more about intimate homicide by reading the latest annual report to the Chief Coroner by Ontario’s Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

### Who is most at risk for woman abuse?

Any woman could find herself in an abusive relationship but some groups of women appear to be at greater risk overall, specifically women who are:

- young
- in dating or common-law relationships
- disabled
- poor<sup>3</sup>
- Aboriginal
- recently out of a relationship

*never generalize from aggregate statistics to individuals: for example, most young women recently out of a relationship are not abused*

*These quantitative data give one perspective. Qualitative data such as case studies show the context, dynamics and consequences of abuse*



Aysan Sev’er (2002). *Fleeing the House of Horrors: Women Who Have Left Abusive Partners*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

**Most  
crime  
victims  
do not  
call the  
police**

Google

Search for Jacqueline Campbell’s Danger Assessment to learn about this and other ways to measure “lethality indicators.”

# WHAT CAUSES WOMAN ABUSE?

**TORONTO STAR** A 27-year-old unemployed father took just 37 days to get re-arrested and charged with beating up his wife again. In his second round of charges he was accused of violently pushing his wife into some cupboards, throwing her to the ground and then threatening to kill her with a piece of broken glass.

Ask this man for an explanation and he might say it was her fault: she was nagging, burned the dinner, spent too much money, insulted him, or talked to another man. He might focus on the situation: he was drunk, under stress after losing his job, or the children were noisy.

***But the underlying cause of woman abuse is the man's need to control,*** often paired with a belief that men can or should be in charge. Perhaps he learned

these attitudes by watching his father, or because he was raised believing that men's rights are more important than those of women or children.

Here are some factors contributing to the dynamic of violence against women in our society.

## ***Socialization of girls***

Many girls are encouraged to be nurturing, non-confrontational, and to put the needs of others over their own. Girls are exposed to messages that being male is better, men cannot be expected to share domestic duties, women are only valued for their beauty and ability to have children, and women without a man should be pitied.

Woman abuse is not a problem of mental illness or a reaction to stress. It is never caused by the victim's behaviour

## ***Stereotypes of masculinity and the role of men***

Little boys are socialized in quite a different way. It starts when they are babies and continues at school, where male aggression at recess is often excused as boisterous play, for example. Boys can receive messages that being powerful and in control are good, thinking is better than feeling, and expressing feelings is a sign of weakness. As adults, some have difficulty appreciating the viewpoint of others. They may believe the man is head of the household and his opinions and needs are the most important.



The Ontario Women's Directorate has "tip sheets" for parents and caregivers, to encourage healthy, equal relationships in boys and girls  
[www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)

## Violence in the media

Stereotypes of male and female roles are prevalent in movies and on television, suggesting that men are aggressive and in control and women are passive, submissive, sexually available, and eager to cater to the needs of men. Moreover, media portrayals of violence may be presented as normal, deserved by the victim, and executed without consequence.

### ***Societal attitudes condoning violence against women***

Portrayals of women in films and on television suggest that we collectively see women as legitimate targets of violence. Indeed, some people believe there are circumstances when a man is justified in hitting a woman, such as if she is unfaithful or he is drunk.



*Canadian society is changing: while many women and men today do not buy into stereotypes and strict gender roles, some people still do*

### **Inequality of Women**

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women<sup>5</sup> concluded that the root cause of woman abuse is the social, economic, and political inequality of women. For example, women earn less money than men, their work at home is under valued, and few politicians are women. If society now takes violence against women seriously, it is because women worked hard for this.

***Woman abuse is not caused by anger, stress or alcohol. It can be found in all age, cultural, socio-economic, educational, and religious groups***

Myths are still prevalent. Many Canadians mistakenly believe family violence is caused by family stress (54%) or alcohol or drugs (33%). Two thirds of Canadians (66%) believe it is often or always a family matter that is not their concern.<sup>10</sup>

## ADVOCACY WHEEL

*This model illustrates key principles guiding intervention with abused women*

Things NOT to do include violating her right to confidentiality, trivializing and minimizing the abuse (e.g., “you stayed this long, why not just stick it out?”), blaming her (e.g., “why didn’t you just leave?”), not respecting her autonomy (e.g., telling her what to do), ignoring her need for safety, and normalizing the victimization.



Developed by the Domestic Violence Project of Kenosha, Wisconsin [www.pathwaysofcourage.org](http://www.pathwaysofcourage.org)



Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (2000). *Competency Standards for People Who Come into Professional Contact with Those Affected by Domestic/Family Violence*. Australia. [find at [www.padv.dpmc.gov.au](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au)]

## HOW TO SUPPORT A WOMAN

*Address her safety,  
ask what she needs,  
and be willing to listen*

Remember, you may not be able to address the situation alone and you will not be able to predict an abuser's behaviour.



Women at risk of harm need a safety plan, a set of strategies worked out ahead of time to help them escape a dangerous situation. [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca) has a template for a safety plan.

Staff at a shelter, women's centre or abused women's advocacy agency can help women develop safety plans. If unsure of the nearest agency, call the **Assaulted Women's Help Line** or visit the web site of the Ontario Women's Directorate (see pages 13 and 14 for contact information)

### Guiding principles for intervention

- safety is the priority: ask if she is in danger and what she needs to be safe
- she is the expert on her life
- your response COULD put her at greater risk so proceed with caution
- every woman is unique: ask her what she needs and don't make assumptions
- if you feel uncomfortable or unprepared to assist, tell your supervisor

### Some basic "tips"

- find a private time and place to speak with her
- let her know she is not alone, you believe her, and it is not her fault
- listen
- don't offer advice: offer support and choices
- let her know there are many people available to help
- provide information on local resources such as the woman-abuse crisis line

Google

Find and compare the RADAR domestic violence screening system, the RUCS (Routine Universal Comprehensive Screening) and the WAST (Woman Abuse Screening Tool), all used in health settings.

# ANTI-VIOLENCE SERVICES

## When helping women and their children...

...you can rely on a network of organizations with the mandate or the mission to help women and children be safe and stay safe. See page 13 for how to find resources.

### ● **Women's advocates**

Although called different names in different places, there may be a women's centre or abused women's advocacy agency in your area, where women receive confidential counselling and advice.

### ● **Crisis lines**

Check on the first page of the telephone directory for the local 24-hours crisis lines. Women can also find the local crisis line by calling the province-wide Assaulted Women's Help Line (see page 13).

### ● **Women's shelters**

There are over 150 shelters in Ontario including emergency shelters specializing in violence against women, shelters for homeless women, safe houses, and second-stage housing facilities. Many have agreements with local animal shelters so women arriving with pets are not turned away. See [www.ospca.on.ca](http://www.ospca.on.ca)

### ● **Children's Aid Societies**

The 52 CASs across Ontario are mandated by law to investigate and intervene when children are or may be in need of protection from abuse or neglect by caregivers. See page 27.

### ● **Police**

Women can access police services by calling 9-1-1 or finding the local number in the telephone book.



All police services in Ontario have mandatory charging policies so officers must lay charges when having reasonable grounds to believe a crime (e.g., assault, criminal harassment) occurred

### ● **Courts and victim services**

When criminal charges are laid, women and children may be subpoenaed to testify. In most Ontario courthouses, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program helps them through that process. Several cities also have Domestic Violence Courts. In some areas, specialized child witness projects help children prepare to testify.

### ● **Abusive men's programs**


Usually delivered in a group format and often based on the Power & Control model (page 4), these programs accept both self-referred clients and men ordered by the courts to attend. The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence publishes a directory of treatment programs in Ontario and across Canada.






### Resources for safety


Find the nearest abused women's shelter at [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca). Shelters providing culturally relevant services to Aboriginal women are also listed at the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence: [www.nacafv.ca](http://www.nacafv.ca). Other women's shelters can be found at [www.womennet.ca](http://www.womennet.ca) under "women's shelters."

 A woman in imminent danger should call the police immediately

 The Family Violence Assistance Program of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [[www.ospca.on.ca](http://www.ospca.on.ca)] is designed for women who bring pets to women's shelters

### Income support

People needing "welfare" apply to **Ontario Works**. Each office is operated by the local municipal government under the auspices of the Ministry of Community & Social Services. Women call (toll free) one of the seven Intake Screening Units. Call the Ministry at 1-888-789-4199 for more information about the process.

 **Ontario Works lets victims of woman abuse defer workfare (first for three months with possible renewals) and defer the obligation to seek support payments from an ex-partner because doing so may endanger her safety**

A woman who cannot work because of a medical condition can apply for **Ontario Disability Support Benefits**. This is a lengthy process and she may have to collect Ontario Works in the meantime.



Woman and Abuse Welfare Research Project (2004). *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of Ontario's Welfare System*. Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses. [[www.oaith.ca](http://www.oaith.ca)]

### Counselling and advocacy

Some communities have local service directories and the telephone book is also helpful. Visit the Ontario Association of Women's Centres ([www.oawc.org](http://www.oawc.org)) to see if you have a women's centre in your area. Another resource is [www.womennet.ca](http://www.womennet.ca). The Farm Line (1-888-451-2903) has an on-line resource directory at [www.thefarmline.ca](http://www.thefarmline.ca). Or call the Assaulted Women's Help Line to find services in your area.

## Legal advice

Women may seek advice on child custody, property division, child maintenance, or restraining orders. The following document covers all these topics and more:



Community Legal Education Ontario (2004). *Do You Know a Woman Who is Being Abused? A Legal Rights Handbook* [www.cleo.on.ca].

**The “Getting Legal Help” series also available at [www.cleo.on.ca](http://www.cleo.on.ca) helps women find lawyers and apply for Legal Aid**

## Resources for women new to Canada

- [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org): information and answers for newcomers to Ontario
- [www.projectbluesky.ca](http://www.projectbluesky.ca): resources in Chinese, Korean & Japanese
- [www.hotpeachpages.net](http://www.hotpeachpages.net): links to material in over 70 languages



Katrina Pacey (2003). *Assisting Immigrant and Refugee Women Abused by Their Sponsors: A Guide for Service Providers*. [www.bcifv.org].

## Parenting Support

- The over 200 Ontario Early Years Centres and satellites offer free support to parents of children pre-natally to age six, including opportunities to talk with professionals and other parents. See [www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca)
- The Parent Help Line (1-888-603-9100) offers information, support and referral, 24/7. Speak with a counsellor or access over 300 pre-recorded messages about parenting issues in both English and French. See also [www.parenthelpline.ca](http://www.parenthelpline.ca).
- Family Service Canada (1-800-668-7808) can help you find family serving organizations. Or visit [www.cmho.org](http://www.cmho.org) (Children’s Mental Health Ontario)

## Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

- At this national toll-free, 24/7, bilingual help line, children and teenagers can speak with someone anonymously about personal problems and ask questions.



***Some children believe that use of a toll-free number like Kids Help Phone will appear on the family telephone bill: reassure them this is not the case***

## WOMAN ABUSE AND CHILDREN

*Abuse threatens a child's sense of his or her family as safe and nurturing*

Children living with woman abuse are: likely to be maltreated themselves; at risk of injury during violent incidents; unable to grow up in a safe, supportive and peaceful environment; and, at risk to develop trauma symptoms (e.g., nightmares).



***Each child is unique. Even children in the same family are affected in different ways, depending upon factors such as age, gender, relationship to the abuser, and role in the family***

### How children are “exposed” to woman abuse

- seeing a mother assaulted or demeaned
- hearing loud conflict and violence
- seeing the aftermath (e.g., injuries)
- learning about what happened to a mother
- being used by an abusive parent as part of the abuse
- seeing a father abuse his new partner when they visit him on weekends
- being denied what is owed them for child support

### How children might be “used” by an abusive parent

- suggesting a child's bad behaviour is the reason for violence
- encouraging the children to abuse the other parent
- threatening violence against the children and/or pets
- talking to children about the abused parent's behaviour
- prolonged court proceedings about custody and access, especially when the abuser has previously shown little interest in the children
- holding the children hostage or abducting them

### ***Children are not “witnesses” to violence***

In the research literature, children are often called “witnesses” to violence. This term implies a passive role – but children living with violence will actively interpret, predict, assess their roles in causing violence, worry

about consequences, engage in problem solving and/or take measures to protect themselves or siblings, both physically and emotionally.

### ***Roles between incidents***

Among the many roles children can play, they may try to predict an eruption of violence and modify their own behaviour to prevent or avoid an incident.

### **What children may think and feel**

They may feel fear, distress, anxiety, self-blame, guilt, anger, grief, confusion, worry, embarrassment, and hope for rescue. To quell these intense emotions, they may use coping strategies such as those listed on pages 22 and 23, many of which are effective at the time but not helpful in the long run (e.g., using drugs).

### **Lessons children may learn from violence**

- violence and threats get you what you want
- a person has two choices – to be the aggressor or be the victim
- victims are to blame for violence
- when people hurt others, they do not get in trouble
- anger causes violence or drinking causes violence
- people who love you can also hurt you
- anger should be suppressed because it can get out of control
- unhealthy, unequal relationships are normal or to be expected
- men are in charge and get to control women's lives
- women don't have the right to be treated with respect



Elena Cohen & Barbara Walthall (2003). *Silent Realities: Supporting Young Children and their Families who Experience Violence*. Washington, DC: National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-centered Practice. [[www.cwresource.org](http://www.cwresource.org)]

***Children who do not blame themselves for the abuse and who develop helpful coping strategies (e.g., reaching out for help) will probably have the best outcomes***

## THE NEED FOR DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE

*Interventions should ensure safety and respect individual needs and differences*

In devising an intervention strategy, service providers consider the severity and frequency of violence, look for power and control tactics, and assess for other adverse experiences affecting the children.

### ***Woman abuse is different than marital conflict***

While woman abuse can occur without physical assaults, relatively minor incidents such as slapping and pushing can occur once or twice in relationships not otherwise characterized by power and control tactics.<sup>14</sup>

### **The hallmark of woman abuse is power and control**

Woman abuse involves ongoing, instrumental use of power and control tactics against a woman by her partner to meet his needs. Physical violence or the threat of it is often present. Its root cause is gender inequality.

### **Marital conflict is different than woman abuse**

Marital discord may be part of an abusive relationship. However, marital discord characterizes a substantial number of intimate relationships where there is not woman abuse.

### **The two are often confused in research**

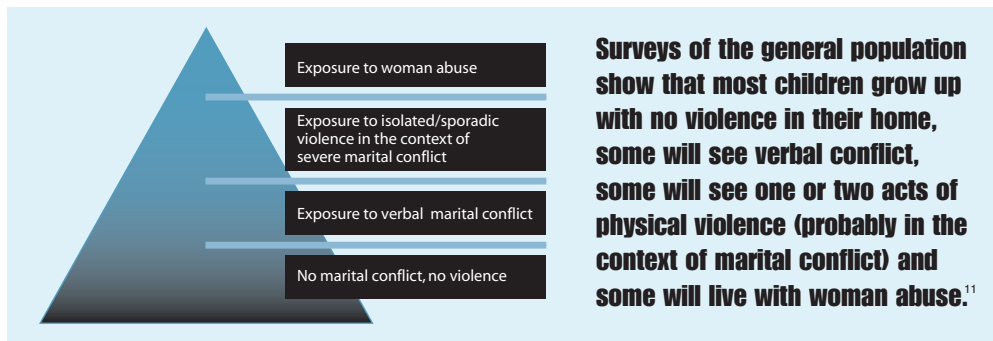
The boundaries between marital conflict and woman abuse can be blurred in general population surveys, minimizing the true impact of woman abuse on adult victims and their children. Also, symmetry between the rates of violence reported by men and women are likely to occur when an episode of violence within the context of severe marital conflict is lumped together with the patterns of intimidation, domination, and threat that characterize woman abuse.

### **The type of intervention will be different**


Couple therapies appropriate for marital conflict are both ineffective for relationships characterized by woman abuse and may increase the risk faced by a woman and her children. Likewise, the reverse is true. Interventions designed for male perpetrators of women abuse are not appropriate to deal with marital conflict.

**Remember:  
violence in any  
form is never  
acceptable.**






## *The adversities of childhood*

 Other co-occurring challenges that can affect children are ideally considered in planning an intervention for children


 Adverse Childhood Events Study: [www.cestudy.org](http://www.cestudy.org)

Large-scale studies of childhood like the ACE Study help us see that children who live with woman abuse will typically face other challenges as well. The more frequent the physical abuse of a mother in a family, the more likely these are true:

- the child is maltreated (emotional or physical neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or emotional abuse) or subject to physical punishment.<sup>9, 11, 12, 16</sup> This is sometimes called poly-victimization or multiple victimization
- the family experiences economic hardship, unemployment, alcoholism, parental criminality, and/or the recent introduction or exodus of a parental figure<sup>8, 9, 11</sup>

 ***A mother's ability to be the best parent she can be may be compromised by the abuse and its emotional and financial consequences<sup>1</sup>***

For many children, this “package” of adversities will compromise health, emotional well-being and academic success, in the short and/or long term. Statistically, the effect appears cumulative: the more types of victimization and adversities, the longer they last, and the more severe they are, the more profound is the effect.

 Children may also be “exposed” to violence in the media (like movies and music lyrics), in the news, on the play ground or in school hallways, and some children are exposed to violence in their neighbourhoods.<sup>4, 12</sup>

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE AT DIFFERENT AGES<sup>1,7</sup>

*How children are affected  
by violence at home  
depends on many factors*

As children get older, they develop a more sophisticated understanding of the causes and consequences of violence, a more accurate view of their own role in the violence (versus a self-blaming stance), and an increasing ability to intervene. Their emotional coping strategies (see pages 22 and 23) may also evolve and change.

### **Infants and Toddlers**

Babies and toddlers are too young to understand what is happening between adults but they hear noise and feel the tension. They may be distressed or scared; be upset if not getting their needs met promptly; be too frightened to explore and play; or, sense the stress and distress of their mothers.

Infants are highly vulnerable to abuse including shaken baby injuries



Help women find an Ontario Early Years Centre, to get answers to questions, information about services for young children, and the chance to speak with professionals and other parents: [www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca)

### **Pre-schoolers**

Children of this age need to hear that what happened was not their fault, they are still loved, and that important features of daily life will go on. When pre-schoolers see violence and other loud conflict, they may:

- worry about being hurt and may have nightmares about being hurt
- believe they caused the “fight” by something they did
- hope that a TV character or super hero will come and save them
- be confused if Daddy is gone and worry that Mommy may leave too

Pre-schoolers can be upset by changes to daily routines and separation from cherished items such as blankets, teddies, or pets. If the family left home, perhaps to enter a shelter, encourage the mother to re-establish comforting routines such as meal and bedtime schedules. The present is more important to pre-schoolers than the past.

## School-age Children

At this age – 6 to 12 years – children have increased connections with peers and want to be liked by them. They still depend on adults for security and basic needs.

Seeing “fights” between parents, many children now recognize how actions have reasons and consequences and that mothers may be upset even after a “fight” ends. They will probably see “fighting” as caused by stress, family finances, alcohol or whatever else their parents argue over. Believing this explanation is easier (emotionally) than seeing a parent as a “bad” person who is mean on purpose. When they see “fights”, they judge behaviour by its fairness: who started it, who is bigger, and if the consequence (e.g., arrest) was consistent with perceived seriousness. They are learning what it means to be male and female in our society. However, in homes with woman abuse, children are getting distorted messages such as, men are in charge and their needs are most important.

## Adolescents



You may see teenagers who are victims of abuse, witnesses to abuse, perpetrators of abuse in the home, and/or who are involved in abusive relationships. A teen can be all four

At this age, young people may feel:

- embarrassment / strong need for privacy / need to be seen as “normal”
- responsibility for taking care of younger siblings
- anger at either or both parents
- concern for the well-being of their mother
- vengeful toward the abuser, or relief if the abuser is gone

As they grow larger, some teens intervene physically in incidents, even risking injury. Teenagers have a wider range of coping strategies than younger children that may include leaving home, using drugs/alcohol, and seeking intimate relationships for escape (see page 22). Some strategies can lead to problems outside the home such as arrest, school drop-out, teen pregnancy, or abusive dating relationships. We still have a lot to learn about how boys and girls are affected differently, in part because most researchers lump them together.



The Ontario Women’s Directorate has a “tip sheet” for adults working with or mentoring youth: [www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)

*When faced with a difficult situation, children and teenagers find ways to “cope”*

They come to an understanding (possibly distorted) about what is happening and deal with the flood of hurtful emotions. Their strategies can involve feelings (emotional), thoughts (cognitive), or actions (behavioural).

### ***Some strategies may be helpful in the moment but are costly in the long run***

- coping strategies help a child get through a time of stress or crisis, such as when there is woman abuse at home
- however, if used as a general response to other circumstances, these strategies may create problems in the long run
- the longer a costly strategy is used, or the more effective it is in shielding a youth from overwhelming emotions and hurt, the harder it may be to extinguish



***Young children cannot use coping strategies and need adults to buffer them from the harmful consequences of stress and adversities***

These are some coping strategies you may see in children and teenagers living with woman abuse and child maltreatment. Remember that coping styles vary with age and that some of these strategies can be triggered by other adversities such as severe marital conflict and parental substance abuse.

### ***Mental Blocking or Disconnecting Emotionally***

- numbing emotions or blocking thoughts
- tuning out the noise or chaos, learning not to hear it, being oblivious
- concentrating hard to believe they are somewhere else
- drinking alcohol or using drugs

### ***Making it Better Through Fantasy***

- planning revenge on the abuser, fantasizing about killing him
- fantasizing about a happier life, living with a different family
- fantasizing about life after a divorce or after the abuser leaves
- fantasizing about abuser being “hit by a bus”
- hoping to be rescued, by super heroes or police or “Prince Charming”

### ***Physical Avoidance***

- going into another room, leaving the house during a violent episode
- finding excuses to avoid going home or running away from home

### Looking for Love (and Acceptance) in all the Wrong Places

- falling in with bad friends
- having sex for the intimacy and closeness
- trying to have a baby as a teenager or getting pregnant to have someone to love them

### Taking Charge Through Caretaking

- protecting brothers and sisters from danger
- nurturing siblings like a surrogate parent or taking the “parent” role with siblings
- nurturing and taking care of his or her mother

### Reaching out for Help

- telling a teacher, neighbour, or friend’s mother
- calling the police
- talking to siblings, friends, or supportive adults

### Crying out for Help

- suicidal gestures
- self-injury, carving
- lashing out in anger / being aggressive with others / getting into fights

### Re-Directing Emotions into Positive Activities

- sports, running, fitness
- writing, journalling, drawing, poetry, acting, being creative
- excelling academically

### Trying to Predict, Explain, Prevent or Control the Behaviour of an Abuser

- thinking “Mommy has been bad” or “I have been bad” or “Daddy is under stress at work”
- thinking “I can stop the violence by changing my behaviour” or “I can predict it”
- trying to be the perfect child
- lying to cover up bad things (e.g., a bad grade) to avoid criticism, abuse or family stress



**Once the family is safe, gradually extinguishing strategies with negative effects and replacing them with healthier strategies may be the key to helping children who have lived with woman abuse and maltreatment**



Help mothers understand the coping of their children with material in *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting* (2004).  
[[www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)]

## RESPONDING TO CHILD DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE & NEGLECT

*When working with children,  
some may tell you  
they are being abused*

Children may tell you that someone is hurting them, they worry about someone who may hurt them, or that they are not taken care of properly or supervised at home.



***If a child (under 16) is being abused, at risk of abuse, or not having basic needs met, in Ontario it is your legal responsibility to call the Children's Aid Society: see page 27***

While you may consult a supervisor for guidance, if you heard the child disclose abuse or neglect, you must make the call, and you must call immediately. Letting the child leave your agency before you make the report can put him or her at risk.

### ***Disclosures of woman abuse***

A child may tell you that his or her mother is being hurt by her partner. In Ontario, this is not one of the reasons you have to call the CAS, unless you suspect that the child is at risk of harm. This includes risk to physical safety and also how the situation is affecting them emotionally (see page 27).



**Ask the child if he or she is ever hurt when Mommy gets hurt (if the answer is yes, call the CAS)**

If you are unsure how to respond, call the local CAS and ask for guidance.

### ***When a child makes a disclosure of abuse...***

... stop for a minute and take stock of the enormous responsibility you have:

- appreciate how difficult it was to reveal a family secret
- assume the child has decided that help is needed
- understand the risk to the child if you do not respond appropriately



***Failure to act may discourage a child from telling anyone for a long time and place him or her at risk of further harm***



## HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD DURING A DISCLOSURE<sup>2</sup>

### **Allow the child to tell his or her story**

Use active listening. Do not pressure the child to talk. Remember that your role is not to gather evidence or conduct an investigation.

### **Reassure the child by validating his or her feelings**

Acknowledge the child's feelings with statements such as "sounds like that was scary for you." Depending upon the situation, it may be helpful to say you are glad he or she told you, that abuse is never a child's fault, and that no one should be hurt.



***If a child asks you to keep this secret, explain that you may need to tell someone whose job it is to help children be safe***

Google

Find the basic principles of "Active Listening" on the internet

### **Do not criticize or speak negatively about the abusive parent**

Children often have confused feelings. They may hate the abuse, but have a close bond to the abusive parent and enjoy times spent together. Reluctance to tell may be linked to a fear of marital separation. If you criticize the abusive parent, a child's feelings of loyalty and protectiveness toward the parent may cause the child to feel that you are not the person to speak with about the abuse.



***A child who does not receive the hoped-for reaction may not disclose again***

### **Do not make commitments you cannot keep**

Statements such as "I'll keep your secret" or "I won't let him hurt your mom anymore" may diminish a child's trust in you and others if subsequent experience shows that statements were not true. The child might come to believe that no one can help and it is not worth telling anyone.

### **Follow the child's lead**

Some children have short attention spans and spend little time on any one topic, even if it is a distressing one. Permit the child to say as much or as little as needed.



For when an adult discloses abuse, see *Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Professionals* (2001) for guidance on what to do and say (and what not to do and not to say). [find at [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/)]

# BARRIERS TO CHILD DISCLOSURE

*Children take an enormous risk in revealing family secrets*

It is a common misperception that children experiencing abuse at home will readily tell adults such as teachers, counsellors, or health practitioners.

While most children will blithely relate intimate family things that would mortify their parents, children who grow up with woman abuse or child maltreatment are just the opposite. They are warned or know instinctively that revealing family secrets will have bad consequences. At an age when children want to blend in with peers and be the same, they have already realized how different their family is.

## *Why would children not tell?*

This depends on many factors including age and relationship with the abuser. Also important in some cases are:

- not understanding that abusive behaviour is wrong or not normal
- embarrassment or desire for privacy
- being warned to “keep your mouth shut”
- being denied contact with people who could intervene (e.g., doctor) or having that contact monitored
- believing they caused the violence
- having no trusted adult in their lives
- fear of consequences for themselves (e.g., being taken from the family)
- fear of consequences for the family (e.g., arrest of father, divorce, mother being hurt)

## *What is at stake for a child in telling someone?*

- risking more (or worse) abuse
- potentially being “taken away” by the Children’s Aid Society
- being pitied, shunned, or teased by the other kids
- having family be angry at them and/or being kicked out of home

Some fears are realistic and some are misunderstandings.

*Children may deny anything is wrong even if asked a direct question*

## REPORTING CHILD MALTREATMENT<sup>15</sup>

### *Children's Aid Societies are mandated to protect children from maltreatment*

We all have a legal obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society if we suspect a child is or may be in need of protection from abuse or neglect.

The Child & Family Services Act (CFSA) defines the term "child in need of protection" and it includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.

Skilled social workers at the CAS evaluate each situation individually to determine if a child is in need of protection.



**You can call the CAS and provide the details of your concerns, without giving names. They will say if you have to make a formal report**

#### ***Who makes the report?***

The person who has the reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must make the report directly. Do not delegate this responsibility.

#### ***What if I'm not sure?***

You do not need to be sure that a child is or may be in need of protection to make a report. "Reasonable grounds" are what an average person, given his or her

training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgment, would suspect.



***There are 52 CAS agencies in Ontario. To find the agency in your area, use the telephone book or visit [www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org) and look for "members"***



***According to the CFSA, a child is in need of protection if they are suffering emotional harm (i.e., unaddressed and serious levels of anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive, aggressive behaviour or delayed development)***

For more information, see *How & When to Report Abuse or Neglect* from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. [[www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)]



## STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

### *Working with vulnerable children involves special responsibilities*

Basic principles of professional conduct include respect for clients/patients, safety from harm, confidentiality, non-exploitation, objectivity, and appropriate boundaries, both physical and psychological. It also means having sufficient training and knowledge to perform the job.

Immediately consult a supervisor if you have questions or concerns about a specific situation. Document both your concerns and your actions

- 1.** Always be professional and maintain high standards of personal behaviour
- 2.** Be aware of situations which can be misconstrued or manipulated by others, such as being alone with a child in a car
- 3.** Be vigilant and aware of how your actions and attention can be misinterpreted by a child or teenager (e.g., as sexual interest)
- 4.** When dealing with boys and girls, be aware of how socialization affects them differently and promote gender equality
- 5.** Be aware of how touch may be experienced or misinterpreted by a child (many professionals adopt the policy of not hugging children and using touch sparingly, especially with school-aged children and teenagers)
- 6.** Never use or respond in kind to sexual innuendo or flirting
- 7.** Do not swear, yell, demean a colleague, or call anyone names
- 8.** Never take a child to your home, generally avoid speaking about your personal life, do not accept purchased gifts, and avoid social outings with children (except those approved by your agency or supervisor)



For an example of a Code of Conduct, see the Code of Ethics of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers [[www.ocswssw.org](http://www.ocswssw.org)]

# TAKING STOCK OF YOUR OWN ATTITUDES

*Each of us brings our unique history, biases and assumptions to our work*

In school, we learn many facts and skills, but this learning is filtered through the lens of our experiences, our life as a male or female in society, stereotypes, and values. Our views are also shaped by media messages, societal attitudes, and what we learned in our families while growing up.

## Personal experience with abuse and maltreatment

Personal experience of abuse as a child and/or in intimate relationships may affect our opinions, responses, and decisions. We may be more sensitive in picking up cues, or we can be too sensitive and see abuse where it does not exist. It can make us empathic and compassionate, or impatient and judgmental. It may also hasten the development of trauma symptoms and burnout in some people.



***If you are or have been in an abusive relationship, seek assistance to resolve your feelings before you start working in this area***

## Assumptions and stereotypes

Assumptions we hold may be correct, or completely wrong. Problematic assumptions include that it is easy to leave an abusive relationship, women could modify their behaviour to prevent violence (e.g., less nagging), abuse is normal in certain cultures, and calling the police solves the problem.



**Review the Advocacy Wheel on page 10: if not comfortable with these principles, consult a mentor or supervisor for guidance**

If you don't feel comfortable with the topic of violence against women and children, make an effort to learn more. Many sources of additional information are listed on pages 32 and 33.

Google

Do a web search to find lists of "myths" about family violence. For example, see:  
[www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

### *Hearing horrific stories from women and children changes us*

Be prepared for the emotional impact you may feel when working with victimized women and children. Their stories may leave you feeling sad, angry, or shocked. While these feelings are normal, it is not helpful to share them directly with the woman or her children.



***When you need to talk, find a supervisor or colleague for de-briefing***

#### **How can this work affect me?**

- how I feel (e.g., anxious), think (e.g., diminished concentration), act (e.g., use of coping strategies such as alcohol to relax), and interact with others (e.g., withdrawal from friends)
- my health (e.g., somatic reactions, impaired immune system)
- my work as a professional, including performance of job tasks, morale, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and behaviour on the job (e.g., absenteeism)



***If you start to feel that your work is affecting you in any of these ways, seek assistance or consult a supervisor***

#### **What can I do?**

- develop constructive coping strategies such as good nutritional habits, exercise, adequate sleep, hobbies, massage, time to relax
- avoid overwhelming myself with overwork, take breaks, limit overtime hours
- be aware of negative coping strategies (e.g., using alcohol/drugs to cope)
- develop and maintain good support networks, both on and off the job
- work within my agency to establish debriefing protocols and other strategies to mitigate the cumulative effects of the work



Jan Richardson (2001). *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers*. Ottawa: Health Canada . [find at [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cn-nc](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cn-nc)]



# CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

## Yes

In your field placement, as a volunteer, or on the job, you can help. But your role need not start or stop there. Here are just a few examples of other strategies and activities.

### In my family...

- I can challenge rigid gender roles
- I can challenge any sexist remarks, jokes or demeaning comments
- I can be a good role model for younger members of the family

### In my intimate relationships...

- I can create a healthy, equal relationship for myself and my partner

### As a parent...

- I can raise my children to respect themselves and respect others
- I can use positive discipline that teaches and choose not to spank



American Psychological Association (2003). *Teach Carefully: How Understanding Child Development Can Help Prevent Violence*. Washington, DC: APA. [find at [www.actagainstviolence.org](http://www.actagainstviolence.org)]

### In my school...

- I can ask that violence against women and children be part of the curriculum
- I can support my friends when they experience abuse, not judge, and give helpful information so they can make good decisions to be safe

### On the job...

- I can encourage my employer to acknowledge the issue, have policies against sexual harassment, and create a respectful workplace environment



Health Canada (1999). *Family Violence: Awareness Information for People in the Workplace*. Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

### In my community...

- I can volunteer, donate money, or assist with fundraising
- I can promote gender equality in my community activities

## WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

*There is a lot more information out there about woman abuse and its effects on children*

Bancroft, Lundy & Jay Silverman (2002). *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Johnson, Holly (1996). *Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada*. Toronto: Nelson.

Kasani, J.H. & W.D. Allen (1998). *The Impact of Family Violence on Children and Adolescents*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### **Additional On-line Documents Not Previously Mentioned**

Agar, Sharon (2004). *Interventions for Children who Witness Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of the Literature*. Vancouver, BC: B.C. Institute Against Family Violence. [[www.bcifv.org](http://www.bcifv.org)]

Family Violence Prevention Fund (2003). *Advocacy Matters: Helping Mothers and Their Children Involved with the Child Protection System*. San Francisco, CA: FVPF. [[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)]

Green, K. (1997). *Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities: An Aboriginal Perspective*. Ottawa: Health Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. [[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/)]

Schechter, Susan & Jeff Edleson (1999). *Effective Intervention in Woman Battering and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*. [[www.thegreenbook.info](http://www.thegreenbook.info)]

Smith, Ekuwa (2004). *Nowhere to Turn? Responding to Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Visible Minority Women*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council on Social Development. [[www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca)]

Trocme, N. et al. (2001). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse & Neglect: Final Report*. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada. [[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/)]

### **Statistics Canada [[www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)]**

Use the Internet to find these sources of statistics.

- 1999 and 2004 General Social Survey (victimization survey of the general population)
- 1993 National Survey on Violence Against Women (survey of general population of women)
- Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (annual police statistics)
- Homicide Survey (annual police statistics)
- Transition House Survey

See also the series called *Juristat*, for sale from Statistics Canada (in hard copy and on-line) and found in most major libraries.

## **National Clearinghouse on Family Violence** [[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/)]

This site from Health Canada has a wealth of information. All documents can be downloaded for free. Among the many documents available are directories of services across Canada and handbooks that pertain to the helping professions, such as:

- *Family Violence: Clinical Guidelines for Nurses* (1992)
- *Family Violence Handbook for the Dental Community* (1994)
- *A Handbook Dealing With Woman Abuse & the Canadian Criminal Justice System: Guidelines for Physicians* (1998)
- *A Handbook for Health & Social Service Professionals Responding to Abuse During Pregnancy* (1998)
- *A Handbook for Health & Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence* (1998)
- *A Booklet for Service Providers who Work with Immigrant Families: On Issues Relating to Child Discipline, Child Abuse & Child Neglect* (2000)
- *Counselling Programs for Men Who Are Violent in Relationships: Questions & Answers for Practitioners in the Health, Social Services & Criminal Justice Systems* (2000)

## **Other helpful Web Sites**

Ontario Women's Directorate	<a href="http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca">www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca</a>
British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence	<a href="http://www.bcifv.org">www.bcifv.org</a>
Education Wife Assault	<a href="http://www.womanabuseprevention.com">www.womanabuseprevention.com</a>
National Aboriginal Circle against Family Violence	<a href="http://www.nacafv.ca">www.nacafv.ca</a>
Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse	<a href="http://www.onpea.org">www.onpea.org</a>
Ontario Women's Justice Network	<a href="http://www.owjn.org">www.owjn.org</a>
White Ribbon Campaign	<a href="http://www.whiteribbon.ca">www.whiteribbon.ca</a>
Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse	<a href="http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au">www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au</a>
National Criminal Justice Reference Service	<a href="http://www.ncjrs.org">www.ncjrs.org</a>
MINCAVA [Minnesota Center Against Violence & Abuse]	<a href="http://www.mincava.umn.edu">www.mincava.umn.edu</a>
Violence Against Women On-Line Resources	<a href="http://www.vaw.umn.edu">www.vaw.umn.edu</a>

Google

Find the on-line Domestic Violence Shelter Tour to go from room to room, hear the stories of women, and get answers to questions commonly asked by women entering shelters.

## **Scholarly Journals**

- *Child Abuse & Neglect*
- *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
- *Violence Against Women*
- *Journal of Family Violence*
- *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*
- *Violence & Victims*



Look on the back cover for six other resources developed for helping professionals by the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System

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13. Hotton, Tina (2001). Spousal Violence After Marital Separation. *Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics: Juristat*, 21(7).
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15. Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, *How & When to Report Child Abuse or Neglect* [on-line version], found at [www.oacas.org/resources/whentoreport.htm](http://www.oacas.org/resources/whentoreport.htm).
16. Ross, S.M. (1996). Risk of Physical Abuse to Children of Spouse Abusing Parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 20(7): 589-598.
17. Statistics Canada (2004). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2004*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
18. Statistics Canada (2000). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2000*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

## Also available from the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System



Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators (2001) (disponible aussi en français)



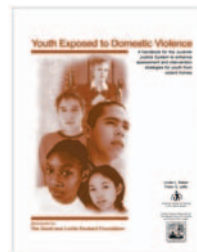
Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: An Early Childhood Educator's Handbook (2002)



Children Exposed to Violence: A Handbook for Police Trainers (2002) (also available as a CD-ROM)



Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Teacher's Handbook (2002) (also available as a CD-ROM)



Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Handbook for the Juvenile Justice System (2003)



Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers (2004) (disponible aussi en français)

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