

Living Safe As a Family in Canada: What Is Abuse In Family Relationships?

The Allies in Action Project educates newcomers to Canada about domestic abuse/family violence and how to maintain healthy family relationships.

What is Abuse?

- **Physical:** Shoving, slapping, biting, choking, punching, or kicking. Using a weapon to hurt someone. Breaking someone's things or threatening to damage something of value.
- **Emotional or verbal:** Embarrassing someone, yelling, insulting, or calling someone names. Criticizing or blaming someone for everything. Accusing someone of cheating or making them think that no one else will want them or that they are unlovable.
- **Psychological Control and Stalking:** Deciding what someone can do, where they go, who they see. Opening and reading their mail, text messages, email, or phoning, texting, or emailing them excessively. Following or watching someone all the time, making threats of violence, or telling them they are imagining the abuse.
- **Financial:** Not allowing someone to have their own money, use bank accounts, or allow them to have a job. Taking money or running up debts in someone's name.
- **Sexual:** Forcing someone to perform sex acts that make them uncomfortable or hurt them. Pressuring them to engage in any kind of sexual activity that they don't want to do, or injuring sexual parts of their body without their agreement.

Abuse within family relationships can look like intimate partner violence/domestic violence, dating violence, child abuse & neglect, or elder abuse & neglect.

Newcomers can experience some unique forms of abuse. There may also be added challenges stopping immigrant women from getting help. For example:

- Using woman's or children's immigration status as a form of control
- Isolation from friends, family, and home country
- Power differences between abuser and victim including language, finances, employment status
- Religious, cultural, and social expectations – fear of losing face or fear of the unknown

Not all women will say they are being abused or label their experiences as abusive.

- Their beliefs about the roles of men and women may lead them to believe they are not being abused
- Extended family may accept abusive behaviors leading a victim to believe it is not abuse
- Sometimes people outside the family will label certain forms of abuse as “cultural” leading a woman to believe she cannot be helped

How can we help women in our communities?

- Listen without judgment if a woman shares problems in her relationship or experiences of abuse
- If you are worried about a friend who may be in an unhealthy relationship, gently let them know you are worried and that they can talk to you
- Spread the message to family, friends, and the community that abusive behaviour is unacceptable and that victims of abuse are never at fault
- Know the resources in your community helping women experiencing abuse, and support women to get help when they are ready

*** IMPORTANT***

If you leave your partner and you do not have permanent resident status or you are a refugee claimant, get legal help right away.

- Call the **Legal Aid Immigration Line** 604-601-6076 for Greater Victoria or 1-888-601-6076 (no charge) for elsewhere in BC
- Call **VictimAid BC** for immediate help. 1-800-563-0808 (no charge) and can be assisted in 110 languages.