



HELPING
CHILDREN
EXPOSED
TO VIOLENCE
AT HOME
AN ESSENTIALS GUIDE



London Family
Court Clinic
Est. 1974

Professional Services for Families in Court



Author

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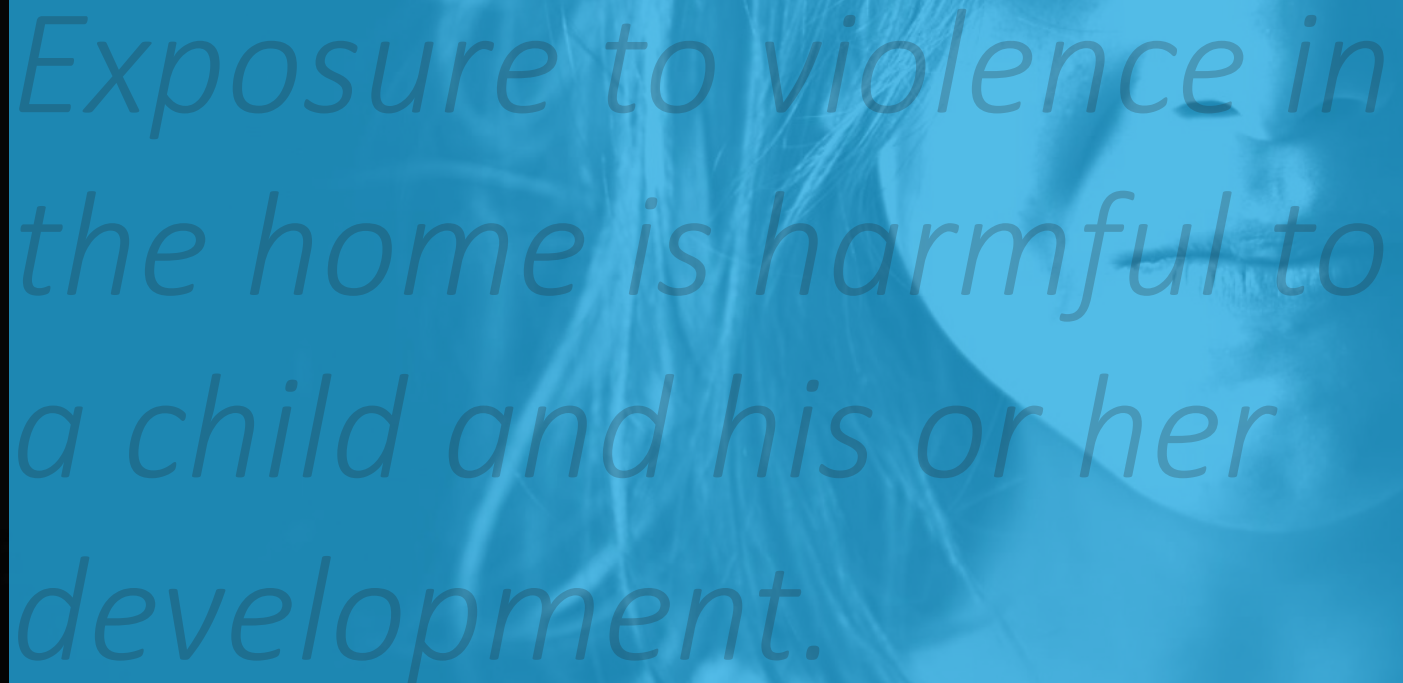
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Exposure to violence in the home is harmful to a child and his or her development.

This resource brings together, in one place, the best and latest research and information regarding children who are exposed to violence in the home, and presents it in an easy-to-read Guide for professionals and volunteers who help women and children. Topics addressed in this Guide include: what children might feel, think and do during violent incidents against their mothers; roles that they may adopt before, during or after incidents; strategies of coping and survival; and how violence may be experienced by children of different ages – from infancy to adolescence. The purpose of this Guide is to examine how violence against a mother can shape a child, both in the short-term (e.g., his or her development) and over the long-term. By learning how a child is individually shaped by experiences in his or her home, and considering important contextual features of that child's family life, we can offer better ways to help.

Why an Essentials Guide?

The concept of an Essentials Guide reflects our commitment to producing training material that helps busy people learn or upgrade their skills in a convenient way, while being respectful of their multiple commitments in life. There is no recipe or cookie-cutter approach for working with abused women and their children, and there is a lot to know about the field. No post-secondary educational or training program teaches absolutely everything people want to learn. Each woman and child is unique, and they deserve advocacy and support that matches and meets their needs. So, instead of prescriptions, we offer principles to guide interventions, as well as flexible tools for practice, and guidance on skill building. An intended outcome of this Guide is to promote equity for women and better outcomes for children who have been exposed to violence at home.

Who can use this Guide?

Anyone called upon to help or advocate for women and children can use this Essentials Guide. This might be individuals who work in what is called the 'violence against women' (VAW) sector, which comprises women's

shelters, refuges, transition houses, and community-based agencies that advocate for women and children. But equally as important, people who work in other social service settings or helping professions should be aware of abuse dynamics and the impacts that those dynamics can have on children. People who work in the legal system, for instance, will meet many abused women and their children – in criminal prosecutions and in family law matters, such as divorce. Users of this Guide may work in a paid role, or in a volunteer capacity, or even be a concerned family member, coworker or friend. Abused women themselves may also find the information in this Guide helpful. In fact, aspects of this Guide are written specifically for them. If you are experienced in the VAW field, material in this Guide should reinforce your observations and the knowledge that you've gained from working with abused women, and with children who have been exposed to violence against their mothers. If you are new to the field, the material in this Guide will help you to understand what children and youth might need from you, as a service provider, and what they need from their mothers. We have aimed to make this Guide useful and relevant across many countries and legal jurisdictions.

The social-historical context of woman abuse

We believe that all violence is unacceptable, and the London Family Court Clinic has produced other publications, held training programs, and provided clinical services that help and support victims of violence. This Guide focuses specifically on understanding and helping children exposed to violence against their mothers. Women are disproportionately affected by violence in intimate partner relationships in every country in the world. In Canada, 7 out of 10 individuals who experience family violence are women and girls. Further, women are more likely to experience extreme forms of violence and are four times as likely as men to be victims of intimate partner homicide. This disproportionality of violence against women in intimate relationships largely stems from the legacy of patriarchy, which situated social and economic power in the male gender and established gender inequality. This gender inequality and sexism continues to be present in many areas of society today, including in the media, in politics, in the workplace, and sometimes in the home. And for some women, the abuse and violence that is enabled through sexism is compounded by other forms of oppression that have led to social inequality, including racism, homophobia, classism, and religious persecution.

Children living with abuse against their mothers are much more likely to be the target of abuse themselves. Society's treatment of children has its own legacy, which includes treating children as property, as 'little adults,' as being resilient to negative life events, or as being inherently bad. Children have also been marginalized in terms of their participation in many aspects of society – the notion has been that children should be 'seen and not heard.' Historically, these ideas have legitimized the abuse of children by adults in positions of authority, and have prevented children from having a voice.

CHILDREN ARE CHANGED BY VIOLENCE AT HOME

A trauma-informed approach to service delivery that incorporates several guiding principles is essential to good practice with abused women and children exposed to violence. These guiding principles include:

- **Safety:** The primary objective is to promote the safety of women and their children. It is also important to understand the 'duty to report' child maltreatment.
- **Trauma awareness:** It is important to recognize that trauma is pervasive in children exposed to violence at home, and it often co-occurs with other adverse childhood experiences. Service providers should understand the complexity of domestic violence (including the impact on women and children), and should be able to: assess risk; help women and children develop safety plans; identify controlling behaviours; understand which behaviours are criminal; not minimize or deny the responsibility of abusive men; appropriately address the needs of children and their mothers.
- **Trustworthiness and transparency:** A child's sense of trust in others, particularly those tasked with keeping them safe, may be compromised when they have been exposed to violence in the home. In building trust with a child, it is important to have an informed and ongoing consent process, to engage the child in meaningful participation in the decision-making about their own care (in a way that is consistent with their developmental level), and to ensure predictability in the service they receive. Confidentiality and agency requirements about sharing of information with other agencies must be understood by all parties involved, and women and children must be advised of any limits on confidentiality (e.g., court subpoenas).
- **Collaboration and mutuality:** Well-meaning efforts to help sometimes actually reinforce the disempowerment of women and children. Therefore, efforts should be made to equalize power imbalances by allowing children and mothers to have a voice and choice in their own safety and intervention plan. Intervention efforts should be strength-based in nature, and helpers should

work together to support women as mothers without penalizing them for the behaviour and choices of their partner or ex-partner. Invite evaluation of your services from children and mothers, and use this information to guide your service delivery. Cooperation and consultation between agencies achieves the best outcomes for women and children.

- **Cultural, historical, and gender issues:** Recognize the historical context of gender-based violence. Be open to learning about and developing skills to work appropriately with clients of varying backgrounds. Ask clients about their own history and cultural background. A helper should strive to understand the meaning that a client attributes to their trauma experience and what healing means to them. Consider the diversity of the women and children (e.g., race, class, age, sexuality, abilities, culture) who might access services, and work towards eliminating barriers that may discriminate, prevent, or inhibit access.



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Children are changed by growing up with violence and abuse at home

The impact of a hit or a slap is obvious to see. But abusive words and interactions, and exposure to violence against one's own mother, causes invisible bruises.

Change can be sudden or gradual:

Violence at home can take the form of one or more traumatic incidents that trigger a sudden change in a child. Or change can occur slowly, in reaction to the daily dynamics of witnessing an abusive relationship, thus shaping a child incrementally as they develop and grow.

Change can be visible or can be kept hidden inside:

Some changes are obvious, and can be seen in a child's behaviour (e.g., crying, aggression) or in their attitude towards others (e.g., disrespect to women as a result of witnessing violence against their mother). But violence in the home can also change how children think and feel – about themselves, about their families, and about life in general.

Children are not passive witnesses to abuse and violence at home:

Little eyes and little ears don't miss much as they soak in sights and sounds. In fact, child 'witnesses' of violence and abuse can be overwhelmed by intense feelings, and as a result concentrate hard on their own thoughts. They may feel confused and scared, or they may blame themselves. As they watch or listen, they guess what caused the 'fight,' they imagine what might happen next, and they anticipate potential consequences.

Change can be bad or good:

By understanding things from the child's point of view, we can nurture positive changes. For instance, we can correct distorted ideas, encourage helpful coping, build good interpersonal skills, and foster healthier management of intense emotions. And we can support mothers as they help their children heal and thrive.

A child who lives with violence may be forever changed, but they are not forever 'damaged.' There is a lot we can do to make tomorrow better.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Coercive control:

An ongoing pattern of domination using strategies that can include irrational demands, surveillance, isolation, and the realistic threat of negative consequences (e.g., physical harm). Coercive control can be used under the guise of child “discipline.” The Power & Control Wheel (as seen on page 9) shows the spectrum of coercive control tactics used against women. These can include threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimization, and denial of harm.

Child exposure to domestic violence:

Seeing, hearing, being told about, or seeing the aftermath of abuse and coercive control used against a parent.

Child maltreatment:

Also referred to as ‘child abuse,’ this is a term that can mean physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and/or physical or emotional neglect, and/or denial of medical care.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):

A term now common in the research literature that usually refers to what can be gender symmetrical or bi-directional violence in a relationship (e.g., male to female, or female to male, or same-sex).

Woman abuse:

A pattern of male behaviour that is characterized by coercive control tactics against a woman that may, or may not, involve physical assault. Many people use the term ‘woman abuse’ because it denotes the gendered nature of domestic violence.

Domestic violence:

The abuse, assault, or systematic control of a person by an intimate partner. This is usually (though not always) a pattern of behaviour used by men against women.

Family violence:

A term used to describe any form of abuse or neglect of an adult or child within a family. This refers to an abuse of power by one person in the family to hurt or control another person in the family who trusts and depends on the abuser.

TYPES OF ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Abuse doesn't always involve physical violence. Abuse can be motivated by a need to be in control, or to demean, intimidate, or put the victim in a position of powerlessness. Abuse can be directed at adults, teenagers, or children. Several types of abuse can be present in the same family.

Child sexual abuse:

Any sexual contact with a child, or any activity undertaken with a sexual purpose. This can include genital fondling, digital penetration, or an invitation to sexually touch the perpetrator.

Emotional abuse:

Also called 'psychological abuse,' emotional abuse involves demeaning comments, insults, taunts (e.g., 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, or destroying sentimental or valued possessions. Children can also be emotionally abused. In some parts of Canada, exposing children to domestic violence is a form of emotional abuse.

Economic abuse:

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

Neglect:

An ongoing failure to provide needed age-appropriate care, such as food, clothing, supervision, medical care and other basic needs for the development of the physical, intellectual and emotional capacities of children.

Sexual abuse:

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

Spiritual abuse:

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

Technological abuse:

A range of behaviours where a partner misuses technology to harass, stalk, or harm the victim. These acts can range from making threats via cell phone, text messages, and email, to blocking caller ID so the victim is unaware that the perpetrator is calling. The perpetrator may reveal and publicize records of an individual which were previously private or difficult to obtain (sometimes called doxxing). They may send and/or post pictures or videos of the victim for the purpose of distressing or harming the victim. A perpetrator may access victim's accounts (email, phone, social media, etc.) without the victim's consent and often without their knowledge. The use of technology to engage in surveillance and monitoring can be invasive and traumatizing.

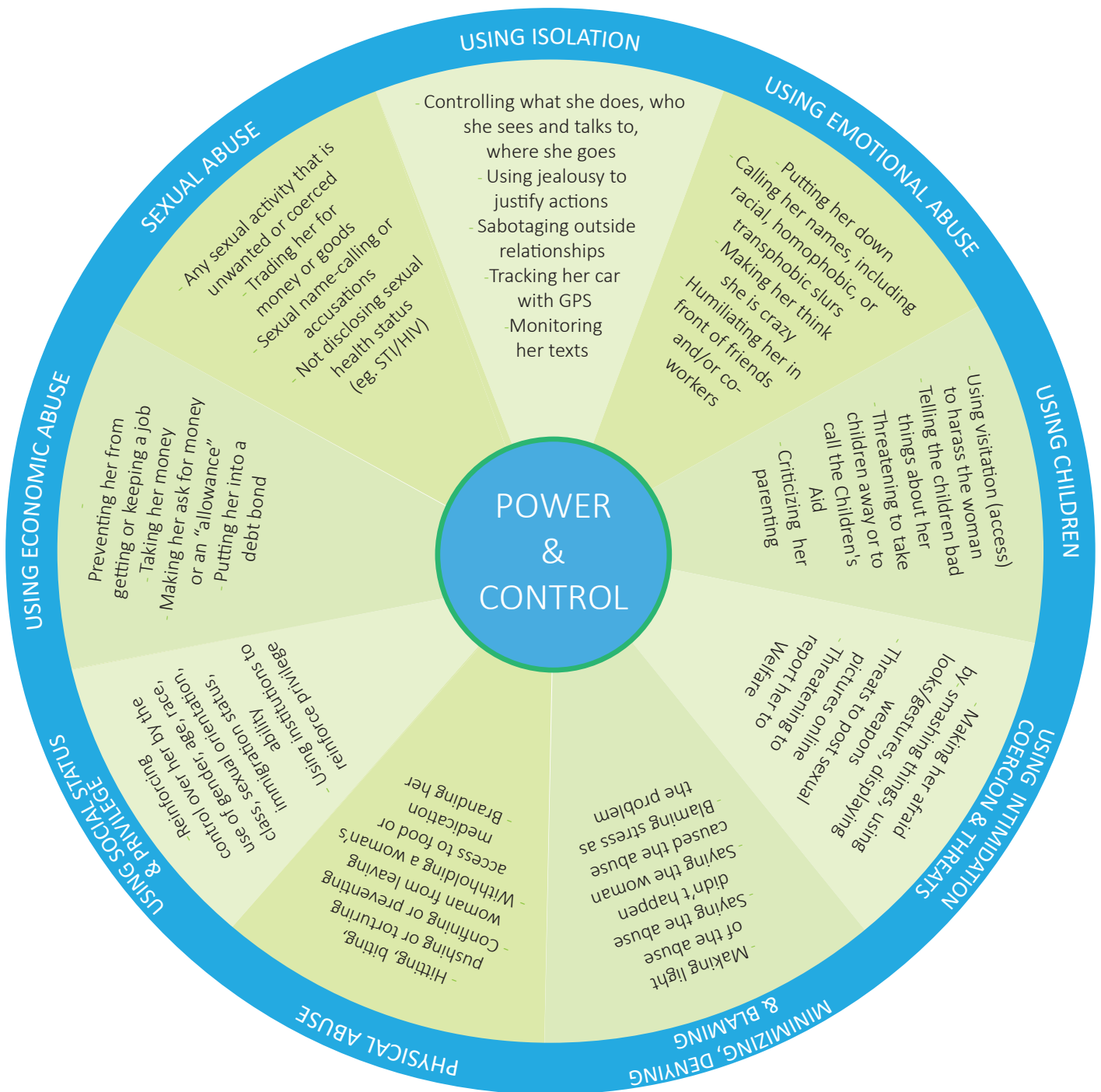
(Note: For more about online and digital abuse, see the resource, '[Online Abuse: Virtual violence and its impact on young women and girls](#),' which is also part of the DELTA series.

Physical abuse:

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

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Coercive control is the hallmark of woman abuse. Some relationships are unhappy, but they are not abusive. Abuse is an ongoing (and sometimes escalating) pattern of control over a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Coercive control *may* involve physical violence, but it usually does not (however, the threat of physical violence may be ever-present). Control is used instrumentally, to humiliate, engender fear, or emphasize one's superiority over another. The original Power & Control Wheel was developed at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Minnesota, and this version is an adaptation by the London Abused Women's Centre.



The following variations of the original wheel can be found on the Internet:

- Family Violence in Later Life
- Teen Power & Control Wheel
- Immigrant Power & Control Wheel
- Lesbian/Gay Power & Control Wheel
- Military Power & Control Wheel
- Muslim Wheel of Domestic Violence
- Deaf Hope Power & Control Wheel
- People with Disabilities in Partner Relationships
- Police Perpetrated Domestic Violence
- Violence Against Native Women: Battering

ABUSE OF CHILDREN WHEEL

This model shows the power and control tactics associated with child maltreatment. It was developed at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Minnesota.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: FACTS & FIGURES

Abuse in the home is hidden behind closed doors, and people are reluctant to talk about domestic violence for many different reasons, including concerns about their safety, stigma, and worries about not being believed. There are also different ways to define violence at home. This makes it difficult to get an accurate statistical picture of the realities of domestic violence in Canada. So, how do we learn about violence against women in intimate relationships and the impact that violence has on children?

- Anonymous telephone surveys of the general population.
- A review of cases reported to, or discovered by, the police.
- Information provided by children's aid societies.
- A review of cases where women were murdered by an intimate partner.
- Talking with women who are experiencing domestic violence, or who have survived violence.

Violence against women – current facts and figures:

- 80% of intimate partner violence is against women.
- 51% of women, as a result of intimate partner violence, have experienced some form of physical injury.
- About 1 in 10 women victimized by abuse were pregnant at the time of the violence.
- The rates of violence against women vary widely across Canada, with the territories showing the highest rates.
- Violence against women increases during times of crisis, such as during natural disasters and economic downturns.
- Domestic violence costs Canadians \$7.4 billion annually (e.g., policing, healthcare, lost productivity, etc.).

About **1 in 10** women victimized by *abuse* were pregnant at the time of the violence.

80% of intimate partner violence is against women.

The General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization is an anonymous telephone survey conducted every five years by Statistics Canada. Surveyors ask male and female Canadians over the age of 15 about 'spousal violence.' The 2014 GSS revealed the following:

- 4% of respondents reported having been physically or sexually abused by their partner during the preceding five years.
- 70% of self-reported spousal violence was not reported to the police.
- Women were more than twice as likely to report the most severe forms of spousal violence (e.g., sexual assault, being choked, or being threatened with a gun or knife).
- 49% reported that the severity of the violence increased after the couple had separated.

The relationship between woman abuse and child abuse:

- 48% of GSS (2014) respondents who reported spousal violence also reported that they had been victims of child maltreatment as children.
- The co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and child abuse is 30% to 60%.
- Between 2002 and 2013, 9% of victims of domestic homicides were children.
- 52% of GSS (2009) respondents reported that a child heard or saw the violence.
- 48% of female victims whose children witnessed the violence indicated that police had found out. Of those incidents that came to the attention of police, 72% called themselves, a rate that was four times higher than when there were no children present.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women:

- There were 1,181 cases of missing or murdered indigenous women in Canada between 1980 and 2012.
- Grassroots organizations actually believe that the number is much higher (closer to 4,000).
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis women are killed at six times the rate of non-indigenous women.

What do police statistics show?

- 87% of complainants in domestic assault cases reported to the police (or discovered by police) are female. In most cases where police become involved, they are called only one time (86%).
- In 3% of cases with male perpetrators, police attended five times or more.
- Only 24% of women reported domestic violence to the police.
- The rate of police-reported woman abuse is 542 per 1,000 women.

Only 24% of women reported domestic violence to the police.

How many children live in shelters for abused women?

- On any given night in Canada, about 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe for them at home.
- About 300 women and children are turned away from shelters on any given night because the shelters are already full.

How many women are murdered by intimate partners?

- 306 domestic homicides and homicide-suicides in Ontario occurred between 2002 and 2013, resulting in 426 deaths.
- 280 (80%) of those deaths were adult females who were murdered by a current or former partner.
- 30 (9%) of the homicide victims were children.
- 80% of the cases reviewed by the Office of the Chief Coroner Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC), involved 7 or more risk factors (e.g., history of domestic violence, control of victim's daily activities, prior threats to kill, prior suicide attempts of the perpetrator). A list of the 39 risk factors is available in the DVDRC Annual Report.





Cyber violence against women and girls:

According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), at least three quarters of women and girls in the world have been exposed to some form of violence online. Internet violence can include online trolling, verbal threats and harassment, doxing, or posting and sharing images and videos depicting crimes against women and girls.

More information on woman abuse can be found online at the following websites:

- Public Health Agency of Canada Stop Family Violence
- Department of Justice's Family Violence Status of Women's Preventing Abuse
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Family Violence
- National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence
- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Violence Against Women Learning Network
- Western University's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children
- Annual report of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

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About **300** women and children are turned away from shelters on any given night because the shelters are already full.

WOMAN ABUSE AND CHILDREN

Children are not mere 'witnesses' to events in their homes

Abuse threatens a child's sense of his or her family as being safe and nurturing. When a man is abusive to a child's mother, it is more than bad role modelling. It is bad parenting. A man may maltreat the children directly, or put them at risk of injury during violent incidents towards the mother. Women who live with abusive partners face enormous challenges in trying to be the best mothers that they can be. Children may be isolated from potential sources of support, and they can learn to see the world as being scary and unsafe.

Each child is unique. Even children in the same family are affected by domestic violence in different ways, depending upon a variety of factors, including age, gender, relationship to the abuser, role in the family, protective factors, and resilience.



How children are 'exposed' to woman abuse:

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

How children might be 'used' by an abusive parent:

- Suggesting that a child's misbehaviour is the reason the parent is abusive
- Encouraging the children to abuse their mother
- Threatening violence against the children and/or pets
- Talking inappropriately to children about their mother'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

Unhealthy lessons that children may learn from violence against their mothers:

- Violence and threats get you what you want
- A person has two choices: to be the aggressor or to be the victim
- Victims are to blame for violence
- When people hurt others, they don't get in trouble
- Women are weak, helpless, incompetent, stupid, or violent
- Anger causes violence
- 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

Children are good observers, but they can be poor interpreters. They listen and they see, but they don't understand situations the same way that adults do.



WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK, FEEL, AND DO WHEN THERE IS VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOME?

Children are not mere 'witnesses' to events in their homes (despite the fact that they are often called 'witnesses' to domestic violence in the research literature). This term implies a passive role. But children who live with conflict and abuse actively interpret, predict, assess their roles in causing a 'fight,' worry about the consequences, engage in problem solving, and/or take measures to protect themselves or their siblings – both physically and emotionally.

What children may feel:

Fear, confusion, guilt, anger, frustration, stomach aches, and worry. The smallest children are too young to appreciate what others are feeling. Nevertheless, visible cues (e.g., blood or crying) signal that someone is hurt. Older children and teenagers are better able to put themselves in their parents' positions. If a mother gets physically hit, many can imagine how she might feel.

What children may think:

Some children try hard to stay out of the way (below

the radar), lest they become the next target of the abuse. They might think, "Will I get in trouble?" ... "Will I get yelled at?" ... "Will I get hit?" ... "Will I die?" Children who feel responsible for starting the 'fight' are likely to blame themselves for any negative consequences, such as visible injury, arrest, incarceration, or one parent leaving the family. Some children will hope for rescue, perhaps by 'superheroes.'

Some children will blame their mother for doing whatever it is that she is being accused of by her partner – perhaps spending too much money, or not having dinner ready on time. If their father had been taken away by police on a previous occasion, a child might wonder if it will happen again. His arrest may be welcomed by a few, but dreaded by others. Some children believe that they themselves will be taken by the police (e.g., for being 'bad' and causing the 'fight.'). Some are angry at their mother for not stopping the 'fight' to prevent the police from coming.

Self-centredness:

He selfishly expects the status and rewards of fatherhood without making sacrifices or assuming any responsibilities. He may resist changes to his lifestyle when a baby is born, and he can get enraged at normal behaviour, such as crying in infants. He expects children to meet his needs (e.g., listen to his troubles, provide affection, or keep him company – when he's in the mood).

His partner may describe him in the following ways:

- "When the baby cried, he actually thought she did it on purpose to get on his nerves."
- "He couldn't tell you the kids' birth dates or the names of their teachers."
- "He really has no interest in the kids unless he's in the mood to toss the ball around or something like that."

Manipulativeness:

He confuses the children about who is to blame for the violence and who is the better parent.

His partner may describe him in the following ways:

- "Since I left, he repeatedly tells the kids that the divorce was all my fault because I wanted to have boyfriends and go out partying. And they're starting to believe him."
- "He told the children that God required him to punish them and me, to teach us a lesson."

Ability to perform under observation:

During professional evaluations, or in social situations, some abusive men can seem to be loving and attentive fathers. The contrast between their public and private behaviour can be stark. As a result, children may feel most comfortable with him in public places. Some abusive partners can appear – at times – to be kind and dependable parents.

His partner may describe him in the following ways:

- "When we're with his family or his friends from work, you'd give him a father-of-the-year award."
- "The judge sent us for an assessment. He turned on the charm so that I ended up looking like a liar."

EFFECTS OF COERCIVE TACTICS ON A MOTHER

How might coercive control tactics affect a woman as she parents her children?

Tactics of coercive control are the hallmarks of an abusive relationship. How might coercive control tactics affect a woman as she parents her children?

The woman believes that she's an inadequate parent:

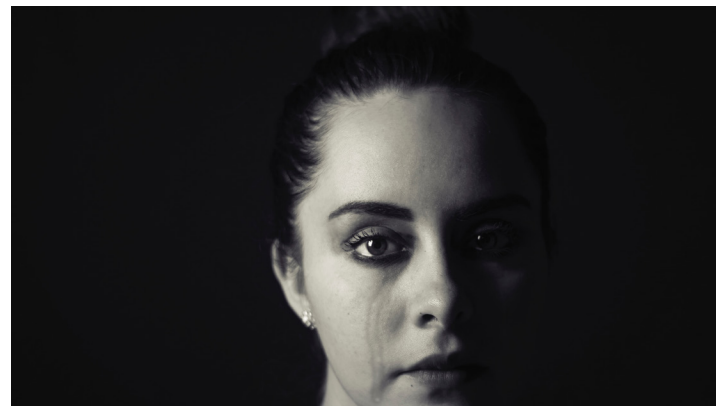
- She is portrayed by the abuser as an unfit mother or the cause of her children's deficits.
- She fears having her children taken away by child protection services.
- She is frustrated in her attempts to create structure or to be consistent in her parenting.
- Her children may have problems at school, or in the neighbourhood, which fuels her belief that she is a bad parent.

The woman loses the respect of some or all of her children:

- Her children may grow to devalue or be ashamed of their mother.
- The children may learn to disregard her parental authority and refuse to follow her rules.
- Some children may come to see her as a legitimate target of abuse.

The woman believes her partner's excuses for abuse and reinforces them with the children:

- She tells the children that the abuse is her fault, and so she must change or improve her behaviour.
- She feels responsible for the abuse and guilty for its impact on the children.
- She excuses the abuse because she thinks it's simply linked to alcohol or to his stress.
- She believes (and teaches her children) that woman abuse is culturally or religiously appropriate.
- She believes (and teaches her children) that men and boys should have more privileges and power in the family than women and girls.



The woman changes her parenting style in response to her abuser's parenting style:

- She is too permissive in response to the authoritarian parenting of her abuser.
- She takes on an authoritarian style to try and keep the children from annoying her abusive partner.
- She makes age-inappropriate or unreasonable demands on the children to pacify her abuser.
- She is afraid to use discipline because the children have already been through so much.
- She assumes the demanding parts of parenting, while he takes on all the fun parts.

The woman's capacity to manage is thwarted or overwhelmed:

- Depression, anxiety, poor sleeping, etc. compromise her capacity to care for her children and provide for their daily needs.
- If denied the use of birth control, too many children can be born too close together.
- She may be denied sufficient money to meet the children's basic needs for food, etc.
- She parents reactively rather than proactively, responding to crises instead of preventing problems.

The woman may use survival strategies with negative effects:

- She may leave children with inadequate caretakers to get a break.
- She may avoid being at home (e.g., work double shifts).
- She may use alcohol or drugs to excess.
- She may maltreat the children, physically or verbally.

The woman's bond with her children is compromised:

- The children may be angry at their mother for failing to protect them or for not evicting the abuser.
- The mother is prevented by her abuser from comforting a distressed child.
- One of the children assumes a care-taking role for the mother.
- Children anticipate a mother's deportation or leaving, and they may become anxious or may emotionally disengage to protect themselves from the impending loss.
- The children may blame their mother for the absence of their father from the home, and for other disruptions (e.g., moving, changing schools).

The woman gets trapped in a competition for the children's loyalties:

- The abuser attempts to shape the child's view of him as good and the mother as bad.
- After separation, the abuser entices the children to support his bid for custody with promises of a great life at his house.
- During access visits, the abuser is a 'fun parent' who has no rules.
- The abuser has more money and can offer the children more material goods and a nicer home.

HOW ABUSIVE MEN AFFECT FAMILY DYNAMICS

There are very few studies examining the impact of domestic violence on family functioning and dynamics. However, Lundy Bancroft, Jay Silverman, and Daniel Ritchie offer helpful clinical descriptions of the tactics that an abuser might use to shape relationships within the family to meet their own needs. These tactics are laid out in their book, 'The Batterer as Parent' (2012), and are summarized below.

Fostering disrespect for the mother and her parenting authority:

When children are exposed to domestic abuse inflicted upon their mother, they may come to see her as helpless, downtrodden, and even stupid. They may acquire the abuser's view of their mother as being unworthy of respect. Some will even see her as a legitimate target of abuse.

There are several tactics that an abuser may use to foster disrespect of the mother, including the following:

- Interfering with her attempts to create structure (e.g., implementing homework or chores)
- Contradicting her rules
- Rewarding the child's disrespectful behaviour towards their mother
- Ridiculing her in front of her child
- Portraying her as incompetent in front of the child
- Requiring her to follow his parenting commands

Abusive tactics often continue (and may even escalate) after separation. The abuser may vie for the child's loyalty by making his home a fun place with no rules. He may permit activities that are disapproved of by the mother (e.g., violent video games). He may alienate the child from his or her mother through ongoing ridicule or reinforcing the idea that she is incompetent. The abuser may seek custody for vengeful reasons.

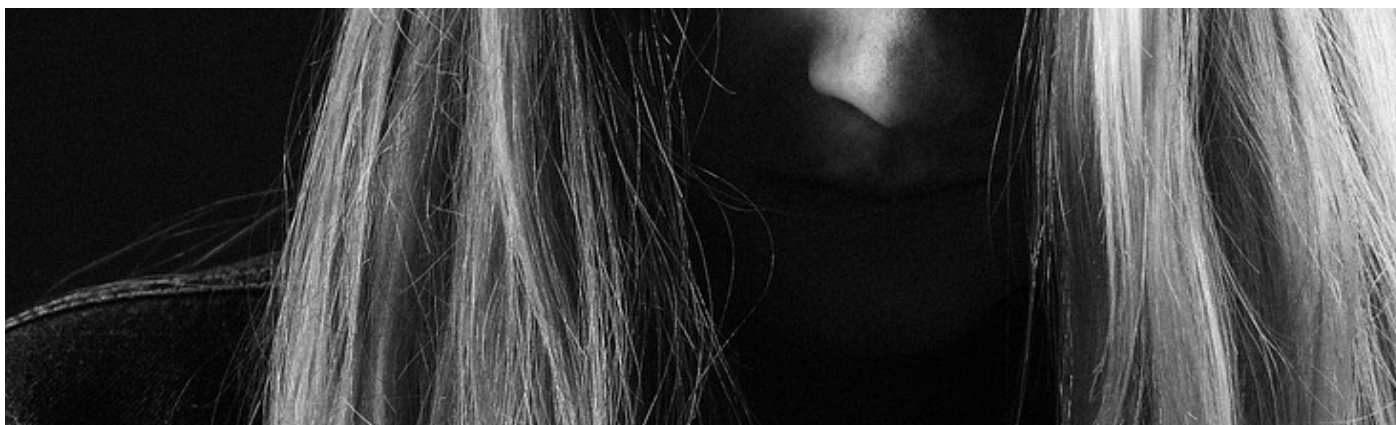
Negatively influencing the mother/child relationship:

Woman abuse can impact the mother/child relationship in both direct and indirect ways. When mothers intervene to protect their children from their abuser, they may be physically hurt by their abuser as punishment for their intervention. In some cases, the abuser may react to the mothers' protection efforts by hurting the children more. As a result, it is important to keep in mind that a mother's intervention on behalf of her children may actually diminish over time as she tries to reduce harm. The abuser may also interfere directly to disrupt the bond between a mother and her children by using the following tactics:

- Preventing the mother from comforting a distressed child
- Preventing the use of birth control so that children are born too close together, thus overwhelming the mother
- Increasing social isolation and restricting opportunities for her to be involved with the children in community activities

Woman abuse can also impact the mother/child bond indirectly. Abuse can foster depression, anxiety, poor sleep, rage, or a loss of confidence. Each of these issues can hinder a mother's ability to focus on the needs of her children. As a result, she may resort to coping through the use of alcohol and/or drugs, which can not only affect the mother/child bond but may also increase the likelihood of her own maltreatment of the children, including permissive or even neglectful parenting.

Children exposed to violence against their mother may eventually distance themselves from her. This distancing, which is more pronounced in teenagers, may result from the development of contempt for their mother or from being ashamed to be associated with her. After a separation, a child may assume the role of abuser. This is more common in boys, and it can occur for a number of reasons, including that they've learned (from their father) that abuse is a way to assert their own dominance. A child might also assume the role of abuser in an effort to win approval of the absent father.



Using the child as a weapon against the mother:

The abuser may engage in maltreatment, neglect, or other hurtful behaviour to a child in an effort to hurt the mother. Specific tactics could include the following:

- Destroying Christmas presents in order to hurt the mother
- Enlisting the children to spy on their mother
- Deliberately endangering the children
- Threatening to harm, kidnap, or kill the child
- Leaving the family destitute
- Calling child protective services to 'report' the mother

After separation, the abuser may blame the mother for the separation and enlist the child's support to pressure the mother for reconciliation. Alternatively, the abuser may encourage the children to align with him and his feelings of betrayal and contempt towards the mother. The abuser may use the child to communicate with the mother (or spy on her). He may seek custody of the children, and he may call child protective services to allege that she has mistreated or abused the children – in an effort to further his case that the children should be placed in his care. The abuser may embroil the family in a lengthy and protracted custody dispute.

Other ways the abuser may impact family functioning:

There are a number of ways that an abuser can impact family functioning to create unhealthy family dynamics for mothers and their children, including sowing divisions, scapegoating one family member, engendering chronic fear, and fostering role reversals. Specific tactics the abuser may use can include the following:

- Turning family members against each other
- Creating alliances of some family members against others
- Favouring one child over others
- Revealing confidences of one family member to another
- Punishing all children for the misbehaviour of one
- Engendering fear by harming family pets
- Blaming one child for all of the family's problems
- Encouraging competition between the children for the abuser's affections and attention
- Parentification of children (e.g., giving a child a parental role in the family)
- Infantilizing of the mother (e.g., treating her like a child)



Tactics used in custody disputes:

The impact of an abuser's behaviour on family dynamics and functioning may extend well beyond the end of the relationship. After separation, the abuser may project a non-abusive image and use a new partner as a 'character reference.' The abuser may use the mother's anger or mistrust towards him to discredit her and present himself as the 'friendly' party who is willing to communicate and co-parent collaboratively, while portraying her as uncooperative and alienating him from the children.

Perpetuating litigation in Court may be used as a form of abuse, creating chronic stress for her and depleting the family's financial resources. He may use a woman's sexual orientation against her by revealing it in Court in an attempt to disrupt her support network or show that she is not

forthcoming and thus untrustworthy. He may invoke his parents to seek visitation and court-ordered access, thus further reducing her time with the children and increasing the children's exposure to him and his family. In addition, the imposition of Court orders to govern her decision-making as it relates to the children further reduces her sense of control and autonomy as a parent.

Reference

1. Bancroft, L., Silverman, J. G., & Ritchie, D. (2012). *The batterer as parent: Addressing the impact of domestic violence on family dynamics* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

WAYS THAT A CHILD CAN BE CHANGED BY VIOLENCE AT HOME

Violence can convey messages that teach tolerance of abuse and discourage help-seeking.

Seeing how violence has shaped a child is the first step in helping that child. The next steps would be to address distorted ideas, encourage helpful coping and healthy interpersonal skills, and foster healing of the mother/child bond.

Children are denied a good father figure and positive male role model:

As described by Lundy Bancroft, Jay Silverman, and Daniel Ritchie in their book 'The Batterer as Parent' (2nd Edition), most abusive men are self-centred and manipulative, and they either parent in an authoritarian style or have little involvement with the children. A man's abusive behaviour fosters

disrespect for the children's mother and undermines her parenting authority. Even between violent incidents, abusive men can have a toxic influence on daily family dynamics.

Abuse can harm the mother/child bond:

An abusive man undermines a mother's efforts to parent, whether by contradicting her, sapping her confidence as a parent, or eroding the children's view of her as a person.

Children can develop negative core beliefs about themselves:

We all have core beliefs about ourselves. Am I smart,

compassionate, optimistic? Am I someone who deserves to be happy? Do I have something to offer the world? Am I of lesser value because I'm female? Am I entitled to having my way even if it disadvantages others? Am I in control of my choices, or does life throw bad luck my way? Core beliefs are formed in childhood, and parents are a big part of that process. When children are exposed to violence, they may develop negative core beliefs about themselves (e.g., 'I'm not lovable'), about others (e.g., 'Men are strong, women are weak'), and about the world in general (e.g., that the world is an unsafe place).

Children can be isolated from helpful sources of support:

To hide family secrets, children who live with woman abuse usually don't invite friends home. They also try to prevent their parents' contact with others (e.g., hiding memos about parent/teacher night), and they even deny that anything is wrong if asked by a concerned adult. The child knows – instinctively, or as explicitly warned – that bad things will happen if the world learns the family secrets. They learn to pass everything off as 'normal.' As a consequence, they may learn to distort reality and cut themselves off from people who could listen and help.

Unhealthy family roles can evolve in homes with domestic violence:

Roles in abusive families reflect how each person adapts and copes with the secret, confusing, and sometimes dangerous situations in which they live.

Abuse destroys a child's view of the world as a safe and predictable place:

Children who grow up in violent homes might learn harmful lessons such as: you have to deal with your problems by yourself; adults don't keep their promises; bad things happen no matter how hard you try to be good; life is not fair. In contrast, children who grow up with encouragement, fairness, and safety can approach life with enthusiasm and embrace new opportunities.

Abuse co-occurs with other stresses and adversities with negative effects:

Research consistently shows that domestic violence almost never stands alone as the only problem or stress in a family. More than likely, the family dynamics are also affected by one or more of the following

problems: parental substance abuse or alcoholism; criminal behaviour and possible incarceration of a parent; mental illness; poverty; residential instability; unemployment; child abuse or neglect. Children may (mistakenly) believe that it is one of these other issues that is responsible for the abuse against their mother.

A child's style of coping and their survival skills may become problematic:

A child's innate ability to adapt serves them well when trapped in a home with abuse, conflict, or violence. Strategies can involve thoughts (e.g., fantasizing about a better family), actions (e.g., running away), or feelings (e.g., anger, guilt). A child's actions and choices serve as survival skills – temporarily helpful adaptations to an unhealthy situation. But some survival strategies, like running away or distorted thinking, can create new problems.

Children may adopt some of the rationalizations for the abuse:

A man's rationalizations for abuse can include beliefs or statements like "I'm the man, so I'm in charge," or "God demands that I keep the family in line." A child who believes these ideas may blame their mother for her own victimization. They may see women as inferior, excuse the man's abusive behaviour, or even try to emulate him. A child could grow up to justify or accept abuse in intimate relationships, in workplace settings, or with friends.

Children can believe that victimization is inevitable or normal:

Violence can convey messages that teach tolerance of abuse and discourage help-seeking. Some women clearly stay with their partners out of fear, knowing that they would be seriously injured, stalked, or even killed if they left. Some women might believe: "All men are like that, so the next one won't be any better." Or they may believe: "Things will get better when he finds a job." Girls may develop low expectations of men or believe that women shouldn't expect happiness.

ASSUMPTIONS AND REALITIES ABOUT

ABOUT WOMAN ABUSE AND CHILDREN

Some of the choices and reactions of women and children who have experienced domestic violence may not seem logical until you understand them as survival strategies.

Myth: A woman who loves her children will get out of an abusive relationship to protect them from harm.

Reality: Some women stay in abusive relationships to protect the children.

Especially when the violence is severe, the period around and after a relationship breakup can be the most dangerous for a woman. In many cases, the abuse continues after the relationship ends. And the probability of being murdered increases when the relationship ends.

A woman might fear losing custody of her children, especially if the man has threatened to report her to child protection services, or can finance a protracted custody battle, or is capable of abducting the children (perhaps to his country of origin). Even a woman who retains custody will worry about her children's safety during the kids' visitations with their father, because she is no longer there to run interference and protect them. Some women leave the relationship only to reconcile later for safety reasons, or because she has difficulty providing for or managing the children on her own.

Myth: Children will recognize their mother as a victim and their father as the cause of the abuse.

Reality: Children can blame their mothers for the abuse as much or more than they blame their fathers.

Young children don't recognize the power imbalance when parents 'fight.' To the children, both adults seem equally powerful. Toddlers or preschoolers live predominantly in the present, so an abusive father who bestows a nice gift will be quickly forgiven for a recent upsetting incident. Not

until they approach adolescence will most children develop a more adult-like understanding of the dynamics of violence and abuse. Still, older children may be angry at their mother and blame her for bringing an abusive man into the home, or for not protecting herself or them from his abuse. Or they may be angry at her or blame her for staying with him after it was evident that he was abusive, or for reconciling with him after leaving.

Myth: Children would hate a father who abused them or their mother.

Reality: Children can love a man who is abusive to them or their mother.

An abusive man who is seen as an unfit parent by most adults can be adored and respected by his children. Over time, some children may grow closer to him, and may identify with him more than with their mother. Perhaps they will believe his rationalizations about his abuse of their mother being her own fault. Once gone from the family, children may grieve their father's absence, as is often the case in any parental separation. For children who are too young to comprehend cause and effect, the separation may seem to be caused by the mother (who has decided to leave the relationship) rather than the father, whose behaviour made the relationship untenable and unsafe, and who was the real reason for the separation.

Myth: When the abusive man is out of the picture, any family problems the children have will get better.

Reality: In fact, when the man leaves the home, children may be more out-of-control, angry, sad, or in conflict with others (such as their siblings).

Ending a child's exposure to violence at home is the single best intervention. However, if that exposure was lengthy, problems may not disappear. Strained family dynamics and a child's conduct problems are linked to many factors, which can include the absence of an

authoritarian parent. On the surface, authoritarian parenting may seem effective, as it can keep the children 'in line.' So, when an authoritarian parent leaves, the children may misbehave because they never developed internal controls and are unable to regulate their own behaviour and impulses. The mother may then struggle to establish her own parental authority. In other words, an abusive man can undermine a mother's parenting. And when he is gone, the children may resist her authority.

The strains of crisis and transition experienced by a family can have a lasting impact on the children. Leaving an abusive partner is often associated with a decline in standard of living, residential moves, school changes, a disruption in a child's peer relations, and perhaps one or more stays in a shelter. Such disruptions can have a deleterious impact on a child's mood and behaviour, and some children will blame their mothers for the unwelcome changes.

Domestic violence is a complex issue. It is easy to assume that a child's problems are all caused by the violence at home. In reality, however, it is difficult to isolate one cause when children exhibit concerning or problematic behaviour (e.g. depression, acting out). In addition to being exposed to domestic violence, children may have a number of other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that are known to contribute to poorer health outcomes and a lower overall wellbeing. This can include child abuse and

neglect, the loss of a parent, and living in economic hardship. The link between ACEs and a child's wellbeing later in life was evaluated in one of the largest health outcome studies in the United States. The study found that the more adverse events in childhood, the higher the risk of developing health and related problems. Even more broadly than the ACEs, our understanding of the social determinants of health and mental health have evolved to the point where we now know that social and economic factors influence the health and wellbeing of parents and children. These factors include disability, social exclusion, unemployment, and food insecurity.



Some stress is okay, and can even be beneficial, as dealing with stress is how we all learn to cope with life.

WOMAN ABUSE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Babies and Toddlers

From birth to age two, babies grow and change quickly. There are several important factors associated with the healthy development of infants, including frequent bodily contact, the prompt meeting of needs for food and changing, adequate sleep, and a lot of face-to-face interaction with their mother or primary caregiver. Babies are completely dependent on adults, and they need good nutrition, reliable access to healthcare (e.g., vaccinations, monitoring of their development), stability through routines, and a lot of hugs.



Milestones for a baby/toddler in the first two years:

- Smiling, laughing, making gurgling noises
- Following you with their eyes
- Grabbing and holding small objects (and usually putting them in their mouth)
- Becoming attached to one person more than others (e.g., the primary caregiver)
- Soaking in information through watching, listening, touching, tasting and smelling
- Getting frustrated and/or crying when they want something but cannot ask for it with words
- Being anxious with a stranger and when they are away from their primary caregiver
- Sleeping less (as they age) and being more active during the day
- Getting stronger (rolling over, crawling, sitting up, standing independently, taking their first steps)
- Using simple gestures like shaking their head for “No”
- Copying gestures and trying to say what their caregiver says
- Pointing using their index finger
- Moving from ‘baby words’ to real words
- Throwing temper tantrums more regularly

When a baby/toddler is exposed to violence at home:

While babies and toddlers are unable to understand what is happening between adults, they nevertheless hear the noise and feel the tension. Babies and toddlers may be distressed or scared, they may be upset if they're not getting their needs met promptly, they may be too frightened to explore and play, or they may sense the distress of their mothers. Babies and toddlers can't protect themselves or leave a stressful situation, and they depend entirely on adults to keep them out of harm's way.

What features of woman abuse might be most stressful for this age group?

- Loud noises, such as banging and yelling
- A sudden and/or unpredictable eruption of loud noise
- A distracted, tense, unhappy, or socially isolated mother
- An angry, self-centred, inconsistent father or father figure
- The risk of being injured physically (either by accident or by physical maltreatment)
- Compromised nutrition and health if financial abuse is present (e.g., the abuser restricts money to buy baby formula, vitamins, diapers, home safety devices, etc.)

Some stress is okay, and can even be beneficial, as dealing with stress is how we all learn to cope with life. At first, baths are stressful for babies, but they quickly become normal and expected. When yelling and tension becomes normal, even babies and toddlers learn to adapt. They may stay in a heightened sense of arousal and show their distress through constant crying and/or irritability. They may be difficult to soothe. Alternatively, babies and toddlers may become numb and turn inward, showing their distress by not engaging with people or objects in their environment. Neither response is healthy, but they are the only ways that babies know how to adapt.

Once babies are away from violence and conflict, they are happy to simply be with their primary caregivers and to be fed and played with. Without a responsive environment, a baby's attachment to their mother may become disrupted, and they may become more difficult to soothe – even by their mother. Babies and toddlers live in the present, so the past and the future do not concern them much. However, predictable routines are comforting.

Key aspects of development in infants	Potential impacts of exposure to violence at home
Taking in information from the world around them through their senses.	Loud noises and vivid visual images associated with violence can be distressing; intense anxiety.
Forming secure attachment to a primary caregiver (e.g., their mother).	Parents may not consistently respond to the infant's needs, which can negatively affect the parent-child bond; intense separation anxiety; withdrawal.
Becoming more active explorers of their world through play.	Fear and instability may inhibit the child's exploration and play; imitation in play may be related to the aggression that they witness.
Learning about social interaction and relationships from what they observe in the family.	Learning about aggression through observed interaction.
Settling in to routines and improved self-soothing.	Sleep and/or eating may be disrupted; inconsolable crying.

Babies and toddlers are highly vulnerable to maltreatment. Mothers of babies and toddlers require extra support with basic needs, and helping a new mother can ensure that things are on the right track early in a child's life. A parenting course or guidance on parenting issues can be important for a mother, particularly learning the difference between normal infant behaviour and the effects that conflict, abuse and violence at home can have on a baby or toddler's behaviour. Some women will need legal advice and advocacy about custody and/or protective options available to them through the courts, such as restraining orders. Some women may need respite from the daily caretaking of a challenging toddler. An affordable, high-quality childcare program can provide respite for the mother and help the child with self-regulation and age-appropriate socialization.

Areas of focus for intervention with mothers of infants and/or toddlers:

- Ensure that the mother is safe from violence and that the children are safe from maltreatment.
- Help with housing, accessing income assistance, and accessing medical services, and provide other assistance that the mother requires.
- Offer support to the woman in her role as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to 'moms-and-tots' group, etc.).
- Make a referral to the local home-visiting program for young mothers and babies.
- Help the mother access a high-quality childcare program, which will provide respite for her and will help the child with self-regulation and age-appropriate socialization.
- Help the woman to gain legal advice, if required, for custody and support issues.
- Discuss strategies that she might use to address the safety of her child when on access visits with her ex-partner.
- Consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns that a baby or toddler might be at risk for abuse/neglect, or if you think they are in need of protection.

Woman Abuse and Parenting Infants and Toddlers

What you may feel when parenting your baby or toddler:

Resentment: If you are too tired or distracted to meet your child's need for constant attention.

Guilt: If you regret the fact that your child does not have a responsible and loving father.

Concern: If you worry about the safety of your child when they visit your ex-partner.

Babies and toddlers need your attention 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That can be overwhelming and exhausting. Finding ways to take a break is important so that you're not too stressed out or too tired to meet the demands of a baby or active toddler.

A baby's visits with your ex-partner:

When your child visits your ex-partner, you may worry about their safety, or worry that your ex-partner cannot look after a baby properly. You may want a visitation agreement that takes your concerns into account. This may be difficult or impossible for you to negotiate by yourself, so it's important to get a lawyer to help. The Ontario Women's Justice Network explains the legal options for abused women. And you can visit your local Family Law Information Centre.

Explaining the violence to your baby or toddler:

Children of this age, even those starting to talk and understand simple words, cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation. Your actions will speak louder than words.

How to help your baby or toddler:

Children should not live in a home with violence, so getting away from abuse is the best thing you can do as a mother. However, sometimes that is not possible. Here are some other ways that you can help your baby or toddler:

- Spend time in face-to-face interactions with your child, engaging in lots of baby talk and giggles. Babies and toddlers love to see their mother's face and hear her voice.
- Hold your child and hug them. Tell them that you love them.

- Take a parenting course or read some parenting books, especially if you feel unsure of yourself as a parent, or if this is your first child.
- Find other new mothers to spend time with (e.g., at a 'moms-and-tots' group).
- Find people you trust to babysit your child so that you can go shopping, take a walk, or go see a movie.
- Consider using a high-quality childcare centre, even if you are not working. Or drop into an Ontario Early Years Centre or Family Centre.
- If you have a home visitor from your local public health unit, ask that individual for some suggestions to help your child.
- If you feel too overwhelmed to take care of your child, find someone immediately to babysit, so that you can take a break.
- NEVER shake a baby. Shaking can cause permanent brain damage and even death.
- Take care of yourself. Your child needs you.

Resources

Check the development of your baby or toddler:

The Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS) is a developmental checklist for infants and children up to 6 years of age, which is to be completed by a parent or health/childcare professional. The NDDS is available free to download for Ontario residents.

You can also check your baby's development by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC has developmental checklists (up to 5 years of age) available for free download, as well as a video and photo library of the milestones in action.

You know what you and your children need:

The London Family Court Clinic's downloadable checklist, 'You know what you need...ask for it,' provides a list of what an abused woman may need to be safe and to take care of her children. The checklist provides space where a woman can write down names and addresses as she learns about places she can go to get help.



Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5)

Preschoolers (children aged 3 to 5) are becoming individuals, learning to express their emotions appropriately, playing cooperatively with friends, and getting ready to start school. However, they still think that the world revolves around them, and what they see is more ‘real’ than what they are *told* about.

Milestones for a preschooler up to age 5 years:

- Shows concern for others when they are distressed
- Shows affection without prompting
- Separates from his or her parents more and more easily
- Can follow two or three-step instructions
- Can name most familiar objects
- Speaks well enough for strangers to understand
- Make-believe play is more and more elaborate
- Is confused between what is real and what is make-believe
- Able to use a pencil and turn pages in a book
- Climbs, runs, rides a bike
- Would rather play with other children than by themselves
- Can tell a story, and is beginning to predict what will happen next
- Tells other people, even strangers, about things in the family that you would rather keep private
- Can play a game with turn-taking
- Is aware of gender
- Is sometimes demanding and sometimes very cooperative
- Has fewer temper tantrums, but has more aggression directed at others (e.g., same-age friends)

- Has nightmares, and is afraid of things like the dark and monsters in the closet.
- Is toilet trained
- Shows curiosity about how things work, and asks, “why, why, why?”
- Has a short attention span and is distracted easily

When a preschooler is exposed to violence at home:

- Worries about being hurt and may have nightmares
- Believes that they caused the ‘fight’ by something they did
- Hope that a TV character or ‘superhero’ will come and save them
- Tries to stop the ‘fight’ (e.g., by yelling)
- ‘Tunes out’ the noise by focusing on something else, like toys or the television
- Is distressed when Mommy is upset, but feels better when she seems okay again
- Is confused if Daddy is gone, and worries that Mommy may leave too

What features of woman abuse might be most stressful for this age group?

- Seeing Mommy upset or crying
- Seeing Mommy bleeding or with bruises
- Seeing (and/or hearing) Daddy angry and yelling
- The sounds and sights of first responders when they secure the scene and assist on a call to the home
- Chaotic change and unpredictability
- Fear that they might be injured
- A disruption in their routines if they are forced to leave a familiar home (e.g., to go to a shelter), or if their father is no longer in the home

Key aspects of development	Potential impact of exposure to violence at home
Learning how to express angry feelings and other emotions in appropriate ways.	Learning unhealthy ways to express anger and other emotions; use of aggression; intense anxiety; lack of responsiveness.
Experiences and observations are most significant in forming meaning in their world.	Confusion by conflicting messages (e.g., what I see vs. what I am told).
Thinking in self-centred ways.	Potential distress by perceived unfairness, a father's arrest, and/or a trip to a shelter.
Forming ideas about gender roles based on social messages.	May attribute violence to something that they did.
Increasing physical independence (e.g., dressing self, toilet trained).	Instability may inhibit independence. Child may exhibit regressive behaviours. Intense separation anxiety.

Because of their self-centred nature, preschoolers might blame themselves for bad events like when their parents 'fight.' Preschoolers can be easily upset by changes to daily routines and separation from cherished items, such as blankets or pets. It can help to maintain or re-establish comforting routines, such as bedtime schedules. The present is more important to preschoolers than the past.

Children of this age need to hear that what happened was not their fault, that they are still loved, and that important features of daily life will continue, even if their families have changed or moved.

What lessons does spanking teach children?

Spanking is not a good discipline strategy for any child. And for children who have witnessed woman abuse or experienced violence in the home, spanking is especially bad. The unspoken messages that spanking sends are the same as some of the rationalizations that men use for violence against their intimate partners. Those messages include the following:

- A big person is more powerful than a little person.
- Some types of people have the right to hit other types of people.
- A person who says they love you can still hurt you.
- Being angry is a good excuse to hit someone.

- A person who says they love you can still hurt you.
- Being angry is a good excuse to hit someone.
- People who get hit are the ones to blame.
- People who do the hitting always have a good reason.
- Apologizing for "losing control" makes what happened acceptable.

It is important for the helper to be mindful of how parenting practices vary across cultures. The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London, Ontario has worked with local child protective services to develop a culturally appropriate response to family violence. Their extensive work, which is a model for community collaboration, prevention, and intervention related to collectivist cultures and their best practices, is outlined in the book 'Enhancing Culturally Integrative Family Violence Response in Muslim Communities' by Mohammed Baobaid and Lynda Ashbourne.

Areas of focus for intervention with mothers of preschoolers:

- Ensure that the mother is safe from violence, and that the children are safe from maltreatment.
- Help with housing, accessing income assistance, and accessing medical services, and provide other assistance that the mother requires.
- Offer support to the woman in her role as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to a parenting program, etc.).
- Encourage the mother to re-establish comforting routines for her preschooler (e.g., regular bedtime) as soon as practically possible.
- Help the mother access a high-quality childcare program, which will provide respite for her and will help the child with age-appropriate socialization and school readiness.
- Help the woman to gain legal advice, if required, for custody and support issues.
- Discuss the strategies that she might use to address the safety of her child when on access visits with her ex-partner.
- Consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns that a child might be at risk for abuse/neglect, or if you think they are in need of protection.



For the abused woman:

What your preschooler may be feeling:

Children should not live in a home with violence, so getting away from abuse is the best thing that you can do as a mother. Preschoolers who have experienced violence at home may have feelings and beliefs that might seem strange to an adult. But these feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions – to an abnormal situation. Preschoolers might feel:

- Confusion:** About why people are saying bad things about Daddy.
About why Daddy can't live with us anymore.
- Distress:** About seeing Mommy upset.
About unfamiliar surroundings (e.g., in a shelter or new residence).

Distress (cont):

About the loss of familiar routines and about treasured possessions left behind.

Over the flood of emotions, and of not knowing how to control them.

Guilt: From (mistakenly) taking on blame: "It's my fault."

Grief: Over missing Daddy, and maybe relatives on Daddy's side of the family.
Over missing old house/apartment, old friends, toys and possessions that have been left behind.

Fear: Of abandonment: "If Daddy left me, will Mommy leave me too?"
For personal safety: "If it happens again, will I get hurt?"

What you may be feeling about your preschooler:

- Betrayal:** If they miss their father.
- Confusion:** If they are not upset about what happened to you.
- Concern:** If you worry that the violence has damaged them or caused bad behaviour.
- Guilt:** If you regret that they don't have a responsible and loving father.

A preschooler's visits with your ex-partner:

When your child visits your ex-partner, you may worry about their safety, or worry that your ex-partner can't look after a baby properly. You may want a visitation agreement that takes your concerns into account. This may be difficult or impossible for you to negotiate by yourself, so it's important to get a lawyer to help. The Ontario Women's Justice Network explains the legal options for abused women. And you can visit your local Family Law Information Centre.

Explaining the violence to your preschooler:

Today is far more important to your preschooler than what happened in the past. In fact, they may not seem very upset at all (unless they see you upset). If the abuser was a man to whom they were emotionally attached (e.g., if they saw him as "Daddy"), they will experience the same emotions felt by children of divorce. Be careful about blaming their father for the violence or for the separation. They need only to be told in simple terms that Mommy and Daddy have to live apart. When they are older, they will understand things more like an adult does. Today, they need to hear that what happened was not their fault, that they are still loved, and that Mommy can and will keep them safe.

How to help your preschooler:

- Re-establish (or establish) familiar routines as quickly as possible. This will be comforting for the child.
- Tell your preschooler that you love them, and give them lots of hugs and attention.
- Help them believe that nothing that happened between Mommy and Daddy (or Mommy's partner) was their fault.

- Take responsibility for your decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated).
- Don't rely on your preschooler for emotional support. Seek out friends, family, or professionals for that support.
- Have clear rules and consequences so that your preschooler knows what you expect.
- Consider finding a high-quality childcare program, which will give you a break and also help prepare your child for school.
- Read a book with your preschooler designed for their age level.
- Teach your child that "hands are not for hitting," hands are for tickling, drawing, making shadow puppets, etc.
- Take care of yourself. Your preschooler needs you.

Resources

Check the development of your baby or toddler:

The Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS) is a developmental checklist for infants and children up to 6 years of age, which is to be completed by a parent or health/childcare professional. The NDDS is available free to download for Ontario residents.

You can also check your baby's development by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC has developmental checklists (up to 5 years of age) available for free download, as well as a video and photo library of the milestones in action.

You know what you and your children need:

The London Family Court Clinic's downloadable checklist, 'You know what you need...ask for it,' provides a list of what an abused woman may need to be safe and to take care of her children. The checklist provides space where a woman can write down names and addresses as she learns about places she can go to get help.

Books to read with your preschooler:

Books can provide a helpful and structured way to talk with children about their experiences and family dynamics. The London Family Court Clinic has compiled a downloadable list of books to read with children (of different ages) who have been exposed to domestic violence. It is important to read the book by yourself first to make sure that the content and language are okay for your child.



School-aged children (ages 6 to 12)

Elementary school children (ages 6 to 12) can understand the differences between right and wrong, and cause and effect. Academic and social success at school has a big impact on their self-concept. They will make friends and plan social activities for themselves. Towards the end of elementary school, many kids will be thinking about how they are thought of by members of the opposite sex. They start to identify more with the same-sex parent and are now keenly aware of differences between males and females in society. However, this learning can be distorted when a child lives with violence against their mother.

A child's development up to age 12:

- Able to think and talk about their emotions and how they feel
- Able to understand how other people feel
- Beginning to take into account another person's perspective
- Wants everything and everyone to be fair
- Considers the reason for a behaviour, not just the outcome
- Everything is a contest. They have to be better than their friends at sports or dance, etc.
- Being popular with friends is important
- Doing well in school is important, and if they do not do well, they blame themselves

When a school-aged child is exposed to violence at home:

- They may be concerned for their mother's safety and about any consequences for their father (e.g., arrest).
- They may understand that their mother remains upset even after the violent incident has ended.
- They may recognize one person in a 'fight' as being the aggressor, and the other person as being the victim.
- They will accept reasons for violence that seem plausible (e.g., alcohol, job stress).
- The intent of a 'fight' is as important as how the 'fight' turned out.
- The fairness of a 'fight' is very important.
- They will notice any differences between what they saw happen and how their mother or the abuser later describes it.
- They may blame themselves for the violence if they hear themselves talked about (by the adults) during the 'fight.'
- They may blame themselves for the violence if they believe they could have prevented it in some way (e.g., by cleaning up).
- They may feel that arrest or incarceration are not fair consequences for their father.

What features of woman abuse might be most stressful for this age group?

- A realization that their mother can't control her partner to protect herself (or perhaps even to keep them safe)
- An understanding that their mother is sad and upset between violent incidents
- A concern that their mother may be hurt
- A fear that no one will take care of them if their mother is seriously hurt or dies
- If a child feels a need to preserve a sense of their father as being a good person, they may be upset by negative comments that others make about him
- Changing schools and losing touch with friends, if the family has to move (e.g., to go into a shelter), can be upsetting
- If the child loves their father, there will be concern that he might experience negative consequences (e.g., be arrested), or that the parents will separate
- A fear that they might be injured (either now or in the next 'fight')
- School performance being negatively affected
- Anticipatory anxiety about the next incident, or about the unpredictability of their father's 'moods'
- Worry that neighbours and friends will hear the noise or find out about the abuse

Key aspects of development	Potential impact of exposure to violence at home
An increased emotional awareness of self and others.	More aware of own reactions to violence; more aware of impact on others (e.g., mother's safety, father being charged); emotional numbing may occur.
Increased complexity in thinking about right and wrong; an emphasis on fairness and intent.	Potentially more susceptible to rationalizations heard to justify violence (e.g., alcohol as the cause, the victim 'deserves it'), or may challenge rationalizations as not being fair or right; may try to assess whether the 'fight' was fair; can see discrepancies between actions and words, and can consider intent; the justifications used for violence involving children (e.g., behaviour problems, disabilities) may lead to self-blame or guilt.
Academic and social success at school has a primary impact on self-concept.	Learning may be compromised (e.g., distracted at school, poor sleep, truancy); may miss positive statements (by parents, teachers or friends), or selectively attend to negative ones.
Increased influence from outside family (e.g., peers, school); competition assumes new importance within peer group.	Possibly more influenced by messages that confirm attitudes and behaviours associated with partner abuse; may use hostile aggression in competitive situations; increased risk for exhibiting bullying behaviour and/or being bullied.
Increased same-sex identification.	May learn gender roles as associated with partner abuse (e.g., males as perpetrators, females as victims).

As children develop and grow through the elementary school years, their understanding of the abuse against their mothers gets more sophisticated. A school-aged child may recognize how actions have reasons and consequences, and that mothers may be upset even after a 'fight' ends. They probably see 'fighting' as being caused by stress, or family finances, or alcohol, or whatever else their parents may argue about. Believing this explanation is easier (emotionally) than seeing a beloved parent as someone who is mean on purpose. Seeing a 'fight,' they judge the behaviour by its fairness: for instance, who started it, who is bigger, and if any consequences were deserved.

Areas of focus for intervention with mothers of school-aged children:

- Ensure that the mother is safe from violence, and that the children are safe from maltreatment.
- Help with housing, accessing income assistance, and accessing medical services, and provide other assistance that the mother requires.
- Offer support to the woman in her role as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to a parenting program, etc.).
- Liaise with the school, if required, to access assessments or supports for her child.
- Help the woman to gain legal advice, if required, for custody and support issues.
- Discuss the strategies that she might use to address the safety of her child when on access visits with her ex-partner.
- Consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns that a child might be at risk for abuse/neglect, or if you think they are in need of protection.



For the abused woman:

What your child may be feeling:

- Guilt:** If the child blames themselves for bad things, such as the violence or a divorce.
- Concern:** About seeing Mommy sad and upset.
- Grief:** Over missing Daddy, and maybe relatives on Daddy's side of the family. Over missing their old house/apartment, or old friends, toys and/or possessions that have been left behind.
- Confusion:** About why one beloved parent would hurt another beloved parent.
- Worry:** Over what the future will hold for the family.

What you may be feeling about your child:

- Resentful:** If the child blames themselves for bad things, such as the violence or a divorce.
- Hurt:** If he/she is disrespectful or withdraws from you.
- Concern:** If you worry that the violence has damaged them or caused bad behaviour.
- Guilt:** If you regret that they don't have a responsible and loving father.
- Frustration:** If they seem to have 'forgotten' about the violence or maltreatment.

Explaining the violence to your school-aged child:

A child of this age will still see a 'fight' between Mommy and Daddy, but they can recognize when the 'fight' is not fair, such as when Daddy is bigger than Mommy. Explain the violence in terms of rules. For example: "There is a law, a very serious rule, that people cannot hit others. This is a good rule. It keeps everyone safe. Daddy knows this rule. He must learn to live with people and not break this rule."

Why does Daddy break this rule? Children of this age

may need to explain a father's violence using external factors, such as substance abuse, a bad childhood, or current stressors (e.g., financial worries). The alternative is to believe that the parent is trying to be cruel and hurtful on purpose. Explaining the violence using external factors may help children manage the confusion and ambivalence that they feel after seeing one parent hurt the other. As they get older, they will need to adopt a more complex understanding of causes, motives, and consequences.

A school-aged child's visits with your ex-partner:

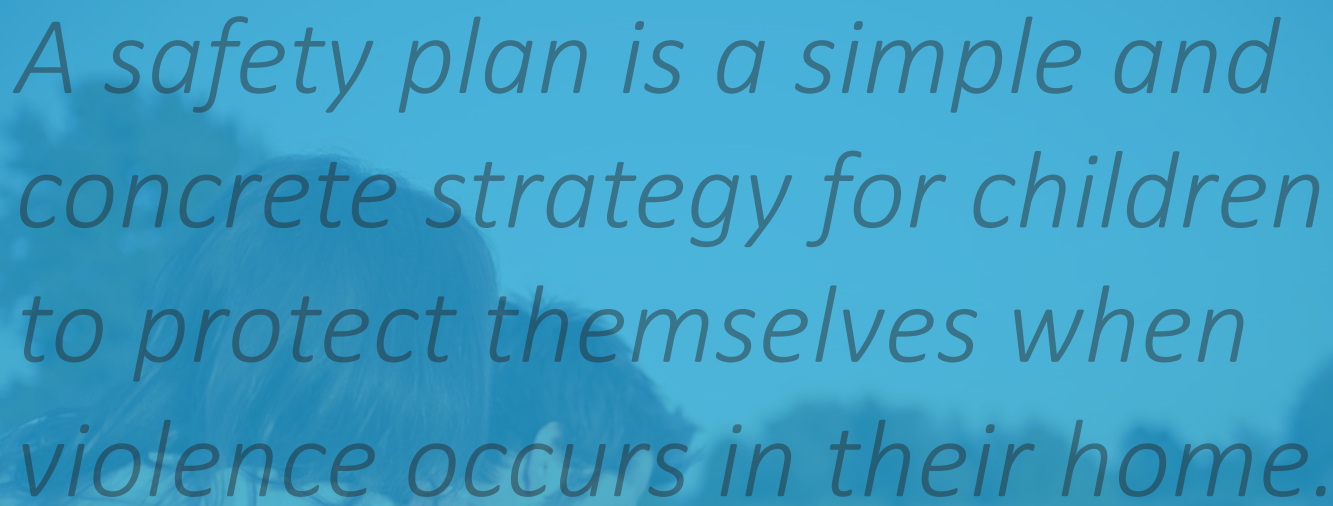
When your child visits your ex-partner, you may worry about their safety, or worry that your ex-partner can't look after a child properly. You may want a visitation agreement that takes your concerns into account. This may be difficult or impossible for you to negotiate by yourself, so it's important to get a lawyer to help. The Ontario Women's Justice Network explains the legal options for abused women. And you can visit your local Family Law Information Centre.

How to help your school-aged child:

- Tell them (and show them) that you love them and will take care of them.
- Help them believe that the violence and separation were not their fault.
- Let them know that you are there to talk when they are ready (but do not force them to talk.)
- Let them know that it's okay to talk about their father.
- Take responsibility for your decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated.)
- Don't rely on your child for emotional support. Seek out friends, family, or professionals for that support.
- Reassure your child that you are okay.
- Do not express your anger at their father in front of them.
- Do not say to your child that they are "like your dad."
- Help your child learn to meet their wants without intimidating or threatening others.
- Find activities that they can do with friends (e.g., soccer.)
- Spend some "fun time" together (homework and chores do not count.)
- Help them succeed at school, and make sure that their schooling doesn't take a back seat to family.

troubles

- Limit (or eliminate) the amount of television, videogames, and movies with violence and violent themes that your child watches or plays.
- Take care of yourself. Your school-aged child needs you.



A safety plan is a simple and concrete strategy for children to protect themselves when violence occurs in their home.

Resources

You know what you and your children need:

The London Family Court Clinic's downloadable checklist, 'You know what you need...ask for it,' provides a list of what an abused woman may need to be safe and to take care of her children. The form provides space where a woman can write down names and addresses as she learns about places she can go to get help.

Create a safety plan with the child:

A safety plan is a simple and concrete strategy for children to protect themselves when violence occurs in their home. This plan is best developed in collaboration with the abused woman and her child. It is important for the child to understand that violence is very dangerous, and that it is against the law. The child should also be told and reminded that they are not responsible for their mother's safety, but that they may be able to get help. The safety plan should include specific actions for the child to take, including a safe place to seek refuge and how to call the police. A sample safety plan for children is available at the London Abused Women's Centre.

The Kids Help Phone is a place that children can call to speak with someone privately and anonymously about personal problems or to ask questions. It operates 24 hours a day. The number for kids is 1-800-668-6868. They also have a Parent Help Line: 1-888-603-9100.

Books to read with your school-aged child:

Books can provide a helpful and structured way to talk with children about their experiences and family dynamics. London Family Court Clinic's downloadable list of books to read with children (of different ages) who have been exposed to domestic violence may be helpful. It is important to read the book by yourself first to make sure that the content and language are okay for your child.

Resources for teachers and educators:

Woman Abuse Affects Our Children is a guide and series of video modules designed to assist teachers and educators in recognizing the signs of exposure to domestic violence in children, to understand the impacts of exposure, and to support their students. Safety planning and school-based prevention resources are also included.

Teenagers (ages 13 to 18)

Teenagers are not children, but they aren't adults either. Adolescents mature and grow a lot between the ages of 12 and 18. The 'unfinished' parts of the brain in teenagers include areas responsible for good decision-making, self-awareness, impulse control, and the ability to regulate emotions. Teens still have a lot to learn about problem solving, controlling emotions, understanding what others think of them, and assessing the motives of others.

The brain continues to mature and grow into the early 20s, so many of the developmental tasks and potential impacts of exposure to violence in the home as a child or a teenager persist in the emerging adult.

A teenager's development up to age 18:

- Increased independence from family, especially for social activities
- Dramatic physical changes and mood changes (brought on by puberty)
- An importance of friendships and the need for acceptance by friends
- A growing interest in dating and relationships
- More likely to challenge you (and other authority figures) when you try to impose rules
- Wants more freedom but without taking on more responsibility
- May not always make good choices about friends or about risky behaviours, such as drugs
- May be embarrassed to be seen with a parent in public; may value friends more than family
- Obsessed with own appearance, clothes, music, gadgets, etc., and the money to get those things
- Acts impulsively without thinking through consequences




When a teenager is exposed to violence at home:

- They may feel responsible for taking care of younger brothers and sisters, to keep them safe.
- They may feel a strong need for privacy and to project an image of their family as being "normal."
- They may be embarrassed by their family and reluctant to bring friends home.
- They may try to intervene in violent incidents to protect their mother.
- They may fantasize about leaving home, or actually leave home.
- They may show concern for the wellbeing of their mother.
- They may blame their mother for not protecting them or their siblings from violence at home.
- They may feel vengeful towards the abuser, or feel great relief if he is gone
- They may adopt unhealthy coping strategies, such as drug use or early sexual activity
- They may have difficulty establishing healthy dating relationships or avoid intimacy
They may start to stereotype males as perpetrators and females as victims.

Now physically larger, teenagers may intervene in incidents and even risk injury. Some teens will be injured – or even be arrested for assault – by intervening in 'fights' between adults. Adolescence is a challenging developmental stage for both parents and youth, with its dramatic physical and mood changes. Young people are drawn closer to their peer group, and how they are perceived by others is immensely important to teenagers. But though they are gaining more autonomy, they still need guidance and supervision.

Some techniques used by teenagers to deal with violence at home are effective at solving the immediate problem, like running away or using drugs to numb the emotional pain. But this relief comes at a cost if it leads to problems at school or in other areas of life. At the same time, teenagers are better able to reach out for help – for instance, by talking or chatting with others who have similar experiences, or by using a confidential telephone help line like Kids Help Phone.



What features of woman abuse might be most stressful for this age group?

- A realization that their mother can't control her partner to protect herself (or perhaps even to keep them safe)
- Understanding that their mother is sad and upset between violent incidents
- A concern that their mother may be hurt
- A fear that no one will take care of them if their mother is seriously hurt or dies
- If a teenager feels a need to preserve a sense of their father as being a good person, they may be upset by negative comments that others make about him
- Changing schools and losing touch with friends, if the family has to move (e.g., to go into a shelter), can be upsetting
- If the teen loves their father, there will be concern that he might experience negative consequences (e.g., be arrested), or that the parents will separate.
- A fear that they might be injured (either now or in the next 'fight')
- School performance being negatively affected
- Anticipatory anxiety about the next incident, or about the unpredictability of their father's 'moods'
- Worry that neighbours and friends will hear the noise or find out about the abuse

Key aspects of development	Potential impact of exposure to violence at home
Increased sense of self and autonomy from family.	Accelerated responsibility and autonomy (e.g., youth in care-taking roles and/or having premature independence); family skills for respectful communication and negotiation may be poorly developed, which could make the transition to adolescence more difficult and result in challenges like parent-child conflict, early home leaving, school drop-out, or substance abuse.
Physical changes brought on by puberty.	May try to stop the violence; may use increased size to impose will with physical intimidation or aggression towards the abuser.
Increased peer group influence and desire for acceptance.	Possibly more embarrassed by family, which can result in shame, secrecy, or insecurity; may use high-risk behaviours to impress peers (e.g., theft, drugs); may increase time away from home; may engage in maladaptive defensive strategies (e.g., drugs) and/or offensive strategies (e.g., aggression towards the abuser) to avoid or cope with violence and its stigma.
Self-worth more strongly linked to view of physical attractiveness.	View of self may be distorted by the abuser's degradation of the mother and/or by child maltreatment; may experience an eating disorder and/or use image management activities (e.g., body piercing, tattoos).
Dating raises issues of sexuality, intimacy, and relationship skills.	May have difficulty establishing healthy relationships; may fear being abused or being abusive in intimate relationships, especially when conflict arises; may avoid intimacy or prematurely seek intimacy and childbearing to escape and attempt to create a support system.
Increased capacity for abstract reasoning and a broader world view.	'All or nothing' interpretations of experiences may be learned and compete with a greater capacity to see 'shades of grey' (e.g., everyone is either a victim or a perpetrator). This style of processing information may be intensified by experiences of child maltreatment; may be predisposed towards attitudes and values associated with violence and/or victimization.
Increased influence by media and social media.	May be more influenced by negative media messages about violent behaviour and/or gender role stereotypes; peer relationships have a new dimension online with postings, comments, and reactions that can influence mood and behaviour.

Areas of focus for intervention with mothers of teenagers:

- Ensure that the mother is safe from violence, and that the children are safe from maltreatment.
- Help with housing, accessing income assistance, and accessing medical services, and provide other assistance that the mother requires.
- Offer support to the woman in her role as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to a parenting program, etc.).
- Liaise with the school, if required, to access assessments or supports for her teenager.
- Help the woman to gain legal advice, if required, for custody and support issues.
- Discuss the strategies that she might use to address the safety of her teenager when on access visits with her ex-partner.
- Consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns that her child might be at risk for abuse/neglect, or if you think they are in need of protection.

Resources

You know what you and your children need:

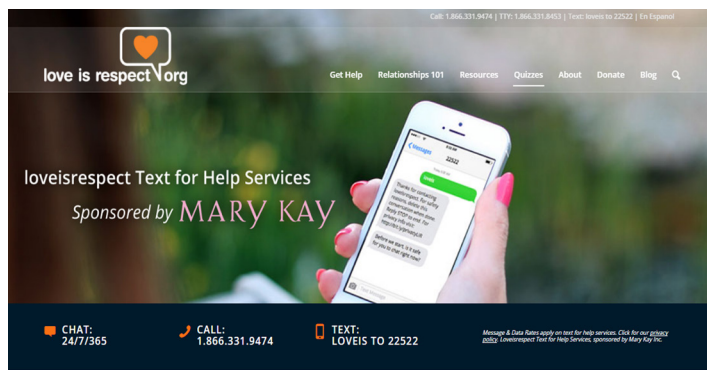
London Family Court Clinic's downloadable checklist, 'You know what you need...ask for it,' provides a list of what an abused woman may need to be safe and to take care of her children. The form provides space where a woman can write down names and addresses as she learns about places she can go to get help.

Create a safety plan with the teenager:

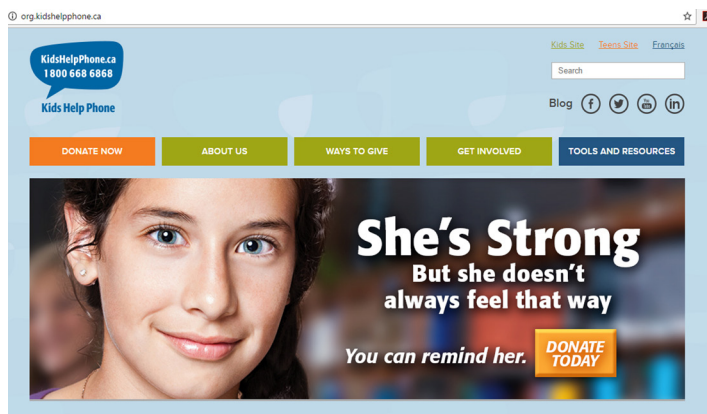
A safety plan is a simple and concrete strategy for children and teenagers to protect themselves when violence occurs in the home. This plan is best developed in collaboration with the abused woman and her child/teen. It is important for the teenager to understand that violence is very dangerous, and that it is against the law. The teenager should also be told and reminded that they are not responsible for their mother's safety, but that they may be able to get help. The safety plan should include specific actions for the child to take, including a safe place to seek refuge and how to call the police. A sample safety plan for children is available at the London Abused Women's Centre.

- The Kids Help Phone is a place that children can call to speak with someone privately and anonymously about personal problems or to ask questions. It operates 24 hours a day. The number for kids is 1-800-668-6868. They also have a Parent Help Line: 1-888-603-9100.

Resources for Teenagers



- Love is Respect - this website provides information and resources on dating violence and healthy relationships, including early warning signs, the types of abuse, and the cycle of abuse.



- Kids Help Phone - this website provides information specifically for teens about family violence, safety planning, and what would happen if they were to call police or child protective services. It also provides a search engine for teens to find supports in their area.

For the abused woman:

What your teenager may be feeling:

- Relief:** That the abuser is out of their life.
That the abuser is out of their mother's life and away from their younger siblings.
- Anger:** About you not leaving sooner.
That you didn't protect yourself from the abuse.
If they didn't protect their mother from maltreatment.
That their mother's whole life has been turned upside down.
That their teenage issues have been swept aside by a focus on the violence.
- Worry:** That you might go back to him, especially if you have reconciled with him in the past.
About you dating a new abuser, if you have done that in the past.
- Concern:** That you are sad and upset.
About the wellbeing of their younger siblings.
- Vengeful:** Fantasizing about taking revenge against the abuser.
- Confusion:** About how to re-assume the role of 'child' after being a caretaker (as a result of the violence).

What you may be feeling about your teenager:

- Confusion:** About why your teen is angry at you.
- Hurt:** If your teen blames you for all their problems.
- Frustration:** If your teen isn't following house rules and seems to be out of control.
- Anger:** If your teen challenges your authority or takes on abusive qualities.

Guilt: If you think your teen's problems are related to the violence.

Explaining the violence to your teenager:

Unlike younger children, teenagers can understand the 'bigger picture' of woman abuse, and you can have a frank discussion about what you were thinking and feeling during the violence. Spend most of the discussion, however, on what your teen was thinking and feeling. Let your teen express their anger or other emotions and any worries they may have about the future. This may not be pleasant to hear, but let your teen talk. The teenage years can be worrisome, even at the best of times. Teenagers need stability and guidance, and a firm base from which to experiment. Reassure them that you will be their base.

How to help your teenager:

- Tell them (and show them) that you love them, and that you don't blame them for anything that happened.
- Let your teen know that you are there to talk when they are ready.
- Take responsibility for your decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated).
- Don't rely on them for emotional support. Seek out friends, family, or professionals for that support.
- Negotiate clear rules and consequences that are appropriate for their age.
- Review the coping strategies on page 44, and encourage healthy coping strategies.
- Take care of yourself. Your teenager needs you.

COPING AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

When facing a difficult situation, children and teenagers find ways to ‘cope.’ They come to an understanding (possibly a distorted understanding) about what is happening in their lives and they 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 turn out to be costly in the long run. Coping strategies can help a child get through a time of stress or crisis, such as when there is woman abuse at home. However, if these strategies are used as a general response to other life circumstances, it may create problems over time (e.g., when occasional binge drinking turns into alcohol dependence). Meanwhile, the more effective a coping strategy is in shielding a youth from overwhelming hurtful emotions, the harder it may be to modify or extinguish that coping strategy. Young children have limited coping strategies, and they need adults to buffer them from the harmful consequences of stress and adversities.

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

Mental blocking or disconnecting emotionally:

Numbing emotions or blocking thoughts; tuning out the noise or chaos; learning not to hear the abuse or violence; being oblivious; concentrating hard to believe that they are somewhere else; drinking alcohol or using drugs.

Making their ‘reality’ better through fantasy:

Planning revenge on the abuser; fantasizing about killing the abuser or about him dying; fantasizing about a happier life; fantasizing about living with a different family or about having a kind father; fantasizing about life after a divorce or after the abuser leaves; hoping to be rescued by

‘superheroes,’ by the police, or by ‘Prince Charming.’

Physical avoidance:

Going into another room; leaving the house during a violent episode; finding excuses to avoid going home; running away from home.

Looking for love and acceptance in 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 on the ‘parent’ role with siblings; nurturing and taking care of their mother.

Reaching out for help:

Telling a teacher, a neighbour, or a friend's parent about the violence; calling the police; talking to siblings, friends, or supportive adults.

Crying out for help:

Suicidal gestures; self-injury (e.g., cutting); lashing out in anger; being aggressive with others, or getting into fights.

Re-directing emotions into positive activities:

Engaging in sports, running, fitness, writing, journaling, drawing, poetry, acting, being creative, or excelling academically.

Trying to predict, explain, prevent, or control the behaviour of an abusive man:

Thinking that “Mommy has been bad,” or “I have been bad,” or “Daddy is under stress at work”; thinking that “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 in school) to avoid criticism, abuse or family stress.

WHAT CHILDREN CAN LEARN FROM EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOME

The victim of violence is the one to blame

Children learn what they live. The experience of living with violence teaches lessons. A mother's reaction to violence is also a learning experience for a child.

But, children who live with violence can learn things that are not true, including:

- The victim of violence is the one to blame
- Violence and threats get you what you want, and/or win arguments, or solve problems
- Boys/men should be in control, and girls/women should obey
- When people hurt others, they do not get in trouble
- Women are weak, helpless, incompetent, stupid, or violent
- Anger or drinking alcohol causes violence
- A person that loves you can also hurt you
- Anger should be suppressed because it could get out of control
- Inequality between men and women is okay in relationships

Meanwhile, children can learn good lessons from a mother's actions to leave and be safe, including:

- Hurting other people has consequences
- Being a victim of violence is not your fault
- Women do not have to accept violence or abuse as a normal or expected part of their relationships with men
- Women are strong, capable, and resilient
- "Mommy will keep me safe"
- There are people who will help women and children be safe

ROLES THAT CHILDREN MAY ASSUME

IN A FAMILY WITH VIOLENCE

Assessing the family role of each child can be helpful when families continue to struggle with conflict or abuse even after the perpetrator has left the home.

In families, we adopt or are given ‘roles’ that we play (either willingly or unconsciously). Examples of family roles include the mediator of disputes, the ‘baby’ of the family, the prized child who can do no wrong, the responsible one that everyone relies on, or the ‘black sheep’ who doesn’t fit in and is expected to disappoint the others. In families that are characterized by woman abuse, the roles that develop or are assigned reflect the unique ways that each person adapts and copes with the secret, confusing, and dangerous situation in which they live.

Key points about family roles:

- A role may be imposed on a child, or it may be assumed by the child.
- Children can play more than one role.
- Children may play different roles before, during, or in the aftermath of violence.
- During abusive incidents, a child might play the ‘referee,’ or the ‘rescuer,’ or the ‘deflector’/‘distractor,’ or the ‘caretaker’ of younger siblings.
- A child may use their family role as a strategy to cope, and they might not be able to ‘turn off’ their role overnight once the abuser is gone.
- If roles are assigned by the abuser, it can cause a child to feel guilt, grief, and other hurtful emotions, especially after he leaves.

Why examining family roles is important:

- It helps us understand how a child interprets and copes with violence (so that we can intervene effectively)
- It helps us understand how different children in the same family can have dramatically different understandings of what happened in their homes
- It helps us understand how a child may think and feel once the abuser is gone
- It serves as a framework for understanding how tension can occur between siblings or in a mother-child relationship
- The role identities that are formed in childhood are often retained and used into adulthood

Children who adopt pseudo-adult roles, such as the ‘caretaker,’ may have difficulty adjusting when expected to assume the role of child once again. A child who adopted the role of ‘abuser’s ally,’ may take up the role of the now-absent abuser; the ‘scapegoat’ child’s isolation within the family may be intensified by feelings of responsibility for the marital breakup; the ‘perfect child’ may be impatient with or blaming towards their siblings who misbehaved or otherwise ‘triggered’ the abuse in the home.

Assessing the family role of each child can be helpful when families continue to struggle with conflict or abuse even after the perpetrator has left the home.

Below are examples of roles assumed by children and teenagers in families that are characterized by male abuse and/or violence towards the mother.

Caretaker:

Acts as a parent to younger siblings and to the mother; may oversee routines and household responsibilities (e.g., meals, putting young siblings to bed); helps to keep siblings safe during violent incidents, and comforts them afterwards (e.g., reassures siblings, makes tea for the mother).

Mother's confidant:

The child who is privy to the mother's feelings and concerns. After witnessing abusive incidents, his or her recollections may serve as a 'reality check' for the mother, particularly if/when the abuser later minimizes or lies about events.

Abuser's confidant:

The child who is treated better by the abuser; most likely to be told by the abuser his justifications for violence against their mother; may be asked to report back on his or her mother's behaviour and be rewarded for doing so (e.g., with privileges or the absence of harsh treatment).

Abuser's ally:

The child who is co-opted to assist in the abuse of the mother (e.g., made to say demeaning things or physically hit her).

The 'perfect child':

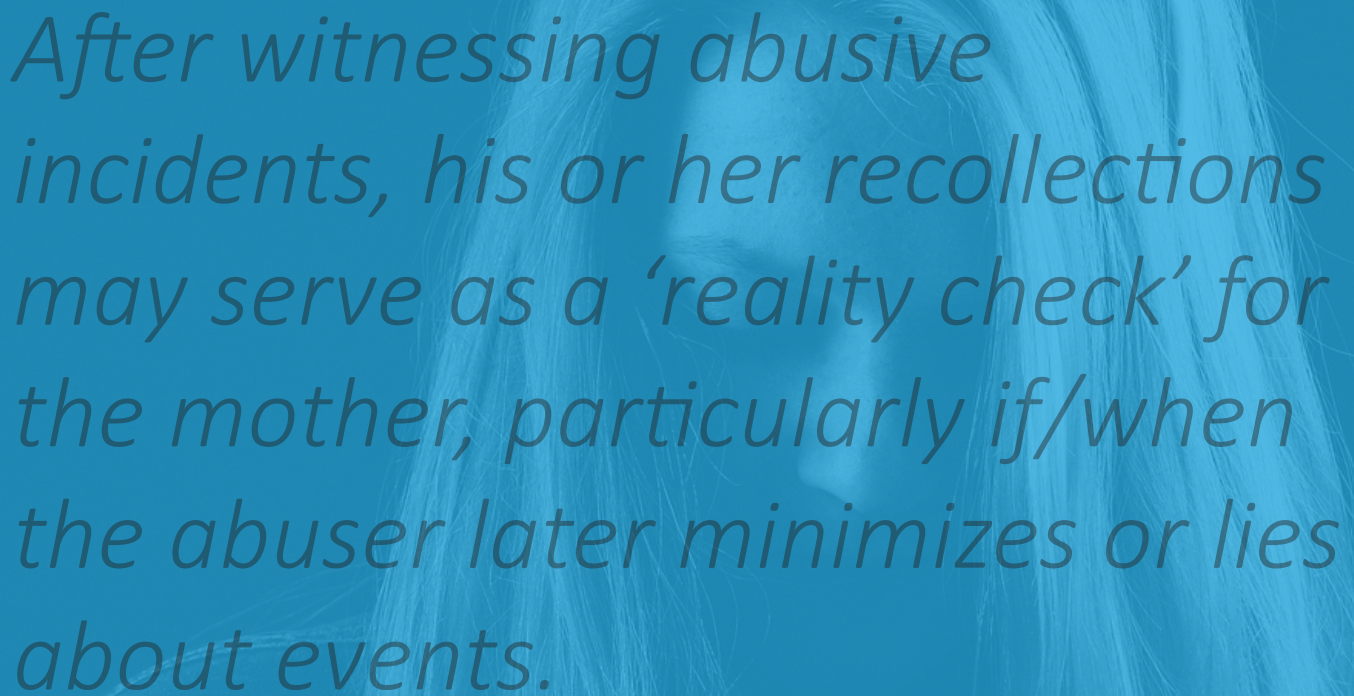
The child who tries to prevent violence by actively addressing issues that they perceive (wrongly) as being triggers to the abuse (e.g., they try to excel in school, never argue, rebel, or misbehave).

Referee:

The child who mediates and tries to keep the peace.

Scapegoat:

The child identified as the 'cause' of the family problems, who is blamed for tension between parents, or whose behaviour is used to justify violence; may have special needs or be a step-child to the abuser.



After witnessing abusive incidents, his or her recollections may serve as a 'reality check' for the mother, particularly if/when the abuser later minimizes or lies about events.

RESPONDING TO CHILD DISCLOSURES

OF VIOLENCE IN THE HOME

Why don't children tell about abuse at home?

Disclosures of child abuse: When working with children, some may tell you that they are being abused. A child may tell you that someone is hurting him or her, or that they are worried about someone hurting them, or that they are not being taken care of or being properly supervised at home.

If you suspect that a child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, or is not having their basic needs met, it is your legal responsibility in Canada and the United States to call the appropriate child protection authority. While you may consult a supervisor for guidance, if you have heard a 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 could put him or her at significant risk.

Disclosures of woman abuse: A child may tell you that his or her mother is being hurt by her partner. In some parts of Canada, hearing this information is explicitly a reason to involve the child protection authorities. Exposure to domestic violence can be seen as a form of emotional harm to the child, or as a factor that could elevate the risk that a child will be maltreated themselves. If unsure of the situation in your province or territory, consult your supervisor, ask the local police, or contact child protective services in your area.

When a child makes a disclosure of abuse:

Stop for a minute and take stock of the enormity of the responsibility that you have:

- Appreciate how difficult it was for the child to reveal a family secret
- Assume that the child has decided that help is needed
- Understand the risk to the child if you do not respond appropriately
- Recognize that a failure to act may discourage the child from telling anyone for a long time, and that it may place him or her at risk of further harm

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 to conduct an investigation.

Reassure the child by validating their feelings:

Acknowledge the child's feelings with statements like "It sounds like that was scary for you." Depending on the situation, it may be helpful to say that you are glad that he or she told you and that you want everyone to be safe.

Do not criticize or speak negatively about the abusive parent:

Children living in abusive homes often have confused feelings. They may hate the abuse, but at the same time have a close bond to the abusive parent and enjoy times spent with that parent. A reluctance to tell about the abuse may be linked to a fear of marital separation. If you criticize the abusive parent, a child's

feelings of loyalty and protectiveness towards that parent may cause the child to feel that you are not the person to speak with about the abuse.

Do not make promises that 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 your statements were not true. The child might come to believe that no one can help, and that it is not worth telling anyone. If a child asks you to keep their story secret, it is important to explain to the child that you may need to tell someone whose job it is to help keep children safe.

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. Let the child say as much or as little as they want/need.



Barriers to disclosure

Children take an enormous risk in revealing family secrets. It is a common misperception that children who experience abuse at home will readily tell adults such as teachers, counsellors, or health practitioners. Rather, while most children will even casually relate intimate family information (that might mortify their parents), children who grow up with woman abuse or child maltreatment often act in just the opposite way. They are warned (or know instinctively) that revealing family secrets will have dire consequences. At an age when children want to blend in with peers and be just like others, they have already realized that their family and its dynamics are different.



Why don’t children tell about abuse at home? This depends on several factors, including a child’s age and their relationship with the abuser. Other factors can include:

- Not understanding that abusive behavior is wrong or not normal
- Embarrassment or a desire for privacy
- Being warned (by the abuser) to “keep your mouth shut”
- Being denied contact with people who could intervene (e.g., doctor), or having that contact monitored
- Believing that they caused the violence
- Having no trusted adult in their lives
- A fear of consequences for themselves (e.g., being taken away from the family)
- A 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 about abuse at home?

- Risking more (or worse) abuse
- Potentially being “taken away” by child protection services
- Being pitied, shunned, or teased by other kids
- Having the family be angry at them and/or being kicked out of their home

REPORTING CHILD MALTREATMENT

It is important to report suspected child maltreatment to the appropriate authority without delay. In Canada, each province and territory has its own system for investigating and responding to child maltreatment. Some differences exist, but there are many common elements.

Statutes and Regulations:

The legal framework will be spelled out in a statute and regulations that define the powers and jurisdiction of provincial or territorial child welfare authorities. These statutes and regulations may be called different things in different jurisdictions – for example, the Child & Family Services Act in Nunavut, and the Youth Protection Act in Quebec.

Legal definition of a “child in need of protection”:

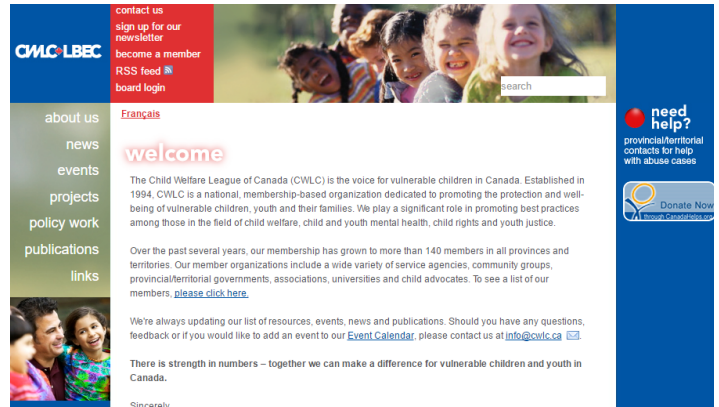
The legal definition of a child in need of protection typically describes a child who is experiencing (or is at risk of experiencing) physical abuse, including inappropriate discipline, sexual abuse, emotional or practical neglect, denial of medical or dental care, and factors that cause emotional harm or injury to the child.

When a child is exposed to domestic violence at home, is that a reason to make a report?

Exposure to domestic violence is one of the factors that may cause emotional harm or injury to a child. This is spelled out in the statutes of some provinces/territories and is implied in others. Children who live with domestic violence are often abused directly, especially if the abuse against their mother is frequent or severe. If unsure, call the local child protection agency and ask for direction. Be prepared to describe the child’s specific circumstances. A skilled social worker will consider a range of factors to evaluate each situation individually and determine if an investigation is required.

How to find the child protection authority where you live:

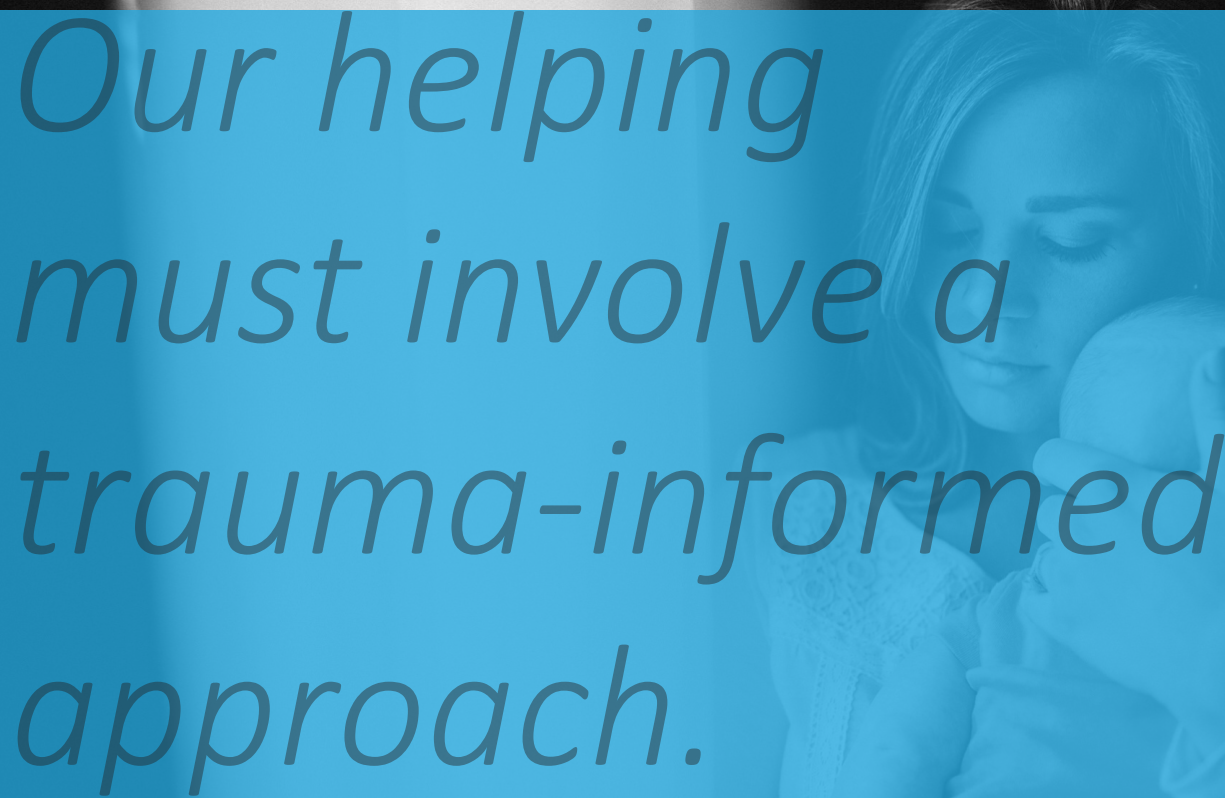
- Call the police to ask where you must report suspected child abuse
- Child Welfare League of Canada
- First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada



Child Welfare League of Canada



First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada



*Our helping
must involve a
trauma-informed
approach.*

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE IN THE HOME

Children and youth who witness violence in their home may experience developmental trauma as a result of being exposed to ongoing or repetitive trauma, such as neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, abandonment, or exposure to woman abuse and coercive control. Developmental trauma occurs within the child's caregiving system, and it interferes with healthy attachment to their caregivers and negatively impacts their development.

Developmental trauma is often layered with other forms of trauma that the child and/or their family members have experienced, including other single incident traumas (e.g., car accident, significant loss), complex trauma (e.g., living through war), intergenerational trauma, and/or historical trauma. Intergenerational trauma results from the emotional and psychological effects of living with trauma survivors. Coping and survival strategies can be passed down from one generation to the next. Historical trauma is the cumulative psychological impact across the lifespan and over generations that results from

the trauma experienced by an entire culture or community of people. Examples of this include genocide, residential schools, colonialism, and slavery.

Our helping must involve a trauma-informed approach. Helping can take many forms, including counselling (individual, group or family) and psychoeducational approaches. Some techniques used with children and youth are more effective than others. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network maintains a list of 'treatments that work' and provides related fact sheets. Interventions are most helpful when they are individualized and logically derived from an understanding of each child's unique situation.

When working with children, timing is important. You can do the right thing for the right child, but at the wrong time. The child may need to learn safer coping skills before working through specifics of their trauma experience.

How individuals remember and are affected by traumatic events depends in part on their age. Coping styles also vary based on age. Children and teens (and also adults) may remember past events through ‘the eyes’ of the age that they were at the time. However, they may judge themselves based on the expectations they have of themselves today (e.g., “Why didn't I just run away?”). Some traumas in early life (e.g., child sexual abuse) may re-emerge as issues in later stages of life (e.g., when beginning to date). Exposure to adversities over several developmental stages is more detrimental because the negative effects can accumulate.

An individual’s cultural background may affect their ability to engage with the service that a helper may be offering. Historical trauma can impact trust-building between people of different cultures, particularly when the service provider is from the dominant culture and the individual receiving the help is not. Those new to Canada may not be familiar with or trust social services and government organizations, particularly if such services and structures were not trustworthy in their country of origin. Language may be a further barrier to service. An abused woman and her children may have different ideas about healing and wellness. Asking the individual about their culture and providing them with choice in service may mitigate some of these challenges. In some cases, working collaboratively with other cultural-specific agencies, or referring the family to another organization altogether, may be most helpful and best reflect the wishes of the mother and her children.



Interventions may address the struggles and difficulties that children manifest. Issues potentially to be addressed in interventions with children and teenagers include:

- Trauma symptoms or traumatic grief symptoms
- Distorted thoughts about abuse (e.g., self-blame, victim blaming, and shame)
- Management of intense emotions, such as anger or anxiety
- Stress management and relaxation techniques
- Modifying or extinguishing coping strategies that could be harmful in the long run (e.g., drugs and alcohol)
- Building constructive problem-solving skills
- Improving self-confidence and a perceived capacity for self-protection

Interventions may address struggles related to the relationship between the child and their mother. This can include:

- Mapping out expectations for healthy (non-violent) family relationships
- Strengthening healthy communication, and practicing problem-solving
- Establishing safe ways to talk together about the past
- Working to heal and move forward as a family
- Identifying (and engaging in) ‘fun’ family activities

Finally, in the appropriate circumstances, interventions that focus on healing the father/child bond in a healthy way that holds abusive men accountable is a worthwhile (even if difficult) goal. One such intervention is called Caring Dads. This program is specifically designed for men who have abused or neglected their children, or who have exposed their children to domestic violence. The program also involves systematic outreach to mothers to ensure safety and freedom from coercion.

THE NEED FOR A DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE

In creating an intervention plan, service deliverers must consider the severity and frequency of violence, look for power and control tactics, and ask about any other adverse experiences affecting the children.

Woman abuse is different from marital conflict:

Woman abuse can occur without physical assault. Woman abuse involves the ongoing, instrumental use of coercive control tactics against a woman by her partner to meet his needs. Physical violence (or the threat of it) is often present, but it is not the defining feature of woman abuse.

Couples in 'normal' relationships (those not characterized by coercive control tactics) can experience marital conflict, which can include relatively minor incidents of physical abuse, such as slapping and pushing once or twice. While marital conflict may be part of an abusive relationship, it also characterizes a substantial number of intimate relationships in which woman abuse is not present. In other words, marital conflict and woman abuse are very different.

Unfortunately, the boundaries between marital conflict and woman abuse can be blurred in general population surveys. These surveys often report similar rates of violence reported by men and women. This is because sporadic violence within the context of marital conflict is lumped together with the patterns of intimidation and threat that characterize woman abuse. As a result, general population surveys minimize the true impact of woman abuse on adult victims and their children.

Couples therapies which are appropriate for marital conflict are ineffective for relationships that are characterized by woman abuse, and these therapies may actually increase the risk of abuse faced by a woman and her children. Likewise, the reverse is also true. Interventions designed for male perpetrators of woman abuse are not appropriate in dealing with marital conflict.

Working with mothers in shelters:

Shelter residents may be in the midst of crisis and transition, which is sometimes precipitated by a recent and/or severe incident of violence. However, women enter shelters in large part to seek safety and a better life for their children. Studies of women in shelters suggest that their most significant child-related needs include:

- Counselling for their children
- Being kept informed of what happens in counselling for their children
- Information about healthy or normal child development
- Referrals and information about counselling for children that is available locally
- Referrals and information about general children's services (e.g., childcare)
- Childcare or parenting relief/respice to give the woman a break
- Information on parenting a difficult child, or support and insight into a child's worrisome behaviour

Resources

Helping Abused Women in Shelters – Provides information on the challenges of women entering a shelter, how to cope while living in a shelter, intervention strategies and supporting the leaving process, as well as self-care for shelter workers.



Women in rural and remote areas may not be able to rely on police for safety due to long response times, and they may not have close neighbours to hear and/or intervene in violent incidents.

Working with women on farms or in rural or remote areas:

Women in rural or remote areas may present additional needs and concerns, especially if the woman lives on a farm or in an area where resources are scarce. These women can also face additional barriers to leaving abusive relationships and getting assistance. Issues that they may worry about or experience include:

- The visibility of their situation in the community and the implications for confidentiality
- A lack of public transportation, long distances to travel, and/or treacherous winter driving as barriers to accessing services
- The safety of animals if they leave the home (e.g., horses and cows)
- The implications of leaving the family farm, and/or

of property division in a divorce

- The difficulty of finding appropriate resources
- The fact that many resources (e.g., legal aid offices) are in urban areas
- Less knowledge about family violence among some rural area service providers (compared to urban areas), or access only to generalist services in rural regions

Women in rural and remote areas may not be able to rely on police for safety due to long response times, and they may not have close neighbours to hear and/or intervene in violent incidents. These factors leave women in rural or remote areas more vulnerable.

Resources

Serving Victims of Violence in Rural Communities – Developed by the Victim Witness Assistance Program of Eastern Ontario, this resource outlines the challenges faced by abused women in rural communities, as well as best practices and practical strategies for better addressing their needs.

Working with Indigenous mothers:

Women of First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry may seek tradition-based interventions. This could mean combining traditional healing with mainstream practice, or using an intervention based solely on indigenous principles.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are diverse, and there are no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answers. However, tradition-based interventions and assistance may:

- Be holistic and focus on healing and wellness rather than dwelling on the negative.
- Seek harmony and balance among individuals, family and community.
- Discourage crisis-bound responses, which punish the abuser and separate the family.
- Encourage community-level healing and a re-connection with past wisdom.

Many Indigenous peoples link problems like family violence to the loss of culture and traditions through colonization and disenfranchisement. In addition, residential schools disrupted the inter-generational transmission of parenting skills. Helpers of indigenous women and children should have familiarity with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and should read the Executive Summary and the Calls to Action.

Service providers should also keep in mind issues like the following:

- The woman may have limited resources
- The abuser could be an important member of the community
- The woman may be suspicious or fearful of the justice system and the child protection system
- Victims are reluctant to put an abuser in a system that is viewed as racist
- There may be few services available in the woman’s community

- Treatment for an abuser, independent of the family, is not always the preferred approach

Resources

Community Guide to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women – This resource, created by the Ontario Native Women’s Association, outlines the historical context of violence against women in indigenous communities, best practices, and community-specific approaches.

Working with mothers new to Canada:

Women new to Canada have experienced both emigration (leaving everything familiar behind) and immigration (getting used to strange new surroundings). They may have experienced trauma in their country of origin (e.g., war, torture) or during their journey to Canada (e.g., human smuggling, refugee camps). Many speak neither of Canada’s official languages (English and French), and they may have no family here.

Among the community of new Canadians, there is great variability in their settlement experience and help-seeking behaviour, which is dependent on a variety of factors, including the recency of their emigration, their education level, proficiency in English, religious commitment, community support infrastructure, and social history. Women new to Canada experience the same range of emotions and reactions as all women who are abused (e.g., fear, shame, hope for change), but seeking assistance from Canadian social and legal systems can be an even more daunting task for a new immigrant for reasons including: beliefs about the family; barriers to service; and concerns about immigration issues.

Beliefs about the family:

- She believes the focus should be on the needs of the family unit as a whole over her own needs
- Family matters are private and are not to be discussed with others
- A husband's behaviour must be tolerated by his wife
- Divorce may lead to being ostracized from the community
- Traditional ideas of gender roles (e.g., women are compliant, men are in charge)
- The need to project an image of 'good woman' to the community
- Strong prescriptions against divorce

System issues and barriers to service:

- Language barriers may prevent a woman from seeking advice and assistance
- A fear of police rooted in past experience of police as corrupt (or as an arm of state repression) in their country of origin
- Not wanting husband charged may prevent calls (or subsequent calls) to police
- Fear of shelters and a deep embarrassment if shelters are used
- Fear of the Children's Aid Society
- Going to a professional may be a last resort after talking to family or a religious leader

Immigration issues:

- She may fear the consequences of divorce or criminal charge on her immigration status
- Fear of deportation (and possibly having to leave children in Canada)
- Belief that she does not qualify for Ontario Works because of sponsorship

Language is a significant barrier that prevents many women from finding and using social and legal services, and from calling 9-1-1. Women may have been discouraged or prevented from learning English. Limitations with English can make it difficult to read street signs, get on the right bus to your office, use the Internet as a resource, read the telephone book, or use the telephone to find help.

What service providers can do:

The onus is on us, the service providers, to modify our usual style of service delivery to accommodate her better. Some ideas to consider:

- Visit her at home whenever possible
- Take extra time to build rapport and make her feel comfortable
- Use interpreters (cultural interpreters if available), even if she seems to manage in English
- Do not expect or ask for disclosure of intimate matters (unless absolutely necessary for the intervention)
- Speak slowly and avoid using jargon or idiomatic expressions that do not translate easily
- Ask what type of help she is looking for and direct her to the best place for assistance if you are unable to meet all of her needs
- Learn something about her homeland and culture, or about the political situation if there has been a war or other catastrophic event

Resources

Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration

Domestic Violence Risks in Families with Collectivist Values: Understanding Cultural Context – This resource discusses the complexities of domestic violence in immigrant communities with collectivist values, including pre-migration trauma, institutional racism, the problems with blaming culture for violence, the role of the family, and unique challenges faced by women.

Reference

Allen, N. E., Bybee, D. I., & Sullivan, C. M. (2004). Battered women's multitude of needs: Evidence supporting the need for comprehensive advocacy. *Violence Against Women*, 10(9), 1015-1035. doi:10.1177/1077801204267658

SUPPORTING WOMEN AS MOTHERS

A mother may ask for assistance with issues such as:

- Physical safety and/or safety planning for herself and her children
- Information about community resources for children
- Counselling for children (to let them talk about their feelings, learn to deal with anger, and learn to respect their mothers)
- Information on child development and how violence affects development
- Respite from care-taking, or a break from day-to-day struggles
- Help with parenting a child whose behaviour is worrisome or challenging
- Help to relate to her children in a new and different way
- Assistance to negotiate contact with a partner over his access to the children
- Legal advice about a custody agreement/order or about getting child support

Safety takes priority. Help with parenting is relevant only after safety is addressed. If a woman and her children are not safe, help them access the appropriate services in your community. There are a range of services available to help abused women and their children, including:

Abused women's advocates:

Women's centres or abused women's advocacy agencies provide confidential counselling and support, and can help women access the legal system.

Crisis lines:

Check the telephone directory for the local crisis line. Some areas have crisis lines specifically for abused women.

Women's shelters and transition houses:

In Canada, there are over 625 emergency shelters, transition houses, safe houses, and second-stage housing facilities. See www.sheltersafe.ca to find one near you.

There are 32 shelters on First Nations reserves, and

others serving First Nations families in urban areas. See the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence to find one near you.

Child protection agencies:

These organizations investigate and intervene when a child is (or may be) in need of protection from abuse or neglect by their caregivers. The Child Welfare League of Canada provides a listing of child protection agencies in Canada. It is important to be aware that, in many jurisdictions, there are child protection agencies that respond to the needs of specific cultural and religious groups (e.g., Catholic or Jewish individuals) in addition to a non-denominational or integrated agency. There are also a number of child protection agencies that specifically address the needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and families.

Family-serving organizations:

These agencies provide a range of services, including assessment and treatment, which can include play therapy, parenting guidance and support, and family counselling. Helpers should become aware of agencies that address the needs of families of different cultures.

Police:

The police can lay charges for crimes (e.g., assault and criminal harassment). An emergency 9-1-1 system is available in most (but not all) parts of Canada.

Victim services:

Police-based or court-based services help victims of crime. For links to programs across Canada, see www.vaonline.org.

Abusive men's treatment programs:

Most of these programs accept both self-referred and court-ordered clients. The Public Health Agency of Canada—Stop Violence Now provides an extensive list of services for both victims and perpetrators of family violence.



Each day yields dozens of opportunities for ‘teachable moments’ which foster healing and promote healthy development.

Helping a mother is among the most effective strategies to help her children. A mother's love, affection, availability, and investment in her child's wellbeing and healthy development are powerful factors to harness in our work helping children. Each day yields dozens of opportunities for ‘teachable moments’ which foster healing and promote healthy development.

Three strategies for helpers:

‘Counselling’ may be the first thing that comes to mind when we think about how to help. But the following three strategies are also important interventions:

1. Ending a child's exposure to domestic violence and maltreatment is the single most important way to help children. The severity of violence (including the frequency) and the number of types of maltreatment that a child has endured are statistically correlated to the probability and level of problems later in life for that child.

2. If required, help the family find a safe place

to live, a source of income, and other features of daily living to meet basic needs and create stability. Outcomes in children are also statistically correlated with stresses and adversities typically seen in conjunction with domestic violence, such as socio-economic disadvantage, a low standard of living, low parental educational level, parental alcohol problems, and child sexual abuse.

3. Support women as mothers by fostering good parenting skills and encouraging them to address any personal issues that may be compromising their parenting (e.g., depression). Outcomes in children exposed to domestic violence are correlated with family functioning and parenting style (including discipline techniques).

STAYING SAFE

After a separation, you and your children still need a safety plan.

Now that you are separated:

- Update your personal safety plan or find an advocate to help you make a safety plan.
- Get legal advice about child custody, child support, property division, and (if needed) protection orders. (e.g., peace bonds and restraining orders.)
- Find and use as many support resources (and people to help) that you can.

Some things you can do at home include:

- Change your locks, add a stronger lock, and/or install a peep hole.
- Tell your landlord and/or your neighbours that your ex-partner doesn't live there anymore and that he shouldn't be hanging around.
- Put 9-1-1 on the speed dial, and teach your children how and when to use it.
- Ask a trusted neighbour to call 9-1-1 if they hear suspicious sounds coming from your residence.

Remember:

- Stalking is against the law. It is called 'criminal harassment.'
- The Law Society Referral Service can help you find a local lawyer. Their line for victims of woman abuse in crisis (e.g., in a shelter, hospital, or living with an abuser) is 1-800-268-8326 or 416-947-3330.
- The Ontario Women's Directorate website has many useful links under 'Help for Assaulted Women'
- There is no 'statute of limitations' on most crimes in Canada. You can report to the police any crime committed against you in the past.

You can help children make a safety plan suited to their ages. Some measures to consider:

- Immediately start a motion in the Family Court for custody of the children (do this even if you were not married.)
- Whatever the custody arrangements (e.g., interim custody, sole custody, joint custody), carry the papers with you at all times.
- Give the school a copy of the custody documents and ask that your ex-partner be removed from the list of people approved to pick up your children.
- Give the school a picture of your ex-partner and clear instructions about who can and cannot pick up the children (including members of his family, if that is appropriate.)
- Help the children make their own safety plan.

Important messages to give children:

- It is not a child's responsibility to keep a mother safe.
- "I will do everything in my power to keep you safe."
- When adults fight, it is an adult problem and adults need to fix it.

Cybersafety

It is important for a woman to 'clean up' all the technology that she has used, as well as her Internet activities (to the extent possible). The safest option is to assume that all technological devices have been compromised, and that everything said or done online currently and in the past, including passwords, calendar, email and contacts, is being monitored or can be accessed by your ex-partner. It may be necessary to have a knowledgeable friend or computer technician help with the 'clean up' process and install up-to-date security software, as well as provide some education on the complexity of privacy and safety on the Internet.

THE NURTURING CHILDREN WHEEL DULUTH

The Nurturing Children Wheel was developed by the Domestic Abuse Program in Duluth, Minnesota. The Wheel shows eight ways to love and care for children.



WHEN CHILDREN ACT ABUSIVELY IN YOUR HOME

When your child is abusive towards you or other children in your home (e.g., using insults, threats, or physical violence), this is a problem that must be responded to immediately. You may be tempted to excuse the behaviour because of what the child has been through with your ex-partner. But abuse is always unacceptable.

As soon as you see abusive behaviour, take action immediately to help your child. This is important because for the following reasons:

- Your child's abusive behaviour is hurtful and disrespectful, and you do not deserve to be abused.
- The behaviour could be harmful to your other children.
- Your child could get into serious trouble (e.g., school expulsion or criminal charges) if the abusive behaviour is exhibited at school or in dating relationships.

When you see or experience your child being abusive:

- Do not give in to threats or demands
- Do not respond with abusive behaviour yourself (e.g., yelling insults, hitting your child)
- Do not ignore the behaviour. Your child needs to learn not to be abusive
- Tell the child that you both need some time apart to calm down
- Tell the child that you will speak with him or her later



Some time later:

- Find an opportunity to talk calmly with the child
- Validate his or her feelings (e.g., by saying something like "You were angry at me because I wouldn't let you watch that movie.")
- Make a link between his or her behaviour and the abusive behaviour that he or she saw in the past (from their abusive father)
- Clearly state why the behaviour is/was wrong (e.g., "It is NOT okay to call people mean names, even when you are angry.")
- Make it clear that there will be consequences for abusive behaviour in the future (and mean what you say)

If the child repeats the abusive behavior:

- Repeat the steps above and enforce the consequences
- Be sure to stay calm and make it clear that the consequence is a result of their abusive behaviour, which is not acceptable
- Be consistent: respond to each and every instance that the child is abusive
- Find a place in your community to get counselling

Dealing with anger:

Anger is an emotion. It is neither good nor bad. Everyone feels angry sometimes. Some people, including some children, think that anger causes abuse. As a result, they may be afraid to let their anger out. For others, anger comes out in hurtful ways (e.g., yelling, insults, violence). Either way, it is important to help your child deal with anger. You can do that through the following ways:

- Telling them that it is okay to have angry feelings
- Helping them put a name to their feelings, including anger
- Encouraging them to express their anger in ways that don't hurt others (e.g., by talking about why they are angry)
- Showing them ways to be angry that do not hurt others (e.g., by getting some exercise)

Here are some words that can help:

- “It’s okay to be angry, but it’s not okay to hit people.”
- “You seem angry. Take a deep breath and then blow out all the air. Let’s do it again. Okay, now use your words to help me understand what’s wrong.”
- “I was angry when the vacuum broke. I called Nana and told her I was upset. She’s going to bring her vacuum over for us to borrow.” (sharing an example that shows healthier ways to express anger)

