



ABOUT  
RELATIONSHIP  
VIOLENCE

**LOVE**

**IS NOT**

**ABUSIVE**

## About Relationship Violence

Relationship violence may involve physical violence, but we need to understand relationship violence more broadly as behaviour that is *violating*. Such violence may also be coercive, that is, a *pattern* of behaviour that is harmful. For example, this may include behaviour that humiliates, belittles, shames, intimidates, frightens, manipulates, or punishes.

Both women and men sometimes resort to violence. Whoever uses it, is responsible for their own behaviour, for stopping their violence and, if need be, for obtaining professional assistance and support in order to stop it.

Whatever a partner's behaviour may be like – even if violent – it will not be resolved through a violent response. If a person's behaviour is hurtful, infuriating, or destructive to the relationship, then these issues and perhaps the future of the relationship need to be given honest consideration (which might require a lot of courage and some hard decisions). Ceasing violence should never be dependent on an expected change in a partner's behaviour. It needs to stop because it will achieve only harm, and will diminish very rapidly any chance of the relationship being salvaged.

Relationship violence, whether it's the behaviour of women or men, can be substituted with behaviours, strategies and skills that make room for tempers to calm, for issues to be tackled rationally, reasonably, and constructively – creating hope for the relationship rather than despair.

Relationship violence is often a sign that a relationship is heading into serious trouble and that problems exist that will very likely not be resolved without appropriate professional support and assistance. Once it is occurring, relationship violence usually worsens and becomes habitual.

Although there are some clear criteria for identifying relationship violence (such as physical or sexual assault, psychological trauma, or financial deprivation), what women or men experience as violating needs to be taken seriously and considered carefully. Furthermore,

the simplistic distinction (still made in much literature on relationship violence) between victim and perpetrator is much less helpful than taking all the facts of a situation into consideration.

Making this distinction serves only to make matters worse, particularly in cases where both partners have used some form of violence. By distorting the reality of what has been happening, it is likely that the kind of solutions applied to the problem will be unfair (inequitable), inappropriate, and destructive, rather than helpful to the future of the relationship.

In circumstances of significant or persistent violence, partners may need to be separated, or one partner helped to stay in alternative safe accommodation, while sense is made of what has been happening, and genuinely helpful options for support and assistance are considered.

Feeling unsafe or that things are unsafe for children should never be ignored. This is especially the case where people are geographically isolated. If the situation becomes worse, there may not be enough time to prevent something bad happening, because of the distance someone must travel to get or give help.

## How to help someone else

You may know of a relationship in which violence is occurring, but don't know what to do. There are several things to keep in mind here:

- Think about how you could help (and what you might need to do) that won't create a risk for your safety.
- Don't offer to help unless you are prepared for a potentially frustrating, confusing and draining situation.
- Think about who could give *you* extra support while you're helping others.

## Ways of helping

- Express clearly your concern about what is happening.
- Avoid imposing your own view or opinions about what they should do.

- Help them understand and take the violence seriously; including what it might mean for their relationship if it continues (remember relationship violence often worsens and becomes habitual).
- Be a good listener and avoid being impatient (even if little progress seems to be made).
- Be encouraging and supportive, but avoid being critical of the other partner.
- Help them to understand that it is not a betrayal, cowardly, or weak to take measures to stop the violence. It puts a value on their relationship and on themselves to take action, even if to do so is at first embarrassing, upsetting, or hard.
- Be sure to consider carefully their safety and your own. If need be, draw up a safety plan.
- Help them to obtain the very best professional support and assistance available. Perhaps offer to go with them to see a counsellor, or speak to a doctor or the police.
- Offer to help obtain any information that may be needed by them, to be able to make sound, well-informed decisions about things.
- Don't take over; don't pressure them into decisions; don't do things without their consent.
- If the situation is becoming unsafe, is immediately unsafe, or is feeling unsafe, encourage them to contact the police (or offer to do so yourself). If using some other means of achieving safety (such as arranging for a friend to come and take them to safety, or driving themselves to a safe place), ensure that risks are properly considered and assessed before doing so.

## RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Tick  the signs that are familiar

### Physical Violence

- Pushing, shoving
- Punching, biting, scratching, kicking, slapping
- Holding roughly, shaking, restraining

- Torturing, burning
- Throwing or smashing a partner's personal objects
- Hurting or killing a partner's pet
- Threateningly punching holes in a wall or door
- Throwing objects as weapons, such as dishes, glasses, ornaments, or other objects, that could do harm
- Threatening to use – or using – a weapon, such as a gun, knife, scissors, pan, shoe, or bottle, to hurt a partner
- Driving a vehicle, with a partner as a passenger, too fast or recklessly, to cause fear or to intimidate

### Emotional and Verbal Violence

- Hurtful put-downs or name-calling
- Humiliating or shaming a partner
- Playing nasty, manipulative, or hurtful mind-games
- Making a partner frightened
- Constant nagging or needling
- Making a partner always feel bad about him or herself
- Disclosing embarrassing or private things about a partner in public, without your partner's consent
- Being very controlling or manipulative
- Using superior verbal skills to confuse, override, or intimidate a partner
- Involving/using children to manipulate or hurt a partner

### Social Violence

- Not allowing a partner to choose his/her own friends
- Often speaking badly about a partner's family or friends
- Intentionally making a partner's family or friends feel unwelcome

- Humiliating, shaming, or belittling a partner in public
- Controlling a partner's every move; always checking-up on him/her; not allowing him/her to go out when he/she chooses

### Financial Violence

- Not allowing a partner to have money
- Selling a partner's property, or property owned together, without his/her knowledge or permission
- Knowingly exploiting, manipulating, or taking advantage of a partner financially
- Making a partner beg, or behave in a manner against his/her will, for money
- Controlling or using a partner's finances (or finances held in common) against his/her will
- Shaming, belittling, or humiliating a partner because of his/her limited capacity to earn income

### Religious Violence

- Trying to make a partner feel inferior or guilty because he/she doesn't, or doesn't want to, share the same beliefs
- Making a partner feel unsafe, frightened, inferior, humiliated, or personally compromised, by coercing him/her to participate in certain religious gatherings, rituals or ceremonies
- Using religious ideas, beliefs, threats, manipulation, or mind-games, to control a partner, exploit a partner sexually or financially, or cause him/her significant guilt, fear, or anxiety

### Sexual Violence

- Forcing a partner to have sex against his/her will
- Being intentionally dishonest about the use of contraception
- Using drugs or alcohol in order to exploit a partner sexually
- Intentionally humiliating a partner sexually
- Using an object to violate a partner sexually

- ❑ Saying or insinuating hurtful or humiliating things about a partner's genitals or sexual performance – especially in the hearing of others

If some of these signs are familiar and you are concerned about your behaviour or the behaviour of your partner –

Speak to someone you trust, who can support you in thinking through what to do

Speak to your doctor

Phone a 24 hour Domestic Violence Help Line

## TAKE ACTION