Is someone you know being abused?
Do you know the warning signs?

Help, Hope & Healing
Are you concerned that someone is being abused, but don’t know what to do?

You may suspect abuse is happening to a neighbour, friend or family member, but do not know what to do or how to talk about it. You may worry about making the situation worse. This brochure describes the warning signs and the steps you can take to help.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing violence against women. You can reach out to organizations in your community that support women at risk of abuse and those that can help abusers.

Definition of Violence against Women

Violence against women is a serious social problem that takes many forms, including:

- **domestic violence (also known as spousal abuse, wife assault, or intimate partner violence);**
- **sexual assault;**
- **sexual harassment;** and
- **criminal harassment (also known as stalking).**

Violence against women takes place in homes, workplaces, schools, institutions and community settings, and it puts children who are exposed to it at greater risk of developmental, behavioural and emotional difficulties. Violence affects women of all age groups, cultures, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
**Warning Signs of Abuse**
If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to take action:

**HE**
- puts her down
- does all the talking and dominates the conversation
- checks up on her all the time, even at work
- tries to suggest he is the victim and acts depressed
- tries to keep her away from you
- acts as if he owns her
- lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities
- acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home

**SHE**
- is apologetic, makes excuses for his behaviour or becomes aggressive and angry
- is nervous talking when he’s nearby
- seems to be sick more often and misses work
- tries to cover her bruises
- makes excuses at the last minute about why she can’t meet you or she tries to avoid you on the street
- seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid
- uses more drugs or alcohol to cope

*While most abuse occurs in intimate heterosexual relationships, it can occur in gay and lesbian relationships as well. The suggestions in this brochure are equally applicable.*
### The danger may be greater if:

**HE**

- has access to her and her children
- has access to weapons
- has a history of abuse with her or others
- has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him
- says “If I can’t have you, no one will.”
- threatens to harm her children, her pets or her property
- has threatened to kill himself
- has hit or choked her
- is going through major life changes (e.g. job, separation, depression)
- is convinced she is seeing someone else
- blames her for his problems
- doesn’t seek support
- watches her actions, listens to her telephone conversations, reads her emails and follows her
- has trouble keeping a job
- misuses drugs or alcohol
- has no respect for the law

**SHE**

- has just separated or is planning to leave
- fears for her life and for her children’s safety
- is in a custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship
- is involved in another relationship
- is pregnant
- denies or minimizes the risk
- has unexplained injuries
- has no access to a phone
- faces other obstacles (e.g. she does not speak English, is not yet a legal resident of Canada or lives in a remote area)
- has no friends or family

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*Statistics indicate that women who are under 25 years of age, women with a disability, Aboriginal women and women living in a common-law arrangement are at higher risk of abuse. (Statistics Canada – Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005)*

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*Always keep yourself safe. Don’t get in the middle of an assault. In an emergency, call the police, or 911 if available in your area.*
Here are some of the ways you can help when you recognize the warning signs of abuse:

- Talk to her about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her you believe her and that it is not her fault.
- Encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected.
- Offer to provide childcare while she seeks help.
- Provided your own safety is not at risk, offer your home as a safe haven to her, her children and pets. If she accepts your offer, do not let her partner in.
- Encourage her to pack a small bag with important items and keep it stored at your home in case she needs it.
- Know that you or she can call VictimLink at 1-800-563-0808, your local transition house or safe home. In an emergency call the police, or 911 if available in your area.

If she denies the abuse:

- Assure her she can talk to you any time.
- Don’t become angry or frustrated with her decisions. It is important to understand that she may be afraid or not ready to take the next steps.
- Try to understand why she might be having difficulty getting help. She may feel ashamed.
- Offer to go with her if she needs additional information or support.
- If she has children, let her know gently that you are concerned about her and her children’s safety and emotional well-being. She may be more willing to recognize her situation if she realizes her children may also be in danger.

Why does she stay?

- She loves him and hopes he will change.
- She believes her children need their father.
- She has no means of supporting herself and her children.
- She is isolated and has no support from family and friends.
- She feels ashamed.
- She may not be aware of services that are available.
- She may not have transportation.
- She believes he will kill her if she leaves.
- She is an immigrant, sponsored by her husband, and is unaware of her rights. She may believe she will be deported if she reports the abuse or leaves him.
Here are some concerns you may have about whether you should help:

### Points of Concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Points to Consider</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You feel it’s none of your business.</td>
<td>It could be a matter of life or death. Violence is everyone’s business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t know what to say.</td>
<td>Saying you care and are concerned is a good start.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You might make things worse.</td>
<td>Doing nothing could make things worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not serious enough to involve the police.</td>
<td>Police are trained to respond and can refer to other services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are afraid his violence will turn to you or your family.</td>
<td>Speak to her alone. Let the police know if you receive threats.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You think she doesn’t really want to leave because she keeps going back to him.</td>
<td>She may not have had the support she needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are afraid she will become angry with you.</td>
<td>Maybe, but she will know that you care.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You feel that both partners are your friends.</td>
<td>One friend is being abusive and one lives in fear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You believe that if she wanted help, she would ask for it.</td>
<td>She may be too ashamed to ask for help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You think it is a private matter.</td>
<td>It isn’t when someone is being hurt.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Who can help?

Call VictimLink BC at 1 800 563-0808, a 24-hour crisis line for B.C. in up to 110 languages.
www.victimlinkbc.ca

In an emergency, call your local police or 911, if available in your community.

Stopping violence against women is everyone’s responsibility.

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
www.gov.bc.ca/pssg