



Family Centre Information Package

Abuse



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WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse can mean **many** different things. Abuse generally refers to emotional, mental, physical, verbal, sexual, or economic mistreatment. It is important to note that neglect is also considered a form of abuse. Abuse is a pattern of behaviour in which a person (or people) mistreats another person or animal in such a way that either causes harm or risks causing harm.

SIGNS

Some warning signs of abuse in **children** include, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained injuries, including bruises, welts, cuts, etc.
- Withdrawn, fearful, or anxious
- Wearing inappropriate clothing to cover injuries (i.e. long sleeves on a hot day)
- Flinching when touched
- Displays inappropriate sexual knowledge for his/her age
- Has an STD or is pregnant, especially before the age of 14
- Often misses or is late for school
- Wears dirty or inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Has untreated injuries/illnesses and consistently bad hygiene

For additional warning signs of abuse in children, please visit:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm

Some warning signs of abuse in **adults** include, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained injuries, or suspicious explanations for injuries (i.e. "I fell down the stairs")
- Social withdrawal
- The person is no longer able to visit family or friends unless his/her partner is present
- The individual's partner belittles or humiliates the person in public
- The person does not have access to money or is concerned about spending money
- The individual appears fearful or avoidant of a particular person

For additional warning signs of abuse in adults, please visit:

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/adult-protection/appg/ap-alert-guide/ap-alert6.htm>

Some warning signs of abuse in **the elderly** include, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained injuries
- Misuse of prescription drugs (either overdose or not taking medications regularly)
- Caregiver refuses to allow elder to be seen alone by visitors
- Unexplained STDs
- Malnutrition, dehydration, or untreated injuries
- Changes in the elder's financial situation
- Sudden changes to the elder's will, power of attorney, etc.
- Large withdrawals from the elder's account, especially when the elder could not have done these things due to illness, etc.

For additional warning signs of abuse in the elderly, please visit:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/elder_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm

FACTS

- Abusers are usually known to the victim (i.e. parents, relatives, a partner).
- Abuse happens in all age, gender, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups. Anyone can be an abuser, and anyone can be abused.
- Abuse is rarely a one-time occurrence, and will often become more severe over time if nothing is done to intervene. Sometimes, abuse can happen dozens of times before the victim first says anything about it.
- In many cases, an abusive relationship begins with verbal and emotional abuse and eventually escalates to physical abuse. A physically abusive relationship also involves a "cycle of violence". In this cycle, there is a tension building stage (tension in the air), followed by a violent episode (violence occurs), after which there is a "honeymoon" stage (abuser apologizes, says it will never happen again, etc.)
- Although the majority of abuse victims we know about are women, men can also be victims of abuse. Don't assume, because a victim is male, that he is lying or exaggerating.
- Children who are abused are more likely to grow up to be abusers. **However**, many adults who were abused as children are strongly motivated to break the cycle of abuse.
- Men and women who stay in abusive relationships are not 'weak' and they do not 'like' the abuse. It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive relationship. These people should not be judged for not leaving.
- The average female victim of abuse makes seven to eight attempts to leave an abusive partner before she leaves permanently.¹ There are many barriers preventing victims from leaving their

¹ <http://womenscommunity.org/why-dont-i-leave.html>

abusers, including having no protection for themselves and living in poverty. Abusers will often threaten their victims or victims' children, including going so far as to threaten to kill them.

- The most dangerous time for an abused woman is when she leaves her abuser for good. This is when she is most at risk of being seriously injured or even killed. Because of this, it is extremely important to have the proper supports in place to ensure the woman's safety.
- Although alcohol/drug use is frequently associated with domestic violence, they are not the **cause** of the violence, even though many abusers use intoxication as an excuse for their behavior. Abuse can also occur in the absence of alcohol or drug use.
- No one deserves to be abused! The abuser is responsible for the abuse, **not** the victim.

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Family Centre offers individual and family counselling services (ages 7+). If you are interested in scheduling a counselling session, please call Family Centre (403) 320-4232 extension 240, to speak to an intake counsellor.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics, including abuse. There is no cost for accessing the library; all that is required is a library card, which is available at reception. To search and reserve available resources click [here](#).



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HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

- If you are in immediate or imminent danger of violence, get out! Get yourself to a safe place, call a friend, or call the police. Your personal safety is your first priority.
- Get help. Talk to a friend, counsellor, self-help hotline, family member, religious figure, anyone you think you can trust.
- Think about getting out of the relationship. Just think about it.
- Create a safety plan. This can be a plan for leaving the relationship, or just for leaving the house during a time of crisis. There are tips for creating a safety plan at [this](#) site.
- Keep a diary of the instances of abuse or neglect, in the event you wish to file a report.
- Make a list of your strengths, your resources, your options.
- Don't drink or use drugs with your abuser – the likelihood of abuse is increased when drugs and alcohol are involved.
- Teach your children to call 911 in an emergency.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE YOU KNOW

If you have reasonable grounds to believe someone is being abused and is in imminent danger, call the police by dialing 911.

If you suspect (on reasonable grounds) that a child is being abused, you are obligated to report the abuse. You can report the abuse to the police or a child welfare agency. Call 310-0000 to get the number of your local child authority or contact Southwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority. If a child tells you he/she is being abused:

- Believe them!
- Listen to the child's story without judgement, and try to remain calm and composed.
- Gather information without asking leading questions or interrogating the child. If possible, allow the story to unfold naturally and spontaneously at the child's own pace.
- Remember to tell the child he did nothing wrong! And that he did the right thing by telling someone!
- Report the information to the appropriate authorities.

If you suspect or know that a friend is being abused, there are a few things that you can do (if your friend is receptive):

- Find time to speak to her in private.
- Be supportive. You are there to listen, not to judge. Let your friend know you are concerned about his safety, but do not blame him for what is happening.
- If your friend is receptive to the idea, help her make a [safety plan](#).
- Encourage your friend to speak to someone who can help.
- Support your friend no matter what choice he makes. Do not get angry if he decides to stay in the relationship.

If you suspect an elderly friend or relative is being abused:

- Report the abuse to the appropriate [authorities](#).
- Take the elderly person's claims seriously.
- Stay in contact with the elder as often as possible, either in person, on the phone, etc.
- If the elderly person is in a public care facility, if possible, move him to a different home.
 - **If the abuse is occurring in a public care facility, you are obligated by law to report it. Call 1-888-357-9339**

RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES

- Southwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority 403-381-5555
 - 2nd, 4th and 6th Floors, Lethbridge Centre Tower 403-381-5500
400 4 Avenue S., Lethbridge, AB T1J 4E1
 - Provides services intended to support the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families, including intervention services.
 - **Report suspected or known abuse of children to this authority or to the police.**
- Emergency Youth Shelter (Wood's Homes) 403-317-1777
- YWCA Harbour House 403-320-1881
 - A crisis unit for women (and their children) consisting of 24 beds. They can stay up to 21 days and can access 24 hour a day support and counselling.
- Lethbridge Elder Abuse Response Network Contact Jennifer: 403-394-0306
 - 500 11 Street S., Lethbridge, AB T1J 4G7
 - Provides elder abuse services, including assessing need and risk, responding to calls, and providing referrals to community supports.
- Lethbridge Family Services Counselling 403-327-5724
 - 1107 2A Avenue N., Lethbridge, AB T1H 0E6
 - LFS provides counselling services to individuals who are experiencing difficulties in their lives, including anxiety. Subsidies may be available.
- Associates Counselling Services 403-381-6000
 - 239 12B Street N., Lethbridge, AB, T1H 2K8
 - Associates is an association of independent professionals and offers a wide range of counselling services, including family and child/youth counselling. Subsidies may be available.
- Crossroads Counselling Centre 403-327-7080
 - 202 – 542 7 St. S, Lethbridge, AB, T1J 2H1
 - Crossroads offers counselling to individuals, couples, and families for a variety of concerns. Subsidies may be available.

WEBSITES

- Help Guide Child Abuse:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- Responding to Child Abuse Handbook (pdf file):
http://justice.alberta.ca/programs_services/families/Documents/responding_to_child_abuse_handbook_2006.pdf
- Alberta Human Services—Child Abuse: <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/15387.html>
- Help Guide Elder Abuse:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/elder_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network : <http://www.albertaelderabuse.ca/>
- Office on Women's Help (US): <http://womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women/get-help-for-violence/how-to-help-a-friend-who-is-being-abused.cfm>

- General Abuse Information: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/adult-protection/appg/ap-alert-guide/ap-alert6.htm>

ONLINE CHAT AND DISCUSSION FORUMS

- Kids help Phone online: <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/AskUsOnline.aspx>
- Youth in BC: <http://youthinbc.com/>
- Crisis Support Centre: http://www.crisissupportcentre.com/index.php/get_support_now/online-crisis-chat/
- Distress Centre (requires registration to access, but you can remain anonymous): <http://www.distresscentre.com/>
- Youth Space (30 years of age and under): <http://youthspace.ca/chat>
- After Silence: <http://www.aftersilence.org/>

VIDEO

- *Matilda* (1996): A young girl, whose parents neglect her, discovers she has magical powers. Matilda, along with the help of her amazing teacher, uses these powers to teach her parents and her horrible principal a lesson. Rated PG.
- *Enough* (2002): A woman escapes her abusive husband, and begins to take self-defense training to protect herself in case he finds her again. Rated 14A.
- *What's Love Got to Do With It?* (1993): The story of Tina Turner's life with her abusive husband, Ike, and how she finally broke the cycle and broke free. Rated 18A.

BOOKS

- *Push* by Sapphire: Precious, a 16 year old girl, is pregnant for the second time, living with an abusive mother, and struggling to get an education in the face of adversities. This book has been made into a movie: *Precious* (2009)
- *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer: This story describes one boy's life in an abusive home.

OTHER

- Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-387-5437
- Distress Line of Southwestern Alberta 403-327-7905
- Family Violence Info Line 403-310-1818
- Kid's Help Phone 1-800- 668-6868
- Men's Help Line 1-403-266-4357

REFERENCES

- http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- <http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/adult-protection/appg/ap-alert-guide/ap-alert6.htm>
- http://www.helpguide.org/mental/elder_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- <http://womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women/get-help-for-violence/how-to-help-a-friend-who-is-being-abused.cfm>
- <http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/psc/familyviolence/>
- <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence#LEAVE>