



Family Centre Information Package

Family Violence/Abuse



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WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE/ABUSE?

Also called domestic violence/abuse and intimate partner violence, it can mean **many** different things. Abuse generally refers to emotional, mental, physical, verbal, sexual, or economic mistreatment. It is important to note that neglect and exposure is also considered forms of abuse, especially for children. Abuse is a pattern of behaviour in which a person (or people) mistreats another person in such a way that either causes harm or risks causing harm, and is often done as an attempt to intimidate and/or control the other person.

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- Withdrawn, fearful, or anxious, or alternatively more aggressive or angry
- 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
- Hypervigilant or overly responsible
- Often misses or is late for school
- Poor hygiene
- Has untreated injuries/illnesses and consistently bad hygiene

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

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/child-abuse-and-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")
- Express changes in their health e.g. increased illnesses and headaches
- Social withdrawal and/or overly apologetic and meek, and reduce social communication

- Appears anxious and on edge, or guarded and might not be able to make decisions and/or get flustered when asked to
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy or do.
- 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 (make sure to scroll down past the sign in option): <http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/>

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 they could not have done these things due to illness, etc.

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

<http://lethseniors.com/support-services/learn-lethbridge-elder-abuse-response-network/>

Some warning signs of abuse in **individuals with developmental disabilities** include, but are not limited to:

- Destructive Behaviour and extreme behaviours (e.g. aggression and submissive)
- High levels of anxiety, especially when asked to go to certain places or accompany a specific person
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Reduced mental alertness or physical ability (often due to over or under medicating)
- Poor hygiene
- Unattended medical or dental needs
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Unexplained frequent hospitalizations
- All of the warning signs listed under adults.

For additional warning signs of abuse in individuals with developmental disabilities, please visit:

[Abuse of Persons with Disabilities Information Sheet](#)

What are the facts?

- **Characteristics of abuse and abusers:**
 - Abuse is rarely a one-time occurrence, and without intervention abuse is subject to become more severe over time.
 - In many cases, an abusive relationship begins with verbal and emotional abuse and eventually escalates to physical abuse.
 - An abusive relationship also often involve 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.)
 - 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.
 - While not all abusers are the same, or act the same, there are some common traits, some of which the abuser might try to explain as the way the show their love or concerns. These traits include, but are not limited to: Jealousy, unrealistic expectations, strong adherence to stereotypical gender roles, blaming others for their problems and their own feelings, creating isolation, and use of force during an argument.
 - Although alcohol/drug use is frequently associated with family 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.
- **Characteristics of abuse victims:** there is no definitive age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status to describe a victim of abuse.
 - **Anyone can be an abuser, and anyone can be abused.**
 - Although many abuse victims we know about are women, men can also be victims of abuse. It is important that male victims of abuse are treated with the same respect and dignity as a female victim.
 - 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

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

- There are many barriers preventing victims from leaving their 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.
- No one deserves to be abused! The abuser is responsible for the abuse, not the victim.

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Family Centre can help you connect to resources in our community through our Family Connector. They are knowledgeable about the agencies and resources available in Lethbridge and surrounding area and can help get you to the right service.

We also offer parent support, where parent educators can support you to support your children.

Please leave a message for our Family Connector at (403) 320-4232 extension 240 and you will receive a call back within 1 business day.

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.



HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

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- If you are in **immediate or imminent danger of violence**. Try to get yourself to a safe place, call a friend, or call the police. Your personal safety is your first priority.
- Explore options for support, can you talk to a friend, counsellor, self-help hotline, family member, religious figure, or anyone else that you think you can trust.
- Think about your options and identify any possible supports for helping you to increase safety while in the relationship or for help getting out of the relationship.
- Create a safety plan. This can be a plan for while you are in the relationship, leaving the relationship, or just for leaving the house during a time of crisis, and for if you have left the relationship and need support in maintaining your safety. There are tips for creating a safety plan at [this](#) site.

- Safety planning can be more challenging when isolation is higher, some things to consider in these situations include, but not limited to²:
 - o having a code word/text/gif that you can send a friend or family member that lets them know help is needed.
 - o Always wear something with pockets so you can always have a fully charged phone with you.
 - o Create physical indications for neighbors, such as turning on or off certain lights, opening or closing a specific set of blinds or curtains.
 - o Stick to routines and patterns, if you always check in with a friend or family member on Tuesdays at 10am, sit outside to drink your morning coffee/tea every day at 8am, check the mail every day at 1pm, or tend to your yard at 5pm maintain these behaviors.
 - o Create physical distancing at home if possible, going outdoors can be a way to get space.
 - o Increasing screen time can be good as it can act as a distraction for people.
- 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 and resources, you are the most familiar with your situation and have already been doing things to help keep yourself safe.
- 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 Lethbridge Children's Services: Day: (403) 381-5555 and After hours: 1-800-638-0715

²https://www.sagesse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Domestic-Violence-Community-Protocol-COVID.pdf?mc_cid=8918673ec0&mc_eid=5e78f6ce8c

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/she did nothing wrong! And that he/she 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 them in private.
- Be supportive. You are there to listen, not to judge. Let your friend know you are concerned about their safety, and do not blame them for what is happening.
- Believe them, and acknowledge what your friend is saying, validating their feelings of guilt, anger and fear (among others).
- Let them know that it is not their fault, the abuser is responsible for the abuse not them.
- If your friend is receptive to the idea, help them make a [safety plan](#).
- Encourage your friend to speak to someone who can help.
- Avoid telling them what to do e.g. "you need to leave" and/or "you have to call the police". Support your friend with the choice they make. Do not get angry if they decide to stay in the relationship (research shows that it takes up to 7-8 attempts for someone to leave an abusive relationship).
- Only offer support for things that you can follow through with, if a friend needs support with something that you do not feel comfortable with or are unable to do, help them identify other resources for this.

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.

Family Centre - email: info@famcentre.ca - phone: (403) 320 4232
Suite 225, 200 – 4 Avenue S., Lethbridge Centre, Lethbridge, AB T1J 4C9

- If the elderly person is in a public care facility, if possible, move them 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

- Lethbridge Children’s Services 403-381-5555
 - 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.**
- 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.
- Emergency Youth Shelter (Wood’s Homes) 403-317-1777
- Lethbridge Shelter & Resource Centre 403-327-1031
- Safe Haven Women’s Shelter (Taber) 24/7 Crisis Line 403-223-0483
Crisis Intervention Team: crisis@tabersafehaven.ca
- Pincher Creek Women’s Shelter Crisis phone: 403-627-2114
Toll Free number: 1-88-353-4808
Shelter e-mail: info@pcshelter.ca
- Kainai Women’s Wellness Lodge Crisis Line 24/7 403-653-3946
General Phone 403-653-3946
- Lethbridge Elder Abuse Response Network Contact: 403-394-0306
 - Provides elder abuse services, including assessing need and risk, responding to calls, and providing referrals to community supports.
- Community Links 403-328-5465
- Lethbridge Police Services Emergency: 911
Non-Emergency Reporting: 403-328-4444 General Information: 409-327-2210

WEBSITES

- YWCA Lethbridge and District:
<http://ywcalethbridge.org/>
- Alberta Government:
<https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx>
- Community Links:
<http://community-links.ca/>
- Domestic Violence Action Team
<http://dvat.ca/>
- Help Guide Child Abuse:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- Alberta Human Services—Child Abuse:
<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/15387.html>
- Ending Violence, Associations of Canada:
<https://endingviolencecanada.org/getting-help/>
- Calgary’s Women Emergency Shelter:
<https://www.calgarywomensshelter.com/>

ONLINE CHAT & DISCUSSION FORUMS

- Crisis text line: Text HOME to 686868
<https://www.crisistextline.ca/>
- Distress Centre (requires registration to access, but you can remain anonymous):
<http://www.distresscentre.com/>
- Sagesse (bottom right corner of the page):
<https://www.sagesse.org/>

HELP & INFORMATION LINES

- Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-387-5437
- Distress Line of Southwestern Alberta 403-327-7905
- Crisis Intervention Team 403-381-1116 pager (will call you back)
- Family Violence Helpline 403-234-7233
- Family Violence Info Line 403-310-1818
- Kid's Help Phone 1-800- 668-6868
- Men's Help Line 1-403-266-4357

BOOKS

AVAILABLE IN FAMILY CENTRE'S LIBRARY

- *The Impact of Family Violence on Children and Adolescents* by Javad H. Kashani and Wesley D. Allen.
- *My Mom Says, A Safety Book for Kids:* By Debbie Milddleton-Hope
- *Reaching out, working together to identify and respond to child victims of abuse* by Pearl Rimer and Betsy Prager
- *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer: This story describes one boy's life in an abusive home.
- *Ted talk:*
https://www.ted.com/talks/leslie_morgan_steiner_why_domestic_violence_victims_don_t_leave?language=en

Please check out The Lethbridge Public Library for additional books on family violence (including e-books and audio books) <http://www.lethlib.ca/>

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>

Family Centre - email: info@famcentre.ca - phone: (403) 320 4232
Suite 225, 200 – 4 Avenue S., Lethbridge Centre, Lethbridge, AB T1J 4C9

- <https://www.calgarywomensshelter.com/>
- <http://dvat.ca/?p=3>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/domestic-violence>
- <https://www.sagesse.org/>
- <https://endingviolencecanada.org/getting-help/>