

# How to talk to someone who abuses their partner

When one partner is hurting the other, it's called **abuse** or **domestic violence**. It can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, controlling their partner's money or behaviour, controlling them emotionally, or coercive control.

**Coercive control** is a pattern of behaviours used to assert control over a person through repeated acts that disempower them in a number of possible ways including through fear for the safety of self or others, isolating them from support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, removing or threatening to remove the victim's rights and liberties, depriving them of independence, resistance, and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

It can be hard to know what to do. This brochure tells you about the warning signs and helps you talk to someone who may be hurting the people who love them.

Anyone can help to stop abuse. Organizations in your community can help people who have been abused as well as people who abuse their partners.

# Warning signs

It may be abuse if one partner:

- often puts their partner down or calls them names
- does all the talking for their partner
- checks up on their partner all the time, even at work
- claims that they are the victim, despite treating their partner disrespectfully
- keeps their partner away from friends and family and other people
- acts like their partner is their property
- controls their partner's money
- lies about their actions to feel better
- acts like they are the most important person in the home
- controls their partner's daily activities.

It may be abuse if one partner:

- makes excuses for their partner's unacceptable behaviour or aggressively defends their partner's behaviour
- is nervous talking when their partner is around
- seems to be sick more often and misses work
- tries to cover up bruises or injuries
- makes excuses at the last minute about why they can't meet you
- seems sad, lonely, or afraid.



# How to talk to someone who is abusive

Sometimes people try to ignore abuse and focus on supporting the person who is being hurt. Sometimes, people try to sympathize with the person hurting their partner.

Both of these situations may make the abuse worse.

Talking to someone who abuses their partner is an important part of stopping the abuse. Services in your community can help you to understand if it is ok to speak to the abusive person. Services in your community can also help someone who hurts their partner or someone who is worried about how they are acting.

If you think that someone is using violence or hurting their partner, you can talk to the person and provide information about services in the community.

You may want to:

- choose the right time and place to talk
- talk about abuse when the person is calm
- be direct and clear about what you have seen
- tell the person that they are responsible for how they act. Avoid making judgmental comments. Don't agree if they try to blame other people for their abusive behaviour
- tell the person that their abusive behaviour needs to stop
- tell them that you are concerned about the safety of their partner and children.

Never argue with someone about their abusive actions. Confronting the person or arguing with them may make the situation more dangerous for their partner. Call the police if you think the person's partner, ex-partner, or their children may not be safe.

People who hurt their partners will often downplay their actions or deny that they have done anything wrong. They may blame the victim. This type of behaviour deflects their own responsibility for their actions, and it's not ok.

The person might deny the abuse. If they do:

- try to keep your conversation focused on your concerns for their family's safety and well-being
- repeat that abuse is never ok
- help the person find ways to get support to change their behaviour.

# If you're unsure about helping

You may think:

- it's none of your business
- you don't know what to say
- you'll make things worse
- it's not serious enough to involve the police
- their partner could hurt you or your family
- they don't really want to leave because they keep going back
- the abusive person, or the person experiencing the abuse, will become angry with you
- both partners are your friends, and you don't want to choose between them
- if they wanted help, they would ask
- it is a private matter.

But know that:

- it could be a matter of life or death
- saying you care and are worried is a good start
- doing nothing could make things worse
- police are trained to respond to domestic violence
- you can speak to the person you are concerned about privately, but in a place where others are nearby if needed
- they may be quite traumatized and having trouble making decisions, but they will know you care
- one person is being abused and lives in fear
- they may be too afraid and ashamed to ask for help
- it isn't "private" when someone is being abused.

Always keep yourself safe. Don't put yourself in danger. If you receive threats, tell the police.

**Call 911 in an emergency.**

## Helping someone who wants to change their behaviour

- Call **211** for information about organizations that can help. Ask about the Men's Helpline, Women's Helpline, or All Genders Helpline.
- Call the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia: **1-855-225-0220**.

**If there is a risk of danger now, call 911.**





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