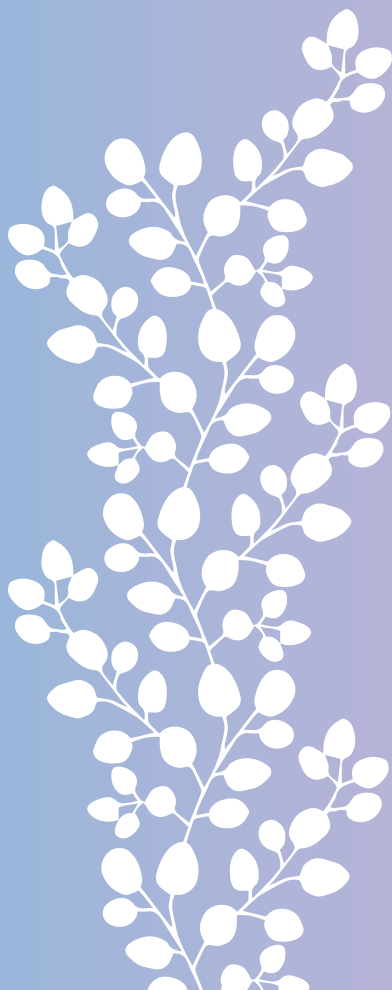
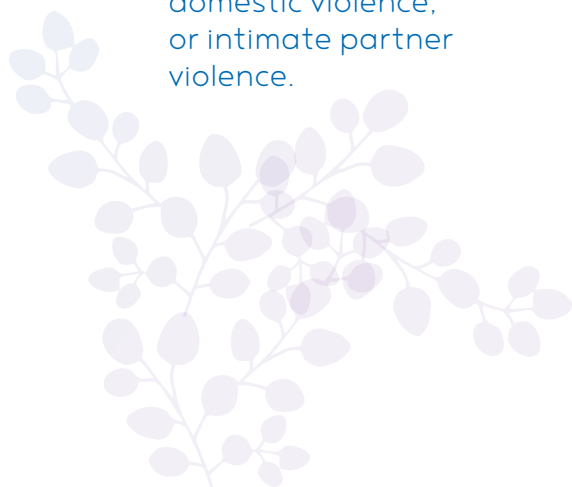


Understanding Abuse





Abuse is also called
family violence,
domestic violence,
or intimate partner
violence.



What is abuse?

Abuse takes many forms. Abuse can be emotional, psychological, social, sexual, financial, and/or physical. A number of these kinds of abuse can occur at the same time. Throughout this book we will be using the term 'abuse'.

abuse

Domestic violence is deliberate and purposeful violence, abuse, and intimidation perpetrated by one person against another in an intimate relationship. It occurs between two persons where one exercises power over the other, causing fear, physical, and/or psychological harm. It may be a single act or a series of acts forming a pattern of abuse. Domestic violence can occur in any relationship, however, women are primarily the victims and men are primarily the perpetrators. Children and young people may experience harm by being exposed to violence in adult relationships, being the direct victims of violence, or a combination of the two.

In an abusive relationship there may be:

Psychological or emotional abuse, such as:

- intimidation and harassment
- threats to harm a person, a pet, or property
- intentionally damaging property
- hurting or killing pets
- keeping a person from having control over their own finances or from making their own decisions
- following or stalking a person, or
- online stalking and harassment.

Verbal abuse, such as:

- yelling and screaming
- name-calling
- making threats, or
- making hurtful criticisms.

Physical abuse, such as:

- pushing
- hitting
- punching
- choking
- kicking
- biting
- forced confinement (not letting someone leave)
- keeping someone from having the necessities of life (for example, food), or
- trying to physically abuse someone.

Sexual abuse, such as:

- unwanted sexual touching
- forcing someone to have sex
- unwanted violence during sex, such as choking a person without their consent, or
- trying to sexually abuse someone.



LEGAL INFO

Some forms of abuse are criminal offences in the Criminal Code, including:

- physical assault, such as hitting, punching, strangling, etc.
- sexual assault
- threats to harm or to kill
- forcibly withholding food and medical treatment
- taking another person's source of income through fraud or threats
- stalking or criminal harassment (creating fear by repeatedly following, communicating, or attempting to communicate with a person)
- forced labour
- forced prostitution (human trafficking)

Healthy relationships

A healthy relationship involves respect and care from both partners.

In a healthy relationship, neither partner should be afraid of the other partner. A healthy relationship is non-violent and involves equality between partners.

We all deserve healthy relationships with our partners.

Negotiation and Fairness
Non-threatening Behaviour
Economic Partnership
Respect
Trust and Support
Shared Responsibility
Responsible Parenting
Honesty and Accountability



In a healthy relationship there is:

Negotiation and Fairness

This means that both partners:

- seek mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict
- accept change
- are willing and open to compromise

Non-threatening Behaviour

This means that both partners:

- talk and act in a way that allows both of them to feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves

Economic Partnership

This means that both partners:

- make money decisions together
- benefit from financial arrangements

Respect

This means that both partners:

- listen to each other openly and without judging
- are emotionally supportive and understanding
- value the other's opinions

Trust and Support

This means that both partners:

- support each other's goals in life
- respect each other's right to their own feelings, friends, activities, and opinions

Shared Responsibility

This means that both partners:

- mutually agree on a fair distribution of work
- make family decisions together

Responsible Parenting

This means that both partners:

- share parental responsibilities
- provide a positive, non-violent role model for the children

Honesty and Accountability

This means that both partners:

- accept responsibility
- take responsibility for past use of violence
- admit being wrong
- communicate openly and truthfully

Is it abuse?

It is rare for a couple not to have an occasional argument. However, sometimes you begin to be afraid of your partner and your behaviour changes because of this fear.

The line between normal conflict and abuse is not always clear. It is not easy for most of us to recognize and accept that we are being abused.

Some people struggle to identify their situation as abusive. You may feel that your partner loves you, because partners who abuse often do express love toward the people they hurt. Remember that anyone can choose not to abuse, and that there are other ways to behave toward the people we love. Everyone has to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

You may feel sorry for your partner, or hope you can change your partner. Perhaps your partner is insecure, has problems, or was abused. There is no excuse for abuse. We all have to learn to feel good about ourselves without putting others down. It doesn't mean you don't love your partner if you want your partner to change and stop abusing.

***Regardless of why someone is abusive,
their behaviour cannot be justified.
Abuse is wrong.***

LEGAL INFO

It is very important to remember that abuse is never acceptable, and physical and sexual abuse are crimes under Canadian law.

It could be abuse if ...

Your partner ...

- gets jealous when others are around
- destroys, or threatens to destroy, your possessions
- uses put-downs, name-calling, or threats
- makes you choose between your friends/family and your partner
- blames you when things go wrong
- pushes you
- hits you
- threatens to take your children
- hits the walls
- yells at you
- harms, or threatens to harm, your pet
- threatens to harm your family members or friends
- threatens suicide or self-harm

If you feel you have to ...

- ask permission to spend money or go out
- take the blame when things go wrong
- "make things right" just for your partner
- do what your partner wants
- make excuses for your partner's behavior

If you feel ...

- afraid to make decisions for fear of your partner's reaction or anger
- isolated from friends, family, and activities
- afraid to express your own opinions or say "no"
- afraid to leave your partner

If the lists above sound familiar to you, you may be experiencing abuse.



Why does abuse happen?

There are many other complex reasons why a partner abuses. A partner may abuse because they:

- learned this behaviour in their own family
- feel it is acceptable for men to control women
- believe abuse is a way to have power
- have low self-esteem/are insecure
- are unemployed or live in poverty
- think that there are few, if any, consequences to their violent acts
- have a mental illness or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, or
- abuse alcohol or drugs

Many factors can influence why people choose to be violent. For example, traditional gender roles may lead family members to believe the man is the legal head of the household and should control the family. There is no easy answer to why abuse happens.

Some men are brought up to believe that it is okay to use force to control their female partners or solve family problems.

Some women report feeling like they are being treated like property, belonging first to a father or other male relative and later to a husband.

Traditional gender roles

can also influence the dynamics of abuse in same-gender relationships and relationships in which one or more of the partners are transgender. LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) women, for example, may be shamed by their partners for being too feminine or too masculine, for not “passing” according to socially accepted gender norms, for being out, for not being out, or a number of other reasons. See page 26 for more discussion about how domestic abuse can impact LGBTQ partners.

Many of us grew up in families where there was a lot of conflict or where violence was common. Violence is on television, in movies, in video games, in advertisements, and online. It is often considered normal to be dominant and even to be violent, especially for men.

Social expectations can play a role in abuse. Both men and women may feel pressured to act out traditional gender roles. Social expectations can lead people to believe that it is acceptable for men to be 'tough' and abusive, and for women to be peacekeepers who make sure everyone in the home is happy. These gender roles can make men feel pressured to show their masculinity through controlling their female partners.

Gender roles can also make it seem that a power imbalance in relationships is normal and acceptable. The pressures of traditional gender roles often lead women to be blamed if their home is not harmonious, even if their partner is choosing to abuse. These pressures can also lead to women blaming themselves.

People who abuse often believe that ending the abuse is not their responsibility. They often blame the victim. They might say, "she made me" or "she drove me to it".

Abusive partners sometimes confuse abusive behaviour with expressing anger. Anger is an emotion that everyone experiences, and it can be expressed in healthy ways. Abuse is never acceptable.

Sometimes actions are in self-defense or an immediate response to being abused. If you respond to abuse by yelling, putting your partner down, slapping, or using aggressive behavior, it does not in any way excuse your partner's abusive behavior.

No one has the right to abuse others.

Is there a pattern to abuse?

In an abusive relationship, your partner might only be abusive on a rare occasion, or might be abusive to you only once. Other abusive partners are abusive many times during the relationship. Abuse and violence can start early in some relationships. In other relationships, the abuse may start later—sometimes during pregnancy. Violence and abuse may be used to maintain power and control over you. You may notice that there is a pattern to this behaviour.

It could look like this:

- Tension and anger start to build up. Sometimes there is an argument between you and your partner.
- Your partner physically abuses you or makes threats about becoming violent.
- Then there is a cool-down, make-up, or calm stage. Your partner may apologize and promise that it will never happen again. Your partner may reinforce these statements with “quick fixes” such as buying you gifts, dinner, or flowers. Often these actions are focused on making the person who abused feel better rather than trying to make you feel better.

Alternatively, some abusive partners begin to take responsibility and engage in long-term solutions such as seeking help from family, friends, or counselors.

If a partner engages in “quick fixes” the changes are often temporary. In some cases, the tension builds up again, and the abuse starts over.

Over time the abuse may increase in intensity. Even if your abusive partner does take responsibility through engaging in long-term change, changes may take time. Sometimes the abuse happens again in spite of the progress your partner has made. You have to decide for yourself if you want to continue to work on, or leave, your relationship.

There is a pattern
to abuse...

Tension and anger

Abuse

Quick fix

...but you can
step out of the cycle.

The effects of abuse

People who are abused often live with constant fear, worry, guilt, and self-blame. If you have experienced abuse from your partner, you may:

- begin to feel worthless, helpless, or ashamed
- feel like a failure
- feel isolated and degraded.

The effects of emotional or psychological abuse cannot be seen, but can be just as harmful as physical abuse. If you have experienced abuse of any kind, you may feel that no one could ever love you. You may feel stupid, ugly, and alone. You may begin to lose your self-respect. You may begin to use alcohol or drugs to escape.

You may feel like the hardest thing is feeling the loss of:

- your self-respect
- respect for your partner
- someone to be with
- a sense of hope
- happiness
- love
- companionship
- the feeling of safety that a relationship can provide
- family and friends
- independence
- your future goals and dreams
- laughter and joy
- your own identity
- freedom
- the ability to make decisions

RESOURCES

Even if you are not ready to make changes, sometimes it helps to talk. **Transition houses** are there to offer this support. Call 1 855 225 0220, or your local transition house (women's shelter), if you want to just talk.

For information about children and abuse, see page 105 of this book.

Remember

*There is no excuse
for abuse. Abuse of
any kind is never okay.*

*The abuse is not your
fault. No one deserves
to be abused.*

*It takes a lot of courage
to face these issues.*

*You are not alone. There
are people willing to help.*



Challenges to accessing support

The following sections are written about women who have experienced abuse. This is because of the reality that women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. However, many of the following points may be equally valid for men and non-binary people (people who don't identify with the gender binary) as well.

Women who have experienced abuse may have different experiences. Their stories may not be same, but there are often similarities. Many women feel isolated and alone. They may feel responsible for their partner's abuse and emotional state. Sometimes women blame themselves for the abuse.



Women who have experienced abuse may keep the abuse a secret because they fear that if they tell anyone they will:

- break up their family
- lose their children
- lose their support and social networks, friends, family and community
- bring dishonour and shame to the family
- have to live in poverty
- make their partner angry and/or retaliate.

Women from many diverse and different backgrounds may be abused.

Women who experience abuse may:

- have different levels of education and income
- be different ages
- have different abilities
- have different sexual orientations and gender identities
- be from different spiritual groups, cultures, or races.

If you have experienced abuse, you can always call a Transition House hotline and just talk: 1 855 225 0220

SAFETY

Women from different racial or cultural groups, immigrant and migrant women, lesbian and queer women, bisexual women, transgender women, women living in poverty, and women who are disabled often face additional challenges in leaving abuse. Perhaps a woman's faith or tradition says she must stay at home with her family, even if she is being abused.

Women may have had bad experiences with the law, the medical profession, the justice system, or government agencies. Language barriers, racism, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, fear of being deported, isolation, and disbelief are just a few of the additional barriers to reporting and dealing with abuse.

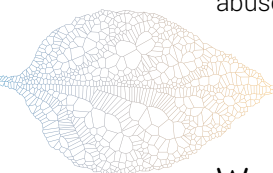
Women from different backgrounds and identity groups are impacted by abuse differently. It is important to recognize how factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and ability can make leaving abuse and finding support more difficult.

Women Living in Poverty

Women living in poverty are more vulnerable to abuse and may face additional challenges in leaving abuse. For example, women living in poverty may be reluctant to leave an abusive partner because they feel they do not have the resources to live on their own. If they have children, they may also have concerns about being able to support their children without the abusive partner's income.

Sometimes women living in poverty have more than one job to make ends meet. This can make accessing support services difficult. For example, getting time off to see a lawyer or support person may be a challenge. Sometimes not having money for transportation to support agencies can also be a barrier.

Poverty can make relationships difficult because there are pressures on both partners to get by on limited resources. Though there is never an excuse for abuse, poverty can create emotional and psychological stress that can fuel abuse and make it worse.



Women in Rural Communities

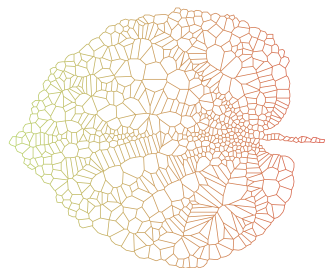
Women living in rural communities may also face barriers in leaving abuse and finding support. Rural women often do not tell anyone about the abuse they are suffering because it can be hard to stay anonymous in a small community.

In a small community, there may also be fewer support services for women. They may need to seek support outside their community, which can be difficult if there are no reliable and affordable transportation services in the area.

RESOURCES

To find support and assistance in your area, see the resources starting on page 125 of this book.

If they leave their community, rural women risk being isolated from the support of friends, neighbours, and family. They may also have to remove their children from their school, their grandparents and other family members, and their community.

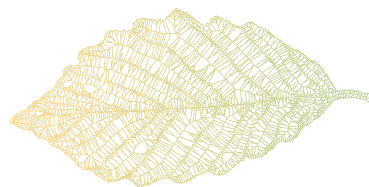


Women with Disabilities

Women who have physical and intellectual disabilities are often more vulnerable to abuse than other women. Women with disabilities may also encounter a number of obstacles in leaving abuse and trying to access support services.

A woman with a disability may find that her abusive partner uses her disability in order to be abusive. For example, her abusive partner may threaten to destroy assistive devices or make other threats to stop her from leaving. Her partner may make her feel worthless or that the abuse is her fault. She could also feel that she would be losing an essential support person by leaving her abusive partner.

Women with disabilities may have difficulty explaining the dynamics of abuse to police and service providers. They may also encounter physical obstacles when trying to access services (for example, if a service she needs is not wheelchair accessible).



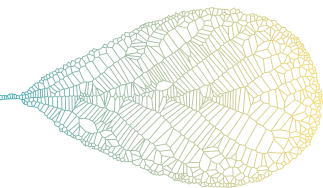
African Nova Scotian Women

African Nova Scotia women may also face particular challenges in leaving abusive partners and finding the help they need. For example, historical and present discrimination and experiences of racism have resulted in many African Nova Scotians not trusting the police and the justice system.

Some African Nova Scotian women may worry that reporting abuse will expose their partners to racism from police and the justice system. They may also worry that reporting abuse will keep alive stereotypes that African Canadian men are violent.

For many African Nova Scotian people, extended family and kinship are important. Some African Nova Scotian women may fear having to leave their community and family support network if they report abuse and seek help.

See page 132 for resources for African Nova Scotian women.



First Nations Women

Women in First Nations Communities also face unique barriers in leaving abuse and accessing support services. First Nations women may be reluctant to leave abuse because it can mean leaving a community where they have kinship and cultural roots.

First Nations women may also worry about reinforcing stereotypes and negative perceptions about First Nations people and family violence.

First Nations women may have fears that staff at support services will not understand their cultural needs. They may also be reluctant to interact with police or the justice system because of past and current experiences of oppression and racism by the police and justice system.

RESOURCES

Addressing Mi'kmaq Family Violence Family Violence and Aboriginal Communities: Building Our Knowledge and Direction through Community Based Research and Community Forums, May 2011, report of the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum Justice Working committee. tripartiteforum.pinwheeldesign.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Tripartite-Family-Violence.pdf

Mi'kmaw Family Healing Centres (MFHC), located in Waycobah and Millbrook First Nations, deliver treatment and prevention services to all 13 Mi'kmaw First Nation Bands of Nova Scotia. MFHC's Board of Directors are the 13 Bands and a Representative from the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association. MFHCs operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

All of the counsellors and support staff are committed to assisting Mi'kmaw women, men, and children to develop and maintain a healthy and violence-free lifestyle. Families receive treatment in their own communities with counsellors who are knowledgeable of their language, values, and lifestyle.

RESOURCES

When women, men, and children are referred to off-reserve programs, the counsellor will ensure that the family member successfully accesses and receives services. This type of holistic programming is well established and practices by MFHC. The **Whole-Family Treatment Program** is based on the thinking and recommendations of the local and national First Nations community.

Services:

- Protection, safety, shelter, and basic life necessities to women and children
- 24-hour crisis support telephone line
- Support and information to women, men, and children to enable them to develop and maintain a healthful and violence-free lifestyle
- Individual and Group Counselling for women, men, and children
- Outreach services to women, men, and children
- Referral and follow-up to other social services programs
- Community Education in Family Violence Intervention, Treatment, and Prevention.

Waycobah Family Healing Centre
Phone 902-756-3440

Millbrook Family Healing Centre
Phone 902-893-8483

The Native Council of Nova Scotia serves Mi'kmaq/ Aboriginal peoples residing off-reserve in Nova Scotia throughout traditional Mi'kmaq territory, and operates the **Welkaqnik Next Step Shelter**, a second stage housing program. A full time Community Support Counsellor is also available to assist clients to gain perspective on their situation and consider alternatives and options.

Welkaqnik Management Committee
Toll-free 1-800-565-4372
ncns.ca

The Native Social Counselling Agency assist off-reserve Aboriginal clients facing social problems and conditions, and who are in need of counselling referral services, with confidential support referral services.

N.C.N.S. Community Support Counsellor

P.O. Box 1320, Truro, N.S. B2N 5N2

Phone 1-902-895-1738

ncns.ca/programs-services/native-social-counselling-agency

For additional resources, see pages 150–151 of this book.

Immigrant Women

Women who are new to Canada also face challenges in leaving abusive relationships. Living in a new country can result in isolation from family and friends, language barriers, and cultural differences that can create difficulties for immigrant women who have experienced abuse.

Women who are new to Canada may not understand Canadian laws and their rights as women living in Canada. Some women may also have concerns about being on their own without male protection.

Newcomer women may also worry about how leaving an abusive relationship could affect their immigration status. This fear is common for many immigrant women, but especially for women who have conditional permanent resident status.

As of 2017, the Government of Canada no longer requires spouses or partners of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to live with their sponsor in order to keep their permanent resident status.

If you receive your Confirmation of Permanent Residence on or after April 18, 2017 and it indicates that you “must cohabit in a conjugal relationship with your sponsor or partner for a continuous period of 2 years after the day on which you became a Permanent Resident”, this requirement no longer applies to you.

In Canada, abuse is not tolerated. If you are a sponsored spouse or partner and are experiencing abuse or neglect by your sponsor or their family, you do not have to remain in that abusive situation.

You can call **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada** at 1-888-242-2100 in order to request an exception to the two year condition. Whatever you say during this phone call will be kept confidential.

The Immigrant Settlement Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) is a leading community organization that welcomes immigrants to Nova Scotia. ISANS offers services and creates opportunities for immigrants. For more information, visit: isans.ca.

For information on **custody and access, and separation and divorce**, visit:

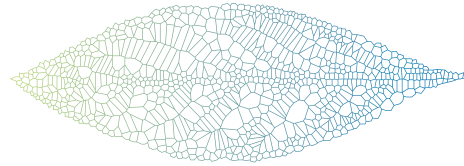
www.legalinfo.org/i-have-a-legal-question/family-law/

Fact sheets are available in five languages.

You can call **811** for **health information and advice**.

Services provided in over 125 languages.

See page 145 for additional resources for immigrant women and migrant women.



immigrants

People who have moved to live in Canada and have Permanent Resident status such as Government-Assisted Refugees, Privately Sponsored Refugees, Economic and Family class immigrants, and Provincial Nominees.

migrants

People who have moved to Canada and do not have permanent status such as Temporary Foreign Workers, Refugee Claimants, and International Students and their families. They are eligible for different services. Immigration status is a crucial social determinant of physical and mental health.

LGBTQ

People often assume that domestic abuse primarily affects cisgender women in heterosexual relationships. This is not true. Lesbians, gay, bisexual, non-binary, transgender, and queer people experience abuse as often, and in some cases more often, than cisgender women in heterosexual relationships.

cis-gender

A word to describe someone whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth. This is different from someone who is transgender, whose gender identity is different than the gender they were assigned at birth.

non-binary

A word to describe people who do not fit the traditional gender binary of men and women. They may identify as having no gender, more than one gender, or moving between genders.

queer

Though this word has historically been used as a slur, many LGBTQ people have reclaimed this word to describe themselves. Queer can mean many things to different people, but is generally used by those who fall outside of the norms of gender and sexuality.

Bisexual women in particular experience domestic abuse at a much higher rate than average. This can be because of a number of reasons, such as a bisexual woman's partner feeling threatened by her bisexual identity and wanting to control her.

In some cases LGBTQ people who are in abusive relationships do not tell anyone about the abuse because they fear they won't be believed or because they fear their partner may use their sexual orientation or gender identity in an abusive way. For example, they may fear that their abusive partner will expose their sexuality or gender identity to their families, friends, employers, or community.

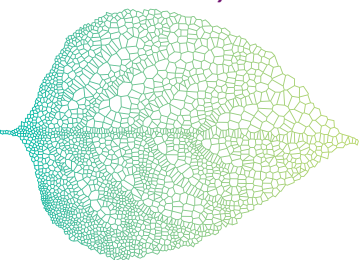
Women who are in relationships with other women may worry about being dismissed by others because of the false assumption that only men abuse. Women who are in same-gender relationships may be impacted by the false belief that violence between people of the same gender is equal so both partners are equally responsible. This same is true for men who are in relationships with other men.

Transgender and non-binary people may be afraid to leave or report abuse because they do not know if support services such as transition houses have transgender-inclusive policies and staff who are trained to be sensitive to their needs and concerns. In the Halifax area, Adsum House, Alice Housing, and Avalon Sexual Assault Centre have formal transgender-inclusive policies.

See the resources starting on page 148 of this book for contact information.

Other organizations in Halifax and other parts of the province may also be welcoming and supportive. If you are a transgender or non-binary person leaving abuse, it can be helpful to talk to members of your community who might know from their own experiences which services are well equipped to provide a safe, supportive space for you.

*It is important to remember that abuse
is abuse regardless of your sexual
orientation or gender identity.
No matter who you are or who you love,
you do not deserve to be abused.*



Remember

*There is no excuse for abuse.
Abuse of any kind is never okay.
The abuse is not your fault.
No one deserves to be abused.
It takes a lot of courage to face
these issues.
You are not alone.
There are people willing to help.*

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Barbara Cottrell, writer

Crystal Sutherland, editor and project manager

Allison Smith (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia),
editing support and legal review

Kathy Kaulbach, graphic designer

Etta Moffatt, design consultant

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Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

PO Box 745, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2T3

Phone: 902-424-8662,
Toll-free 1-800-565-8662

Fax: 902-424-0573

E-mail: women@novascotia.ca

Website: women.gov.ns.ca

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