



# Neighbours, Friends & Families

## How you can identify and help women at risk of abuse

Are you worried that a friend or family member is being abused? Are you worried that a friend or family member is abusive or violent to his wife, girlfriend or partner? This program can help you learn about the warning signs of woman abuse and how you may be able to talk to about it with your loved ones.

Neighbours, Friends and Families is a campaign to help people learn about the signs of violence against women.

We can all do something to prevent violence against women. You can reach out to organizations in your community that support abused women and those that help men who have been abusive.

## Warning Signs of Abuse

Sometimes we do not know what to do or how to talk about violence or abuse when it is happening to someone we care about. You may worry about making the situation worse. By learning more about the warning signs and risk factors of woman abuse, you may be able to help.

**If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to talk to someone about how you can help:**

**He** puts her down  
**He** checks up on her – reads her email, checks her phone or monitors her online  
**He** blames her for their problems and seems depressed  
**He** tries to keep her away from you and her family members  
**He** acts as if he owns her  
**He** lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities  
**He** says he is shamed by her because she does not behave properly  
**He** acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home  
**He** acts like a bully

**She** makes excuses for his abusive behaviour  
**She** becomes aggressive and angry  
**She** is nervous talking when he is there  
**She** seems to be sick more often and misses work  
**She** tries to cover her bruises  
**She** makes excuses at the last minute or cancels plans with you or her friends  
**She** seems sad, lonely, withdrawn  
**She** is afraid  
**She** uses more drugs or alcohol to cope  
**She** does not have her own money or needs permission from him to spend small amounts

## Signs of High Risk for Domestic Violence

**He** has access to her and her and the children  
**He** has access to weapons  
**He** has a history of violence with her or others  
**He** has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him  
**He** says “If I can’t have her, no one will”  
**He** threatens to harm her children, her pets or her property  
**He** has threatened to kill himself  
**He** has hit her or strangled her  
**He** is going through major life changes (e.g. Job, separation, depression)  
**He** is convinced she is seeing someone else  
**He** blames her for ruining his life  
**He** doesn’t seek support  
**He** watches her actions, listens to her telephone conversations, sees her emails and follows her  
**He** has trouble keeping a job  
**He** takes drugs or drinks every day  
**He** has no respect for the law

**She** has just separated or is planning to leave  
**She** fears for her life and for her children’s safety  
**She** does not believe the risk is high even if there are warning signs  
**She** is in a high conflict custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship  
**She** is involved in another relationship  
**She** has injuries from violent incidents  
**She** has no access to a phone or transportation  
**She** lives in a remote or rural area  
**She** does not speak English  
**She** is not a legal resident of Canada  
**She** does not have contact with friends or family or lives far away from them  
**She** has completed a Danger Assessment which shows a high risk.

Transition house staff, victim services, police and some other service providers may use a risk assessment tool to look for warning signs of higher risk.

Research also shows that most victims of domestic violence do not report the violence to a formal agency. Only one in four Nova Scotian women who experience spousal violence reported it to police. Only one in three women reported it to a service-providing agency. *NS Domestic Violence Action Plan, 2010*

*Most research about relationship violence looks at heterosexual relationships. Abuse also happens in lesbian, gay or transgender relationships. These suggestions apply in all types of intimate partner violence relationships.*

## Some ways to support her

**Talk** to her about what you see and tell her that you are worried about her.

**Remind** her that you believe her and that the violence is not her fault.

If she is thinking about leaving, it is **important to keep this secret from him. This can be a very dangerous time.**

**Encourage** her not to confront her partner.

**Offer** to take care of her children while she goes to appointments or meets with service providers.

**Offer** your home as a safe place for 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.

**Call 1-855-225-0220** or a transition house or shelter for abused women to talk about other ways you might be able to help or to get help with safety planning.

## If she denies the violence or does not want your help

**Remind** her that she can talk to you when she is ready. **Be patient.**

**Don't** become angry or frustrated with her decisions.

**Understand** that she may be afraid or may be making decisions she thinks will keep her safer.

**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**, remind her that you are concerned about the children's safety and emotional well-being. She may be more willing to recognize her situation if she recognizes her children may also be in danger.

**Child protection staff members are trained to assess children's safety.  
We are all responsible to report children at risk.**

## Overcoming your hesitation to help

### Things you might be worried about

**You** feel it's none of your business

**You** might make things worse

**You** don't know if it's serious enough to involve police

**You** are afraid his violence will turn to you or your family

**You** think she doesn't really want to leave because she keeps going back

**You** feel that both partners are your friends

**You** believe that if she wanted help, she would ask for it

**You** don't want him to get in trouble.

### Things to do or think about

It could be a matter of life or death.

Violence is everyone's business.

Saying you care and are concerned is a good start

**Doing nothing could make things worse.**

Talk to someone who can help you safely plan your approach. **Don't confront him.** Tell him you care about him. **Let the police know if you receive threats.**

**Violence in relationships is complex. There are many reasons why the relationship stays together.**

**One friend is being abused and lives in fear, stopping the violence will be good for both of them.**

**She may be too afraid and ashamed to ask for help**

**Violence often gets worse over time. If he does not change, the trouble could be worse or someone could be seriously harmed.**

**Always keep yourself safe. Don't get in the middle of an assault. Call the police in an emergency.**

**To talk to someone who can help, call 1-855-225-0220**

**Or contact a transition house** or shelter for abused women in your area: [www.thans.ca](http://www.thans.ca)

**For more information and resources about domestic violence** in Nova Scotia, please visit: [women.novascotia.ca/our-priorities/womens-safety](http://women.novascotia.ca/our-priorities/womens-safety)

**For information about family law** in Nova Scotia, visit: [www.nsfamilylaw.ca](http://www.nsfamilylaw.ca)