

Help Starts Here.

Help is available if you or someone you know is a victim of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is any form of violent or abusive behaviour that happens during a relationship or after such a relationship ends.

Being in a relationship does not give anyone the right to be violent or abusive. Yet domestic violence happens in all types of relationships: dating, common law, and marriage. Violent and abusive behaviour is detrimental to victims and families and in some cases, the violence is life threatening. Incidents of violence or abuse can happen once or many times during the relationship and after the relationship ends.

Domestic violence may not include just direct physical or sexual violence, but also other forms of abuse in an attempt to control or intimidate someone. Examples of this can include: hurting or threatening to hurt a pet, threatening to hurt someone else, threatening to commit suicide, destroying property or stealing money. While many types of domestic violence are criminal offences, all types of domestic violence—physical and sexual assaults, threats, harassment and other forms of emotional abuse, and financial abuse or exploitation—are harmful. If you or someone you know has been or is in a violent or abusive relationship, **help is available.**

Can it happen to me?

It can happen to anyone. While it is more common that women experience domestic violence, it happens to people of different ages, abilities, and cultural and economic backgrounds. It happens to females and males, regardless of sexual orientation.

Violence or abuse can happen at the beginning of a relationship, after many months or years, or even after the relationship has ended. And it can happen whether or not drinking or other substances are involved.

Abusive partners often blame their actions on the victim. Remember that **domestic violence is the fault of the person who commits it.**

What are the effects of domestic violence?

Victims of domestic violence may experience a range of emotions. Initially, some may be shocked by what happened, and find it hard to grasp how someone they love could abuse them. Other emotions may include shame, fear, anxiety, confusion, anger, depression, isolation, and grief. A sense of violation, powerlessness, and loss of trust are

experienced by many victims. Victims of domestic violence may withdraw from others. Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem are very common.

Emotional distress can have other ill health effects, such as stomach trouble, headaches, or sleeping or eating problems. Physical violence can result in bruises, broken bones, or other serious physical injuries. Sexual violence can result in sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy as well as physical and emotional injuries.

Victims who have children may experience additional emotional distress because of the effects on their children.

Children's experience

Children who witness violent or abusive behaviour against a parent may exhibit various emotions such as anxiety, confusion, fear and anger, and some may act out aggressively. How children react may be influenced by many things, for example, their developmental level, the nature of the violence or abuse, whether there are other family problems, and the support they receive within and outside the family.



Why don't some victims seek help?

Some victims of domestic violence don't ask for help because they fear for their safety or the safety of their children. Victims may also be afraid their children will be taken away. They may be financially dependent on their partner. Some victims may fear losing their home or having to move to another community. Some may have immigration concerns.

Victims may not know their rights or how to get help. They may worry about not being believed or understood. Some have a more difficult time seeking help because of social or physical isolation from others. Victims of domestic violence may have a strong emotional attachment to their partner. Some may minimize the violence or believe things will improve. Some keep quiet because of family or community pressure.

Help is available for victims of domestic violence. If you or someone you know is in a violent relationship, **tell someone you trust and find out what you can do to get help.**

What about reporting to the police?

You may wish to report domestic violence to the police. Involving the police and justice system is critical to becoming safe and stopping the violence. It may also play an important role in the healing process. A support person can be with you when you report a crime to the police.

You can get help from victim services and other agencies, whether or not the police are involved. If you are unsure about reporting to the police, you may find that talking with a victim service worker helps in making this decision.

When Children Need Protection

If you believe that a child (a person under 19) needs protection, you have a legal duty to report the matter to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (more about this in the next section, under B.C.'s *Child, Family and Community Service Act*). This may result in a report being made to the police.

What are the laws related to domestic violence?

The *Criminal Code*

Many types of domestic violence are criminal offences:

- physical violence — e.g. assault, assault causing bodily harm, assault using a weapon, aggravated assault, forcible confinement;
- sexual violence — e.g. sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, sexual exploitation (e.g., assaulting a person with a disability);
- emotional abuse — e.g. criminal harassment (stalking), uttering threats, harassing telephone calls, intimidation;
- property or financial abuse — e.g. mischief (e.g., destruction of property), theft, fraud.

In addition to criminal offences, the *Criminal Code* contains protective provisions such as peace bonds and conditions of release. These provisions may improve the safety of victims of domestic violence and their children by setting out certain conditions the abuser must follow (e.g. no contact with the victim).

B.C.'s *Family Relations Act*

The *Family Relations Act* contains protective provisions that allow courts to issue restraining orders. Restraining orders, like peace bonds, may improve the safety of victims and their children by setting out conditions the abuser must follow.

B.C.'s laws for victims

Victims of crime have rights. The *Victims of Crime Act* sets out victims' rights to be treated with dignity and respect and to obtain information.

The *Crime Victim Assistance Act* provides for benefits to help with recovery from injuries and other costs resulting from violent crime.

B.C.'s *Child, Family and Community Service Act*

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* is aimed at



Help Starts Here.

Information for Victims of Crime

protecting children through various measures, including family support services and services to children who witness family violence. The Act sets out the circumstances in which a child protection report must be made. This includes specific circumstances in which a child (anyone under 19) has been, or is likely to be: harmed by the child's parent; or harmed by someone else and the child's parent is unable or unwilling to protect the child. A child protection social worker determines the most appropriate response to the report. This may include, among other things, making a report to the police where appropriate.

The **Helpline for Children (310-1234)** is the place to call to make a report concerning a child who may need protection or to ask questions about reporting.

Where can I get help?

Police

Police respond to reports of possible criminal offences or from people who are in immediate danger. They investigate offences and make arrests where appropriate. Police apply for peace bonds to protect you if you have good reason to believe that someone will harm you or your children. Police also provide you with information about other agencies that may be able to help.

Victim Services

Victim services are located in community agencies or police stations. Services include emotional support, justice system information, safety planning, referrals to counselling and other services and support to victims going to court. Victim services also help you by providing information and application forms for crime victim assistance benefits and victim notification.

Victims who are injured from violent crime can apply to the Crime Victim Assistance Program for benefits under the Crime Victim Assistance Act. Victims who want to be notified about changes in the status of the accused/offender can register for notification with the Victim Safety Unit.

The **VictimLINK line (1-800-563-0808)** provides information and referrals to all victims, as well as immediate crisis response to victims of domestic violence.

Other Services

Health clinics and hospitals provide emergency and longer-term services to help victims of domestic violence recover from physical and psychological trauma. BC NurseLine provides telephone access to health information and advice from registered nurses.

Transition houses and safe homes provide temporary, safe housing for victims of domestic violence and their children.

Counselling services for victims of domestic violence and their children are provided by community agencies, including Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs and Children who Witness Abuse Programs. Child protection and family support services are provided through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Child, youth, and family services are also provided by various community agencies.

In addition, some community agencies provide health, information, or advocacy services tailored for persons with disabilities, men, women, specific age groups, cultural backgrounds or sexual orientation.

Various legal services are available to you if you need legal assistance in divorce or custody matters, or you need to obtain a restraining order. The Lawyer Referral Service helps you find a lawyer in your community. Legal aid, available through the Legal Services Society, provides free legal advice and representation to you if you are eligible.



VictimLINK (1-800-563-0808) can connect you to a network of community and government resources, including social, health, and justice resources such as victim services, counselling resources, and transition houses.

*Contact information for specific services is provided in the **Resources** section at the end of this information sheet.*

Steps to take if you need help

- If you or your children are not in a safe place, go to one. To find a transition house or safe home, look in your phone book under emergency numbers, or call VictimLINK.
- If you or your children are in immediate danger or need urgent medical attention, contact the police or ambulance services, by calling 911 or the emergency number for your community.
- Tell someone you trust what happened. Allow a friend or family member to provide emotional support or practical help to you.
- Contact victim services by calling VictimLINK. Victim services can help you directly and can also refer you to counselling and other services.
- Go to a hospital, a walk-in clinic, or your doctor as soon as possible after being physically injured or sexually assaulted. Even if the assault is not recent, it may be important to go for a checkup.
- If you want to contact the police but the situation is not urgent, call the non-emergency number for police in your community.
- If you have questions about domestic violence, or your rights, don't hesitate to ask a victim service worker.

Resources

BC NurseLine

- Phone: toll free 1-866-215-4700, 24 hours every day
- Deaf or hard of hearing: toll free 1-866-889-4700
- Translation services in over 130 languages on request

Crime Victim Assistance Program

- Phone: toll free 1-866-660-3888
- E-mail: SGCrimeVictimAssistanceProgram@gov.bc.ca

Helpline for Children

- Phone: 310-1234 (no area code required), 24 hours every day
- TTD (Telephone Device for the Deaf): toll free 1-866-660-0505

Lawyer Referral Service

- Phone: (604) 687-3221 or toll free 1-800-663-1919

Legal Services Society (LSS Call Centre and LawLINE)

- Phone: (604) 408-2172 or toll free 1-866-577-2525
- TTY (Teletypewriter): (604) 601-6236 or toll free 1-877-991-2299

Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs and Children Who Witness Abuse Programs

- Phone: through VictimLINK toll free 1-800-563-0808 (see below)
- Website: www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/womens_services/stopping-violence/index.htm

Victim Safety Unit

- Phone: (604) 660-0316 or toll free 1-877-315-8822
- E-mail: vsusg@gov.bc.ca

VictimLINK (Victim Services Information and Referrals)

- Phone: toll free 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day
- TTY (Teletypewriter): through Information Service Vancouver's TTY service at (604) 875-0885 (collect calls accepted)
- Multi-lingual

Please note: *This document provides general information only. It is not intended to provide legal information or advice.*

