

How to help someone who has an abusive partner

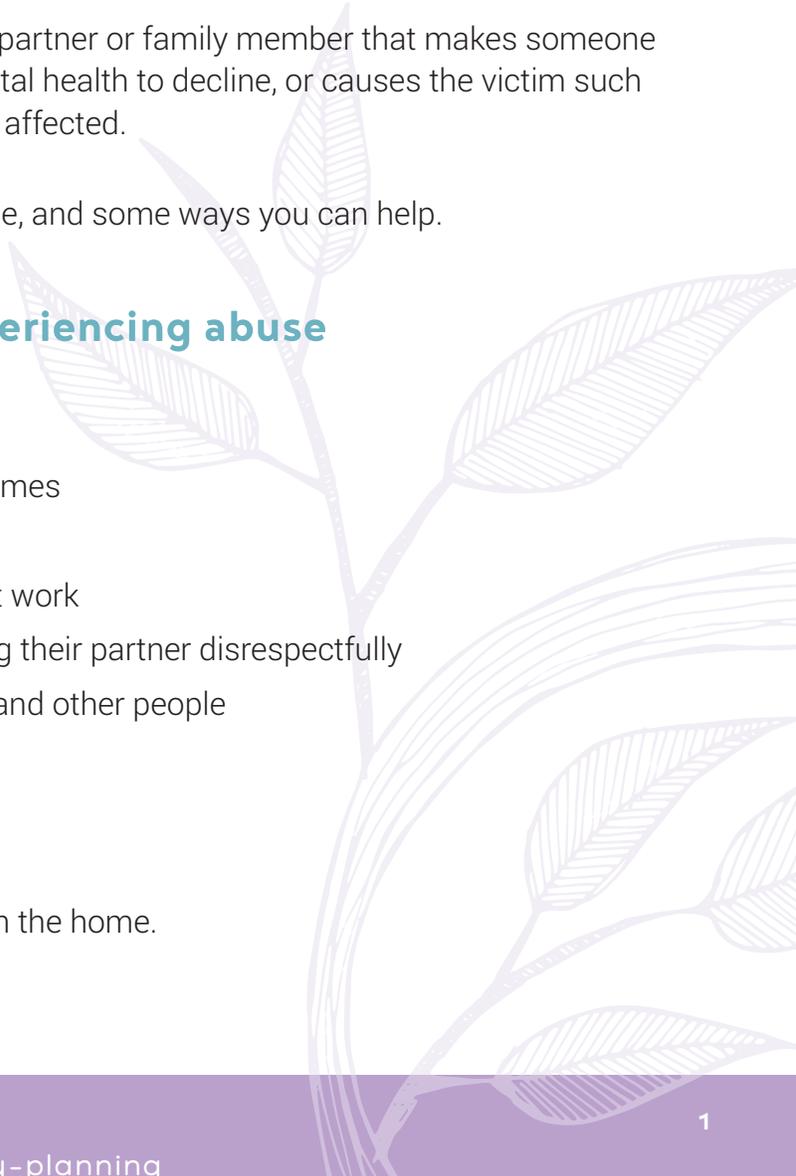
You may know someone whose partner is abusing them. They may be your neighbour, friend or family member. It's hard to know what to do or how to talk about it. You may not know where to start, or you may worry you will make the situation worse.

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 behaviour by a current or former partner or family member that makes someone fear they will be physically harmed, causes their mental health to decline, or causes the victim such distress that their day-to-day activities are negatively affected.

This brochure gives you some warning signs of abuse, and some ways you can help.

Warning signs someone may be experiencing abuse



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, family and other people
- treats their partner like property
- takes control of their partner's money
- lies to make themselves look good
- acts like they are the most important person in the home.

It may be abuse if one partner:

- makes excuses for their partner's behaviour or aggressively defends their partner's behaviour
- is inattentive or distracted
- 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.

Signs of a high risk of danger

The danger may be greater if the abusive partner:

- has access to the children
- has access to weapons
- has a history of hurting people
- has threatened to harm or kill their partner if they leave
- threatens to harm the other partner's children, pets, or property
- threatens to kill themselves
- chokes/strangles the other partner
- is jealous about the other partner
- watches the other partner closely, listens to their telephone conversations, reads their emails, or follows them
- has trouble keeping a job
- takes drugs or drinks every day
- has no respect for the law.

Situations that increase the chance of serious harm

It is more dangerous if:

- the couple have just separated, or if one partner is planning to leave
- they are fighting over parenting time or access to the children, or one has children from another relationship

- the abused partner fears for their life and their children's safety
- the person experiencing abuse cannot see that their situation may be dangerous
- one partner is involved in another relationship
- the abused partner has no access to a phone or money
- one partner does not speak English, or is not yet a legal resident of Canada
- they live in a remote area
- the abused partner has no friends or family nearby.

Some people are at higher risk for violence and abuse due to discrimination and other barriers. This includes women under 25, women with a disability, Indigenous women, Black women, immigrant women, and trans and non-binary people.

Ways to help

Talk to them about what you see and tell them that you are concerned, and:

- If they talk about their partner's violence, tell them you believe them, and that it is not their fault.
- Encourage them not to confront their partner if they are planning to leave. Tell them how a [safety plan](#) can help.
- Offer to look after their children while they get help.
- Encourage them to pack a small bag with important items, and keep it stored at your home in case they need it.
- Call the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia Support Line any time of day, any day of the week. In an emergency, call 911.

They may deny that their partner is hurting them. If they do:

- let them know they can talk to you any time
- respect their decisions: don't become angry or frustrated. They may be afraid, or not ready to take the next steps. Many people at risk want the relationship to continue and hope their partner will get help to end the abuse
- try to understand they may feel ashamed and may have trouble asking for this help
- offer to go with them if they want more information or support
- if they have children, let them know you are worried about the children's safety and emotional well-being.

If you're unsure about helping

You may think:

- it's none of your business
- you don't know what to say
- you might 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
- they will become angry with you
- both partners are your friends
- if they wanted help, they would ask for it
- 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
- someone you know 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. Tell the police if you receive threats.

Call 911 in an emergency.

If you need help

You can get help in Nova Scotia any time of the day, any day of the week:

- 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](tel:1-855-225-0220)

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



Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
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Neighbours, Friends & Families