

# DEFINING SEXUAL, PHYSICAL, VERBAL AND ECONOMIC ABUSE & THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN ASSISTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE A2J SHEETS



These A2J Sheets were made possible thanks to the financial support of the Department of Justice Canada and the Government of Canada through the Family Violence - Justice Partnership and Innovation Program.

# A2J SHEETS

No one every remembers all they have learned in a video capsule, even less so in a legal video capsule (us included!)

We learn and retain information better the more ways we interact with it (audio, visual, written...).

That's why we have created these handy A2J sheets (aka Access to Justice sheets) to help you remember the key information mentioned during our video capsules.

We suggest you print this sheet (or have the digital version open), watch the video capsule, take notes and highlight key points along the way.

Make sure to keep a copy of this sheet in a safe spot (not an obscure one you won't remember in five minutes!) so you never again have to question:

- o The basics of the cycle of abuse and red flags to watch out for in relationships.
- o The basics of sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, psychological and economic abuse.
- o The different ways to get help and how a social worker can help you.

Happy learning!

**DISCLAIMER:** Please note that the topics presented on GoodOwl's website, social media accounts, emails, video capsules, or A2J sheets (like this one!), contain general legal information and not legal advice. Please consult with a lawyer for legal advice regarding your specific situation.

# DEFINING DOMESTIC & FAMILY ABUSE

## DEFINING THE TERMS

### Domestic violence

Domestic violence, also called "domestic abuse," is a **pattern of behavior** in any relationship that is **used to gain or maintain power and control** over the other person.

### Family violence

Family violence is when someone uses **abusive behaviour to control and/or harm a member** of their family – like a child, an adult relative, or an intimate partner.

### Intimate partner violence (IPV)

Any behaviour by a **current or former intimate partner** that causes **physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic harm**. It includes physical aggression, sexual coercion, intimidation, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.

In IPV, all behaviours are meant to **establish power and control over the victim**.

### Intimate partner

An intimate partner, in this context, can be a spouse, former spouse, parent of your children, or a current or former dating partner.

**\*Note:** Ongoing physical contact doesn't have to be sexual.

## WHO CAN BE A VICTIM OF IPV?

IPV can happen to **anyone** in an intimate relationship, **regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, demographic or economic class**. However, some groups are at higher risk of being victims of IPV.

### Type of relationship

IPV can occur in any type of intimate relationship. For example, it can occur if you are married, in a long-term relationship, or just friends with benefits.

### Sexual orientation and IPV

IPV can occur in heterosexual relationships or with same-sex couples.

### Gender and IPV

People of all genders can be victims of IPV. However, women are much more likely than men to be victims of IPV.

## MYTH BUSTING

### Myth #1

Mary says that her friend Karl is 'abusing' her, but that's not true because they've only been on three dates. **FALSE.**

The length of the relationship does not matter. People in intimate relationships can experience IPV even if they haven't known the abuser for a long time.

## Myth #2

Carlos thinks that sometimes the behaviour of his wife Jane is abusive, but he thinks he can't experience abuse because he's a man. **FALSE.**

Although it is less common, men in heterosexual relationships can experience IPV.

## Myth #3

Amanda has seen her friend Steve be abusive towards his boyfriend Paul, but she doesn't know if it's technically abuse because abuse only happens in relationships between men and women. **FALSE.**

Any intimate partner can experience abuse, including same-sex couples.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

There can be many different ways that abuse presents itself in relationships. Intimate partner violence refers to abuse in a relationship between two people who are or have been intimate, where the goal of the abuser is to gain complete control over the victim.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

Anyone in an intimate partnership can experience IPV. IPV can happen in heterosexual or same-sex couples, individuals of all genders can experience abuse, and abuse can begin at any point in the relationship.

# COERCIVE CONTROL

## WHAT DOES "COERCIVE CONTROL" MEAN?

Coercive control describes a **pattern of controlling behaviors**, that make the **victim dependent on their abuser**. The abuser usually separates the victim from their family and friends, exploits them, and takes away their independence.

The abuser can also often regulate a victim's everyday behaviour.

Some examples of how the abuser controls the victim include:

- **Isolating** them from their friends and family
  - For example, not allowing them to talk or visit their friends and family in general or without the abuser's supervision
- Controlling the victim's **time**
  - For example, only allowing the victim to sleep at a certain time
- Controlling aspects of the victim's **personality**
  - For example, not allowing the victim to say certain words or controlling how they dress
- Repeatedly **putting a victim down**
  - For example, telling them they are worthless

The overall goal of the abuser is to have **complete control over the victim**.

## MYTH BUSTING

### Myth #1

Selina is very close to her mom and sister, but Selina's boyfriend Tommy is always making rude comments about them. Whenever Selina calls her mom and sister or goes to visit them, Tommy is distant and cold. He has also said that she is 'weird' for hanging out with them so much and that only 'stupid little girls' call their moms that often. Tommy always points out her mom's mistakes and how Selina's sister can sometimes hurt her feelings. When her mom and sister notice this and they tell Selina they are worried about how much Tommy is controlling her. Selina says that it's not a big deal and totally normal. **FALSE.**

Tommy's behaviour is not normal. His comments and behaviour are isolating Selina from her family. He is using emotional and verbal abuse to make Selina feel bad about her bond with her family. His behaviour has some red flags since it looks like he is gaining more control over Selina.

### Myth #2

Stephan and Andrew have been going out for five months. Andrew is very busy, so he shared his Google Calendar with Stephan to make planning dates easier. But Stephan is now using the Google Calendar to schedule all of Andrew's free time with him. He yells at Andrew when he doesn't get home right after a meeting or if he doesn't pick up the phone when he is 'free'. Andrew confessed to his friend Juan that Stephan's behaviour was making Andrew feel very anxious all the time and he felt like no amount of time he spent with Stephan was enough. Juan said that it seemed normal to him and he would love to have someone what to spend all their time with him. Andrew decides that he is making a big deal out of nothing. **FALSE.**



## Myth #2 (continued)

Stephan's behaviour presents some red flags since he appears to be controlling all of Andrew's free time and is making Andrew feel isolated and nervous, especially when he yells or loses his temper when Andrew doesn't come home right after a meeting. Stephan's behaviour is becoming more controlling and worrisome.

### **KEY TAKEAWAY**

Coercive control is a series of controlling behaviours used by an abuser with an overall goal of the abuser to have complete control over the victim.

# DEFINING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP & THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC OR FAMILY VIOLENCE?

If you are wondering if you are experiencing domestic or family violence, it is likely that **you are having these feelings and thoughts for a reason**, and it is worth exploring.

Some general **red flags** to watch out for include:

- **Feeling scared** of how your partner may act towards you;
- Watching what you do or say to **avoid upsetting** your partner;
- **Making excuses for or hiding** your partner's behaviour from friends and family;
- Your partner **disrespects or belittles you, or disregards** your feelings;
- Your partner **embarrasses or humiliates** you in front of other people;
- Your partner is **overly possessive or jealous**;
- You are only with your partner because you are **scared of what would happen if you left**.

You can also fill out **SOS Violence Conjugale's online questionnaire** to help you identify whether there are different forms of violence in your relationship with a current or former partner: <https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en/test-auto-evaluation>

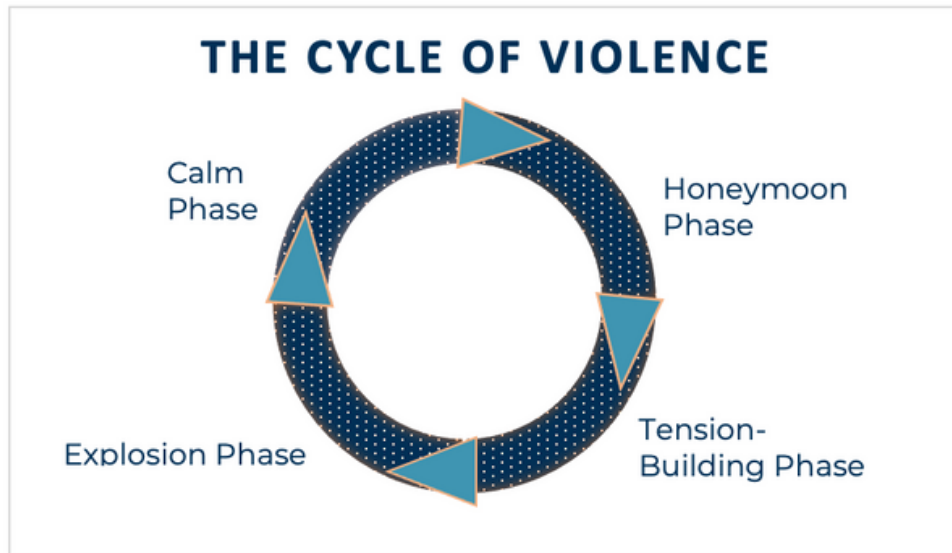
## DEFINING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

There are **different types of behaviour** that can make a relationship abusive.

What is **common among all abusive relationships** is that the actions of the abuser help them **gain and maintain power and control** over the victim.

## EXPLAINING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The cycle of violence presents the different phases of an abusive relationship. It usually follows a typical pattern meant for the abuser to maintain power and control.



### The Beginning of an Abusive Relationship

There are usually, but not always, **early warning signs** that continue in the relationship:

- Overly possessive and jealous
  - Maybe your partner gets upset easily if you are speaking with someone else. They may always call to check-up on you, even when you're just out with your friends.
- It's all about your partner, never about you
  - Maybe your partner likes to talk about himself all the time and all your conversations are about him and his issues. It seems like you can never get a word in.

- Disrespectful behaviour
  - Maybe your partner puts you down in front of others. It seems like they are always criticizing you or embarrassing you. It makes you feel bad about yourself and like you are not good enough for them.
- Intimidating behaviour
  - Maybe your partner gets angry easily and scares you.
- Not respecting your sexual boundaries
  - Maybe your partner pressures you do things you are not ready for or simply uncomfortable with.
- Abusing drugs and alcohol
  - Maybe your partner is always or very often drinking or using drugs. Alcohol and drugs seem to be a very big part of your partner's daily life.

## Tension-Building Phase

In this phase, the abusive partner is **on-edge and tense**. Communication between the partners is off and the abusive partner is withholding affection.

The abuser tries to blame their partner for the stress that they are experiencing, and the victim adjusts their behaviour to try to keep the abuser calm. The victim is worried and tries to figure out what is wrong with the abuser.

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** There are moments of tension in healthy relationships too. The main difference is that in healthy relationships conflict is resolved through communication and healthy problem-solving.

## Tension-Building Phase

The tension comes to a head with an abusive incident that ends the tension.

The incident can be an act or acts of **physical, sexual, emotional, and/or psychological violence** or the **destruction of property**.

After this event, the victim wants to leave the relationship.

## Honeymoon Phase

After an abusive incident, the abuser changes their behaviour towards the victim. Their main goal is to keep the victim from leaving the relationship.

The abuser may:

- Apologize,
- Make promises,
- Make excuses,
- Justify the abusive behaviour,
- Become loving and kind.

During the honeymoon phase, **the goal of the abuser is for the victim to stay in the relationship**. During this time, the victim gets hope that the abuser can change.

As an abusive relationship progresses, the honeymoon phases may become shorter and shorter or disappear altogether if the abuser does not think the victim will leave.

## Calm Phase

Eventually, the abuser acts like the abuse never happened. They may fulfill some of the promises they made. At the same time, the abuser might also brainwash and manipulate the victim into thinking the abuse did not happen or that the abusive act is not who they are, but rather their current behaviour is “who they truly are.” In this phase, the victim is hopeful that the abuse is over and will not happen again.

*Eventually, the cycle restarts and the tension-building phase begins...*

## IS INTIMIDATION A FORM OF ABUSE?

Yes, intimidation is one of the tactics used by abusive partners to assert power and gain control over a victim.

It is a form of emotional and psychological abuse, and victims can get legal or social support to deal with this.

Intimidation is meant to **instill fear** in the victim. Some examples include:

- Using threatening gestures,
- Screaming at someone, or
- Threats of violence.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

Watch out for some red flags of behaviour your partner may have that make you uncomfortable or unhappy in the relationship. If you have doubts about whether you are in an abusive relationship, fill out SOS Violence Conjugale's online questionnaire.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

The cycle of violence begins with tension building, culminates in a violent incident, afterwards a honeymoon phase and finally a calm phase. The cycle will oftentimes repeat itself; the violence increases and the honeymoon stage may shorten or disappear over time.

# DEFINING SEXUAL ABUSE

## WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual abuse is when an abuser **forces a victim to perform sexual acts** with the abuser or others. It can happen at any point in an intimate relationship, regardless of how long you have known the abuser.

Sexual abuse can be **direct or indirect**, and verbal or physical.

Sexual abuse can also be **psychological**, for example if it is used to humiliate, disrespect, or intimidate a victim.

### What exactly is consent?

- Consent is when a person freely chooses to engage in a sexual act with another person.
- Consent has to be **voluntary, enthusiastic and ongoing**
  - Voluntary means that it cannot be forced or given out of fear
  - Enthusiastic means that it can be expressed by words or clear behaviour that leaves no doubt in your partner's mind that you are consenting
  - Ongoing means that consent must be given every time for every sexual act
- Every sexual act must be consensual and respectful according to both partners' needs
- Having given consent to a sexual act in the past or with that person in the past does not mean that you consent in the future



## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF INDIRECT SEXUAL ABUSE?

Indirect sexual abuse is when an abuser uses verbal and/or psychological abuse in a sexual context. Some examples include:

- Sexual harassment,
  - For example, constantly calling you sexually derogatory names or making fun of your sexuality
- Sharing private images of you without your consent, or
- Forcing you to strip to humiliate you.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF DIRECT SEXUAL ABUSE?

Direct sexual abuse is when an abuser uses verbal or physical abuse during a sexual act or to initiate a sexual act. Some examples include:

- Unwanted sexual touching, forcing sex and other sexual acts,
- Not respecting your boundaries surrounding sex,
  - For example, not using a condom when you have asked them to
- Using force, guilt, threats or manipulating you when you don't want to engage in sex,
- Physically hurting you during sex, or
- Having sex with you after beating you.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Sexual exploitation is when an abuser **forces** the victim to have sex with others, or involuntarily engage in sex work.

It can also include an abuser who engages in a sexual act when the victim is **unable to consent**, for example, if the victim is asleep or drugged. It can also be if the victim is dependent and afraid of the abuser.

## SCENARIO 1

Anne and Mary are on their first date. Anne asks Mary if she can kiss her. Mary says yes and they kiss. A week later, can Anne kiss Mary without her consent? **NO.**

Consent needs to be given every single time for every sexual act. Consenting in the past does not mean that you consent for the future.

## SCENARIO 2

Paul and Amina have been dating for five years. Amina doesn't like how Paul always talks about sex. In front of their friends, Paul will talk about their sex life in detail. He will make jokes about Amina and what she does or doesn't like to do in the bedroom. It makes Amina uncomfortable, and she asks Paul to stop talking like that. He tells her it's not a big deal and that she's a prude. Is this abuse? **YES.**

Paul's behaviour is abusive. He is indirectly sexually abusing Amina by constantly humiliating and embarrassing her in front of her friends and sharing personal details of their sexual life to their friends without her consent.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

Consent is crucial! It must be given freely, enthusiastically and for every sexual act.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

Sexual abuse can be direct or indirect, but in both cases, it is used by the abuser to gain control over the victim.

# DEFINING PHYSICAL ABUSE

## WHAT IS PHYSICAL ABUSE?

Physical abuse is when an abuser is physically aggressive or makes threats of physical harm towards the victim, their children, pets or others important to the victim.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL ABUSE?

Some examples of physical abuse include:

- Hitting, slapping, punching, shaking, choking, etc.
- Physically harming children or pets in front of the partner,
- Throwing objects toward you,
- Physically restraining you,
- Withholding basic necessities like water, food, or medications.

Some examples of threats of physical harm include:

- Threatening to physically harm the victim, their children, pets, or others
- Destroying property, and
- Driving recklessly.

At its most severe, **physical abuse can result in the death of the victim.**

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

Physical abuse can include the threat of violence and it does not have to be directly against the victim. It can be violence or the threat of violence towards the victim or someone they love.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

Physical abuse, at its most severe, can lead to the death of the victim. If you feel unsafe in your relationship, you can seek help to plan a safe exit plan.

# DEFINING VERBAL ABUSE

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VERBAL, EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE?

Verbal, emotional and psychological abuse are often described separately, but many times the abuse tactics used within each type is similar.

Psychological abuse has a stronger effect on how a victim **thinks**, while emotional and verbal abuse affects how the victim **feels**.

**Verbal abuse** involves using abusive, offensive *language* to embarrass, put down or threaten the victim. It makes the victim feel afraid and like they are not safe.

**Psychological abuse** involves a series of humiliating, derogatory, demeaning, belittling, rejecting *attitudes* toward the victim. The abuser may play mind games or “gaslight” the victim, making them doubt their thoughts and reality.

**Emotional abuse** involves actions or language that uses the victim’s emotional triggers or trauma to take advantage of their vulnerabilities and insecurities.

Overall, with all these types of abuse, the abuser tries to intimidate, control, manipulate and brainwash the victim into feeling worthless, powerless or like they are crazy.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF VERBAL, EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE?

Some examples of these types of abuse include:

- Calling the victim names,
- Calling the victim ugly or stupid,
- Humiliating the victim in public,
- Ridiculing or insulting a victim's gender, religion, race or ethnicity,
- Constantly criticizing the victim,
- "Gaslighting," lying and making the victim doubt their memory,
- Constantly accusing the victim of cheating, or
- Threatening to harm themselves, the victim or kids.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Emotional and verbal abuse impact how a victim feels, and psychological abuse impacts how a victim thinks. All three types of abuse help the abuser gain control over the victim.

# DEFINING ECONOMIC ABUSE

## WHAT IS ECONOMIC ABUSE?

Economic abuse is when one partner has **total control over all the money** and decisions about money in a relationship. In short, one partner controls all the money and the other partner does not have access to the money.

Money is used by the abuser to control and gain power over the victim. This abuse makes the victim **financially dependent** on the abuser and often prevents them from leaving the relationship.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF ECONOMIC ABUSE?

Some examples of this type of abuse includes:

- Having all the bank accounts under the name of the abuser,
- The abuser limiting or prohibiting the victim's access to money,
- Not allowing the victim to attend school or get a job,
- Spending money meant for essential things (like rent or food) on non-essential things for the abuser (like drugs or alcohol), or
- The abuser using the victim's name to get loans.

## SCENARIO 1

Sophie and Charlie live together, share expenses and have a joint bank account. Sophie's paycheque is deposited straight into the joint bank account. Sophie was in charge of paying the hydro bill, but one month she forgot, so Charlie took over the chore of paying all the bills for the house. Because Sophie has some credit card debt and buys clothes, Charlie told Sophie that she is 'bad with money' and Charlie now gives Sophie a set amount of money that she can spend every week. One time, Sophie spent slightly more than her set budget and Charlie took away her debit and credit cards. Is this abuse? **YES.**



Charlie is controlling how and when Sophie can spend money. Over the course of their relationship, Charlie has gained more and more control over the household's finances and Sophie has become more and more financially dependent on him.

## SCENARIO 2

Kendra and James just had a baby. Kendra worked full-time as a nurse right before giving birth to the baby. After the baby was born, James was really uncomfortable with the idea of Kendra going back to work. When Kendra brings up the idea of putting the baby in daycare so she can go back to work, James gets upset and tells her that daycare is more expensive than her staying at home with the baby. He threatened to leave Kendra and take the baby if she tried to go back to her job. Kendra is starting to get worried about money, because James goes out with his friends every weekend and spends a lot of money 'having fun'. When Kendra confronts him about it, he says that he works hard all week and deserves to have fun. Is this abuse? **YES.**

James' behaviour amounts to economic abuse because he is controlling Kendra's ability to work and he is spending a lot of money on luxuries for himself. His threats about taking the baby away if Kendra goes back to work are also signs of emotional abuse.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

An abuser gains control over the victim by limiting, controlling, or removing their access to money.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILDREN

## **HOW ARE CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?**

There are multiple ways in which children are affected by domestic and family violence. The abuser may abuse the children directly or may use the children against the victim.

An abuser may use children to prevent the victim from leaving.

## **WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW AN ABUSIVE PARTNER USES CHILDREN?**

Direct abuse of children:

- Physically harming the children to punish the victim, or
- Using physical, verbal, emotional or psychological violence against the children.

Using the children to gain control over the victim:

- Threatening to harm the children,
- Humiliating the victim in front of the children, or
- Refusing the victim access to the children.

Using the children to prevent the victim from leaving the relationship:

- Using the children to manipulate the partner into staying,
- Threatening to take the children away if the victim leaves,
- Threatening to or actually making the children hate the victim, or
- Using the children to monitor or gain more information about the victim.

## WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN?

Unfortunately, there are significant **short- and long-term consequences** for children who have directly or indirectly been exposed to domestic violence. The trauma of seeing a family member being harmed can impact children's normal developmental processes.

Children who have been exposed to violence in the home may experience:

- Emotional and behavioural problems,
- Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms,
- Problems in school,
- Problems with the law as teenagers or adults,
- Problems in future romantic relationships; for example, among male and female children who were exposed to interparental violence and/or experienced child abuse:
  - Boys are more likely to become abusers, and
  - Girls are more likely to become victims of IPV

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

Children are impacted by IPV even if they are not directly abused. Just witnessing a loved one be abused can have short- and long-term impacts on the child.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

An abuser may use a child to gain control over the victim, including using threats against or manipulating children to keep control over the victim.

# PSYCHOSOCIAL HELP & SPECIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS

## IF I NEED HELP, WHO SHOULD I CALL?

If you are in immediate danger, you should **call 911**, the emergency line to reach the police.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF I CALL THE POLICE?

If you call the police because you are in danger, **they have the right to enter your home.**

- This means that even if your abuser does not let them enter, they have the legal right to come in.

The police also have the **right to decide what will happen when they arrive.**

- This means they could arrest your abusive partner, regardless of whether you want this.

The police can also **help you leave the home if you ask them for help.**

- For example, police could take you to a local shelter.

## IF I DON'T WANT TO CALL THE POLICE, CAN I STILL GET HELP?

The police are not the only way to get help. There are a lot of online, phone, and in-person services to help you through this situation.

## Phone Services

You can access help by calling a helpline and speak to someone right away. They can often provide support and local resources.

- **SOS Violence Conjugale**
  - 1-800-363-9010
  - Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
  - Provide direct telephone support, information and referrals to shelters
  - Available in French and English
- **Auberge Shalom**
  - 514-731-0833
  - Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
  - Provide support and information
  - Available in French and English
- **Helpline for victims of sexual assault and sexual exploitation**
  - 1-888-933-9007
  - Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
  - Available in French and English

## Websites

You can also get more information and learn more about IPV online through different websites. Most of them have a 'quick-exit' and a 'clear browser history' option.

- SOS Violence Conjugale
  - <https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en>
- Auberge Shalom
  - <https://www.aubergeshalom.org>
- Ending Violence Association of Canada
  - <https://endingviolencecanada.org>

## Shelters

If you are ready to leave, you can go to a shelter. Shelters can help victims before or right after leaving an abusive relationship. Shelters can also offer a lot of resources for victims of IPV on a drop-in basis.

There are different types of shelters available to women and their children:

- Emergency Shelters
  - These shelters take in women and their children for a shorter amount of time right after they leave a situation of abuse.
  - To find emergency shelters near you, you visit **Domesticshelters.org** or by calling the **SOS Violence Conjugale helpline**.
- Second-Stage Housing
  - Second-stage housing is a partially subsidized apartment you can stay in for a longer period of time after leaving the emergency shelter. The actual length of time can depend on the organization, but it can be up to 21 months.
- External Resources at Shelters
  - Shelters often offer a lot of resources for victims of IPV before or after leaving an abusive relationship.
  - For example, shelters may help a victim learn about different types of abuse, make a plan to leave safely, and provide support and/or counselling.

## Other Services

- CAVAC – Crime Victims Assistance Centre
  - This government organization can provide legal information, post-traumatic and psychosocial interventions, along with other services for victims or witnesses of a crime
- CLSC – Local Community Health Centre
  - These government health centres can provide health and social services for victims of IPV
- Private Practice
  - Victims of IPV can also seek counselling or services from practitioners who specialize in victims of domestic abuse and their children. However, unlike the other services listed, these are not free and must be paid by the victim.



## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

If you are in immediate danger, you should call 911. If you are not in immediate danger, you can access help in a lot of different ways.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

Shelters and community organizations offer a lot of different services, from helping victims navigate the legal system to counselling and support.

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN HELPING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

## WHAT IS A SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE?

Social workers provide victims of IPV with a **non-judgemental and safe space** where they can get support. They **educate, support, and encourage clients** to be empowered and to do what is best for them.

Social workers are not there to force a client to make a decision they don't want or aren't ready to make.

## WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT CAN A SOCIAL WORKER OFFER TO VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?

Social workers can help victims of IPV by:

- Helping them create a safety plan for when they are ready to leave,
- Providing counselling and support,
- Referring them to more resources, like legal support, shelters, and financial programs,
- Supporting them through legal or social service processes,
- Depending on the situation, provide recommendations for services and support groups available for perpetrators.

## WHEN SHOULD A VICTIM/SURVIVOR CONTACT A SOCIAL WORKER?

Victims can contact a social worker as soon as they notice behaviours that they consider abusive and/or when they are ready to receive support.

Research and practice have shown that **the cycle of abuse repeats itself in abusive relationships**, and oftentimes becomes **increasingly intense** as time goes on.

This means that the sooner the cycle of violence is broken the better! **If you notice red flags, reach out for support in any way you can and become connected with a social worker.**

## **CAN A SOCIAL WORKER HELP ME FIND A LAWYER?**

A common task for social workers is to **refer clients** to appropriate resources, so a social worker will be able to help you find a lawyer.

The Quebec government has introduced a program, **Rebatir**, which offers victims of domestic or sexual abuse **four free hours of legal advice or counsel**. You call 1 833 REBATIR (1 833 732-2847) or email [projet@rebatir.ca](mailto:projet@rebatir.ca) and open a file with them. You can learn more here: <https://www.rebatir.ca/?lang=en>

## **HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR A MEETING WITH A SOCIAL WORKER?**

A social worker can clarify what they can offer, and if they can't offer a service, they could refer you to another organization for additional supports.

Sometimes it helps to note some of the things that you would like to discuss with a social worker, the type of support you're looking for at the moment, services that you are hoping to be referred to or connected with.

## WHERE CAN I FIND A SOCIAL WORKER? HOW DO I CONTACT THEM?

You can find a social worker through the **SOS Violence Conjugale** website (<https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en>) or by calling them at 1-800-363-9010. The worker on the other end will put you in communication with a social worker who specializes in domestic violence.

You can also find a social worker through shelters or an organization directly if you prefer.

## WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION OR DOCUMENTS DO I NEED TO BRING TO A MEETING?

If you are just going to meet a social worker for support, you do not necessarily need to bring anything. **Reaching out for a support is a huge step in itself** and a social worker can guide you on items to bring for the next visits, if needed.

If you are leaving a relationship to seek refuge in an emergency shelter, there are **some documents and items that you should try to take when leaving an abusive situation**.

This includes anything that you think you might need at some point or could be used to hurt you if left behind:

- Bank cards, health cards, ID cards, etc.,
- Passports,
- Birth certificates,
- Marriage or divorce certificate, if applicable,
- Custody documents, if applicable,
- Immigration papers, if applicable,
- Children's report cards,
- Previous and current income tax reports and assessments,
- Mortgage or lease documents,
- Medication and prescriptions.

You can also take any item that is significant to you, as well as clothing for yourself and children.

You can ask a social worker helping you to make a **safety plan** which are the most important documents and items to take with you.

## **ARE MEETINGS WITH SOCIAL WORKERS VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON?**

Many organizations had to shift to virtual support as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, organizations are now better equipped to provide **services virtually**.

Organizations may be able to provide external support through telephone calls or Zoom meetings. There's also chat options available for some services, such as SOS Violence Conjugale.

If you have a preference, it is important to discuss this when you either contact an organization directly or contact a helpline that refers you to resources, such as SOS Violence Conjugale.

## **CAN MY SOCIAL WORKER ACCOMPANY ME TO MEET MY LAWYER?**

Yes, certain shelters and women's organizations will accompany victims/survivors to lawyers, courts, or other legal appointments. **Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVACs)** throughout Quebec provide accompaniment and information when reporting to the police and support throughout the judicial process if a case goes to court.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #1**

A social worker is there to support and empower victims of IPV to achieve their goals. They will never force victims to do something they do not want to do.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY #2**

A social worker can help victims of IPV in many ways. If there is any service they can't provide, they can refer victims to the appropriate person or organization.

**NOTES:**

A large, empty rectangular area with a light gray gradient, intended for taking notes. It occupies the majority of the page below the 'NOTES:' header.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The GoodOwl Center for Justice's mission is to provide, promote and facilitate quality legal services, in a simple, fast and accessible way, to the most vulnerable citizens of our society and to organizations.

-----

Rusan Lateef is a PhD Candidate in the School of Social Work at McGill University. Rusan specializes in sexual abuse research, with a specific focus on adult survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual abuse disclosures, shame, and help-seeking experiences of survivors. Her doctoral research will examine how shame and race/ethnicity impact the counselling experiences of adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

Rusan is also currently involved in research studies that examine the experience of sexual violence survivors seeking legal services in Quebec, and the impact of the MeToo movement on sexual abuse disclosures.

Rusan adopts an intersectional lens in her research in which she continuously aims to include the voices and experiences of marginalized groups.