

# Staying Safe





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# Types of Abuse

Family violence is an abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency. Family violence includes many different forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that adults or children may experience in their intimate, kinship or dependent relationships.

Family violence includes:

- Physical abuse: injuring you or family members;
- Psychological abuse: threatening you or members of your family, destroying your belongings or making you afraid for your safety;
- Emotional abuse: a pattern of treating you in a way that wears down your confidence and self-esteem;
- Financial abuse: forcing you or a family member to give up money or things;
- Forcible confinement: not letting you or an adult family member come and go freely; and
- Sexual abuse: forcing you to do something sexual you don't want to do.

Family violence can happen to anyone, regardless of race, education level, gender or age.

Some signs of abuse are:

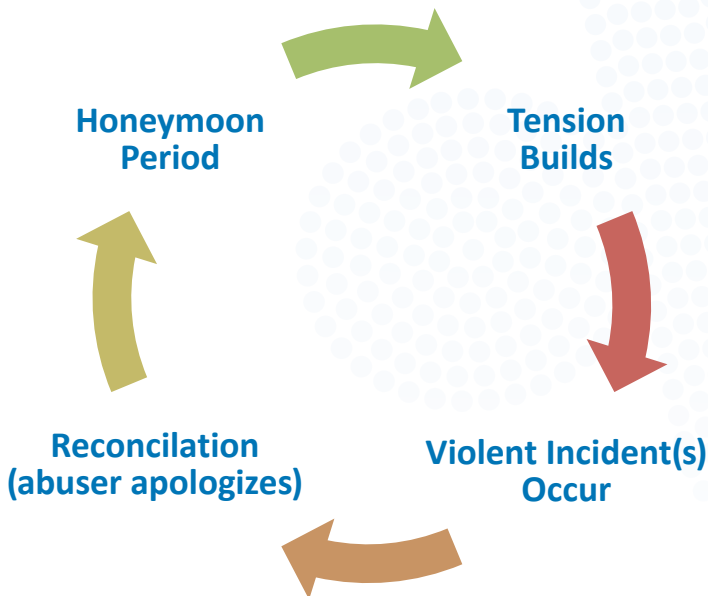
- Putting you down.
- Controlling what you do, who you can see and where you can go.
- Stopping you from seeing your friends or family.
- Not allowing you to make decisions.
- Threatening or intimidating you with words or weapons.
- Forcing you to give your money or paycheck, making you ask for money, or refusing to give you money.
- Physically injuring you. Examples include shoving, slapping, choking or hitting you.

When you decide you are ready to end a violent relationship, you will need to think about how to stay safe, and how you will live apart and be good parents to your children.



# Cycle of Violence

Every family is different, but victims of family violence often notice that the abuse happens in cycles. Things may seem to be fine, but eventually the violent person starts to seem more dangerous. The people in the house begin to get nervous. Over time, they are able to predict that things in the house are going to get worse. The violent person suddenly begins to act out of control, hurting family members and breaking things in the house. He or she is only pretending to be out of control. The violence is how he or she is controlling the rest of the family. While family members are being hurt, they cannot do anything to make it stop. The violent person is in control and is choosing to hurt them. The violence stops when he or she decides to stop. Afterwards, there is often a “honeymoon” period. The violent person apologizes and promises never to do it again. The victim believes the promises and wants to go back to normal, but it is really only “pretend normal”. Things seem fine for a while. Then the cycle begins again.



Over a long period of time, the cycle repeats many times. The honeymoon and pretend normal periods get shorter and eventually end completely. If the violence has been going on for a very long time, the family may think that a good day is a day nobody got hurt.

If this cycle is not interrupted very early, it continues until the victim leaves or dies. In the earliest weeks of a violent relationship, the violent person may see that he or she is hurting the family and be willing to get help and counselling, but the longer the violence continues, the more likely he or she is to think it is a good way to control the family.

The violence is not the victim's fault, but the violence often only ends when the victim chooses to leave the relationship. The violent person may not think he needs to stop. He thinks everything is working.

You know your situation best, so you are the best person to make choices about how to keep yourself and your children safe.





# Safety Plans

If you are living with an abusive partner, you are probably doing many things on a daily basis to keep yourself and/or your children as safe as possible. You are not responsible for the violent person's behaviour. He makes his own decisions about how to act and only he is responsible for his abusive behaviour.

Every person's situation is different. There is no right or wrong way to do a safety plan. This book has some suggestions and might give you some ideas, but the best safety plan is the one you make to fit your own life. You know what will work best to keep you and your children safe.

Sometimes situations change. When this happens, take another look at your plan and see if you need to update it. For example, if you keep an emergency bag of clothes in a safe place, you might want to pack clothes in a bigger size when your kids get taller.

Some people keep their safety plans a secret. Others tell people they absolutely trust. It is up to you. Your local nurse, social worker, victim services worker or counsellor can help you to talk about your safety plan or find out more about what is available in and near your community.





# Sample Safety Plan

I have planned what I will do to keep myself and my children safe. I do not have control over other people's violence, but I do have a choice about how I respond.

## STEP 1: Safety During a Violent Incident

**I can use some or all of the following ways to keep myself and my children safe:**

If I decide to leave, I will...

*Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?*

I can keep my purse/wallet, phone and phone charger, and vehicle keys ready and put them...

*in order to leave more quickly.*

I can tell...

*about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my home.*

I can also tell...

*about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my home.*

I can teach my children how to call the police and fire department.

I will use...

*as my code word with my children or my friends so they can call for help.*

If I have to leave my home, I will go to...

*Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.*

If I cannot go to the place above, then I can go to...

When I suspect that my partner will behave violently/abusively, I will try to move to a space that is the lowest risk, such as...

*Try to avoid areas such as the bathroom, by the telephone, garage, kitchen, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door or window.*

I will use my judgment, experience and intuition.

I have to protect myself and my children until we are out of danger.

## STEP 2: Safety when Preparing to Leave

Leaving must be done in a way that will increase safety. Abusers often strike when they believe that their partner is leaving a relationship.

**I can use some or all of the following safety strategies:**

I will leave money and an extra set of keys with...

*in case I have to leave quickly.*

I will keep copies of important documents or keys at...

I will go to the bank and open a savings account by...

*to increase my independence.*

I can get legal advice from a lawyer or Legal Aid who understands domestic abuse.

**Other things I can do to increase my safety are:**

The local family violence shelter number is...

*I can seek shelter and support by calling this help line.*

If there is no family violence shelter in my community I can contact the community social worker or nurse-in-charge. The phone numbers are:

I will check with...

*to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.*

I can leave extra clothes with or get clothes from...

I will sit down and review my safety plan every (day/month/week)...

*in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence.*

*(family violence support worker, nurse, social worker or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan.*

I will rehearse my escape plan and practice it with my children when safe to do so.

## STEP 3: Safety in My Own Home

There are many things you can do to increase your safety in your home. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

### **Safety measures I can use include:**

- I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- I can install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an alarm system, etc.
- I can buy rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- I will teach my children how to make a collect call to me and to (friend/helper/other) in case my (ex) partner takes/kidnaps them.
- I can install the “call blocking” option on my telephone. This will allow me to make telephone calls, even to the abuser, without my number being identified on another telephone’s display mechanism so the abuser does not get my number.

I will tell and give a written list to all the people who provide child care for my children about who has permission to pick up my children and who does not. The people I can tell and give a written list to include:

School:
Child Care Staff:
Babysitter:
Sunday School Teacher:
Teacher:
Other:

I can tell (neighbour), (clergy), (friend)

*that I am separated and they should call the police if my (ex) partner is seen near my residence.*

## STEP 4: Safety with a Protection Order

Sometimes a court order can help keep the family safe. Talk to your victim services worker about whether this is right for you. Many people obey court orders, but it is only one part of your safety plan. You might need to ask the police and the courts to enforce a protection order, peace bond, conditions or other court order.

### **I can help the police enforce my protection order by:**

I will keep my protection order document(s) (original if possible) in...

*Always keep it with you. If you change purses, make sure you move it into the new purse.*

I will inform my employer, my clergy support, my friend and...

*that I have a protection order in effect.*

If my (ex) partner destroys my protection order, I can get another copy from the courthouse, my lawyer, or...

If my (ex) partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report the violation, contact my (ex) partner's parole or probation officer, contact my lawyer and/or my advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation. Report every violation of the order.

If the police do not help, I can contact my support worker, my (ex) partner's parole or probation officer, or my lawyer as well as filing a complaint with the RCMP.

## STEP 5: Safety on the Job and in Public

It is up to you to decide if and when to tell others that your partner has been violent or abusive towards you and that you may be at ongoing risk. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect you. Think carefully about who to ask for help.

### **I might do any or all of the following:**

I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and...

*at work of my situation.*

I can ask...

*to help screen my calls at work.*

When leaving work, I can...

When going home, if problems occur, I can...

If I use the bus/taxi, I can...



I can use different grocery stores/shopping malls and shop at different times than I did before to reduce the risk of contact with my (ex) partner.

I can also...



## STEP 6: Safety and Drug or Alcohol Consumption

If I am going to use alcohol or drugs, I can do it in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and care about my safety.

I can also...

If my (ex) partner is consuming, I can...

To safeguard my children, I might...

## STEP 7: Safety and My Emotional Health

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life requires much courage and incredible energy.

**To conserve my emotional energy and resources, and to avoid hard emotional times, I can do some of the following:**

If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can...

When I have to talk with my (ex) partner in person or by telephone, I can...



I can try to use “I can...” statements with myself and to be assertive with others.

I can tell myself...

*whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.*

I can call...

*as other resources for support.*

I can find out about and attend workshops and support groups in the community by calling the local shelter for information.



## STEP 8: Items to Take when Leaving

When leaving an abusive partner, it is important to take certain items with you. You can sometimes give extra copies of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case you have to leave quickly.

If there is time, other items might be taken or stored outside the home. Keeping them all together in one location makes it easier if you need to leave in a hurry.

### When I leave, I should take:

- Identification for myself and children
- Protection order papers/documents
- Social insurance cards
- School and vaccination records
- Chequebook, bankcards
- Keys – house/vehicle/office
- Medications
- Divorce/separation papers
- Lease/rental agreement, deed, mortgage
- Insurance papers
- Address book
- Items of special sentimental value
- Children's favourite toys and/or blankets
- Birth certificates
- Immigration papers
- Money
- Credit cards
- Driver's license and ownership
- Passport
- Medical records
- Bank books
- Small valued objects
- Pictures/photos
- Jewellery
- Phone and phone charger

**Telephone numbers I need to know:**

RCMP:
Counsellor:
Women's Shelter:
NWT Helpline:
Crisis line (24 hours):
Lawyer:
Work number:
Supervisor's home number:
Minister/Priest/Elder:
Other:



## Crisis Lines and Emergency Shelters

We all have a role in stopping family violence. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call your local RCMP. Dial your local 3-digit prefix, followed by 1111.

Whether you are a victim of abuse, or are using violence in your relationship, talk to someone you trust. It may be easier to talk privately to someone outside your own family. Your social worker or counsellor can help you. If you feel more comfortable with your priest, minister, doctor or nurse, they can help.

If you or members of your family are experiencing family violence, you can talk privately by calling Alison McAteer House: 1-866-223-7775. The call is free and they can help you apply for an Emergency Protection Order.

If you are a young person, and you need someone to talk to, you can call the Kid's Help Line at 1-800-668-6868 or go to [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca).

The NWT Community Counselling Program helps people deal with a variety of issues, including family violence, mental health issues and addictions. It is available free of charge to every NWT resident.

The NWT Help Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1-800-661-0844.



# Finding a Safe Place to Live

## Short Term

The NWT has five family violence shelters. You can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for safety planning, crisis management, emotional support, information and referrals.

YWCA Alison McAteer House (Yellowknife):  
Toll-free 1-866-223-7775 or in Yellowknife 873-8257

Family Support Centre (Hay River) Crisis:  
(867) 874-6626 or (867) 874-3311

Inuvik Transition House:  
(867) 777-3877

Sutherland House (Fort Smith):  
Toll-free 1-877-872-5925 or in Fort Smith 872-4133

Women and Children's Crisis Centre (Tuktoyaktuk):  
(867) 977-2000

### **How many times can I go to a shelter?**

There is no limit to the number of times you can go to a shelter. If you are experiencing family violence, you have the right to go to a shelter.

### **Do I need to talk to the RCMP?**

No. The NWT Family Violence Shelters respect your choices. If you do not want to report the violence or charge the person hurting you, you can still go to the shelter. The shelter worker may ask you if you want to call the RCMP, but it is your choice.



### **Will Social Services take my kids away if I go to a shelter?**

Shelter workers will only call Social Services if they think your child has been hurt by someone. This does not mean that your children will be taken into care. It means Social Services will be able to make sure your children are safe and can get help or counselling if they have been hurt. Taking your children with you to the shelter is a sign that you are a good parent who cares about their safety.

### **Who can go to the shelter?**

Women in the NWT who are experiencing family violence can go to a shelter. If there is no shelter in your community or region, your Health and Social Services Authority may provide you with a free return air ticket to the nearest family violence shelter. If you have children, they can go with you to the shelter.

### **How do I get to the shelter?**

If you want to go to a family violence shelter, you can call one of the telephone numbers in this booklet. You can call at any time of any day. A shelter worker will provide you with more information and instructions.

### **What will happen to me at the shelter?**

At the shelter, you and your children will get your own room. You can get support from the shelter workers if you want to talk to someone. The shelter workers will talk to you about family violence and may give you information about other services like community counselling, income support and how to apply for housing. It is up to you to use these services or not.

### **How long do I have to stay?**

The maximum length of stay is usually six weeks, but you can leave whenever you like. It is up to you what you do after you leave the shelter. Before you leave, a shelter worker can help you make a safety plan for yourself and your children.

## **What if I'm experiencing family violence, but I don't want to stay at the shelter?**

Shelter workers at the family violence shelters can give you support over the phone and help you to make a safety plan. If you live near a shelter, you can also go there for drop-in support without staying overnight.

### **Long Term**

A shelter is a safe place for you and your children to stay while you make up your mind about what to do next. The shelter staff will talk to you about whether you want to move into your own house without the violent person.

Finding a place to live can be stressful, but you may decide that having your own home is safest for you and your children. You may rent a home in your community or you may get a roommate to share expenses. You should make the decision that is best for you.

If you have children with the violent person, you will need a lawyer to help you with the immediate custody issues. Call Legal Aid right away for advice. In most cases, the other parent will still have rights and responsibilities toward the children. The more information you have, the better prepared you will be.



# Counselling for the Family

Family violence is more than just hitting. It is any pattern of abuse that family members use to control other family members.

The victim usually needs counselling and may need medical treatment. Go to the health centre if you are physically hurt. The nurse can tell you who in your community provides counselling for people in violent relationships.

Many parents in an abusive relationship want to believe that their children either do not know or are not affected by the violence, but children are affected, even if they are not directly abused. Violence in the home can affect how a child acts, and how they think and feel about themselves.

Parents want to protect their children from harm. A counsellor can help the child talk about feelings and how to be safe.





## Counselling for the Person Who Chooses to Use Violence

A person who chooses to use violence against family members often thinks everything is working and that he or she does not need to take counselling. The violent person may even say the other people in the family are the real problem and are the ones who need counselling to change their behaviour. In reality, it is the person who uses violence who needs to change.

It is not the victim's job to make the other person change, but the victim's actions are often an important part of his decision to stop using violence. For example, if he is arrested or a court orders him to stay away from his partner and kids, he may realize how much he is hurting the family. This is an important step in making the change.

The NWT has specialized counselling programs to help people stop using violence. These programs are available inside jails and in the community. The specialized Domestic Violence Treatment Option (DVTO) Court helps people who are charged with family violence offences to take responsibility for their actions and stop hurting family members. Wellness Court helps people who are willing to set and follow a wellness plan to work on the things that help them to stay out of jail.



### **I hurt a family member and I feel terrible about it. How can I change the way I act?**

Hurting family members is very serious. You can choose not to be violent. If you are in jail, you should talk to your case manager about how to make better choices. If you have been released from jail, talk to your local wellness worker or mental health worker.

You can do things to be helpful to your family while you're in jail. For example, you can make sure that your family has enough money and can stay in the home.

### **How can I show the person I hurt that I'm sorry?**

You can respect the person you hurt and take responsibility for what you did. It is not the victim's fault.

Remember that the person you hurt needs to be safe. Sometimes it's best to leave the person alone. You also have to do everything the judge ordered you to do. That means that if you were ordered to stay away from your victim, you have to do that.

You can talk to your case manager in jail, probation officer or people in your community about how to make better choices.