

# Abuse in Dating Relationships

## What You Should Know:

LAWC's definition of abuse in relationships: the intentional and systematic use of tactics to establish and maintain power and control over the thoughts, beliefs, and conduct of a woman.

Abuse in permanent relationships often starts in dating years. It can lead to serious injury, suicide and murder and is always emotionally destructive to both men and women.

Physical abuse and threats of violence are crimes. It is against the law to assault your girlfriend or partner, just as it is a crime to assault a stranger. Abusers can be jailed or fined if convicted. Police are required to lay charges when there is probable cause to believe an assault has occurred.

All forms of abuse are expressions of power. They are meant to control the woman both immediately and in the future through the use of fear and intimidation. Society tolerates woman abuse through its acceptance of sexism in relationships. Men are permitted and encouraged to use force as a way to solving problems. Women are encouraged to take responsibility for the emotional needs of men and to assume blame when relationships break down.

## Early Warning Signs of An Abuser

Are you going out with someone who:

- is jealous and possessive toward you, won't let you have friends, checks up on you, won't accept breaking up
- tries to control you by being very bossy, giving orders, making all the decisions, doesn't take your opinion seriously
- is scary, you worry about how he will react to things you say or do, threatens you, uses or owns weapons
- is violent: has a history of fighting, loses temper quickly, brags about mistreating others
- pressures you for sex, is forceful or scary around sex, thinks women or girls are sex objects, attempts to manipulate or guilt trip you by saying "if you really loved me you would...;" "no one will love you like I do," gets too serious about the relationship too fast
- abuses drugs or alcohol and pressures you to take them
- blames you when mistreating you, says you provoked him, pressing his buttons, made him do it, lead him on
- has a history of bad relationships and blames the other person for all the problems, "girls just don't understand me;"
- believes that men should be in control and powerful and that women should be passive and submissive
- your family and friends have warned you about the person or told you they were worried for your safety

## If You Are Abused...

You are not alone and you are not to blame. You cannot control his violence, but there are ways you can make yourself safer:

- You can call the police if you have been assaulted.
- Tell someone. Talk to a doctor or counsellor after each violent/abusive incident and have them keep a record for future evidence.
- Write down the details for yourself as soon as possible after the assault. Use the list of resources in this brochure. Keep it in a safe, handy place where your partner won't find it.
- Develop a safety plan. Know all exits in your house you could use in an emergency. Memorize emergency numbers. Keep spare house and car keys handy. Know where you can stay in an emergency.
- Call a shelter for abused women. Shelters can provide a safe place to stay in a crisis as well as information and counselling 24 hours a day, seven days a week in person or by phone.
- Consider leaving the relationship as soon as possible.
- Recognize that no one has the right to control you and that it is everyone's human right to live without fear.

### **If You are Abusive...**

You are not alone. Many men have a problem with violence learned from childhood or supported by society. You can learn less dangerous and damaging ways to feel that you are in control. Here are some things you should consider:

- You need to take responsibility for your own behaviour. Your girlfriend or partner does not make you hurt her.
- Your behaviour may destroy your relationship or seriously injure someone you care about.
- Blaming your violence on drugs, alcohol or sickness and apologizing after the violence will not solve your problem.
- Physical violence and threats of violence are crimes. You face fines or imprisonment, if convicted.
- Denying your abuse and resisting intervention will prevent you from getting help. Police and other professionals intervene to keep everyone safe. You can begin to change the way you act with the support of resources listed in this pamphlet.

### **Why Do Men Abuse Women?**

Because they:

- may have learned this behaviour in their family of origin (many abusers have witnessed their father abusing their mother)
- try to maintain a macho image reinforced by society and the media
- believe it is an appropriate male expression of power and control
- want their partner to remain dependent on them
- know there are few, if any, consequences for violent acts

### **Why do Women Stay In Abusive Dating Relationships?**

Because they:

- want their relationships to work and hope their boyfriends will change
- fear their boyfriend will hurt them or seek revenge if they leave

- feel guilt and shame
- see no alternative
- are not aware that help is available
- believe their boyfriend needs them
- do not have social or personal supports
- believe a boyfriend who is occasionally violent is better than no boyfriend at all
- believe the violence and abuse is normal
- think that the violence will go away after they get married

## **How Can Students Help When Abuse Has Happened?**

### **Do:**

- believe your friend
- listen calmly and take the concern seriously
- reassure your friend that nobody deserves to be abused
- support your friend in looking at the risks of more abuse
- create an atmosphere of safety and trust
- suggest talking to a trusted adult such as a teacher, guidance counsellor or school psychologist, or call one of the agencies listed on this pamphlet
- consult with local agencies listed on the back of this pamphlet
- call the 24-hour Abused Women's Helpline

### **Don't:**

- be misled that the crisis has passed
- sound shocked or embarrassed
- make light of the situation
- guarantee secrecy
- take responsibility for support alone
- emphasize how bad others will feel
- make unrealistic promises

## **In The Area of Prevention...Everyone Can:**

- become more aware of verbal and physical abuse in their own relationships
- help students "break the silence"
- be aware of jokes, movies, TV programs, advertising, & videos that are demeaning to women and may promote woman abuse