

## HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS BEING ABUSED

We know from abused women that the assistance of others can be an important part of ending the violence in their lives. The support of friends, family and community can help to break the isolation of abuse, and provide much needed support and information. Information provides women with community resources and concrete ways to take action ie: giving an abused woman a phone number to call for help may be the first step for her. An abused woman may hear for the first time from you that woman abuse is unjust and that she does not deserve it. Every action that we take as individuals is part of the solution towards ending woman abuse. We hope that the following suggestions assist you in helping a woman who is being abused.

- Gather information about woman abuse and the resources available to abused women.
- Listen to the woman and do not blame or judge her. Do not ask her what she did to provoke it or why she was not able to stop it. Do not state that you feel you would never get into a similar situation or that you would never have stayed so long - each woman's situation is different.
- Reassure the woman that she is not responsible for the abuse and that she does not deserve to be abused. Let her know that woman abuse is a societal problem and that she is not alone.
- Do not rationalize the abuser's behaviour or blame it on other things, such as a bad childhood, use of alcohol/drugs, or a job loss. The abuser's behaviour is aimed at intentionally gaining and maintaining control over a woman, and is a learned behaviour that is condoned by our society.
- Recognize that abuse is more than physical abuse. It also involves emotional, financial, and sexual abuse, as well as using the children, making threats, using intimidation, isolating a woman, using social privilege, and minimizing, denying and blaming. Do not minimize the effects of these other forms of control.
- The woman's safety (and children if she has any) are of the utmost importance. Share information with her about community resources and encourage her to learn more about her rights. Assist her with safety planning and encourage her to do this in advance.
- Encourage a woman to seek legal advice before she takes any steps that could have negative legal repercussions - this is **critical** when children are involved.
- Provide information and support, not advice. An abused woman has been controlled by her partner and needs to make her own decisions about which actions she chooses to take.

- Recognize and affirm that the woman has strengths and survival skills and knows what is best for her. She is aware that taking action could potentially put her and her children at further risk.
- Respect that a woman may not take the actions you would like her to follow. The woman may be facing a complex set of barriers that include social, legal and economic factors that she needs to negotiate safely.
- Understand that a woman may decide not to leave her partner, or may delay leaving for a period of time until she has the resources she needs. Some women may also try to end the abuse by supporting their partners in seeking help in abusers' programs.
- Respect the woman's right to confidentiality and do not do anything that could put her at risk. Confronting a woman's partner could put her in danger or sabotage her safety planning and survival skills, as well as plans to leave.
- If you see or hear a woman being assaulted or threatened, call the police - it is a crime. If you witness other forms of abuse, you may wish to talk to the woman about the risk factor for her if you were to confront the abuser. This action may result in the abuser preventing the woman from seeing you, increasing her level of isolation. In other cases, a woman may feel supported if others tell the abuser his behaviour is wrong.
- Recognize that it may be very difficult for a woman to seek the help of community professionals, and that she may feel intimidated, embarrassed or afraid. You could offer to accompany or drive her if it would be of assistance to her, or suggest she ask someone for this support. It is important that she make all appointments on her own and that she does not feel coerced to do so, or be concerned that she will lose your support if she chooses not to take that action.
- If a woman does not speak English, inform her that there are trained interpreters available for her to seek out the professional help of lawyers, police, or women's advocates. If she is deaf or hearing impaired, there are also American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters available through the Canadian Hearing Society.

## **TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF**

Recognizing that you know someone who is being abused can be very difficult. You may not know how to approach someone you suspect is being abused, or be afraid of being wrong. There is also the risk of putting a woman or yourself in danger. You may feel helpless to do anything to assist her, or feel like you have not done enough. At times you may feel frustrated and not understand why the woman is not able to end the abuse in her life. It is normal that you

may find it difficult to hear about abuse and the atrocities a woman may have faced. Here are some suggestions to help deal with your own needs and feelings as you assist an abused woman.

- Gather information about woman abuse for yourself so that you can have a better understanding of what the woman is going through and the barriers to ending woman abuse.
- Find someone that you can talk to that will respect the need for confidentiality. Focus your disclosure on your own needs for information and support and respect the woman's right to privacy and confidentiality.
- Be aware of woman abuse issues in the community and take action in ways that are appropriate for you. Taking action can decrease feelings of helplessness and be a positive use of anger, for example:
  - talk or write to your elected officials (municipal, provincial or federal) about the need for services for women;
  - if you belong to a community service or church group, ask to have a speaker come in to talk about woman abuse;
  - volunteer at an anti-violence agency;
  - challenge sexist jokes or discriminatory practices;
  - attend public demonstrations that promote women's equality, such as International Women's Day or Take Back The Night;
  - donate extra household goods and clothing to a shelter;
  - give charitable donations to women' services;
  - write letters to the editor in response to woman abuse coverage.
- Do not take responsibility for a woman's ability to end the violence in her life. Remember that only she can make the decisions that are best for her.
  - Accept that you might never know the outcome of a woman's situation and that she may use the information that you gave her many years later.

### **Resources for Abused Women and Their Families**

Police (London).....	911
Abused Women's 24-hr helpline.....	519-642-3000
Changing Ways.....	519-438-9869

(counselling for men who abuse)

Community Group Treatment Program for Children Who Witness Woman Abuse.....	519-455-9000
Daya Counselling Centre.....	519-434-0077
Distress Centre Helpline.....	519-667-6711
Family Service London (counselling for heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals/couples).....	519-433-0183
Housing Access Centre (City of London Housing Information).....	519-661-0861
Kids Help Phone (24 hrs).....	1-800-668-6868
London Abused Women's Centre.....	519-432-2204
London Mental Health Crisis Service.....	519-433-2023
Vanier Children's Services.....	519-433-3101
Merrymount Children's Centre.....	519-434-6848
Ontario Works Assistance.....	1-888-748-8895
On-Track (A Women's Self-Development Experience).....	519-663-5317 ext. 2241
Outpatient Psychotherapy Service (stress management, assertiveness group) (need doctor referral).....	519-667-6551
Police Family Consultants.....	519-661-5636
St. Joseph's Sexual Assault/ Domestic Assault Treatment Centre.....	519-646-6100 ext. 64224
Second Stage Housing (longer term safe housing).....	519-642-3003
Sexual Assault Centre London (crisis and support line).....	519-438-2272
Traumatic Stress Service.....	519-667-6550
Victim Support Line.....	1-888-579-2888
Victim/Witness Assistance Program	

(assistance with court appearance).....	519-660-3041
Women's Community House.....	519-642-3000
Zhaawanong Shelter.....	519-432-2270