



YWCA
CANADA

A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN
UN POINT TOURNANT
POUR LES FEMMES



FRESH START™



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About YWCA Canada

YWCA Canada is the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization. With 33 Member Associations operating in more than 400 districts and communities across the country, our Turning Point Programs for Women™ - which address personal safety, economic security and well-being - reach out to 1 million women and girls in nine provinces and one territory. YWCA is the largest national provider of shelter to women, serving 25,000 women, children and teen girls including 6,000 fleeing domestic violence each year. We are the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country, and the second largest provider of childcare services. For more information about YWCA Canada and our Member Associations, visit www.ywacanada.ca.

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WHAT IS THIS BOOK ABOUT?

This book is written for women dealing with violence or abuse in their personal lives who want to know what their options are and what they can do.

It is written for you if you feel that something is wrong, but just cannot put your finger on it, if you have tried to leave but have not been able to, if you want to leave but do not know how.

It is also written for you if you have left but are still feeling uncertain about whether you did the right thing and about what steps you should take next.

And, it is written for you if you want to stay and need to know how to keep yourself (and your children if there are any) safe and are wondering if there is anything you can do to make the abuse stop.

Abuse – emotional, spiritual, physical, sexual, cultural, economic, racial and political – happens everywhere women live, whether that is in cities large or small or in rural or remote areas. It happens to all kinds of women regardless of their race, culture, religion, class, ability, age or income level.

It can happen to young women in new relationships and to older women with partners of 30, 40 or 50 years.

Violence against women is not okay. In Canada, there are criminal laws to deal with people who abuse women and to protect women and children from abuse. There are family laws to help when women want to leave partners who have abused them.

Every woman who has experienced abuse has her own story and situation. We know this book cannot speak to all of those differences, but we hope it can be helpful to you.

The information in this book will be helpful to anyone being abused in an intimate relationship – married, common-law or dating; with a same-sex or opposite-sex partner. Much of the information will apply to other kinds of abusive relationships too; for example, if you are being abused by your caregiver, members of your family or at school or work.

The information in this book is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, it is general information, so may not apply perfectly to every single situation. *While not a substitute for legal advice*, it will help you assess your situation and plan your next steps.

If you are making legal decisions, it is very important for you to talk to a lawyer who can give you advice based on the specific details of your situation.

Dealing with abuse can be frightening, painful and lonely. This book will not take away the painful feelings, but it will help you to understand them and realize that as time moves on, your feelings and circumstances will change.

This book is intended to support you in making the choices you need to make to keep yourself, and your children if you have any, safe. Your choices might be very different from another woman's because you will decide what to do based on your personality, your spiritual/religious/cultural/political values, your abuser's behaviour, your financial situation and many other factors that are unique to you.

This book is a resource. You can use it to gather information and find resources and supports before you need them, to think about what choices you might want to make, to help you know what questions to ask when you are ready to talk to someone about your situation, and to support you in talking with your children about what is going on. Only you know what choices are right or wrong for you.

Use the information that is relevant to you in a way that is helpful to you and your family. Read the parts of the book that are helpful or interesting to you right now and save the rest for later.

Most importantly, remember that there is no shame in wanting to make changes in your life. Don't be afraid to ask questions and to ask for support and help if you need it.

We hope the information in this book will help you feel less alone and more ready to take the first steps on whatever path you have decided is the right one for you.

IS THIS BOOK FOR ME?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, this book might be for you.

Does your partner:

- Constantly harass you?
- Say things that make you feel stupid or incompetent?
- Intimidate, manipulate, and try to control you?
- Make you account for your time, who you see, what you do, where you go?
- Embarrass, shame, ignore and criticize you in front of others?
- Take away your privacy by looking at your journal, your email entries, listening in to your phone calls, etc.?
- Accuse you of having affairs?
- Force you to have sex against your wishes, or perform sexual acts you do not like?
- Hit, slap, kick, punch or push you around?
- Threaten to hurt you, your children, pets, himself or others?
- Threaten to have you deported or withdraw his sponsorship?
- Deny you access to financial resources?
- Ignore your needs, isolate or restrain your movements?
- Abuse his power over your medications, food or safety?
- Blame you for everything that goes wrong?

Do you feel:

- Stupid, crazy or worthless, maybe all these and more?
- Hopeless, anxious, full of tension, unable to make decisions?
- Guilty about what is happening, and fear condemnation by others?
- As if you are walking on eggshells all the time?
- Frightened that you could not make it on your own, nor can you make it staying in your relationship under these conditions?

- Trapped by your love for your partner, afraid of him or what he might do to people you care about?
- Like doing what he wants, because it seems easier than saying no, and you want the abuse to stop?

Even if you are not sure you want to change anything in your life right now, you might find that reading this book, or some parts of it, help you feel less alone and more positive about your situation. It is never bad to have information – you can decide what to do with it when it is right for you.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Finding a definition

There are many different definitions of violence against women (VAW), which is also often called partner abuse, woman abuse, domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV).

Many women prefer the term violence against women to reflect the reality that the vast majority of victims are women, whether their abusers are men or women.

While it is not talked about very much, women in same sex (lesbian) relationships experience roughly the same rate of violence as women in opposite sex (heterosexual) relationships. However, because the vast majority of abusers are men, in this book we use male pronouns (he, his, him) when we are talking about abusers. The information is correct for and can be applied to situations of woman on woman abuse.

The term violence against women encompasses the many kinds of violence women can experience: intimate partner abuse, sexual violence, workplace harassment, pornography, etc.

The United Nations has a broad definition of violence against women, which includes violence that takes place within intimate relationships:

The term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following:

- a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in education institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

The cycle of violence

Abuse in a relationship often follows a pattern that has been described as the “cycle of violence.”

Phase 1 is when tension begins to build. You will know there is a blow-up of some kind coming, because your partner is putting you down, arguing over silly things or giving you the silent treatment. You may find yourself walking on eggshells trying to prevent him from exploding.

Phase 2 is when the abusive incident happens. Your partner might yell and scream at you, break furniture, hurt a pet or physically assault you in some way (shoving, pushing, grabbing, hitting, choking or punching).

Phase 3 is the honeymoon phase, which usually follows the abusive outburst. Your partner may apologize and promise never to be violent again. He may even promise to get help. He may send you flowers or buy you gifts in an attempt to get you to forgive him or to stop you from leaving or from telling anyone what he did.

Phase 4 is the denial stage, when either or both of you pretend that nothing is wrong and that the abuse did not happen. You may find

ways to rationalize the abuse; for example, you may say to your partner: “It’s not your fault. I know you had a really hard day at work, today.” Or your partner might say: “I would not have hit you if you had not dressed that way to go to the party.”

Sometimes women find the build-up of tension in Phase 1 so unbearable that they do something to get it out in the open just so the abuse can happen and be over with.

If you find yourself doing this, it is important for you not to feel guilty about it or as though it makes you responsible for the abuse. However, you might want to consider different ways of coping with the abuse that do not put you at risk of ongoing violence. You can begin to use your awareness of the pattern of your partner’s abuse to find ways to remove yourself from the situation, even if just temporarily.

Confused feelings

Because abusive relationships have a cyclical pattern to them, they are not violent all the time. Sometimes, there can even be long periods of calmness, when the relationship feels like it is going well and when you and your partner are enjoying one another.

Sometimes, these good times will come right after an abusive incident, because your partner is feeling badly about what he has done and he wants to win back your affection.

This can leave you with confusing feelings. You continue to love your partner, even though you hate his abuse of you and even though you are sometimes afraid of or angry with him.

This is natural. You do not have to just feel one way all the time. The best way to deal with your conflicting feelings is to accept them all.

It may help you to sort out your mixed feelings towards your partner and how he treats you by making some lists. Write down all the things you like about how he treats you in one list and all the things you don’t like about how he treats you in another. Make another two lists of what you love about him and what you do not love about him. Do you see any patterns or habits when you look at the lists? Do they give you any ideas about what you might want to do next for yourself?

It is much harder to leave a relationship that has both good and bad in it than to leave one that is all bad. Don’t feel badly about yourself if you are having trouble sorting this out.

At some point, you will want to decide whether the good times are worth putting up with the abuse. These questions might help you with this decision:

- Is the abuse getting worse?
- Do you think your partner might hurt you?
- Are you afraid of him?
- Are you starting to lose your self-esteem?
- Do you feel isolated and lonely?

If the answer to these questions is yes, it is probably time for you to consider making a change in your life, whether that is leaving your partner, seeking outside help, calling the police or something else.

WHY DOES MY PARTNER ABUSE ME?

Abusers want to control the behaviour of the person who is being abused or assaulted.

This can be done by using any of the kinds of behaviours described above. Violence is used to intimidate, humiliate or frighten victims and to make them feel powerless.

Abuse may be a single act, or a number of acts, each of which may appear minor in nature, but taken together form a pattern of abuse.

Abuse often takes place in situations where there is a pattern of assault and/or of controlling behaviour. It can also include threats to harm children, other family members, pets and property.

Abuse often takes place in private, so there are no witnesses and it is easier for the abuser to pretend later that nothing happened. This can also make it more difficult for you to convince other people that you are being abused. You might even deny it to yourself.

Because generations of men throughout the world have used abusive behaviour to control women in the past, your partner may believe it is his right to treat you that way, too.

Not every man uses abusive behaviour, and even men who act abusively to their partner do not abuse everyone in their lives.

If your partner says he abused you because he had too much to drink or because he was under too much stress, ask yourself if he would hit a police officer or his boss. The answer to that question is probably

no. He is making choices with every action or non-action he takes, drunk or not.

Abusers all have their own reasons for being abusive. There are some common characteristics:

- He may have been abused himself.
- He may have grown up being taught that it is okay to take out general frustrations and aggression on someone weaker than himself.
- He probably does not accept responsibility for his actions or his life, but blames all his misfortune on others.
- He may feel powerless, dependent and have low self-esteem. People who feel this way inside often try to control others in order to feel some control in their lives.
- He may never have learned how to accept or control his feelings, or how to express them appropriately.

An abuser learns quickly that his abuse works. He gets what he thinks he wants. He will not change himself unless he wants to or until it stops working for him.

So, “Why does he do this?” is a question you can never fully answer, and even if you could, you would never have control over his behaviour.

WHY DO I FEEL LIKE IT IS MY FAULT?

Do you ever say to yourself:

- *I still love him. If I can just learn to be a better wife, he will stop abusing me.*
- *It’s my fault; I must have done something to deserve it.*
- *I guess I started it by nagging him.*
- *If only I had not said or done that, he would not have abused me.*

Your partner may blame you because you do not fit his picture of the “ideal” wife or partner. As long as you try to change your behaviour to please him, you will remain helpless, confused and victimized. Even if you were “perfect”, the abuse would not stop. Your partner is the only one who can make that happen.

Abusers act for reasons of their own that have nothing to do with the

actions of their victim. You, like many women, may feel guilty, ashamed and afraid of being blamed by others because your relationship is not working.

You may even put yourself down because nothing you do seems to stop the abuse. If you feel this way, remember that the way your partner treats you is not your fault or your responsibility.

It is your partner's responsibility to heal himself, to learn to stop the abusive behaviour and to change his attitude.

Do you tell yourself...

- *I have so much to be thankful for, I should be able to put up with this.*
- *He's upset; it is not his fault.*
- *If only he did not drink, he would not lose control.*
- *If he had a job, or a less stressful job, he would not abuse me.*
- *If only the children were not a problem, he would not blame me.*
- *He cannot help it; he has a fierce temper.*
- *At least he is not as bad as his father.*
- *In our family (country, culture, religion), this is the way it has always been.*

Men use lots of reasons to justify their abuse to themselves and to others. Your partner might claim that his religion or culture says he can use abuse to keep you in your place. He might say that this is how his father treated his mother. You or he may have come to Canada from a country where there is no legal response to violence against women. He may not even consider that he is doing anything wrong. Your partner may feel he owns you because he married you. Some men see a marriage licence as a licence to hit.

You will need to be strong to overcome your partner's attempts to blame you or to convince you he has the right to control you so you are able to do what you know is right for you.

The information in this book can help you to find that strength.

DOES ABUSE HAVE TO BE PHYSICAL?

No, your partner's behaviour does not have to include physical assaults or cause physical injuries to be abusive.

Although physical abuse is easier to see and understand, emotional abuse can be just as serious. It is almost always part of physical abuse and may also happen without any physical abuse at all. It causes scarring on the inside that can last for a long time.

When you fall in love, you give your trust and faith to your partner, along with some of the control over your life – believing that he will take care of you as you will care for him. Sometimes, when your partner seems in control of all the important things and checks in with you at various times during the day to see what you are doing, it may feel as though he is showing you that he loves you. But sometimes, after a while, it can feel bossy and not so loving.

The line between taking charge, controlling and abuse is not always clear. If your partner's behaviour makes you do things you do not want to do or stops you from doing things you want to do, that is control, which is a kind of abuse.

Emotional abuse is very hard to identify, because it increases slowly over time and takes on new forms. You may not even realize the situation is abusive or you may think it is not having an impact on you. In fact, the effects tend to creep inside and feed on your own doubts about yourself. They can build up to the point where you may begin to believe that what he says about you is true and to ignore your instinctive need for safety.

You may begin to feel worthless, inadequate, guilty or crazy as the emotional abuse builds, word by word and look by look, slowly draining your self-esteem, your beliefs and your confidence. You may even start to think that you deserve to be treated the way your partner is treating you.

It is helpful if you can remember that your partner is creating his own perceptions about you to make himself feel more powerful and to make it easier to control you. That doesn't make his perceptions of you true. You are the only one who knows who you really are. You are never responsible for being treated abusively – no one deserves to be abused.

Emotional abuse can go on for a long time. It can have a serious impact on your physical health as well as your self-esteem. You may experience depression, anxiety and other physical illnesses.

Paying attention to warning signs and behaviours can help you identify emotional abuse before it starts or in its early stages.

While all partners disagree and argue sometimes, in a healthy relationship neither person feels scared of the other and both people feel that they have some power and control.

Even if he never physically hurts you, it is unhealthy if your partner:

- intimidates, coerces or threatens you into doing what he wants
- attacks you verbally
- insults you privately or in front of others
- isolates you from your family or friends
- insists on controlling the family finances to the point that you feel fearful or like you have no control.

Emotional abuse is hard to identify and is not taken as seriously as it should be by society at large, so many women do not identify what is happening to them as abuse.

You may not be able to do anything to change your partner's abusive behaviour, but you can decide to change your life and his ability to abuse you. As you read through this book, you will find information you will need as you decide how you want to move forward in your life.

WHAT ABOUT COUNSELING?

As long as your partner is physically abusing you or threatening to hurt you, you should not go for counseling together. Couple or family counseling that includes the abuser should not take place until violence has stopped. It is too dangerous for you. In fact, you should not even see the same counselor.

Should I see a counselor?

Even if your partner refuses to go for counseling, you might find it very helpful to see a counselor yourself, to talk through what is going on and how you are coping with it. Check with your local YWCA to find a counselor who will be sensitive to your background and situation and who has experience working with women who have experienced abuse.

Choose your counselor carefully. If you don't think the first one you meet with is someone you can work with, thank her for her time and try another one. Don't feel guilty or embarrassed about doing this –

finding the right counselor is very important.

These are some questions you might find helpful to ask yourself when assessing potential counselors:

- Is she sensitive to my background and situation?
- Will she support me, even if her beliefs and values are different from mine?
- Does she believe me?
- Does she know what help is available in my area, community and culture?
- Does she know about the legal, financial and other systems I may need to work with?
- Will she give me the information I need to make good choices, refer me to people and agencies that meet my needs, and be an advocate for me when needed?
- Will she support me in making my own choices and decisions, at my own pace?
- Will she avoid blaming me?
- Will she take the abuse and its effects on me seriously, and always keep my safety in mind?

Will counseling work for my partner?

Statistics show that for the abuse to stop, your partner needs to:

- Admit he is responsible for abusing you
- Want to heal himself and stop abusing you
- Learn new ways of coping with his feelings
- Learn to respect you
- Agree that you are not responsible for his actions
- Give up attempts to control you

Many men agree to go for help only when their wives have left them. Often, if their wives return, the old behaviours return too, or new ways of control will develop. Most men who use abusive behaviour have a great deal of difficulty giving up their need for control. Reuniting with your abusive partner, whether it is your idea or his,

can be a time of heightened danger, as he may:

- Think you need to be punished for leaving or for telling someone (e.g. the police) about the abuse
- Be jealous and suspicious you may try to leave again
- Want to isolate you from any friends you made while you were apart

If your partner agrees to go to counseling, be aware he may be going only to keep you in the relationship or to get you back. He may also be doing it to stay out of jail or to avoid paying a fine.

Until he is going for himself, counseling will not change him.

If your partner says he's willing to get help, you should try not to give him any guarantees. You could tell him that you will think about continuing your relationship with him once he has shown that he has changed his controlling and abusive attitude and behaviour. Even if the violence ends and he says he has changed, you should not feel guilty if you have lost your trust in him. There are limits beyond which relationships cannot be repaired.

Before making the decision to return to your partner, or to go to couple counseling, it's a good idea to ask your partner if it is okay to speak with his counselor.

If you are still with your partner while he is getting counseling, it would be helpful for you to learn about the new behaviour that he is learning. That way, you will understand why he is doing certain things and can be supportive. For example, he may be learning to take "time out" and be by himself when he recognizes that he is becoming abusive.

Successful long-term change occurs most often when counseling is combined with negative consequences for abusive behaviour: not just from partners, but also from society in general, including disapproval of friends or neighbours and penalties from the legal system, such as fines or a term in jail.

There are several stages of change for an abuser:

- He must want to change, for himself.
- He must stop using physical force.
- He must give up emotionally abusive and controlling behaviour.
- He must learn to empathize with his partner, understand the effects

of his behaviour, and see his partner's opinions and needs as at least as valid and important as his own.

One or two counseling sessions are not enough.

Remember: You're responsible for your safety, but not for stopping the abuse or changing your partner's attitudes or behaviours. He is the only one who is responsible for stopping the abuse. He is the only one who is responsible for changing himself.

WHY DO I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD STAY?

I spent so many years as a wife that I would not be anybody if I left him.

I'd feel like a failure.

I'm ashamed and afraid to tell anyone about what has been done to me.

My partner is seen as a gentle well-respected person in the community.

No one would believe me anyway. I'd get the blame. Besides, if I told someone and he found out, it would make things worse.

I do not know how I could make enough money to live on.

My children would hate me for taking them away from their friends and home.

There are a lot of things to think about when you are trying to make big changes in your life. Don't be surprised if you have trouble making decisions or find yourself changing your mind over and over.

You may find it especially hard to make decisions if your partner has been the one making most or all of the decisions in your relationship. Suddenly, you are trying to do something you have not done for a long time.

Making the decision to leave is especially difficult. You may be afraid to leave because you have no money, because you don't want to live alone or raise your children by yourself. You may think that you should stay for the sake of the children. You may believe the myth that it is your responsibility to make the family work, and not want to admit to yourself or others that you feel as if you are failing. Sometimes staying with what you know feels less frightening than going into what you do not know.

These are all understandable and reasonable fears. However, this might be a good time to challenge those fears and start to think about what you would like your life to look like.

You could begin by reaching out for information so you know what options are available to help you make the best decisions for yourself and your family when you're ready to make some changes. You may want to call or visit local organizations that provide support to abused women and their children – your local YWCA, your religious centre, a family counseling agency, a cultural or immigrant services centre. You can go to a women's shelter for information or support. You do not have to move into the shelter to use many of their services, but you can stay there at any time if safety is an issue for you.

As you have more information, you'll probably find that making decisions becomes easier.

It's important to keep safety in mind at all times as you start to make changes of any kind in your relationship or your life. Even gathering information can be dangerous if your abuser finds out what you are doing.

You can read the safety section of this book for good information about how to make a plan to keep yourself and your children safe.

SHOULD I TALK TO MY FRIENDS?

It can be hard to make the decision to talk to someone about your abuse. You may be afraid they won't believe you or will think it is your fault. You might be worried they will tell your partner, or embarrassed about the abuse and want to keep it a secret.

Even though it seems hard at first, it's very important to find someone you can talk to. Think carefully about who you trust and who will believe and support you. You want to talk to someone who will respect your privacy and understand the safety issues behind not telling your partner.

The ideal person to talk to is a close friend or relative who you trust and who you think will understand your situation, because that person already knows you and will be able to help you in working through your choices.

However, you may not feel this gives you enough privacy. This is especially so if you live in a small social, cultural or religious community and all your close friends and relatives are also friends with your partner.

In this case, you may need to go beyond your circle of family and friends to a community organization or agency to find support and

information. Call your local YWCA or a women's shelter, community counseling agency or family services agency. At any of these organizations, you will find supportive, non-judgmental staff who can provide you with support and information to assist you in making decisions.

Many religious or cultural leaders encourage people to talk to them about relationship issues. This is fine, as long as you know the leader understands violence against women, will support you in addressing the situation and will not tell your partner what you have said. If the leader's goal is to keep you in your relationship with your partner or if she or he does not see women and men as equal, then it is probably not a good idea to talk to her or him.

You might find your family doctor a good person to talk to. She can listen, make suggestions about possible counselors you could talk to and help you with the health-related issues such as anxiety, sleep and eating disorders, panic attacks and depression that are often associated with abuse.

You should try not to become isolated. This may be difficult if your partner has cut you off from your friends and family in an attempt to increase his control over you. If you don't have friends or family with whom you are close, you could try to develop some new friendships.

If you are able to, you could join a club, take a course or do some volunteer work. Take your children to the library and talk to other mothers who are there. Even getting to know your neighbours and offering to help them with a task like gardening or babysitting can make you feel less isolated and more connected to your community.

If your partner prevents you from getting involved with independent activities, perhaps you can get involved in an activity that does not threaten him; for instance, doing something at your church, synagogue or mosque or becoming a parent volunteer at your children's daycare centre or school.

Always remember – no one ever has to put up with being abused. We all have a right to live free from abuse and the fear of abuse.

Family and friends may try to persuade you not to talk about the abuse or not to do anything about it. This may be because they do not know how serious the abuse that you are experiencing is, or they may be afraid that you will make things worse for yourself if you try to make any changes.

This can mean you may not feel supported as you try to decide what to do about the abuse and with the rest of your life.

Always remember that you are the expert on your life. No one else knows what is best for you.

It's good to ask for help and support from others. Try to find people who will listen, believe and offer suggestions without being judgmental and without telling you what you should do.

Set your mind on what you have to do for your emotional and physical safety. Focus on building your own strengths and your own life.

Whether you know that leaving is the best thing for you to do, or you have decided to stay with your partner for now, trust your own instincts and try not to let others influence you to do something else.

Listen to yourself and keep your safety and that of your children as your top priority.

Even if others say ...

- *You made your bed, now lie in it.*
- *You must be asking for it if you put up with it all this time.*
- *There must be something wrong with you.*
- *We all put up with that crap.*
- *You are his wife; it's your duty to please him. You should be a better wife.*
- *He needs your help.*
- *You must have provoked him.*
- *He is a good provider, many people put up with worse.*
- *You should stay for the sake of the children.*
- *You are hysterical (stupid or crazy). He'd never be like that.*
- *You do not deserve anything if you leave. You will never make it on your own. ... this is not true.*

Remember that you have the right to live a life free from violence and abuse.

WHAT ABOUT MY CHILDREN?

Staying in an abusive situation for the sake of the children is not going to help them in the long run. Being exposed to violence can be a traumatic experience. Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to grow up to act abusively or to put up with abuse because they have not seen or learned how to have relationships based on mutual respect. Children can learn both positively and negatively from their parents how to relate to others and how to deal with conflict.

Children who have witnessed their mothers being abused may not understand the difference between being loved and being abused. Sometimes young people interpret jealous, controlling, abusive behaviour as a sign of love and affection. They feel noticed, which feels better than being ignored. It may be all they know, from watching their parents, so abuse and control may seem normal and become normalized behaviour for them.

How your children may feel

Children try to make sense out of what happens in the world, to believe that there is a reason for it. They may feel that it is your fault or theirs that you are being abused.

They also may be walking on eggshells, feeling tense and frightened, controlled and abused. They may feel guilty that they cannot help you, or angry with you for not helping them. They may take your partner's side because they feel it is safer to be on the side of power.

They may be angry with you because it seems like you can't protect them or for taking them away from their friends and home. But, if they tell you that they are angry with you, or hate you, it's important to understand that they feel safe enough with you to share their feelings.

What to say to your children

More than ever, your children need to know that you love them. It is also very important for you to show them that you understand their feelings and to share some of yours with them. You need to do this in a way that does not make them feel as though they have to choose sides.

Your children need to know that you are there to take care of them. They need to know that you love them, that you understand their

pain and anger and that you are listening to them even when they cannot express exactly what they are feeling or why they are acting out. Let them know that there are no right or wrong feelings and that you will love them no matter what they feel.

Children need to know what is going on, even if it is scary, in order to feel secure. It is better for them to know what is happening than for you to try to hide the truth from them. Tell them the truth. At a gut level, children pick up the tension. It is less scary if they know what the tension is about.

Tell them what is happening in words they can understand based on their age. Focus your explanation on their dad's abusive behaviour, and explain why it is unacceptable. Do not attack his personality or use abusive language.

You can let them know that you feel angry with their father for creating so much tension, or for creating a situation in which you have to move away from home.

Their feelings about you and their father may be confused. You can let them know that they can still love their father, even if they don't like the way he treats you. Let them know that it is their father's responsibility to stop abusing you.

Reassure them that they do not have to choose just one feeling or one parent. They can still love you both while not liking what is happening.

Even though you do not want to draw your children into the adult issues between you and your partner, it is very important to be clear with them that no one deserves beatings or abuse.

You can let them know that this is an adult problem for you and your partner to work out between you, while you continue to teach them how to look after their own safety.

Try to have them spend time with other emotionally healthy adults with whom they are comfortable. It will help them to see adults who can settle differences without control, abuse or violence and who respect each other.

Tell your children that you are learning how to safely improve your family's situation. By standing up for your rights, you show your children that no one has the right to abuse another person.

How they may act

Children often express their experiences through their behaviour. Your children may test you by acting out.

They may do this because they do not have words to express their feelings and are reaching out in the only way they know. You can help them understand the difference between feeling an emotion, and speaking or acting from that emotion and between respectful and hurtful words and actions.

Let your children know that any form of abuse – verbal, emotional or physical – is wrong. Help them to learn more effective and respectful ways of getting what they want, rejecting what they do not want and expressing their feelings.

Do not be afraid to set limits in a firm, loving manner. Children are dependent on adults to tell them what is right and wrong. This does not stop in a new situation. They may be more insecure and confused and try to test your control even more than usual. Tell them clearly what they can and cannot do. Ask them to help you work out some guidelines that will help all of you to be safe. Develop some consequences that they will face if they do not follow the guidelines. Stick to the rules you develop with them. Follow through with strength and love on the consequences that you and they have agreed upon if they violate the guidelines.

Getting outside help

You can support and help your children by working as a team with other people who are trying to help them. This should help you to feel less alone.

Children often cannot put into words all the confused feelings and emotions they are experiencing. Sometimes, expressing their feelings to someone outside of the family helps bring them relief. Often professional counseling, individually or in groups, greatly helps children who have witnessed abuse.

In many cities, there are specialized counseling services and programs for children who have witnessed abuse. Your local YWCA, Community Information Centre, family counseling service or shelter may be able to help you locate these resources.

Child protection concerns

Children who are exposed to violence directed at their mother may be considered “at risk” by child protection authorities.

Professionals such as teachers, daycare workers, shelter workers and doctors have a legal duty to report such situations. If this happens, a worker from the child protection agency may meet with you to discuss concerns about your child’s safety and well-being. In very serious cases, the agency can remove children if the violence is having a negative impact on them. In other cases, the agency can work with you to develop a plan that will keep you and your children safe.

Fear of losing their children makes many women afraid to report abuse, especially if they have had past involvement with a child welfare agency or if they are afraid they may become homeless and have no financial means of looking after their children.

These are very big considerations. Equally frightening is what could happen to your children if they continue living in an abusive environment. This is why you need to get as much information as you can about how you can find the best support for everyone’s safety.

You may want to call a shelter or distress line, without identifying yourself, to get information about the law in your province or territory and how it could affect you and your children. You can get information about what child protection agencies are supposed to do and about your and your children’s rights.

If you have any contact with a child protection agency or if anyone tells you they are going to report you to such an agency, **talk to a lawyer.**

You have the right to be part of any discussions with the child welfare agency about what it is planning to do. Remember, child welfare agencies can remove children from a home if they believe them to be at imminent risk, but they will first try to find a less intrusive way to ensure the children’s safety.

Positive parenting

There are special challenges to parenting positively if you separate from your children’s father. You may be involved in a court battle over custody and access. Your partner may be trying to buy the children’s affections with expensive gifts, travel, etc. He may be able to do this because he has more money and is not taking responsibility for the

many, less interesting day-to-day expenses of the children.

It is natural for you to feel upset about this, so try to remember that the love and constant care you give the children will be part of their security forever. No amount of money can buy that. You can learn new inexpensive ways to have fun with them.

Even though you may want to, don't use your children to get revenge on your partner. Do not put them in the middle, make them take sides, or use them to pass messages back and forth. Your partner may badmouth you to the children. Try not to respond to this by doing the same thing back. Simply tell your children that the dispute between you and their father is an adult one and that you do not want them involved in or worrying about it.

It is important that you take a little time every day to spend with your children. You can find other single parents in the community who will give you ideas and perhaps join you.

Children need to feel loved, accepted and safe in their family. This means that living in a home in which there is no violence is better for them than living in a home in which they never know when violence may erupt. Encourage them to seek out friends and activities in a new community as soon as you settle. Friendships can help them regain security. They need to belong, too.

There are many effective ways to guide and discipline your children without hurting them physically or emotionally. While you may find it automatic and it may seem easier to shout, blame or hit children to get cooperation or to stop them from doing something, especially if this is how your parents treated you or how your partner treats you, in the long run, it isn't.

Most adults need help learning to cope with the frustrations of guiding their children's behaviour. This is an opportunity for you to break the cycle of verbal, emotional and physical violence. They need to learn there are alternatives. You do not have to do it all alone. If you need help, ask the staff at the transition house, or other mothers for help in dealing with your children. Many shelters, your local YWCA and other organizations have support programs for children who have witnessed abuse.

Try to accept that you are not perfect – no parent is. Just keep doing your best. Be open to changing what does not work and learning new ways.

As a parent, you have needs, too. Don't feel badly about wanting time away from the children for your friends and activities. Make sure you take this time for yourself, because it will make you a better parent. If your children have a hard time being away from you, tell them you love them and that though you are going out for a while, you will be back.

HOW CAN I COPE WHILE I AM WITH HIM?

You may not be ready to think about leaving your partner, but there are still things you can do to keep yourself and your children safe.

Setting a bottom line

One strategy is to think about what your bottom line is. Decide what your safety limit is and then stick to it, which is easier said than done. You might decide that your bottom line is:

- If he abuses the children
- If he tries to isolate you from your family and friends
- If he injures you physically

In a non-crisis moment, tell your partner about your bottom line and how he can avoid crossing it. For instance, you could suggest some strategies for him to use if he is feeling jealous about you spending time with your family.

Always remember that you are not responsible for his violence or for helping him find ways to change his behaviour. Your job is to set boundaries for yourself and find ways to keep yourself and your children safe.

You want to be sure you have somewhere safe to go if your partner crosses your bottom line. See the safety planning section of this book for strategies and suggestions.

Denial

Your partner most likely denies that he is abusive to you. In fact, if he comes from an abusive family, he may not even recognize that his behaviour is abusive.

You, too, may deny what is happening or may convince yourself that it is not so bad or that it won't happen again. The cycle of violence described earlier includes the denial phase.

Denial is part of a coping mechanism as long as you stay in an abusive relationship, but it can also stop you from moving on.

Try writing down the details of the abuse you are experiencing. Does this make it harder for you to deny or minimize what is happening to you? If there is somewhere safe for you to keep these notes, you can look at them when your partner is treating you well as a reminder that the abuse will come again. If there is nowhere safe to keep your notes, you should destroy them.

Coping

Finding healthy ways to cope while in an abusive relationship can be challenging. Try to find ways to get some of what you need, whether that is time alone, time with family and friends, time for hobbies or other recreational activities.

If you find yourself using alcohol or other drugs as a coping strategy, it is time to take a look at what you are doing. Having a few drinks or taking medication can offer immediate, short-term relief but it is not a healthy, long-term solution. You may feel more helpless or become numbed or desensitized to the abuse, which can make you less likely to take steps to deal with it. You may begin to neglect your parenting responsibilities. You might have trouble with your job.

If you think you are overusing alcohol or other drugs, that you may be becoming dependent on them or that they are having a negative impact on your daily life, talk to a counselor or your doctor as soon as possible about the appropriate way for you to get support and help. If you don't know where to turn first, you can contact your local YWCA or other women's organization for information and support.

Pregnancy

For many women, abuse starts during pregnancy. There are a number of reasons for this. Even if he wanted the pregnancy, your partner may:

- Feel a loss of control over you because the pregnancy is happening inside your body
- Feel threatened by the attention you are paying to your pregnancy
- Feel competitive towards the soon-to-arrive baby
- Dislike the changes to the your body
- Experience stress caused by the pregnancy

These may all be triggers that lead to an outburst of violence or an escalation of abuse. This abuse can be very harmful both physically and emotionally to you and the baby, before and after birth, so it should not be minimized or ignored.

Talk to your doctor or midwife. She can help you keep yourself and your baby safe both before and after it is born and can provide you with information about community resources. You may also want to talk to a women's counselor who can help you develop a safety plan.

If you have other children and your doctor or midwife is concerned that they may be at risk of harm because of being exposed to abuse in the home, she has the same legal duty as other professionals to report this to child protection authorities. For more information about this, see the child protection section of this book.

Sometimes women think having a baby will end the abuse or make the relationship better. This is almost never the case. Or, your partner may try to convince you to get pregnant. He may do so to increase your dependence on him so you are less likely to leave.

In these situations, it is important to take the time to think through any decision to get pregnant very carefully or, if you are already pregnant, any decision to continue with the pregnancy. You are the one who should be making these decisions, taking into account first what is best for you and any children you already have. Bringing a baby into an abusive situation is never good for anyone.

WHAT IF STAYING DOES NOT WORK?

If you have stayed, but that has not worked out, try not to feel guilty about changing the options you are considering. If you have tried to survive in your relationship, but you are still being abused, you may want to think about leaving.

It can be scary to set a new goal, especially one as big as leaving your relationship. It is a very big step to let go of the dreams we have of a fairy tale life with a "happily ever after" ending. The awareness that you may need to leave can develop many different ways.

It may come to you slowly or you may suddenly see the pattern of abuse and realize you need to leave. You might hear it from another person or identify with a character or familiar situation in a movie or book.

However you come to the decision that you want to leave your abuser,

knowing the steps and resources is the first step. Then, you will need to believe in yourself, care for yourself and your children, and get outside support, if possible.

You will have to decide that you want to be a survivor. Nothing can happen until you take the first step of admitting your need for change, your fear of it, and find the courage and determination to move on.

Most women leave many times before they make it all the way out of an abusive relationship. Sometimes a woman will go to a shelter for a while, return to her partner, and then leave again. Some call the police several times before they take more active measures.

Don't feel ashamed if you are having trouble making the decision to leave. One shelter director calls this "practising to leave." It may help to set small, realistic goals for yourself so you can feel as though you are accomplishing something every day. Keep your safety, and that of your children, in mind all the time.

WHAT IF MY PARTNER THREATENS TO KILL ME OR HIMSELF IF I LEAVE?

The most dangerous time for many women is right after they leave an abusive relationship. If you think that your partner might be violent when he finds out you want to leave, **do not tell him. Try to leave when he's not home.**

He will probably feel very hurt, afraid, abandoned and more out-of-control than ever if you tell him you are leaving. Physical abuse may increase or may occur for the first time. His violence is an attempt to manipulate and control you so that he will not feel the loss, abandonment and face a frightening change. He may hope you will feel sorry for him, that you will feel guilty or afraid, and that you will not leave him. He is trying to gain control over his life by controlling you.

Your partner may threaten to kill himself or you and/or your children if you leave. **Take any such threats seriously. Call the police for assistance.** If you do not know the police emergency number, you can find it in the front pages of your telephone book. This is an important number to memorize or to write down and carry with you at all times.

Once you have left, you need to decide whether you want him to

know where you are staying. If he knows where you are, will he try to come there? Will he be violent or a threat to the safety of anyone with whom you are staying? How can you keep yourself safe if he finds out where you are?

You may find it more comfortable to use the telephone or email if you need to communicate with your partner for any reason. Again, you need to think about what is best for you. Is it safe for him to have a phone number for you, or should you call him from a pay phone or blocked number? Will he harass you by email if he has your email address?

It is not considered a good idea to meet him in your old surroundings or privately. If you must get together with him, try to find a neutral, public place like a shopping mall or restaurant. Bring someone with you if at all possible.

THE SAFETY PLAN

If you are in immediate danger, call the police.

Assess your safety

The following suggestions are for any woman, no matter what kind of abuse she is dealing with.

They are precautions, which do not guarantee safety, but which will be useful to you at some point.

You are the best person to judge what to do to increase your own awareness and plans for safety. Trust in your instincts, even if you cannot imagine needing to take a safety inventory now. It is always best to be prepared for the unknown as much as you can, rather than to be unprepared in the midst of an emergency.

If it is possible, plan your safety while you are living with your partner.

A good start is to be aware of emotional clues:

- Do you feel that your partner is trying to have more control over who you are with, where you go?
- Does your partner change in any way before he begins to abuse you, such as getting a certain look in his eyes, a changed tone of voice or tension in his muscles?

- Do you begin to get stomach pains or feel increasingly anxious?
- Are there situations in which abuse typically will start such as a specific time of day or special days like birthdays, holidays, paydays or after he has been drinking alcohol?
- Have circumstances changed for either of you, such as a pregnancy, illness, job loss, pending separation, changing jobs, moving?

Pay attention to your intuition and your body responses. They are often right.

Gather information

The first step in making a safety plan is to gather information. Information is power, and can greatly improve your ability to survive.

What you need to know to keep yourself safe depends on your situation. You may need to know about emergency shelters or longer-term housing, how to get custody of your children, how to open a bank account, how to change the locks on the doors to your home or many other things.

Try to find someone who will help you get the information you need, who will not tell your partner and who will not blame you for your situation.

You could call the YWCA in your community for support and information. If you do not have a YWCA, there are many other sources of information in your community.

A number of cities in Canada, including Toronto, Edmonton and Calgary, have 211 services. By dialing 211, you can reach a full range of community support services in that city. For a full list of cities with this service, see the resources section or go to www.211Canada.ca online.

Women's shelters can provide a great deal of helpful information over the telephone. You do not have to go to the shelter to stay or even give your name in order to get information and support. You can find the telephone numbers for shelters, distress lines and sexual assault lines, as well as the police emergency number and other provincial police services in the front pages of your phone book.

Community health clinics, hospital emergency departments, police services, native friendship centres, some religious or spiritual centres, cultural or community centres and national organizations such as

those listed at the end of this book can also provide information and referrals.

The Internet can be a good resource for information if used carefully. Most libraries have free computer access and people to help you.

When using the Internet to gather information, be sure to read carefully about the website you are using. Some websites that claim to offer information, including legal information, about woman abuse are written by abusive men so should not be relied on to provide truthful information. Others are written by individuals who may not have the expertise to provide accurate information. In fact, it is best to only use websites that have been recommended by someone you trust.

If you are worried your partner might monitor your computer use, consider using a computer outside the home when you are gathering information about abuse and leaving. Some websites offer information about how to “hide your tracks.” You should follow these instructions and learn how to clear your cache if you are using your computer at home.

Be careful what you write in emails and/or on social networking sites. Postings can be cached by the site even if you delete them from your profile and something said as a joke can come back to haunt you if your abuser reads your email or has access to your Facebook page. Email and social networking sites are not an appropriate place to criticize your abuser – if you need to talk to a friend about your partner’s negative qualities, you should do so in person or on the phone. Use social networking sites like Facebook very cautiously. Even if you don’t give your partner access to your site, he may get the information you put on it from someone else.

Generally, it is a good idea to assume you have no privacy when you post comments to these sites.

Make your safety plan

Remember, these are suggestions. Some may not apply to you. There may be some you don’t want to or can’t use. You can pick and choose from this list to make a safety plan that works for you and your children.

Money

If you are still living with your abuser, open a bank account in your

name in a bank that he does not use, even if you can only put a few dollars in it at first. Add money to the account whenever you can. Eventually, this will give you some money that is just yours. Ask the bank to hold your monthly statements for you to pick up and then either throw them away once you have reviewed them or find somewhere safe and private to keep them. If you bank online with this private account, remember to clear your cache and place any saved statements in a password-encoded file that only you can access. If your partner has access to your computer and might become suspicious of a new locked file, save all of your private information on a memory stick that you keep somewhere safe.

If possible, get a credit card in your name only and keep it in a safe and private place.

Keys

Have an extra set of house and car keys made. Keep them somewhere secret that is also accessible (for example, under a shrub or rock outside your house), so you can grab them quickly if you need to.

The telephone

If you can afford it, buy yourself a cell phone and keep it somewhere safe and private. Get a pay as you go plan so that you are not receiving bills for this phone at your home. Program in emergency numbers as well as telephone numbers for friends or family members who know about your situation.

Make sure you keep this phone charged up so you can use it in an emergency. You might want to keep it outside your home, so you can get to it even if you are trying to get away from your partner. Use it to make any calls you do not want your partner to know about.

If you can't afford a cell phone, find out how to block the "last call redial" service on your home phone, and use it when you are making calls that you do not want your partner to know about.

If possible, have at least one cordless phone in your home, so you can grab it and take it somewhere safe to use it if necessary.

Documents

Keep important documents in a safe place that you can get to easily. If possible, have photocopies made and keep the copies at work or at the house of a trusted friend or family member who will not tell anyone.

These are some of the documents that should be kept in a safe place. You may have additional documents that you want to include:

- emergency phone numbers and address book
- keys for the house, car, office
- all court documents, including protection or restraining orders, custody and access orders and bail conditions
- passports, proof of citizenship, immigration papers
- birth certificates
- health cards
- social insurance cards
- medication prescriptions
- insurance papers
- marriage, separation or divorce papers
- paternity documents
- school and vaccination/medical records
- driver's licence and car registration
- pay stubs, welfare identification
- charge cards, cheque books, bankbooks, financial papers, PINs
- lease-rental agreement, home ownership papers, mortgage papers

Emergency supplies

If you are able to, you may want to put together a small pack with some extra clothes for yourself and your children and any medication or other supplies that you would need if you had to leave your home in a hurry. Find somewhere private to keep this bag that you can get to quickly and easily if you are fleeing a violent situation.

Safety in the home

If you are still living with your abuser and you feel the tension is building and getting worse, try to leave the house if you can do so safely. If you cannot leave the house, go to a room in which there are fewer things that can be used as weapons. Think about where that would be before you need to act.

- Do not run to the kitchen, bathroom, basement or garage if there is a risk you might get trapped there.
- Take a cordless phone to a room with a door that can be locked or jammed shut with a piece of furniture. This room might have a window from which you could escape, but be aware it could be used to get to you, too.
- Keep a charged-up cell phone with you.
- Program a single number call to an emergency service such as 911.
- If you make an emergency call, give the police your name and address and the number from which you are calling and ask them to keep the information on file.

If you are not living with your abuser, there are some steps you can take to make your home safe and feel safer.

- Keep your new address confidential.
- Have an unlisted phone number.
- Consider changing your email address.
- Make sure you know where all the doors and exits are.
- Put a peephole in your door so that you can see who is there without opening the door.
- Install deadbolt locks on your outer doors.
- Make sure all your windows have locks.
- If you can, depending on your circumstances, install an alarm system.
- If you cannot afford to do this and you live in an urban setting, buy a very loud whistle and wear it around your neck when you are alone.
- Make sure your house number is clearly visible from the street so emergency personnel can find your home quickly.
- If you are legally permitted to do so, change the locks on the doors to your home.

Where you can go

Arrange for a safe place to go with your children if you have to leave

your home in an emergency. Your first stop might be a neighbour. Make sure the neighbour understands your situation and can be trusted not to talk to your partner. If you can, get a key to your neighbour's house in case you have to go there when she is not home. Keep this key in your emergency storage place with other keys and valuables. Practise the quickest and easiest route to her house with your children so they can get there by themselves if they have to.

Depending on your situation, you may want to make a full safety plan with a neighbour. Get to know your neighbour's routines and let her know about yours so that one of you will notice when something out of the ordinary happens. Agree on a code word, gesture or sign you can use if you need help but can't say so at the time.

Safety at work and in the community

If you're worried that your abuser might come to your workplace to harass or harm you, consider telling a co-worker, the security person or your boss. They should be willing to work with you to develop a workplace safety plan.

You may want to consider changing your routines, such as the time you go to work and the route you take to get there.

If your partner is very persistent, you may have to change other habits and patterns such as where you shop or spend recreational time.

Long-term safety

If you think that sometime you might need somewhere to stay in an emergency, it's a good idea to check out some options ahead of time.

Women's shelters provide safe, supportive short-term accommodation for abused women and their children in many communities. They are free and open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Find out if your community has a shelter and, if so, where it is and how you could be admitted to it.

It felt wonderful to be safe behind those shelter walls, and I felt so much better about myself when I found out that I was not the only one who had these problems.

If you stay at a shelter, you will meet other women who are in similar situations. You and your children will have the opportunity to get some counseling. You will be able to get information about housing, legal issues, economic supports and other topics that you will need to

know about. Your partner will not be told that you are there, even if he calls looking for you.

Every shelter is different. Each has its own atmosphere, rules and counselors, with different backgrounds and personalities, and different programs, all of which may change from time to time.

Also, the mix of women and children will change. You may encounter women and kids from different cultures, who speak different languages, who have different food preferences and whose needs are different.

Some shelters do not admit children over 16.

If you have particular needs, for example, you need wheelchair accessibility or ASL interpretation, call the shelter nearest you before you need to go there. If they cannot accommodate your needs, ask them where they would recommend you go.

If you do not want to stay in a shelter or if there is not one in your community, consider whether you have a friend or family member who supports you and who has enough space for you and your children to stay for a while. Another option might be to stay in a motel for a few days while you explore other options. If you plan to use any of these options, you need to consider how you will keep yourself and your children safe.

Involve your children in the safety plan

It is very important for your children to know how to keep themselves safe if an abusive incident arises when they are around. They will be less afraid if there's a plan with which they are familiar and comfortable.

Of course, not all of these suggestions will be appropriate, depending on the ages of your children.

Self-defence and/or street-proofing

Many communities have street-proofing lessons for children. Call your local police service, community centre or the children's school to see if there is one. Some of the street-proofing courses include what to do if there is violence at home.

Awareness

Your children will feel safer and more in control if they know how to recognize signs of danger. You can practise with them what they can

do and where they can go if they feel unsafe.

Help them understand that they can always tell you if something scary happens to them and that keeping scary things secret can be dangerous.

Calling for help

Ask your children to think of someone other than you they would feel comfortable talking to about what goes on in your family. Make sure they know how to contact this person in an emergency.

Once your children are old enough to use a telephone, teach them how to use your home phone as well as your cell phone. Although pay phones are hard to find now that most people carry cell phones, you could teach them how to use one. Help them learn one or two emergency numbers (the police emergency number and the number of a friend or family member) they could call for help.

It is important that children know they will not be blamed if they call the police because they don't feel safe or they think you are in danger.

If your children are old enough to use the telephone, they are old enough to memorize your address and to learn what they should say if they have to call someone in an emergency.

Safety drills

Practise and role play with them what to do and where to go if something unsafe is happening at home. If they are very young, practise in a way that does not frighten them but that makes it clear this is serious.

The most important thing for children to know is that they should never become involved in abuse or violence happening between adults. Make sure your children understand that they should not try to help or protect you if your partner is assaulting you. Explain to them that they should stay away from where you are being abused and that getting themselves to a safe place and calling for help is the best thing for everyone.

Practise with them where they could go to be safe — a room in the house that locks, a neighbour's home, etc. If your partner does not live with you any more, practise with the children what they should do if he comes to your home when he is not expected or wanted.

Warning code

Develop a code or a look that you can give your children to let them know that they should go for help or that they should call the police.

Inform others

If you are not living with your ex-partner or the children's father, make sure that other adults who spend regular time with your children (teachers, daycare providers) are informed about the situation and know what they should do if they have concerns.

If anyone other than you is picking the children up from daycare, school or the babysitter, make sure that the sitter, teachers or daycare workers know exactly who that person is.

Transporting or accompanying the children

If you are concerned that your partner might take your children before you can get a custody order, you may need to make arrangements to transport or accompany them anywhere they go. In an extreme situation, you may feel you need to keep them out of school for a short period of time.

If you have a court order to keep your partner away from the children, give copies to anyone who looks after them, as well as a picture of him if they do not know what he looks like. Most schools and daycares are familiar with this kind of situation.

Reassurance

While ensuring that your children are safe and know how to keep themselves safe is important, it is also important to reassure them that you are responsible for managing the situation. Remind them that they are not responsible for your safety, and that they can help you best by making sure they are safe.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN AN EMERGENCY?

If your partner is assaulting you, probably the best thing you can do is to get into a public space and/or call the police.

If you are alone with your abuser, try to run to a place where there are more people. Make as much noise as you can, if there are people anywhere around. You can shout or scream "HELP," "POLICE," or "FIRE." Knowing that someone else may see or hear what is

happening will stop many abusers, and witnesses can be important if the police lay charges.

If you are in imminent danger and have access to a telephone, you can call the police emergency number. Try to describe what is going on and where you are and, if possible, stay on the line with the dispatcher until the police arrive.

There is no right or wrong answer to the question about whether or not to call the police. Every woman's situation is different. You may be afraid to call the police because you think it might make the situation worse or because you think they won't believe you or take you seriously.

You may be concerned that if you call the police you will create legal problems for your partner that are not connected to his abuse of you; for example, immigration or employment problems. You may be worried that calling the police will mean child protection authorities will become involved with your family or that your partner will automatically go to jail.

These are reasonable concerns to have. Only you know what is best for you and your family. However, **if you are in a situation of immediate danger, there is no doubt that calling the police can save your life.**

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CALL THE POLICE?

Everywhere in Canada, the police are required to lay charges in cases of domestic violence if they believe a crime has been committed. This is often called the "mandatory charging policy" and means that, if the police have come to your home and they believe your partner has assaulted you, they will lay a charge against him, even if you do not want them to. You do not have a voice in the charging decision.

This is good for some women, who do not want the responsibility of telling the police to charge their partner. However, there are many women who call the police for help who do not want their partner charged. They may be afraid that if their partner is charged, his abuse will increase or they may not want to be involved with the criminal court for other reasons. A criminal charge can create serious problems for newcomers to Canada. Women in these situations do not like the loss of control that results when the police make the decision about whether or not to lay a charge.

Police services are delivered by different police authorities in different parts of Canada. The RCMP is the federal police service. It has jurisdiction over particular kinds of illegal activity. In addition, it has authority with respect to law enforcement generally in parts of the country that do not have other police forces. Each province and territory also has a provincial or territorial police force that is in charge of law enforcement in parts of the province/territory that do not fall under municipal policing. Most cities and even towns have municipal police forces that are responsible for law enforcement within the city/town boundaries. There are also separate and independent police forces on many Aboriginal reserves.

Because of this, there are many different police policies and procedures, depending on where you are. Police procedures and laws also change from time to time. You can talk to a counselor at a women's shelter or counseling agency for information about how the criminal process works in your community and then incorporate this information into your safety plan.

If you call the police, they will respond by coming to your home. An emergency call provides the police with the right to enter your home even if you or your partner tell them not to.

The police should make sure that you can talk to them alone, away from your partner. If they do not, you can tell them that this is what you want to do.

Tell the police officer as clearly as you can what happened and whether you or your children were assaulted, threatened or suffered any other type of abuse. If you require help communicating in English, ask them to provide you with an interpreter.

The police will first ensure the safety of everyone involved and get medical attention for anyone who has been injured.

Let the police know if you or your children have been physically harmed. They can call an ambulance or a doctor you know and trust or take you to a hospital emergency department or a sexual or domestic assault care and treatment centre at the hospital. If you go to the hospital, it is important to try to tell the doctors, nurses and other people as much of your story as you can, even though this may be embarrassing or you may feel ashamed.

As difficult as this may be for you, it is helpful to have pictures taken of your injuries. Documenting an assault provides important

evidence if criminal charges are laid against your partner or if you decide to seek an order from the family court to keep your abuser away from you.

Depending on the province or territory, the police may also be able to contact the Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Service (VCARS), a community response program that provides immediate on-site service to victims of crime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When the police conduct their investigation, they will collect evidence, photograph injuries and the scene, and gather information including:

- history of abuse, violence, stalking or criminal harassment
- history of threats
- safety concerns
- presence of or access to firearms
- prior use of weapons
- history of drugs or alcohol use
- mental health issues

It is helpful if you tell them about any previous abuse you or your children have experienced and whether a weapon was used and, if so, where it is now. If there were any witnesses to the assault who are no longer at your home, you can tell the police who and where they are.

The police can help you and your children leave and take you to a shelter or another safe place if that is what you want to do. They can provide you with victim support information and will contact those services on your behalf if they are available in your area. If they forget to tell you what help there is available in your community, make sure to ask.

If you have previously had distressing experiences with the police, keep in mind that they have a duty to respond to a woman in crisis and to treat each incident as seriously as if you had no history or past record with them. If you have problems with a particular officer, you have a right to put in a complaint. On the other hand, though your emotions are probably running high, avoid turning your anger against the police by yelling or swearing at them – this does not help them take care of you and your children.

Let the police know that you have a safety plan in place, that you are taking the children to a safe place and that you can look after them.

In some provinces and territories, if the police suspect that your children are in danger of emotional or physical abuse and that you do not have the means to shelter them from abuse or from witnessing abuse, they may be required to contact a child welfare agency. In some communities, the police automatically report all domestic violence calls where there are children in the home to the child protection authorities.

For more information on what to do when children are involved, see those sections of this book.

As soon as possible after an assault, write accurate, detailed notes about what happened, how you were injured and how you felt. These notes will be useful if you go to court.

Whether or not the police lay charges, they must complete an “occurrence report.” Ask to have a copy and make sure to take down the name, badge number and contact information of the officer in charge for future reference.

Even if you are not ready to leave your partner yet, keep all your documented evidence, including your own notes on the assault, in a safe place. Many women who have had a traumatic experience are not able to remember exactly what happened at the time.

Reviewing your notes from time to time, especially if your partner treats you well for a time after the incident and you hope it will not happen again, will at least help you to see if there is a pattern to his behaviour.

It will also help you to keep your safety plans in your head all the time. This is very important, because the abuse usually returns. Keep track of different incidents by sticking to who, what, when, where and why.

It is also helpful if you keep any written or recorded evidence of abuse, such as phone messages, instant messages, texts, email and notes or cards.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE POLICE LAY CRIMINAL CHARGES?

In Canada, some abusive actions are considered criminal offences

under the Criminal Code of Canada, which applies to all provinces and territories. These include:

- **Assault:** if your partner threatens, attempts or uses physical force against you. There are different kinds of assault charges depending on the degree of intent and harm caused. An assault charge can be laid even if there are no physical injuries.
- **Sexual assault:** if your partner coerces or forces you to engage in sexual activity against your will.
- **Criminal harassment:** if your partner threatens or stalks you.

The police are required to lay criminal charges if they have reason to believe an offence has been committed. This could include threatening to do something that has not yet happened, if the threat is realistic and believable. This is often called “mandatory charging.”

Because of mandatory charging, sometimes women get charged when they were not doing anything wrong. For example, you might have pushed at your partner to protect yourself or your children or your partner might lie to the police and tell them you hit him when you did not. In this kind of situation, if the police are not as thorough as they should be when they investigate, you could be charged. This is called dual or counter charging.

It can be extremely problematic because, if you are both charged, your children may be taken into care by the child protection authority. If you are charged and your partner is not, your charges could make it difficult for you to get custody of your children.

If you call the police, be sure to tell them about the history of abuse as well as the specific incident that led you to call them. It is easier for them to lay the appropriate charges if they know the background and know who is the primary aggressor (the person who is the main abuser in the relationship generally). If you are charged, it is very important for you to speak with a lawyer as soon as possible. Even if you hit or pushed your partner, you may have a defence to the charge if you did so to protect yourself or someone else such as a child. Although it might be tempting to plead guilty just to get the case over with, you should meet with a lawyer to review all the facts before making this decision.

If the police believe a criminal offence has occurred and your partner is no longer on site, they will attempt to find and arrest him. If he cannot be found, the police may obtain a warrant for his arrest.

Following an arrest, the police will take him to the police station. Depending on the circumstances, your partner may be released immediately with conditions, or be held in custody until a bail hearing if the police believe he might threaten or harm you again or that he will not show up for his trial. The police should also put you in contact with victim support services. Once your file has been given to the Crown Attorney by the police, you will be contacted by the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, if one exists in your area, which will support you and provide you with information throughout the criminal process.

WHAT IS A BAIL HEARING?

A bail hearing is when a Justice of the Peace listens to evidence from the Crown Attorney and from the defence lawyer about whether or not your partner should be released from custody (jail) until his trial. Because all accused people are presumed innocent until they are proven to be guilty, your partner will likely be released unless:

- there are unusual circumstances
- there are concerns that he might not show up for his trial
- there was extreme violence used in the assault, or
- he has a criminal record for similar behaviours in the past.

There are usually conditions he will have to follow if he wants to stay out of jail. Most commonly, he will be prohibited from having any contact, direct or indirect, with you and from coming into your home or workplace. There can also be other conditions such as requiring him to follow a curfew or to live at a particular address, banning him from possessing a weapon and so on. If you have particular concerns for your safety, it is important to tell the police, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program or the Crown Attorney, before the bail hearing if at all possible.

If you have children, bail can be a tricky issue; especially if there is already an order from the family court that might conflict with the bail conditions. It is a good idea to tell the police or other victim support workers about any custody and access order that is already in place. If this is not possible, you may want or need to return to family court to talk to the duty counsel lawyer about making sure the access order keeps you and the children safe, as many abusers use access to the children as a way to continue controlling and abusing the mother.

If your partner breaks any of the release conditions, you can call the police. He can be charged with another criminal offence known as “breach of recognizance.”

WHAT IF MY PARTNER STALKS ME?

Like many abusive men, your partner may begin stalking you once you leave him. Stalking behaviours include threatening you, following you or waiting and watching you, your children, your family or anyone you know, calling repeatedly, emailing or texting you or sending you things you do not want.

Any ongoing unwanted contact that makes you afraid is stalking. It is considered a ‘building block crime’ because it often starts with small incidents that get bigger, more frequent and more threatening. It may start with unwanted gifts, repeated calls, following you, threatening to harm you or a loved one and build up to such acts as harming pets, sexual or physical assaults, kidnapping and even murder.

Many kinds of stalking are illegal and are called criminal harassment.

If your partner is stalking you, it is a good idea to take one step at a time.

- Assess your level of safety.
- Make a plan in case a crisis occurs.
- If your partner is close to you, whenever possible go to or stay in a public space with other people around you.
- Call the police or a women’s shelter, which may be able to provide emergency transportation for you if you need it.

If you decide to report your stalker to the police, they may be able to charge him with criminal harassment. Telling your story to the police can be difficult, so you may find it helpful to take a supportive person with you. This person can help you keep track of the information you get from the police and provide you with emotional support. If you can, give the police copies of any gifts, notes or emails your stalker has sent you as well as a written description and a picture of to help them find and identify him.

Keep written records of your meeting with the police, including the names of anyone you talk to, what they said and the file number the police assign to your case. You can use this number each time you contact the police to assist them in finding your file. It will also be

helpful if you need to call them because your stalker is bothering or frightening you another time.

You may want to contact your local YWCA or a community violence against women organization to help you prepare a safety plan and to provide you with ongoing support throughout your process with the police.

It is very helpful for your own safety planning as well as for the police if you keep track of all contact your stalker has with you.

One system for doing this is to use a small appointment calendar and make notes every time your stalker calls or emails you, follows you, waits outside your house, runs into you while you are out or any other form of contact or attempted contact.

Your notes could include any phone numbers that your stalker uses when he calls you. Make notes any time something unusual happens, such as threats or injury to people you care about, people close to you, pets or damage to property or your personal belongings. Write down the stalker's licence plate number and a description of the car he drives and let the police know. If you use a small book, you can keep it with you at all times.

If you have frequent contact with your stalker, you may want to find a safe place to keep your notes so he cannot find them.

You could also ask others to record any dealings they may have had with your partner or any strange incidents they may have witnessed involving him and tell them how they can help you.

Remember, harassment is not a sign of love. It is a sign of obsession and is abuse.

Above all, remember that it will not help to meet with or talk to the stalker. In fact, it may make the situation worse, because he may believe that if you are willing to meet with him, you may be willing to change your mind and include him in your life.

The best thing you can do is to focus on your safety and that of anyone else who is threatened and develop a safety plan, which may include reporting the stalking to the police so they can lay criminal charges.

WHAT IF MY PARTNER SEXUALLY ASSAULTS ME?

It is not unusual for abusive men to sexually assault their partners. This is still very much a taboo topic, and many women who are able to talk about the physical and emotional abuse they are experiencing are not able to talk about sexual abuse.

If you are forced to have sex against your wishes, it is sexual assault. It is possible to be raped by your husband or intimate partner or by a friend on a date. Different cultures may have different definitions about a husband's rights, but in Canada, unwanted, forced sexual contact is against the law even in marriage.

You may feel you have to perform sexually or do sexual acts you do not like in order to survive. You may feel shame, guilt, helplessness, fear or despair, particularly if you have orgasms while you are being forced against your wishes. Do not judge yourself harshly if you have an orgasm. The sexual act is a physical act, and your body may have a normal automatic response. This does not mean that you consented to sex or wanted the assault.

Under Canadian law, when a woman says “No”, it means “No!”

In fact, unless you say “yes,” you have not consented to having sexual activity. Only you have the right to decide whether you want to engage in sexual activities. No matter who it is – a stranger, an acquaintance, your husband or your boyfriend – if you engage in sexual activities because that person abused a position of trust, power, or authority, it is considered sexual assault. If you were forced into a degraded, vulnerable position by his acts of aggression, power and humiliation, it is sexual assault. If he continued with sexual activity without you saying “yes” or after you said “no,” even if you said “yes” earlier, it is sexual assault.

Briefly, the law states that a woman must give voluntary agreement, through words or conduct, to any acts of sex. Consent ends as soon as a woman expresses lack of agreement, through words or conduct, even if she has previously agreed to engage in sexual activity.

There is no consent if the person is incapable of consenting to sexual activity, for example, if she is blacked out, impaired by alcohol or narcotics, unconscious or sleeping. Another person cannot consent on your behalf to you having sex with someone.

A man must prove he took reasonable steps to get consent if he wants to argue, as a defence to a charge of sexual assault, that he honestly

believed he had agreement. This means that there is no defence to a sexual assault charge if the accused's belief that he had consent arises from "intoxication, recklessness, or wilful blindness." This means he cannot say he thought he had consent because he was too drunk or he just did not understand.

You do not deserve to be sexually assaulted

If you are a survivor of rape or any sexual assault – even if it happened long ago – contact your local YWCA, a rape crisis centre or a sexual assault centre for advice and help. You can find one through hospital emergency departments, crisis lines, legal clinics, shelters or transition houses. Do not be ashamed to talk to a rape crisis counselor about your assault. You can talk to a counselor on the phone without having to give your name.

You have medical and legal rights

You have the right to be treated for any injuries without having to say who assaulted you. You have the right to choose whether or not to report the assault to the police. You have the right to receive tests for venereal disease, HIV infection and pregnancy, whether or not you report the assault. **You should have yourself tested.**

There are a number of resources available to you after a sexual assault. Community-based sexual assault or rape crisis centres can provide you with emotional support, counseling and information about resources available in your community and can talk with you about the options you may want to consider. Many also provide accompaniment if you wish to go to the hospital or report your sexual assault to the police.

Many hospitals have sexual assault treatment centres that offer a supportive environment and staff to support you through a medical exam, provide counseling and help you find other resources and services within the community. If you go to the emergency department after you have been assaulted, you can ask whether your hospital has such a centre.

If you report the sexual assault and the police lay charges, you can ask if your community has a program at the criminal court to support you through the court process.

If you do decide to report your sexual assault to the police, it is very important to have support for yourself because the criminal process is

difficult to go through. It can be slow, it is often hard to get information about the status of your case, and testifying in a trial makes many women feel as though they are re-experiencing the assault. There are a number of safeguards in place to make the process less difficult and intimidating for the victim than it used to be, but it is still very hard.

Women are sometimes afraid to ask for help or to talk about their sexual assault because they have concerns about their privacy. When you meet with someone for support, ask what kind of confidentiality they offer and how they keep their files and records secure and private. Women's organizations generally offer high levels of confidentiality. Staff often share information amongst themselves so they can offer the best support and services possible, but do not share information about clients with anyone outside the organization, unless you have consented. There are three exceptions to this:

- If there is a child protection concern, the staff will have to share that information with the appropriate authority, whether or not you consent.
- If the staff believe you are a threat to yourself or others, they are required to provide that information to the authorities.
- If a court orders the agency to turn over information or a file/record, it must do so.

Unfortunately, in sexual assault cases, sometimes the accused tries to get access to the therapy or counseling records of the victim. This is usually an intimidation strategy and it can be very successful.

If your abuser tries to do this, he has to bring a formal application in the criminal court. You will get a notice of this as will your counselor or therapist. You and she both have an opportunity to tell the court why you do not want to turn over your record. Most of the time, women are successful in keeping their counseling or therapy records safe in this situation.

You should talk to your counselor and to a lawyer if you get served with a notice that your abuser is trying to get your records.

Finding someone to talk to after a sexual assault is very important. If you follow the suggestions above, you should be able to get the support you need and keep your privacy.

HOW CAN I KEEP MY PARTNER AWAY FROM ME?

You may be able to get an order from the court to keep your partner away from you.

If he has been arrested and charged with a criminal offence, his bail conditions, as discussed above, will prohibit him from having contact with you for as long as the criminal case is proceeding.

If you are worried that your partner might hurt you or the children, but you do not want to call the police or you have called them and they have not charged him or if you want protection in addition to bail conditions, you may be able to apply for an order yourself to keep him away from you.

Both criminal and family courts have orders – often called “no-contact orders” – that stop one person from having any contact with another.

Peace bonds are criminal court orders.

Restraining or protection orders are family court orders.

In either case, the appropriate court will issue one of these orders if it believes, based on the evidence you provide, that your partner may cause injury to you and/or another member of your family, or when the court sees that you have reason to fear your partner

Peace bonds are sometimes called “810s” because that is the section of the Criminal Code that deals with them. The process to get a peace bond begins with an appointment with the Justice of the Peace, who can issue the paperwork to get your abuser into criminal court. On your court date, you need to provide evidence to prove that you have good reasons to fear him, and he can provide evidence to try to dispute your allegations.

The Justice of the Peace can make a decision to issue a peace bond against your partner, if your evidence is strong enough. The peace bond can run for up to 12 months. It is not a criminal conviction, but if your partner refuses to sign it or breaches it, he could be charged with a criminal offence.

Applying for a peace bond is not always helpful. There are often many adjournments (delays) before the case gets heard in court. During this period of time, you may not have any protection against your partner if he continues to harass and frighten you. Sometimes, by the time you do get to court, the Justice of the Peace won't issue the peace

bond because she or he thinks it is unnecessary since you have been able to cope for all the months waiting.

Another difficulty with peace bonds is that some Justices of the Peace issue mutual peace bonds rather than trying to make a decision about whose story is true. In this case, you are prohibited from contacting your partner just as he is not allowed to contact you. While you might think this is all right, since you do not want to have contact with him anyway, you should be aware that your abuser might try to get you to break the peace bond by pretending to need to see you for some reason and then call the police to have you arrested. As well, information about being named in a peace bond will appear in any criminal records check you might need to undergo for employment, foster parenting or other situations.

Family court orders are different in each province and territory, since they are governed by provincial and territorial family law. In some parts of the country, they are called restraining orders; in others, they are called protection orders. In some places, they are dealt with under specific legislation that deals with these orders and nothing else; in others, they are dealt with in broader legislation that also covers other family law issues such as custody, access, support and division of property.

The processes are somewhat different from region to region as well. In some parts of Canada, a woman can apply for an emergency order anytime of the day or night, 7 days a week. In others, she can only make her application during regular court hours.

However, everywhere in the country, there are some general similarities among these family court orders.

The court may order that the abuser:

- temporarily leave the home immediately
- stay away from you and/or your family members
- not communicate with you and/or your family members in any way at all including through other people
- not come near your home, workplace or the children's school or daycare
- not possess firearms or other weapons.

To grant a no-contact order, the family court judge must believe that

your fear is “reasonable,” meaning that a similar person in your position would be afraid.

It is very helpful to your case if you have documented any incidents of stalking or harassment, any threats, prior experiences with physical abuse (including hospital records if you were ever treated for injuries and the police file if criminal charges were ever laid).

Family court no-contact orders issued against your partner do not give him a criminal record. However, if he enters your home or approaches you without your permission, the police can arrest him for violating the terms of the protection order and he may then be charged with a criminal offence.

It is important that your family court order state specifically and explicitly that it is to be enforced by the police. Restraining orders may or may not have time limitations, and they only apply to partners or ex-partners. Peace bonds and family court no-contact orders can be helpful in making you feel safer and in limiting your partner’s contact with you. However, they are not a guarantee that your partner will not harm you. A persistent abuser will not care that he is breaching a court order if his real goal is to frighten, intimidate or harass you.

It is important to make copies of any no-contact order so you can have a copy in a safe place at home, others in any location where you think your partner might try to have contact with you (at work, the children’s school, etc.) and another with you at all times. It is easier for the police to enforce one of these orders quickly if they can see a copy of it. A no-contact order of any kind is most helpful when it is one part of a comprehensive safety plan, which has been discussed earlier in this book.

DO I NEED A LAWYER?

You have a number of important legal rights. If you leave your partner or if your partner refuses to leave you, you should get legal help. It is very important to get legal help if:

- you have children
- you are not a Canadian citizen
- you have had former dealings with the law or a child welfare agency.

Finding a lawyer

Try to find a lawyer who has dealt with people with a similar background to yours. You can ask the shelter or a social worker for suggestions.

All provinces or territories have legal clinics, law societies or lawyer referral services that offer a free first consultation. You can usually find these in the yellow pages of your phone book.

You may want to check out several lawyers before making a decision about which one to hire. If you can, find a lawyer who treats you with respect and who listens patiently and sympathetically. Shelters may be able to provide you with a free consultation application. Note that you do not have to live in a shelter to be entitled to that consultation. Just call a shelter for guidance.

If your financial situation requires you to rely on legal aid for a lawyer, you will not have as many choices, as the number of lawyers who accept legal aid clients is very few everywhere in the country. You may even have to start your case yourself while you are waiting for a lawyer who will take your case.

What can my lawyer do for me?

Ideally, you will be able to find a lawyer who understands the special issues involved in abuse cases. However, this is often not the case. If you can find a woman's advocate (see advocacy section for more information about what advocates do) to support you through your legal case and accompany you to your meetings with your lawyer and your court dates, you will find this very helpful.

A lawyer will inform you about your rights and responsibilities and may be able to:

- Help you get “exclusive possession” of your home. This is the right to live there until other arrangements are made but does not necessarily give you full ownership of the house.
- Get a restraining order against your partner, if you do not already have one.
- Help you draft a separation agreement out of court.
- Arrange for financial support from your partner.
- Arrange for legal custody of the children.

- Arrange for a divorce.

Warning: Going to court is an adversarial process, which means one side argues against the other. Many jurisdictions advocate instead for mediation as a way for people to work through the separation process. This means sitting down at a table with your partner, his lawyer and your lawyer.

If you have been controlled or abused by your partner, mediation is usually not a good idea, as mediators often are not aware of power and control issues linked to the abusive relationship. It is likely that your partner will continue to exert his control in the process of mediation, which may make it difficult for you to stand up for what you want.

It is helpful to your case if you can tell your lawyer about the abuse you have experienced so he or she can take this into consideration when giving you legal advice.

What if I cannot afford a lawyer?

In each province or territory, there is government funded legal assistance for which you may be eligible. Your application will be assessed based on your income any property you own, any debts you have and the legal issues you are dealing with. If you are still living with your partner, his income will be considered.

You can find the legal aid office contact information in the phone book.

In some cases, getting your application approved depends on what services you need. You can check this out with the legal aid office or with a lawyer.

Choosing a lawyer

You may have no choice in finding a lawyer. If you are using legal aid services you may be assigned a lawyer or you may find that there are very few lawyers (or perhaps only one) who will take a legal aid certificate.

You may not have a lawyer at all. More and more women are going to court with no legal representation because they do not qualify for legal aid but do not have enough money to pay for a lawyer themselves.

This is a very difficult situation to be in. Try to find court services and supports such as duty counsel lawyers who can provide you with some assistance.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to choose a lawyer, get as much information about the lawyer as you can before making a decision so you find someone with whom you think you can work.

Regardless of your situation, it is important to tell your lawyer that you are leaving an abusive relationship. This information will be important to your case, but it is also good for the lawyer to know that you are dealing with a lot of trauma and stress.

Try to remember that your lawyer works for you. If you are not happy with the work your lawyer is doing or if you think she or he is not paying attention to your abuse, talk to her or him about it.

Making decisions

Take the time to gather information before you make any big decisions. Make sure you get your information from knowledgeable sources, whether that is a person, a website, a book or some other source.

Television programs are not a reliable source of legal information, and you should not rely on anything you see there to be accurate.

You can trust any of the resources listed at the end of this book to be accurate and to understand the issues involved in an abuse situation.

You have many legal rights. You want to make sure that your partner does not intimidate or pressure you into signing any of them away. This book provides basic information about some of your legal rights, which gives you a starting point, but you should get more information before making final decisions about important issues like custody and access, property division and child or spousal support. You may not want to ask for all that you are entitled to because you are afraid your partner will abuse you more if you dare to ask for anything. You may think you are willing to give up property or financial rights if your partner agrees not to fight for custody of the children. You may feel that you do not want to hurt your partner by taking his money or home. You may feel that you do not deserve anything.

You may simply not care at the time of separation because getting away and finding safety are the only things you care about.

Give yourself time and space away from your partner before you make decisions you cannot change later. Tell your lawyer how you feel so she or he will understand why you don't want to make decisions quickly.

In some cases, you may not know what you need until you have been away from your partner for a while. It is not until you have been on your own that you will have a good sense of your needs and your children's needs with respect to financial support and custody and access arrangements. As well, the longer you are away from your partner, the more you will be focused on taking care of yourself and your children.

Try not to limit your options until you have the chance to get yourself established on your own.

Advocacy

Laws and law enforcement are not always applied fairly and sensitively. Historically, laws and those who enforce them have not understood the realities of violence against women well. You may encounter police officers, court officials, lawyers and judges who believe that violence is a two-way street, that women are just as abusive as men, that violence ends the day the relationship ends, that children are not affected by violence and so on.

The court process can be confusing and unfriendly. You may not always understand what is happening or why. It can feel as though no one cares about you.

It is very important that you understand what you hear and that you are understood. If you have difficulty understanding all the legal terms or what is going on or if you do not know what to say, do not pretend to understand. If you do, you could, by mistake, agree to something that is not right for you or your children.

Even if your first language is English or French, legal terms can be very confusing.

It helps to have another person, whether it is a friend, a family member, a shelter worker or another professional who understands your particular circumstances and who can come with you to lawyer's appointments and court. This person should know about and respect your culture, your background, your beliefs and values and your personal history.

This person can take notes during meetings and court proceedings to help you remember later what went on. This can be very helpful, because you will be focused on what is happening and you may also be very emotional, which can mean you do not remember the details later.

This person can act as an advocate for you, helping you ask questions or tell your story if you find it too difficult to do so yourself. She can also provide you with emotional support before and after difficult meetings.

If you have cultural, religious or social concerns about what you should do, try to get counseling and support from someone of your culture or faith who can support and advise you. Find someone who values your right to be free of abuse and who understands that your physical and emotional safety is very important.

You can look for help from a women's organization, such as your local YWCA or a women's shelter. If you are looking for a different kind of support, one of these organizations can help you find it.

HOW DO I GET CUSTODY?

Most women with children who leave an abusive partner want to make sure the children will stay living with them.

In Canada, both parents have an equal legal right to the custody of their children until they have signed an agreement or a court has ordered otherwise.

If it is safe for you to do so, it is a good idea to meet with a lawyer to start preparing the paperwork for a custody application before you leave your partner.

However, this is often not possible. You may need to leave quickly in order to keep yourself and/or your children safe. In this case, go to the family court in your community to get information about finding a lawyer, applying for legal aid and starting a custody application as soon as you can once you and the children are in a safe place. If you are staying in a shelter, the workers will be able to assist you with this.

Many women assume their partner will not want custody of the children because they did not have much to do with them during the relationship. However, abusive men often seek custody of their children as a way to continue their control or to try to get their partner to come back to them. You should be prepared for this possibility.

If you had to leave without your children, return for them as soon as it is safe for you to do so. If you cannot do so, try to find ways to communicate with them so they know you have not abandoned them and keep notes about your attempts to see them.

Until there is a custody order saying the children are to live with you, the police will not assist you in getting your children from their father or in stopping him from picking them up from school or daycare.

Applying for custody

Courts decide on appropriate custody and access arrangements for children using the “best interests of the child test.” The elements of this test are spelled out in provincial and territorial laws in most parts of the country. While there are differences from place to place, there are some common elements.

The court will consider what the children are used to. This is often called the status quo. Because a custody case can take months or even years to be completed, it is important for you to try to get interim (temporary) custody of your children. This will help build your case that this is the “status quo” and so should be left in place.

Courts also consider the wishes of the children, if they are old enough to express them. Your children will not have to come into court to testify – depending on their ages and a number of other factors, the court may appoint either a social worker or a lawyer to meet with the children to determine their wishes. These will be shared with you, your partner and the court in a written report. You do not have to pay for this person; the court pays for her or him.

Courts also look at the plans you have made for your children’s future. Where will you live? What school/daycare plans have you made? How will you make sure the children’s lives are disrupted as little as possible? How will you keep them in touch with their extended family? What religious or spiritual plans do you have?

One very important factor the court will consider is how you propose to have the children maintain a relationship with their father. This can be the most difficult issue of all. Because of the abuse you have experienced, you may have concerns about your children’s safety when they are with their father. You may also be very angry with him and want to punish him by not letting him see the children.

Access

It is extremely unusual for the court not to allow access by the father. It generally only does so when there are very serious concerns that he has already abused them.

For this reason, it is a good idea if you make some suggestions to the court about what kind of access you think would be appropriate rather than simply stating that you do not want any at all.

If you are worried that he might take the children, perhaps even out of the country, and not bring them back or if you think he might not know how to handle them on his own, you can ask the court for supervised access. If you are worried he might hurt you when he is picking up or dropping off the children, you can ask that the exchanges of the children be supervised.

Many communities have supervised access centres where children can visit with their access parent and where parents can exchange their children at the beginning and end of access visits. In some cases, the court might order a family member or friend to play this role.

The role of violence

In some provinces and territories, the best interests of the child test explicitly requires the court to consider whether there has been violence within the family. Whether or not this is the case where you live, it is important that you provide evidence about any violence you have experienced in your custody application, so the judge can take it into consideration. Even if you have never called the police or if charges have never been laid, you should tell the court about the abuse because the standard of proof is different in family court than it is in criminal court.

Many people, including many lawyers and judges, think joint custody is the ideal solution to allow children to have both of their parents involved in their lives. This may be true where both parents can respect one another and communicate in an effective way, with the children's best interests as their top priority. However, in situations of abuse, joint custody almost never works well. Your partner will use the order, and the children, as a way to try to maintain his control over you. You should discuss the idea of joint custody very carefully with your lawyer but also with an advocate or support person before you make any final decision.

Access challenges

Unfortunately, even once you have a custody and access order, your ex-partner may try to continue harassing and intimidating you by refusing to follow the order, by not picking the children up when he is supposed to, by returning them late or by trying to interfere with your parenting. It is a good idea to keep careful notes about any and all contact you have with your former partner, noting in particular times when he is not following any court orders. You can also keep notes about anything your children tell you about the time they spend with their father, but you should try not to question them too intensely when they return from a visit. Your children will continue to love their father, even if they know he has treated you badly. You do not want to create a situation where their loyalties are torn.

If you have serious concerns about your children's well-being during access visits, you can talk to your support person, your lawyer or, in extreme cases, the child welfare authority. These are difficult situations to manage.

You can return to court to try to change the access order if your partner is consistently not following it or if the arrangements do not seem to be working well for the children.

Support while dealing with family court

The family court process is difficult emotionally. It can go on for a long time, and your partner may be very abusive towards you. Having a support person is very important. She can remind you of your strengths. She may be able to accompany you to meetings with your lawyer to help you understand what is going on.

You may feel very vulnerable while custody, access, support and property arrangements are being sorted out. The court system or your partner, friends and relatives may put a lot of pressure on you to give up the fight and go back. Your partner may promise you everything, "if only you'll come back." When you are not prepared to do what he wants, he's then likely to threaten, "I'll make sure you get nothing."

Try not to give in to your partner's threats or manipulation. You will need the support of others, especially those whom you feel are competent in dealing with the family court system. Do not be afraid to ask for help.

You will have to depend on yourself to push for action and mobilize

your resources if there is a dispute over custody. If you want your children, it will be up to you to do everything possible to get them. It will not be easy.

Do not hesitate to find an advocate, a person who can support you with your plans. You may need to get testimonials from your friends, family, or your physician, saying that you are a good, responsible, caring parent.

HOW DOES SEPARATION FEEL?

Ending a relationship is not easy. Even when you know it is what you want to do and you know some of what to expect, you will feel many different emotions in the first weeks and months. You may feel as though you are on an emotional roller coaster and never know how you will feel from one minute to the next.

This is completely normal. At times, these very different feelings may seem overwhelming, so try to give yourself space for them.

Every woman's experience is different. The list below describes some common feelings women have after they leave an abusive relationship. You may not experience all of these feelings, but it is a good idea to know about them so you know what to expect and are not discouraged by them.

Initial feelings

You may feel an initial sense of relief or even joy immediately or soon after your leaving your partner. This is understandable. You are free from abuse for the first time in a long time. You may have gone through a long period in which you were trying to make a decision and then making the arrangements to leave. It is going to feel good to have that time over and to be starting a new period in your life where you are in control.

That can be a scary feeling, too. While you may feel relieved to be away from your partner, you may also be anxious or worried about managing on your own, especially if you have not had much responsibility in the past. You may have concerns about money, about finding a job, about how your children are coping, about making new friends. You may feel inadequate to handle everything that lies ahead.

In fact, you might even feel guilty for having disrupted your family. If your children seem unhappy at first, this can add to your feelings of guilt.

You may also feel a sense of loss and a need to grieve. This might seem strange – why would you feel like this when it was your decision to leave? It is very common to grieve the end of a relationship, even a bad one. You had good times as well as bad when you were with your partner, and you are going to miss those.

In fact, you may find yourself only remembering the good times, especially when you are feeling lonely or frightened. Your partner might encourage this by starting to treat you very well, sending you flowers and gifts, promising to change or offering to help more with the children.

Anger

It is very likely you will feel angry some of the time. You may be angry with your partner for his abuse and you may be angry with yourself for having put up with it. This may be the first time it has felt safe to be angry.

You can use your anger in positive ways. It can motivate you to continue moving ahead in your life. If you find yourself wanting to act your anger out in an abusive or vengeful way, find someone to talk to. You do not want your anger to make you an abusive person.

You may find yourself continuing to anticipate an outburst of violence. You may be waiting and listening for the build-up of tension that used to signal a violent incident was on its way. You may continue to walk on eggshells for a while, until you fully realize that you are away from your abuser and that he no longer has this control over you.

Of course, your partner may continue to try to abuse you by stalking you, threatening you, using exchanges of the children to abuse you and so on, so you need to leave your safety plan in place, even as you are working towards a life that is free from violence.

Loneliness

You are almost certain to feel lonely at least some of the time. You are used to being part of a partnership and now that part of your identity is gone. You don't have someone to share your day with or to tell a story about the children to.

You may be cut off from your partner's family because they are taking "his side" in your dispute or because you feel timid about contacting them.

Your friends may be unsure about whether to believe you or your partner and may pull back. People are very uncomfortable acknowledging that a woman they know has been abused, so sometimes cut her off from their lives.

Your loneliness may develop because you have to move and are no longer close to your friends. If you are suddenly working or no longer have enough money to go to the movies or out for dinner, you may find your friends disappearing from your life.

This is very hard because friendships are an important part of most of our lives.

You may need to summon up the courage to initiate activities with your friends. Maybe they are not calling you because they feel awkward about your new situation or don't know what to say. If money or child care is an issue, invite friends over for a games night or organize a potluck supper.

This is also a good time to start to make new friends who know the new independent you. If you have young children, you might want to join a mom and tot group. If you have always wanted to get fit, perhaps you can join a local gym. You can talk to your counselor about ideas for meeting new people.

Even if you are lonely, don't rush into a new intimate relationship until you have finished dealing with your past relationship and until you know you can live alone. If you eventually have a new partner, you want to know when you go into it that you are doing so out of choice and not because you are afraid to be alone. You want to go into it strong and less vulnerable to potential abuse.

Relax. Take your new life one step at a time. Learn how to trust yourself and have confidence in yourself.

Post- traumatic stress

Women who have experienced serious abuse over an extended period of time may develop what is known as post-traumatic stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTS or PTSD). This is a clinical term and should only be applied by a psychologist or other medical professional.

If you are experiencing serious flashbacks to your partner's abuse or to abuse you experienced earlier in your life that you may not have thought about for a long time, if you are having frequent terrifying

dreams, if you are having anxiety attacks that make it difficult for you to function, you should talk to your counselor or doctor, who can make sure you get the help you need.

You are not losing your mind. You are having a normal reaction to extreme trauma. It is important for you to get the support you need so you can cope with the trauma and still move ahead in your life.

Coping strategies

There are many strategies for coping with the emotions you will be feeling after you leave your partner.

You may want to keep a journal or diary to help you write down everything you are feeling. You can look back at it over time to see how you are progressing.

You may want to take up physical activity to work off some of your emotions.

This might be a time to start a hobby you have always been interested in – you might find that a creative outlet for your feelings is just what you need.

No matter what you do, you should give yourself time alone, so you can cry, yell or do whatever else you need to with privacy.

Getting counseling or joining a women's support group is also a very important thing to do, even if you think you feel fine. This can help you understand your feelings better and learn coping techniques. You will feel less isolated if you can talk with others who have been through a similar experience.

Try not to judge yourself for being emotional. What you are feeling is perfectly normal.

And, take the time to enjoy the new feelings of empowerment, freedom and control. Take pleasure in making decisions on your own, without fear of how your partner will react.

Feeling suicidal

If at any point you feel that your emotions are completely out of control, you start to think there is no point to carrying on or you have suicidal thoughts, talk to a professional immediately. You can call a women's or community crisis line, the police emergency number, your family doctor or counselor or you can go directly to the hospital

emergency room to get the support you need.

Healthy living

You have probably spent so long coping with abuse, trying to keep yourself and your children safe and trying to figure out how to escape the abuse that you have not had much time to think about healthy, safe living. Now that you are on your own, you can begin to address this.

You may not yet feel completely safe, even though you have left your abuser. You can feel safer and begin to increase your self-esteem by taking self-defence or assertiveness training courses. These can help you develop your internal strength. Contact your local YWCA or other women's organizations for information on such courses offered in your area.

Your physical health affects the way you feel and your ability to cope with stress. This is a good time to review your eating and sleeping habits to make sure they are healthy. If not, you can take steps to improve them. Try to eat and sleep regularly. If the stress of your situation is stopping you from getting enough sleep, talk with a doctor, a nurse or another health care professional about what you can do.

You may not have had much time for recreational activities. This can be a good way for you to find ways of freeing your mind of anxiety and your body of tension. You could try meditation, yoga, sports, dancing, reading, walking or crafts.

Physical activity can help you have a better sense of well-being and help you stay healthy. It does not have to be strenuous – a daily 20-minute walk can be all you need. If you have children, you can take them with you. If it is winter, and you live in a city, you can walk in a shopping mall.

Take time to be alone or with friends; to get to know yourself as an individual and not just as a mother, someone's wife or partner.

WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

When you first separate from your partner, you will most likely be living on much less money than you are used to. Even if you have a job, your family has been used to two incomes and now only has one. It will take a while to sort out child and/or spousal support, so you may need some assistance until this is in place.

Social assistance

Most governments provide some form of social assistance for which you can apply after you have left your partner.

The amount of money you receive is based on an assessment of your needs. It is meant to cover housing, food, and other basic necessities. Social assistance rates are low, and what you receive is not likely to be enough. You may have to find additional help through social service agencies or your family and friends.

You may also have to make changes to the way you live, at least temporarily.

It may be very difficult for you to ask for or accept help. You may feel ashamed or feel like you are begging. It can be difficult to have to live without as much money as you are used to.

It will help if you can look at this help as a chance to get yourself on your feet until you have the emotional energy and physical resources to support yourself.

Depending on policies and jurisdictions, there may be special subsidies that can help you obtain education or work so that you can support yourself and your family in the future.

Other benefits, depending on the area, may include:

- Medical insurance, a plan that pays for part or all of prescription drugs or special diets ordered by a doctor
- An education allowance
- A fuel or shelter subsidy.

Social assistance may also provide a clothing allowance for school-age children and subsidized daycare.

If you are at a shelter, ask the staff about how to apply for social assistance. If you are on your own, make an appointment with a worker at the social assistance office, usually located at your local city hall. Ask which documents they will require and try to take them to your first interview.

When you apply for social assistance, you will probably need:

- Birth dates of your spouse and dependents
- Medical insurance number and social insurance number

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- Worker's Compensation number (where applicable)
 - Landlord's name and address, or shelter
 - Addresses for the past three years
 - Details of past employment.

Some provinces or territories also require recent bank statements and/or mortgage information.

Property rights

You also have financial rights and responsibilities under family law.

If you and your partner are married, you have a right to share in the value of all the property you acquired during the years you were married. Property includes assets such as a house, cottage, car, RRSPs, pensions, money in savings accounts and so on, as well as debts, including credit card bills, loans and mortgages.

It is a good idea to take with you when you leave any personal belongings, the children's possessions and half of any money in joint bank accounts, if it is safe to do so. If you can, you might also want to take any belongings that have sentimental value, just so your partner can't damage them once you are gone.

Provincial and territorial laws about property division treat common-law spouses differently than married spouses. In most parts of the country, there is not an automatic right to share equally in the property.

Whether you are married to or living common-law with your partner, sorting out property can be complicated, especially because an abusive partner may try to intimidate or threaten you into giving up your rights. Whenever possible, do not make final decisions or enter into final agreements about property division without consulting with a lawyer to find out what your rights are. Even if you decide to give up some of your property rights, you should know what they are.

Spousal support

Depending on the circumstances of your marriage or common-law relationship, you may have a right to spousal support.

Your lawyer or the court will use "spousal support guidelines" to help determine whether you should receive support at all and, if so, how

much and for how long. Generally, the law expects the two spouses to become economically independent from one another if at all possible. Whether or not this is possible for you will depend on a number of factors, such as:

- The length of your relationship
- Who had primary financial responsibility during the relationship
- What roles each of you played (for example, if you stayed home to raise the children while your partner's earning capacity increased)
- Your age
- Your ability to re-enter the workforce.

Child support

Both parents have a legal responsibility to contribute to the financial support of their children. Generally, the parent who does not have primary responsibility for the children pays child support to the parent who does. Provincial, territorial and federal governments have implemented child support guidelines that set out how much support the payer parent is required to provide. This amount is determined based on the payer's income and the number of children.

The base amount of child support may be increased if the child has special needs or decreased if the payer can show that he is experiencing undue hardship.

Child support is generally paid until children are 18 years old. It may be ended earlier if the child leaves home or continued longer if the child remains in school full-time or has a disability that means she or he must continue to rely on the parents for support.

The amount of child support being paid can be varied if the income of the payer increases or decreases.

Child support in families where the children spend roughly equal amounts of time with each parent or where some of the children live with the mother and some with the father is calculated differently.

Child support is enforced in each province and territory by a government agency that has considerable power to ensure the payer meets his obligations. Even if your partner leaves the province or territory where you live, these agencies cooperate with one another to try to find him and get your support to you.

Unfortunately, the process of getting child support flowing can be a very slow one, especially if your partner is trying to avoid his responsibilities. This can be very frustrating for you, and you may need to rely on social assistance for short-term financial support.

If you are receiving social assistance, you will be required to start child support proceedings, even if you don't want to. Any money you receive will be deducted dollar for dollar from your social assistance.

If you are receiving social assistance and do not feel it is safe to apply for child support, tell your worker. In most parts of the country, social assistance can waive the requirement that you apply when there are safety issues.

Whatever your situation, it is important to sort out child support as quickly as you can. Your children deserve to have the benefit of financial support from both you and your former partner, regardless of how you may feel about him. However, if you are too frightened to apply for child support because you think your partner may try to take the children or harm you or them in some other way, talk to your lawyer. Safety is always more important than money.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING?

If you have decided to leave your partner, your first stop may be temporary accommodation at a shelter or with a friend or relative. However, before long you will have to find your own place to live.

If it has been a while since you looked for an apartment or house, you may be shocked at the cost of housing.

Since you will probably be living on less money than when you were with your partner, you may have to move to a smaller place, in a neighbourhood that is less comfortable or convenient than where you lived before.

Just remember that this does not have to be forever. You will be making a lot of changes in the next little while. It will help you cope if you stay focused on what is most important – finding somewhere to live that is safe, affordable and reasonably comfortable for you and your children.

Women living in a shelter are often placed at the top of the priority list for subsidized housing, although the supply of this type of housing is very limited. You should try to get your name on a list as soon as possible.

It can be intimidating to look for housing in the private market. You may be worried that landlords do not want to rent to you because you don't have a partner or because you are receiving social assistance.

You might find it helpful to remind yourself that you know you will be a responsible tenant that any landlord would be happy to have.

If you are nervous about visiting potential apartments or houses, gather as much information as you can over the phone before making an appointment.

Ask the landlord your questions in a business-like and courteous manner, so she or he takes you seriously. Write down your questions ahead of time so you don't forget any. You will want to find out what the apartment or house is like (number of rooms, yard space, whether appliances are included, the amount of rent, who pays the utilities, whether there are any services or facilities such as a laundry room) and what facilities are in the neighbourhood – for example, transit stop, grocery store, community centre, school and so on.

If you are satisfied with the answers to your questions, make an appointment to see the apartment or house. If possible, leave your children with someone so you can really concentrate on checking out the housing without being distracted. Bring a list of references with you – previous landlords, an employer and a friend or relative who can act as a character reference – including their telephone numbers.

If you want to take the apartment or house, ask the landlord about the terms of the rental. For example, do you need to pay last month's rent or a security deposit?

If you cannot meet any of the terms (for example, you may not have enough money to pay last month's rent), tell the landlord you will have to think about whether or not you will rent the accommodation and that you will get back to her or him within 24 hours with a final answer.

This gives you time to check with social assistance or family or friends to see if anyone can help you out.

Before you make a final commitment, see if you can get a written rental agreement or lease that spells out exactly what are your responsibilities and what are the responsibilities of the landlord.

If renting a place on your own is more than you can handle, you could think about sharing a house with another woman. If you have

children, this may give you the space you need, companionship, and lower costs. Be sure that you share similar lifestyles and approaches to parenting. You want to be sure that the emotional and physical well-being of you and your children will not be compromised, or that your custody of the children will not come into question due to a poor choice in roommates.

Keep in mind your need for safety should your partner try to come after you. Note the safety of the neighbourhood, including how close you are to neighbours. Chat with the people living there. Do they seem to be the kind of people who would look out for one another? Do you feel comfortable in this neighbourhood?

What do others say about the landlord? Be sure you do not put yourself in a situation where the landlord may be abusive. Look out for signs of prejudice or a need to have too much control over tenants.

Make yourself a safety checklist:

- Are there adequate locks in your new home?
- Is it well lit?
- Is it safe to get from the driveway to the house?
- Does the building have a secure entrance?
- Is the parking lot or area safe?

If this all seems overwhelming, you can get help from counselors at your local YWCA or women's shelter. They will be able to refer you to housing resources, make suggestions about where you can look for safe, affordable housing and help you put your name on a list for subsidized housing.

LIVING ON LESS

Getting used to living with less money is hard. It can be a challenge to remember that you are in this position because you have decided that living free from abuse is your priority. Try to remind yourself of this if you become discouraged.

There are strategies for living well on a limited budget. You may find some or all of these suggestions helpful, and you will learn your own strategies as you begin to live your new life.

Shop at second-hand stores, discount stores and garage sales. If it is

less expensive and you have the skills, sew and adapt clothes, curtains or upholstery. Make – or re-make – toys, furniture, etc., yourself. There are many fun DIY (do it yourself) sites on the Internet which offer cheap and trendy patterns for making household décor yourself. Try not to window shop unless you are looking for something specific, because it can tempt you into buying something that is not within your budget.

Use the Internet. There are coupon websites and websites like Craig's List where you can buy almost anything you can think of secondhand at very low prices. Just be careful when using these sites to ensure that anyone you buy from has a good "seller rating." Don't send personal information via email or over the phone.

Reuse and recycle and swap for clothes, toys, anything. Do this with friends, family, and through garage sales.

Food

Feeding your children and yourself a healthy diet on a limited income will not be easy, but there are ways to make it more possible. Eating out and buying prepared foods is the most expensive way to eat.

If you don't know how to cook, this can be an opportunity to learn. There are many cooking shows on television and some of them feature meal planning and cooking on a budget. Some community centres offer cooking classes where you can learn to cook and meet new people at the same time. Community kitchens, where people cook together and everyone takes a share of the food home, exist in many places and a quick Internet search might help you find one. This lets you stock up on some basic meals in the freezer so you don't have to cook a full meal from scratch every day.

How you shop is important to eating well on a budget. Check to see if your community has a food co-op or community garden. Buy in bulk if you have space for food storage or buy in bulk with another family and share your purchases. Freeze fresh produce in small batches while it is in season and cheaper than at other times throughout the year. Stop into your supermarket at the end of the day for "end of day specials." Watch flyers and newspaper ads for specials and stock up on non-perishables when they are cheap.

If you have even a small backyard or balcony, consider growing some vegetables. This gives you fresh food at a very low cost and can be satisfying therapy, too. Children often enjoy gardening, so growing

food could be a way for you to spend time together. If you don't have space for your own garden, find out if your neighbourhood or town has community or allotment gardens where you can rent or share a space to grow some food. Some food banks and shelters have shared garden space.

If you are having trouble buying groceries at the end of the month, find out whether you qualify to use the food bank. This is an excellent resource in an emergency or for as long as it takes you to get on your feet financially.

Barter

Some communities have organized barter systems in which you swap skills through a skill bank. For instance, you could offer babysitting skills and receive help changing the oil in your car or getting a drive to an appointment. Even if you don't have paid work, you can exchange skills with others.

Transportation

If you can no longer afford a car, public transit may be your best option. Secondhand bikes for you and your children are another possibility in the warmer months. Many cities now have car co-ops, where you can have scheduled access to a car at a much lower cost than owning one.

Utilities

Live smart. If you are paying for utilities, turn down your heat at night, but don't turn it off in the winter because the pipes will freeze. Make a habit of turning off lights when you leave the room. As you can afford it, replace regular light bulbs with low energy bulbs. You can save money by setting your water heater temperature slightly lower, and turning it off if you are leaving for a few days. See if you have a local environmental organization that can give you hints on how to save energy. Many public utilities offices or gas companies issue information pamphlets.

Entertainment

There are many activities and social events that cost little or nothing. The public library system is generally free, and offers computer access, programs, videos and DVDs as well as books. Public recreation centres often have reduced price sports programs and clubs if you

explain your financial need. Volunteering or joining your local religious institution can also provide social outlets at little or no cost.

WHAT ABOUT FINDING A JOB OR FURTHER TRAINING?

I'm getting more training than I ever thought I could, so that when I'm finished school, I will be qualified for a job that I like, as well as being able to make more money than I could have made before. Best of all, I'm meeting new friends and I feel better about myself. When I left him, I believed I was stupid. Now I know I'm not.

You may realize that you need or want to get a job. A job gives you income, and can also increase your self-esteem and confidence. It can help you become more independent and have more control over your life. A job is an excellent way to meet new people. If you have not worked outside your home for many years and feel you need to improve or develop your work skills, you can find free career counseling at your local YWCA, the employment centre, a social assistance office, or, if you think you may need more education, at a community college or university. Employment counselors can give you an idea of the current employment situation as well as retraining opportunities.

Training

You may want or need further training before you take a job. There may be grants that can help pay your tuition, daycare, transportation, books and other living expenses. Check with your local YWCA or employment centre to find out what is available. If you are on social assistance, check with them to see if you can access these grants without losing your regular benefits.

You may want to think about moving into a trade or high-tech industry. Such work often pays better than jobs in fields that have been traditionally female-dominated. There are often special programs to help women access these trades.

If you need to, you can improve your language skills, often through programs that do not cost anything and that are tied to employment programs. Check with your local YWCA or employment centre for training opportunities. If you have professional qualifications from another country, call your equivalent professional association in Canada to see if you can get your status recognized here. You may need to do some retraining or take some exams to be certified in Canada.

If you have not graduated from high school, you can earn credits towards a diploma, or enter college or university as a mature student. Many of these programs are available online. Pre-entrance requirements are generally adapted to take into account lived experience and not just academic achievement.

You may well find that you do well in school, better than when you were younger, because now you are motivated and have concrete goals. Some colleges and universities offer course credits and exemptions, so that if you have learned part of the program by other means, for example by work experience, you may apply for exemption, a quicker path to getting a degree or diploma.

Some provincial and federal programs may be available for people who want to start their own business. Be creative. Do a little research to see if any hobbies or skills you have to offer have a market in your community. The federal government may sponsor short-term job re-entry and community development programs in your area. See your local YWCA or employment office for details. If you are a young woman, there may be internship opportunities available to built your resume.

If you do not want to take a full-time job, or cannot get one, but you need some extra money, part-time jobs such as telemarketing, housekeeping, babysitting (especially for shift workers), or retail or office work, offer flexibility. Part-time or volunteer work may also develop into full-time work.

Finding a Job

To find a job, contact the employment office, read Internet job sites, want ads in your local newspaper or ads in supermarkets, community colleges and university career centres. The best way to find a job is to tell everyone you know that you are looking for one. It is estimated that 80% of jobs are found through personal networking.

Be active in your job search by putting (free) ads in these places. If you have the time and cannot find a job, volunteer in an agency where you'll learn something new and make connections in that field. It can even lead to a job, if one becomes available. You will be one of the first to know and will already have proved your strengths and skills.

Employment centres, colleges and many community agencies such as the YWCA have programs to help you identify what kind of work you would be best suited for, what your skills are, how to search for a job

or how to get further education, write your resume and how to conduct a successful interview.

It is a very good idea to do research before applying for a particular job. Find out exactly what the company is looking for, and write your resume to show that you can do that work. If there are areas you are unfamiliar with, express an interest and enthusiasm about learning.

Unpaid work can be counted as experience, even if you did it years ago, so make sure to include this in your resume and to talk about it in your interview. You must also be honest about your skills and limitations. It is fine to brag, but don't exaggerate.

When you are called for an interview, make sure you write down the details about date, time and location. Ask for a telephone number in case you need to reach the company before the interview. Ask how many people will be involved in the interview, what the format and length will be and whether you will have to take any tests. Review the job posting and your application as well as information about the company. Visit its website and get to know its mission. See if it has been in the news lately or if any events have taken place that you can comment on in your interview.

Come early and well rested. You do not have to buy new clothes, as long as you are clean and tidy and dressed in a way that is suitable for the job you hope to get.

Have a list of questions about the job and company prepared and bring it with you so you have something to say when the interviewer asks if you have any questions.

Answer the interview questions completely and honestly, but as briefly as you can. If you don't understand one, ask to have it rephrased. Focus on your strengths but acknowledge areas where you will need some training or support.

The job interview is not the time to tell your potential new boss that you may need time off to go to court or that you are newly separated and having trouble coping. Get the job first, and then decide how to approach any special accommodations you might need, once the employer has learned firsthand what an excellent employee you are.

FINALLY...

It won't happen quickly, but over time you will come to the point that you are no longer just coping with your separation but living life on your own and enjoying it. You will no longer think of yourself as surviving, but will have begun to thrive. At that point, you will be able to put away this book and move ahead with your violence-free life as a full, complete person.

The journey you take to this point will be unique to you and will reflect the many positive elements of who you are: your family background, your racial and cultural heritage, your spiritual beliefs, the strengths and skills you have learned as a result of coping with abuse, your dreams and hopes for the future.

Each woman has a different journey to take, and that journey will take each woman a different amount of time.

However, there are many common challenges and barriers along the way. We hope this book helps you overcome some of them so that you can move forward and make a fresh start in your life.

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS FOR ALL WOMEN

I Declare

- I am not the cause of another's violent behaviour
- I do not have to take it
- I am an important human being
- I am a worthwhile woman
- I deserve to be treated with respect
- I do have power over my own life
- I can use my power to take good care of myself
- I can decide for myself what is best for me
- I can make changes in my life if I want to
- I am not alone. I can ask others for help
- I am worth working for and changing for
- I deserve to make my own life safer and happier.

Jennifer Baker, *Stopping Wife Abuse: A Guide to the Emotional, Psychological and Legal Implications for the Abused Woman and Those Helping Her*, Garden City, 1979.

RESOURCES

NATIONAL SERVICES and SUPPORT

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Assaulted Women's Helpline: www.awhl.org

Safe Canada: www.safecanada.ca

ShelterNet.ca: www.shelternet.ca

211Canada, Social Service Directory: www.211canada.ca

CHILD CARE

Canada Childcare Directory: www.canadachildcaresdirectory.com

Daycare Canada: www.daycarecanada.com

MENTAL HEALTH

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:
www.camh.net/Care_Treatment/index.html

MentalHealth: www.ementalhealth.ca

Mymentalhealth.ca: www.mymentalhealth.ca

Schizophrenia Society of Canada: www.schizophrenia.ca

Centre for Suicide Prevention: www.suicideinfo.ca

Mind Your Mind: www.mindyourmind.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association: www.cmhanl.ca

COMMUNITY FOCUSED

FIRST NATION, INUIT, MÉTIS, ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Kanawayhitowin: www.kanawayhitowin.ca

The Healing Journey: www.thehealingjourney.ca

Pauktuutit:

http://pauktuutit.ca/pdf/publications/abuse/WhatToDo_e.pdf

Resources for Aboriginal family violence: www.za-geh-do-win.com

NWAC Youth Violence: www.nwac-hq.org/en/yvptoolkit.html

Québec Native Women Inc Prevention Toolkit: www.faq-qnw.org

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDERED, QUEER (LGBTQ)

Battered Women's Support Services, crisis and intake line:
(604) 687-1867 or TTY (604) 687-6732

Information for Aboriginal women, Latin-American Women, Young Women, LGBTQ: www.bwss.org

MULTILINGUAL and IMMIGRANT-FOCUSED

Rosenet: Immigrant women & youth, Aboriginal women & youth, all women. Information on woman abuse in over 80 languages as well as shelter and program listings:
www.rosenet-ca.org

Information in over 30 languages:
www.settlement.org/sys/faqs_detail.asp?faq_id=4000376
Settlement.org

Project Blue Sky For Asian women providing services in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and English:
www.jss.ca/bluesky/english/index.html

Immigrant Women Services Ottawa:
www.immigrantwomenservices.com

Jewish Women International of Canada:
www.jwicana.com

OLDER WOMEN

Oak-Net: www.oak-net.org

Provincial and Territorial Resources on Elder Abuse:
<http://seniors.gc.ca/c.4nt.2nt@.jsp?lang=eng&cid=160>

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES and DEAF WOMEN

DisAbled Women's Network of Ontario:
http://dawn.thot.net/violence_wwd.html

Springtide Resources: www.springtideresources.org

YOUNG WOMEN

For youth (by the RCMP): www.deal.org

NWAC Youth Violence Prevention Toolkit for Indigenous youth:
www.nwac-hq.org/en/yvptoolkit.html

Kids Help Phone: www.kidshelpphone.ca

Love Is Not Abuse (American): www.loveisnotabuse.com

Canadian Red Cross: www.redcrossyouth.ca

Teen Health Website:

www.chebucto.ns.ca/Health/Teenhealth/mentalhealth

ACTION, ADVOCACY and RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/index-eng.php

Femaide, Crisis Line for Women who are Victims of Violence
(French only in Ontario): www.briserlesilence.ca

VioletNet.org: www.violetnet.org

Homeless Nation: www.homelessnation.org

PovNet: www.povnet.org

Hot Peach Pages: www.hotpeachpages.net

Springtide Resources: www.springtideresources.org

National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence:
<http://nacafv.ca/en/mandat>

Remember Our Sisters Everywhere:

www.rememberoursisterseverywhere.com

Respectwomen.ca: www.respectwomen.ca

Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses: www.oaith.ca

SHELTER, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE, CHILDCARE, LEGAL SERVICES and SUPPORT by PROVINCE

ALBERTA

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters: www.acws.ca

Social Assistance: <http://employment.alberta.ca/4338.html>

For immigrants:

www.informalberta.ca/public/common/viewSublist.do?cartId=1000312

Alberta Health Services:

www.albertahealthservices.ca/services.asp?pid=service&rid=7484

Legal Aid Alberta: www.legalaid.ab.ca

Alberta Justice: www.justice.gov.ab.ca/legal/legal_aid.aspx

Student Legal Services of Edmonton: www.slsedmonton.com

Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic :
www.communitylegalclinic.net

Awo-Taan Healing Lodge: www.awotaan.org

Family Violence and Bullying Division of the Alberta Government:
www.northcentralalbertacfsa.gov.ab.ca

BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia Ministry of Community Services :
www.cd.gov.bc.ca/women/transition-houses/index.htm

Social Assistance: www.gov.bc.ca/hsd

British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development:
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare

ChildcareChoices.ca: www.childcarechoices.ca

Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre: www.wstcoast.org

Pacific Child and Family Enrichment Society: www.pacific-care.bc.ca

British Columbia Women's Hospital and Health Centre:
www.bcwomens.ca/Services/HealthServices/ReproductiveMentalHealth/default.htm

Legal Services Society: www.lss.bc.ca

Law Students' Legal Advice Program: www.lslap.bc.ca

British Columbia Supreme Court:
www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca/legaladvice.htm

Community Legal Assistance Society: www.clasbc.net

MANITOBA

Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters :
www.maws.mb.ca/where_can_i_go.htm

Manitoba Family Services and Housing :
www.gov.mb.ca/fs/housing/index.html

Employment and Income Assistance:
www.gov.mb.ca/fs/assistance/eia.html

Manitoba Child Care Association: www.mccahouse.org

Manitoba Healthy Living: www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/mh

Legal Aid Manitoba: www.legalaid.mb.ca

Settle Manitoba: www.settlemanitoba.ca/settlement/legal_aid.php

Manitoba Department of Justice: www.gov.mb.ca/justice/family/law/

Community Legal Education Association (Manitoba) Inc.:
www.communitylegal.mb.ca

NEW BRUNSWICK

The Shelters (Grace House for Women): www.theshelters.ca

Government of New Brunswick:
www.gnb.ca/OO12/violence/PDF/Freeshelter.pdf

Government of New Brunswick Social Development:
www.gnb.ca/OO17/Social_Assistance

Childcare New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Services:
www.gnb.ca/OO17/

Government of New Brunswick Emergency Social Services:
www.gnb.ca/O378/poster-e.asp

Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick:
Information/publications with specifics for older women, women
with disabilities, Indigenous women and immigrant women who have
experienced violence:
www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/en/index.php

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Newfoundland & Labrador Violence Prevention Initiative:
www.gov.nl.ca/VPI/gethelp/index.html

Respect Women (emergencies, health care, shelters, long-term
housing, food banks, mental health and legal services):
www.respectwomen.ca/wheregethelp.html

Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment
www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/childcare Health and Community
Services Childcare:
www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/income-support/overview.html

Newfoundland Legal Aid Commission:
www.justice.gov.nl.ca/just/protectedsite/Other/otherx/legalaid.htm

Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland :
www.publiclegalinfo.com

Newfoundland & Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis & Prevention
Centre: www.nlsacpc.com

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Victim Services:
www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca/english/services/family_violence/contact_us/victim_services.htm

Northwest Territories Income Support :
www.ece.gov.nt.ca/Divisions/Income_support_NPVI/index_Income_Support.htm

Northwest Territories Early Childhood Services:
www.ece.gov.nt.ca/Divisions/Early_Childhood/

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services:
www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca/english/services/addictions/contact_us.htm

Northwest Territories Department of Justice:
www.justice.gov.nt.ca/legalaid

NOVA SCOTIA

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia www.alicehousing.ca
Alice Housing: www.thans.ca/Content/FindShelter

Employment Support and Financial Assistance:
www.gov.ns.ca/coms/employment/index.html

Child Care Connection Nova Scotia: www.cccns.org

Government of Nova Scotia Childcare Directory:
www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/childcare/directories/FacilitySearch.aspx

Nova Scotia Association of Women and the Law:
www.nawl.ca/ns/en/affili/NSAWL-utIO.htm

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women :
www.women.gov.ns.ca/linkslegal.asp

Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia: www.legalinfo.org

NUNAVUT

Homeless Nation: www.homelessnation.org/en/node/347

Social Assistance: www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/is/programs.htm

Nunavut Department of Education:
www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/echild

Ilisaqsivik Family Resource Centre: www.ilisaqsivik.ca

Nunavut Department of Justice: www.justice.gov.nu.ca

Arctic Law Office: www.arcticlaw.ca

ONTARIO

Housing Help Centre: www.housinghelpcentre.org/shelters.asp

Ontario Women's Directorate:

www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/women/housing

Ministry of Community and Social Services: www.accesson.ca/mcss

Ontario Ministry of Child & Youth Services:

www.ontario.ca/ONT/portal51/licensedchildcare

Ontario Home Daycare Directory : www.ontariohomedaycare.ca

Ontario Shores: www.ontarioshores.ca

Family Law Education for Women: www.onefamilylaw.ca

Ontario Women's Justice Network: www.owjn.org

CLEONet (community legal education in Ontario): www.cleonet.ca

Law Help Ontario: www.lawhelpontario.org

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Transition House Association:

www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/index.php3?number=3275&lang=E

Prince Edward Island Social Assistance:

www.gov.pe.ca/sss/index.php3?number=1024708&lang=E

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:

www.gov.pe.ca/eecd/

Government of Prince Edward Island:

www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/index.php3?number=3277&lang=E

Women's Network Prince Edward Island (legal): www.wnpei.org

The Coalition for Woman Abuse Protocol & Policy in Prince Edward Island (legal): www.cliapei.ca/womanabuse/community.htm

QUÉBEC

Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec: www.fede.qc.ca for French visit

www.mess.gouv.qc.ca

Famille et Aînés Québec:

www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/services-de-garde/Pages/index.aspx

AmiQuébec: www.amiquebec.org

Santé et Services Sociaux Québec:

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/sujets/prob_sante/sante_mentale/index.php?accueil_en&PHPSESSID=6043b7c17e703bebb8b95baf17d4cc71

Services Québec: www.separation-divorce.info.gouv.qc.ca/en

Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale: <http://maisons-femmes.qc.ca/liste-des-maisons-membres>

SASKATCHEWAN

Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan: www.abusehelplines.org

Government of Saskatchewan Social Services:

www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/sap

Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association:

www.skearlychildhoodassociation.ca

Government of Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care:

www.education.gov.sk.ca/ELCC

Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission: www.legalaid.sk.ca

Public Legal Education Association: www.plea.org

Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan: www.pblsask.ca

YUKON

Social Assistance:

www.hss.gov.yk.ca/programs/social_services/assistance/

Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation: www.ykhc.org/826.cfm

Yukon Legal Services Society: www.legalaid.yk.ca

Yukon Public Legal Education Association: www.yplea.com

Yukon Department of Justice: www.justice.gov.yk.ca/general/flic.html

YWCA_s ACROSS CANADA

NATIONAL

YWCA Canada: www.ywcacanada.ca

ALBERTA

YWCA Banff: www.ywcabanff.ab.ca

YWCA Calgary: www.ywcaofcalgary.com

YWCA Edmonton: www.ywcaofedmonton.org

YWCA Lethbridge & District: www.ywcalethbridge.org

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Kamloops Community YMCA-YWCA: www.kamloopsy.org

YMCA-YWCA Central Okanagan: www.ymca-ywca.com

YMCA-YWCA Greater Victoria: www.ymywca.victoria.bc.ca

YWCA Vancouver: www.ywcavan.org

MANITOBA

YMCA-YWCA Winnipeg: www.ymcaywca.mb.ca

YWCA Brandon: www.ywcabrandon.com

YWCA Thompson: (204) 778-6341

NEW BRUNSWICK

YMCA-YWCA Saint John: www.saintjohny.com

YWCA Moncton: www.ywcamoncton.com

NEWFOUNDLAND

YMCA-YWCA Northeast Avalon: www.ymywca.nf.net

NOVA SCOTIA

YWCA Halifax: www.ywcahalifax.com

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

YWCA Yellowknife: (867) 920-2777

ONTARIO

National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA: www.ymcaywca.ca

YMCA-YWCA Guelph: www.guelphy.org

YWCA Cambridge: www.ywcacambridge.ca

YWCA Durham: www.ywcadurham.org

YWCA Hamilton: www.ywcahamilton.org

YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo: www.ywcakw.on.ca

YWCA Muskoka: www.ywcamuskoka.com

YWCA Niagara Region: www.ywcaniagararegion.ca

YWCA Peterborough, Victoria and Haliburton:
www.ywcapeterborough.org

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin: www.ywcastthomaselgin.com

YWCA Toronto: www.ywcaontario.org

QUÉBEC

YWCA Montréal: www.ydesfemmesmtl.org

YWCA Québec: www.ywcaquebec.qc.ca

SASKATCHEWAN

YWCA Prince Albert: www.ywca.sasktelwebsite.net

YWCA Regina: www.ywcaregina.com

YWCA Saskatoon: www.ywcasaskatoon.com