

What to do if someone you know is being abused

Source: [Government of Canada](#)

Is someone you know being abused?

If you think that someone you know is being abused by a family member, it is important to act in a way that is safe and appropriate for everyone involved.

Family violence is not a private matter

Family violence causes significant health impacts and can be a matter of life or death. Your involvement could help improve the situation.

You might be concerned about getting involved because you feel that family violence is a private matter and none of your business, but it's important to remember that someone's life may depend on it.

Signs that someone may be a victim of abuse

Pay attention if someone...

- Seems sad, withdrawn, afraid or otherwise acts like they may be a victim of abuse.
- Is unreasonably angry or aggressive.
- Is nervous when a particular family member is around.
- Makes excuses for a family member's behaviour.
- Is sick or misses school or work a lot, or takes paid or unpaid time off that seems related to an abusive situation.
- Has a change in job performance: poor concentration, mistakes, slowness, inconsistent work quality.
- Tries to cover bruises.
- Drinks more than usual or uses drugs.

Or if you see...

- "Put downs" from one family member to another.
- One family member doing all the talking or dominating the conversation when the other family member is present.
- One family member trying to keep another family member away from her/his work or other activities.
- One family member acting as if he/she "owns" another.
- A family member contacting another while at work to say something that might scare or intimidate her/him.

What you can do

Family violence is never the victim's fault. The most important thing that you can do is offer your support without any blame or judgement...

- **Make sure everyone is safe**

Choose a time and place where you can have a private conversation.

Be careful about communication—a voice message, text or email could put someone in danger.

Never confront an abuser or do anything that makes you feel unsafe.

Get support for your own feelings from a friend or professional you trust.

- **Let the person be in charge**

Listen respectfully to what this person needs; don't try to take over. Don't give details about why you're concerned; just say that you want to be supportive. If the person doesn't want to talk, say that you are available whenever needed.

- **Offer support**

Before you approach the person, find services in your area that might help if and when they are ready.

Don't expect to know all the answers. Explore options together.

Ask direct questions like, "Do you want me to help you find someone to talk to?" or "Do you want to go somewhere safe?"

If a child or a young person tells you that they are being abused

- Believe the child.
- Listen. Don't interrupt or judge.
- React calmly. Don't ask for details.
- Tell the child that the abuse is not their fault, and that it was right to tell you.
- Write down what the child tells you in their own words.

What to do if you suspect child abuse:

If you know a child is being sexually abused, report it to the police immediately. In an emergency, call 911. Every province and territory has a law that says that any person who believes a child is being abused must report it. You will not get in trouble for making a report if you have reason to believe a child is being abused, even if it turns out that you were wrong.

If you have questions about how to recognize child abuse, here are some things you can do:

- Call your local child protection services.
- Talk to a nurse, social worker, doctor or teacher.
- Call the police. (911)
- (Canada): Call the Kids' Help Line 1-800-387-KIDS (5437).
- (U.S.): Call the Kids' Help Line 1-800-852-TEEN (8336).