

Family Violence / Abuse

What is abuse?

Physical, emotional, mental, verbal or sexual mistreatment. Abuse can take many forms, including violence, neglect, isolation, financial control and threats. It can be directed at a partner(s) (of any gender) or a child.



DID YOU KNOW?

Abuse happens in all kinds of relationships. It occurs in all cultures and communities. It's carried out by people of all genders and sexual orientations. **If you've experienced violence or abuse, it's not your fault.**



DANGER

Shaking a young child, even for a few seconds, can lead to brain injury, blindness or even death.

Never shake your child. Ensure that everyone who cares for them learns to care for them calmly.

How Does Abuse Affect Children?

Abuse, including violence and neglect, has a strong negative effect on children.

Children may be injured themselves, or they may be affected by hearing fighting, seeing a parent or caregiver's injuries or being blamed. Even if a child doesn't actually see the abuse, they will feel the tension and fear.

A child may not show they're upset. But violence *does* affect them. They may:

- have behavioural and mental health issues, like aggression, learning problems, depression, anxiety and, later in life, addiction
- not trust their parents and caregivers to keep them safe and be fearful of the world
- learn unhealthy ways of solving problems and treating others
- be more likely as an adult to be abused or become abusive
- be at greater risk for chronic illness like diabetes and heart disease

What is toxic stress?

The effect of serious, ongoing hardship, abuse or neglect on a child who doesn't have adult support. Toxic stress harms the development of a child's brain and body, and can cause lifelong challenges (see [Brain Development](#)).

What You Can Do

If you're living in an abusive relationship:

- ✓ Keep your wallet, keys, identification and phone easily accessible.
- ✓ Teach your child to call 9-1-1, or let them know other ways to get help, like running to a neighbour's house. Remind them never to get between you and your abuser.
- ✓ Keep a packed bag in a safe but easy-to-access place. Include identification, a credit card, legal documents like your immigration papers or court order, medications, a favourite toy or stuffed animal, and personal treasures.
- ✓ Plan where you'll go if you leave, how you'll manage children and pets, and how you'll be able to access money.
- ✓ Tell trusted neighbours to call 9-1-1 if they hear something concerning.
- ✓ Think about which rooms in your home are the safest – rooms with a door or window to the outside, for example, and without anything that could be used as a weapon.
- ✓ Practise getting out of your home safely and quickly.
- ✓ Create a code word with your child that means to leave the house because of an emergency.
- ✓ Teach older toddlers how to use a telephone and call 9-1-1.

- ✓ Tell other caregivers of your child, such as school teachers or daycare workers about the situation, and let them know who can pick up the child from care. If there are protection orders, give these to the staff at daycare or the child's school.

If you've left an abusive relationship:

- ✓ Let people you trust know that you've left.
- ✓ Turn off any location trackers on your phone or, if possible, get a new phone.
- ✓ Change your emergency contacts if they include your ex-partner(s).
- ✓ Make all of your social media accounts private.
- ✓ Set up a new email address.
- ✓ Change important online passwords.
- ✓ Change your day-to-day routines.
- ✓ Keep a recent picture of your child and your ex-partner(s) along with other information that may be needed in an emergency.



DID YOU KNOW?

If you need help, contact VictimLinkBC at 1-800-563-0808 or VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca.

Getting Help

Help is available if you're living with violence or other abuse.

Contact:

- VictimLinkBC toll-free at 1-800-563-0808 or VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca for confidential help in 240 languages 24 hours a day
- crisis lines
- women's shelters (usually called transition houses or safe homes in B.C.)
- child protection social workers
- your health care provider
- the public health or primary care nurse
- the police

See Abuse and Neglect in the [Resources](#) section for more information.



EMERGENCY

If you think you're in immediate danger, take your toddler with you to a safe place and call 9-1-1.



FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What You Can Do

If you think a child might be being abused or neglected, you must report it to a child welfare worker. Phone **1-800-663-9122** anytime, day or night. Call the police, too. And if you think the child is in immediate danger, call **9-1-1**.