

Spousal ABUSE

It is estimated that 7% of Canadians 15 years of age & over in a current or previous relationship have experienced spousal abuse in the last 5 years.

What Is Spousal Abuse?

Any harmful behaviour between two adults in intimate, usually cohabiting relationships including:

- **Physical Abuse** - pushing, punching, slapping, kicking, pinching, choking, pulling hair, throwing things, using a weapon, or sexual assault.
- **Intimidation** - threatening looks, actions and gestures, destroying property, abusing pets, or displaying weapons.
- **Coercion & Threats** - making and / or carrying out physical threats; threatening to leave, to commit suicide, to report a partner to welfare; or pressuring them to drop charges.
- **Emotional Abuse** - attacking a partner's self-esteem through constant put downs, name calling, mind games, or using humiliation and guilt tactics.
- **Isolation** - controlling what the spouse does, who they see and talk to, or where they go.
- **Minimizing, Denying, Blaming** - refusing to take responsibility by making light of the abuse, saying the abuse did not happen, or shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour to a partner.
- **Using Children** - threatening to take the children away, making a spouse feel guilty about the children, or using visitations to harass a spouse.
- **Economic Abuse** - preventing a spouse from getting or keeping a job, making a spouse ask for money, or not letting a spouse know about or have access to family income.
- **'Male Privilege'** - treating a spouse like a servant, making all the big decisions, or being the one to define male and female roles.

Using any of these types of abusive behaviour indicates a problem with abuse. Both women and men can be guilty of abusive behaviour.

The Cycle of Violence & Abuse

The typical stages of the cycle include-

- **Tension Building** The abuser may increasingly feel pressured, victimized or stressed, becoming more critical, insulting, demanding, aggressive, and blaming others or external events. The victim often recognizes that an explosive incident is coming and may feel helpless to stop it.
- **Explosion** The tension erupts into a violent (abusive) episode, with the abuser 'reacting' to and blaming an external situation, event, or another individual (usually the victim) for the explosion.
- **Honeymoon** The abuser may become 'loving and kind', evidenced by apologies, gifts of flowers, candy, jewellery, or an increase in sexual and / or 'dating' activity. This can be accompanied by promises that the abuse will never happen again and asking, even begging, for forgiveness.

Over time the honeymoon phase is typically replaced by an attitude of indifference. Without intervention, violent incidents usually increase in frequency and severity over time, as the cycle repeats itself.



Common Characteristics of Abusers

- *Abusers have a desperate need to be in control and fear losing control.* Abusers try to control the feelings and behaviour of others and overreact to change, events, or individuals over which they feel they have little or no control. They fear their lives will get worse if they let go of control, and become anxious when control is not possible.
- *Abusers have difficulties with intimate relationships.* Intimacy gives abusers a feeling of being out of control. Irrational jealousy and possessiveness often replace intimacy in relationships.
- *Abusers are burdened by low self-esteem.* No matter how competent they may be, abusers often live with harsh self-criticism, expecting much of themselves and others.
- *Abusers live in a world of denial.* When abusers feel threatened, their denial intensifies.
- *Abusers live life from the viewpoint of a victim.* Many who abuse spouses feel justified as their spouse is seen as disobedient, or deliberately provoking or challenging them.
- *Abusers have a rigid view of the roles of men, women, parents, and children.* This view combined with a need or a belief in the right to control, is used to justify their abusive behaviour.
- *Abusers fear abandonment.* Abusers will do anything to hold onto a relationship and may isolate themselves and their family in an attempt to control this fear of being abandoned.
- *Abusers may exhibit a Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde personality.* Abusers can be sensitive and respectful one minute, angry and abusive the next. Abusers can give contradictory messages - *I love you, I hate you or I want you near, leave me alone.*

Help for the Abuser

The abusive person can fail to recognize the impact of their behaviour on their spouse until a possible separation, divorce, or the police are called in. *Is this how you want your relationship to end?*

Ask a counsellor to recommend a Stopping Abuse program or group. The earlier you reach out for help, the sooner you will see positive changes in your life and in your relationships.

In addition to seeking help, it is important to do what you can now to stop the cycle of violence. You can help yourself by remembering:

- **Stopping abuse requires that a person accept responsibility for his / her own response to situations.** The thoughts, imagery, and fantasy that influence your level of stress and anger are yours. Persons who use abusive language or behaviour choose to do so. Explanations such as having a bad temper, getting out of control, or flipping out, are attempts to escape responsibility and to justify abusive behaviour.
- **When you become angry and feel like lashing out verbally or physically, take a time out.** Excuse yourself from the situation, say you will be back in a short while, and take a long walk. The important thing is to remove yourself from the situation so you can develop a self-coping strategy.
- **In dealing with anger, you can learn to be assertive and at the same time respect the rights of others.** You do not need to resort to aggression, which does not respect the rights and well-being of the other person.
- **Prepare a strategy for those situations where you anticipate getting angry.** Plan self-coping statements to say to yourself so you can handle the situation assertively but not aggressively.

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
Brown-Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com