

FAITH LEADERS ON THE FRONT LINE

RESPONDING TO
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
IN OUR COMMUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR FAITH LEADERS

This document was created by One Voice —
a task force of NCJWC Toronto, comprised of women of diverse faiths
working together to end violence against women



National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto
www.ncjwctoronto.org

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto has been actively involved in social action, education, and service for 126 years, committed to addressing the needs of the vulnerable in the community. The One Voice project aligns with the mission of the organization as it has brought together women of diverse faiths to address the issue of violence against women.

Religious leaders across faith groups recognize that awareness and action by members of faith communities are fundamental to ending domestic violence. This guide is designed for faith leaders who want to learn more about how to recognize when domestic violence may be occurring, how to support victims of domestic violence, and how to create a sense of awareness, responsibility, and accountability within their communities.

While we recognize there are different forms of relationships and gender identifications, and that domestic violence takes place in any household, the purpose of this guide is to support women facing abuse in domestic relationships. We focus on women because statistics examining domestic violence have shown that women account for the overwhelming majority of victims, and that women are more likely to experience spousal violence in its most severe forms.¹ Men experience violence as well. While it is beyond the scope of this guide to address violence against men, please see the Referral and Resource List at the end of the Guide for sources of support.

This guide is grounded in the following recognitions. **First**, that domestic violence is not linked to any particular faith group, ethnicity, or race; it is a human problem that exists within all communities, and faith communities are no exception. **Second**, that women experiencing domestic violence often look to their faith leaders and communities as sources of support, empowerment, and safe haven. **Third**, that while faiths differ in their specific practices and beliefs, faith communities share the key commonalities in offering a framework through which to promote equality, mutual respect, human dignity, and healing. Recognizing these three elements, **all faith communities have a moral responsibility and a practical ability to support and strengthen victims, to educate congregants, and to encourage society-at-large to put an end to domestic violence.**

We use the terms *domestic violence*, *domestic abuse*, and *intimate partner violence* interchangeably to refer to all forms of abuse women can experience within domestic relationships. For the purposes of this guide, we define domestic violence as an all-encompassing system of control in which the victim is manipulated and/or coerced to stay in a relationship that reinforces the power of the abuser. Abuse against women is a specific and special form of bullying, or *coercive control*.

¹ Source: Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021.
Released: 2022-10-19. Statistics Canada.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE

Domestic Violence and How to Recognize It.....3

SECTION TWO

The Role of Faith Leaders in Preventing and Responding
to Domestic Violence in Their Communities.....7

SECTION THREE

Summary.....10

SECTION FOUR

Referral and Resource List11

SECTION FIVE

Contributors13

SECTION SIX

Gracious Donors15

SECTION ONE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

Violence is about one person exerting power over another person. An abuser attempts to achieve this by slowly and continually making it harder for the victim to leave the situation. Most abuse begins with subtle psychological and emotional methods of control that are almost invisible to other people. Abusers are careful to avoid detection. Abusive behaviours often increase over time to include more kinds of control and to intensify the control. Eventually, the victim learns to give in to the abuser's demands out of fear and shame, trapped hopelessly in an embarrassing and dangerous situation.

Discussions of violence can categorize abuse as physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, financial, or spiritual violence. However, abuse does not typically occur in one category alone; non-physical abuses are often mixed with physical and structural tactics. Furthermore, all forms of abuse are connected and need to be taken seriously.

METHODS INCLUDE: isolating a woman from friends and family, withholding money, food, identification documents, and transportation, depriving the victim of sleep, and micro-managing household chores and childcare methods.

It is particularly critical to learn to recognize *emotional abuse*. Emotional abuse destroys a person's will and sense of self, and therefore sets the foundation that makes other forms of abuse possible.

EXAMPLES OF ABUSE:

This is a list of some things to look for, but it is not a complete list.

Do you know someone who:

- Constantly makes excuses to other people for their partner's poor behaviour?
- Is shamed or treated poorly by their partner in public?
- Is always told exactly what to do by their partner? Or their partner seems to make decisions for them?
- Has had the police called to their home to respond to a situation of domestic violence?

Domestic violence can take on additional forms or have a particular tone when the abuser and/or the victim are people of faith. **Unfortunately, within religious communities, physical and emotional abuse is sometimes justified, excused or ignored.** In the following diagram, each section illustrates how a woman of faith may be victimized, and how the experience of domestic violence takes on particular forms in a faith environment. The abuser is positioned at the centre of the wheel. Each of the spokes of the wheel illustrates a different way that the abuser can exert power and control in a woman's life — and each of these can be enacted through subtle emotional or psychological manipulations or direct violent means. The descriptions highlight the ways that faith can be (mis)interpreted as a tool for power and control. The visual metaphor of the wheel captures how abuse can manifest as a cycle of separate but related behaviours all generated by the abuser's intention to assert power and control over someone else's life. The descriptions include variations of abuse specific to faith-based contexts.

WHEEL OF ABUSE



Compiled by One Voice

Abused women display **symptoms of trauma**. Symptoms of trauma include: anger and anxiety, substance abuse, unwarranted optimism, self-harm, and many others. Because of the manipulations of the abuser and their own sometimes-false assumptions, community members may act in ways that intensify the victim's sense of isolation, shame, and entrapment.

A victim of domestic violence may act in unexpected ways. Abused women's behaviours are often contradictory or unexpected. Community members may expect a victim to act or respond in a certain way. It is common for an abused woman to act publicly in ways that do not make sense to others, are surprising, are negative, and that may hide the abuse that is happening. For example, a victim may show excessive affection to her husband in public. In contrast, a victim may appear unemotional or indifferent to her partner. In both examples, it might seem like these victims are not affected by domestic violence or do not fear their partners. However, both of these sets of behaviours could be ways that a woman is trying to cope with or hide the abuse. Some abused women are aware of how their contradictory behaviours further isolate and trap them. **An abused woman will often be so embarrassed by her situation that she will find it difficult to disclose her situation for fear of being misunderstood.**

Cycle of violence: Domestic violence happens in cycles that recur. The typical cycle of violence has three phases: false honeymoon, tension building and explosion. Each phase may be as short as a few seconds, or as long as several years. Relationships often start in the honeymoon phase. Over time, the honeymoon phases get shorter. This can make it especially confusing and scary the first time the explosion phase happens. Episodes of explosion also intensify over time as the abuser becomes emboldened to exert more control.

SECTION TWO

THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

The faith leader holds significant power and influence amongst their community members. The potential for faith leaders to improve community responses to domestic violence therefore rests in their role as **a leader**. The faith leader can model how best to support victims of domestic violence and to **publicly recognize the role that faith perspectives play in responding properly or improperly to domestic abuse**.

Faith leaders can begin to change the culture around domestic violence by establishing that domestic violence should be seen as a serious mental, physical, and spiritual health issue, and as a violation of human rights. Just as abusers maintain their control over a victim by telling her that she is making up the violence, faith leaders can also be manipulated by abusers to believe that a victim is imagining the abuse. By personally believing and showing concern for a woman who says she is experiencing domestic violence, faith leaders have great capacity to create a safe environment for those affected. By creating community awareness about domestic violence and by respecting women who come forward to disclose being a victim, faith leaders will model best practices in responding to domestic violence.

WAYS FOR FAITH LEADERS TO CREATE AWARENESS IN A FAITH COMMUNITY ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

- Publicly oppose any religious justifications for violence against women.
- Emphasize the ways your religious texts promote equality and mutual respect.
- Give a sermon, a dvar torah, a khutbah, or spiritual teaching on the red flags, the psychological seriousness, and/or the realities of abuse.
- Screen for domestic violence during family/premarital counselling.
- Display books and brochures about domestic violence in community spaces.
- Display brochures from community service providers who support those affected by domestic violence (ex: women's shelters).
- Host an information and awareness event with educational materials.
- Arrange for a guest speaker on this topic.
- Provide training for staff and volunteers on domestic violence.
- Implement a healthy relationships curriculum in religious school and with youth groups.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO START A CONVERSATION WITH A WOMAN YOU SUSPECT IS BEING ABUSED:

- Are you safe?
- Do you feel like you have no control over your own life?
- Do you ever feel afraid of your partner? Do you worry that your partner may hurt you (physically or emotionally) or your children?
- Do you feel like you have to tolerate poor treatment in order to protect someone else? Like your children? Or yourself?
- Has your partner threatened you with a weapon, such as fists, a knife, or a gun?
- Do you sometimes wonder if the way your partner treats you is normal or ok?
- Would you want to leave your relationship, but think it's just easier or safer to stay?

THE FIVE KEY “R”S TO SUPPORT AND VALIDATE WOMEN WITHIN COMMUNITIES

RECOGNIZE

- Signs of abuse
- The role of religious leaders and religious institutions

RESPECT

- Any woman experiencing abuse
- Confidentiality

REACT

- See something? Say something!
- Work with the victim to increase her safety

REFER

- Build relationships with community organizations
- Refer to appropriate organizations

RALLY

- Be vocal against domestic violence
- Consider supporting political and legal efforts to end domestic violence and change societal conditions that enable it



SECTION THREE

SUMMARY

In recent years, abusive behaviours have been brought to the centre of public attention. These cases have increased public recognition of how bullying and abuses of power are often accepted as normal and unavoidable throughout the world.

At the same time, there has also been a rising legal and cultural consensus against bullying in any form. Within the legal domain, over the past forty years many countries have introduced laws to protect women and children from the effects of societal patterns of male dominance and related abuses of power within relationships. While this legal and culture change work has had an impact on community education and awareness, domestic violence has continued to be underreported in Canada.

Meanwhile, there seems to be a growing understanding of the profoundly negative psychological and physical health consequences that abusive behaviours have on their victims and their families. Both men and women have made greater strides in recognizing what distinguishes a loving and healthy relationship from an unhealthy and abusive relationship.

SECTION FOUR REFERRAL AND RESOURCE LIST

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.ncjwctoronto.org/our-projects/one-voice

IN AN EMERGENCY CALL:

9-1-1

Each police division has a dedicated Family Violence and Sexual Assault Unit

VICTIM SERVICES 416-808-7066

Provides immediate crisis response, intervention and prevention services which are responsive to the needs of individuals, families and communities affected by crime and sudden tragedies.

OTHER RESOURCES

ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE

416-863-0511 or 1-866-863-0511 or TTY 1-866-863-7868 www.awhl.org

24-hour crisis line

A safe space, free of judgment anytime, day or night, to support, listen and guide women who have experienced any type of abuse anywhere in Ontario.

PROVINCIAL CRISIS AND HELP LINES

2-1-1 or 416-314-2447 or 1-888-579-2888

www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/programs.php

Ontario resources for those experiencing violence
Helpline, shelters, supports

BARBRA SCHLIFER COMMEMORATIVE CLINIC (TORONTO)

416-323-9149 www.schliferclinic.com

Offers legal services and representation, trauma-informed counselling and multilingual interpretation to diverse women who have experienced violence.

CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICES TORONTO - WOMAN ABUSE SERVICES

416-228-0048 or 416-921-1163 www.cfstoronto.com/woman-abuse-services

Focuses on providing a safe and supportive environment to abused women and their families where they can receive counselling, support, education, and information on other support services in the community.

JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD SERVICES - WOMAN ABUSE SERVICES

416-638-7800 www.jfandcs.com/woman-abuse-services

Crisis intervention, assessment, individual and group counselling, education and consultation, referrals with other professionals

RIVERDALE IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S CENTRE - VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN PROGRAM

647-395-3605 www.rirc.ca/vaw-program

Assists women and children victimized by violence by providing the emotional and practical support needed to lead a life free of abuse. The objective of the program is to increase the safety of assaulted women and their children who are fleeing violent relationships and ensure that their lives are not further endangered.

LEGAL AID ONTARIO

416-979-1446 or 1-800-668-8258 www.legalaid.on.ca/services/domestic-abuse

Provides a free, two-hour, emergency consultation to anyone experiencing domestic violence

SEXUAL ASSAULT/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CARE CENTRE (SA/DVCC)

416-323-6040

www.womenscollegehospital.ca/care-programs/sexual-assault-domestic-violence-care-centre-sa-dccc

A comprehensive service that assists women, men, and trans people, over the age of 14, who are victims/survivors of sexual assault and domestic/intimate partner violence.

SHELTERS SAFE

www.sheltersafe.ca/ontario

Directory of women's shelters and transition homes

SHELTER MOVERS

1-855-203-6252 www.sheltermovers.com/greatertoronto

Provide free moving and storage services to people leaving abuse.

SECTION FIVE CONTRIBUTORS

ONE VOICE COMMITTEE

Eva Karpati, *Co-Chair One Voice of NCJWC Toronto, Immediate Past President of NCJWC Toronto*

Rev. Michelle Singh, *Co-Chair One Voice NCJWC Toronto; Interfaith Minister, Co-Chair Toronto Steering Committee, World Interfaith Harmony Week*

Diana Alli D'Souza, *President Access Empowerment Council*

Ariella Boehm, *Psychotherapist, Community Member*

Anita Bromberg, *President Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation*

Michelle Franz, *Community Member*

Daveeda Goldberg, *Community Member*

Leyla Haji, *Community Member*

Nazila Isgandarova, *Master Pastoral Studies Program Director, Assistant Professor Emmanuel College of Victoria University at the University of Toronto*

Yegana Jafarova, *Board member Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre*

Naaz Mulji, *Community Member*

Irshad Osman, *Imam, Danforth Islamic Centre*

Jill Robinson, *Community Member*

Ruthe Schipper, *Member Women of Holy Blossom Synagogue.*

Rebecca Starkman, *Ph.D., Community Member*

Dafna Strauss, *Community Member*

Shirley Tetreau, *Member Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, representing the International Focolare Movement*

Margaret Thibideau, *Catholic Community Member*

Hilary Turner, *Community Member*

Special recognition to **Daveeda Goldberg** and **Rebecca Starkman** who spent many hours volunteering to make this an exemplary resource.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF OUR ESTEEMED READERS:

Shaykh Imran Ally, Imam and Chaplain

Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, C.M. Rabbi Emeritus, Beth Tzedec Congregation

Rabbi Sean Gorman, ED, MERCAZ-Canada and Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism

Monica Missaghi, Bahai Faith community member

Rev. Paige Souter, Assistant Curate, The Church of the Redeemer

Imam Abd Alfatah Twakkal, Chair of the London Council of Imams

SECTION **SIX** GRACIOUS DONORS

National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto

RTOERO District 23 North York

Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre

Catholic Women's League

Iman Irshad Osman

Margaret Thibideau

Dr. Nazila Isgandarova

Diana Alli D'Souza

Foundation Access Empowerment Council

Hum Law Firm

“In 2021, police reported 114,132 victims of intimate partner violence (violence committed by current and former legally married spouses, common-law partners, dating partners and other intimate partners) aged 12 years and older (344 victims per 100,000 population). It marked the seventh consecutive year of gradual increase for this type of violence. Eight in 10 (79%) victims of such violence were women and girls, and the rate of victimization was nearly four times higher among women and girls than men and boys (537 versus 147).

In 2021, 90 homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner. Three-quarters (76%) of these victims were women and girls. The number of victims of intimate partner homicide in 2021 was higher than in 2020 (84 victims) and 2019 (77 victims).

The data presented in this article are based on the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, Trend Database.”

— *Statistics Canada October, 2022*



Contact:

Robin Gofine, *Executive Director*

NCJWC Toronto rgofine@ncjwctoronto.org 416-633-5100

www.ncjwctoronto.org