

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

What you need to know

A survivors words

“Outwardly, I was known as a strong, confident, independent and relatively successful woman with a good career. Never would I have thought that I would become a statistic to domestic violence.

The scary part was that I had no idea that I was in a violent relationship while involved. It sort of crept up on me and I didn’t realize how severe it was until I was laying on the floor, bloodied and losing consciousness with each blow to my head - by the man I was to marry the next year.

Most of my suffering came from emotional or verbal abuse, or that’s how it started. It started by him telling me things because he “cared”. Then, every hurtful word was somehow justified due to something I did. I was always blamed for something until I guess I just started to believe it and question myself. Gas lighting, silence, hurting the dog, belittling or disregarding my every move or feeling. He even threatened that he could “shoot me and they wouldn’t find the body”.

It was not until I ran away in the middle of the night and sat on my parents' front step, sobbing, when I realized the the situation I had been in. It was like the fog had lifted and all the red flags or signs I missed, came to light. How did I miss these? On top of that, I didn’t even recognize the woman I was at that point.

Truly, that is where my journey began. A challenging one it was...I tried saving a man from his abusive past and tried to help lift him up. In the process, I lost myself.

Two years later, I am doing exceptional. However, it took a lot of work and change to get where I am. Domestic violence isn’t always as it seems. It is easy to judge and lose patience with survivors but try not to. Unless you yourself have been involved, it is hard enough for victims to understand, let alone people who haven’t experienced such. For employers, the best thing you can do is listen and be patient. Provide supports, alternative working arrangements, time off and an open door. I didn’t have the support of my former employer and it led to my situation and mental health being worse.”



Did you know?

Alberta's rates of domestic assault are among the highest in Canada

Who is affected?

Domestic and family violence can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, cultural and spiritual background or abilities. Victims situations can be in romantic relationships, divorced, children, grandparents, or people with caregivers or guardians.



Know the warning signs

Victims of abuse will often show the following warning signs:

- Withdrawal from family, friends and co-workers
- Changes in ability to concentrate
- Unexplained absences from work
- Upsetting phone calls throughout the day
- Uncharacteristic sadness, withdrawal or exhaustion
- Signs of fear or anxiety
- Not going out or attending any activities
- Have unexplained bruises or other injuries
- Show signs of depression or anxiety

How can I help?

The majority of victims will not talk about their abuse. Some have been brainwashed and are unaware of the abuse themselves. If a survivor opens up about their situation, they trust you.

The most important thing you can do is listen. While instinct might be to act, resist doing so. Unfortunately, our good faith actions could lead victims into further trouble, even death.

Don't offer specific advice about leaving, instead, be a bridge to resources and support within the community. Give your support by showing empathy, listening and being there when needed. It must be the victim's decision to leave, and only when they feel ready.

Leaving an abusive relationship never ends there. Once an individual decides to leave, it is the most dangerous and scary time. Oftentimes, abusers amp up the abuse once their victim decides to leave.

The abused is also left trying to re-build their life, self worth and self-esteem - usually the hardest part. Nothing is simple about a survivor's situation. Resist judgement. If you fear yourself or anyone else is in imminent danger, please contact the authorities. Be sure to contact the child protection hotline if children are in danger. The Child Abuse hotline is 1-800-387-KIDS

Supports

- The Safer Spaces program helps victims of family violence to end their lease at no cost. Visit alberta.ca/SaferSpaces or call 1-877-644-9992 (toll-free)
- Emergency shelters provide shelter, protection and culturally appropriate supports. Call the Family Violence Info Line at 310-1818 to find the emergency shelter closest to you or visit alberta.ca/Shelters
- Emergency financial assistance is available if you need help with expenses to start a new life. Call 1-866-644-5135 or 780-644-5135 in Edmonton
- HealthLink provides healthcare advice 24/7. Dial 811
- If you are Indigenous and need help with court or other community resources, visit Native Counselling Services of Alberta at ncca.ca
- Visit alberta.ca/EndFamilyViolence for additional resources
- An Emergency Protection Order (EPO) provides legal protection to victims. For more info, call the Alberta Legal Aid Office at 1-866-845-3425

Types of domestic violence

Abusive and violent behaviours may include:

- Physical abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Criminal harassment or stalking
- Emotional and verbal abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse
- Pet cruelty
- Spiritual abuse

Why people stay in abusive situations

Internal reasons:

- Fear of safety and threats, fear of financial security, fear of judgement
- Depression
- Depleted self-esteem
- Trying to fix or mend the abuser
- Self-blame
- Love
- Self-doubt
- Anger
- Belief of change

External reasons:

- No transportation (no escape)
- No support from friends, family or co-workers
- Lack of skills, education or a job
- No affordable housing
- Language barriers
- Lack of community awareness and supports
- Lack of childcare
- Little or no money
- Lack of shelter
- No real protection except protective orders which can be ineffective