

Relationship Violence

Relationship violence, or intimate partner violence, is prevalent in Canada, just as it is in most cultures. However despite its prevalence, relationship violence is often stigmatized or viewed as a private matter to be worked out within a relationship. This makes it more difficult for those who are experiencing relationship violence to reach out for support.

Relationship violence may occur as an isolated incident, but most often it is part of a larger pattern of abuse within a relationship. Although there are many types of relationship violence or abuse, one type rarely exists in isolation: an abusive partner uses different forms of violence in order to maintain control in their relationship or a sense of power over their partner.

Types of Violence/Abuse

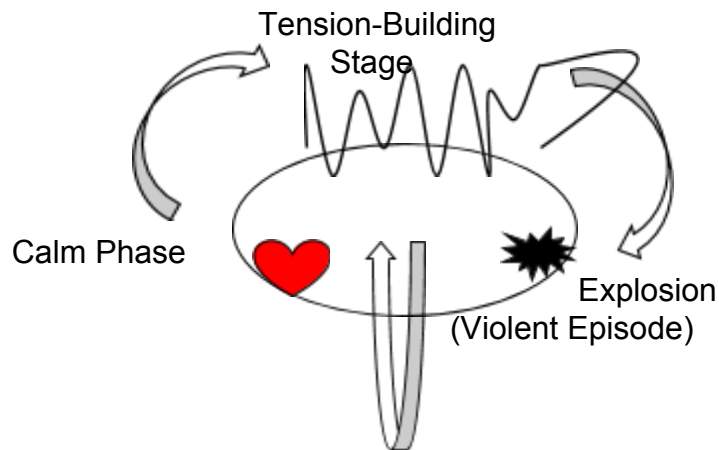
- **Emotional:** Emotional or psychological abuse is an unseen form of violence that may involve yelling, swearing, put-downs, insults and/or threats. Emotional abuse may also include isolation from friends and family, unreasonable jealousy, using manipulation and guilt to control a partner's behaviour or thoughts, or deliberately sabotaging employment or academic success. Abusive partners often suspect and accuse their partners of cheating on them. Someone who is experiencing this form of abuse may feel like they are going crazy or overreacting, but this is not true. These feelings are often the result of an abusive partner's deliberate manipulation to keep their partner from recognizing the abuse.
- **Physical:** Physical abuse is considered assault, and is a criminal offence under the Criminal Code of Canada. It can include using physical size to intimidate, driving recklessly, destroying possessions, punching walls, throwing/breaking things, punching, slapping, grabbing, kicking, strangling, and use or threat of a weapon. Physical abuse can also involve restraining another individual or preventing them from leaving, endangering their physical safety, and denying them medical access if they are sick or hurt.
- **Sexual:** Intimate partner sexual assault is one of the least talked about types of sexual assault. Those who experience it often have difficulty coming forward for support as this form of sexual assault usually accompanies a larger cycle of abuse within the relationship. Sexual abuse or intimate partner sexual assault is when a partner uses force, threats, or coercion to obtain sex or sexual acts. It can also include not respecting a partner's sexual or physical privacy, refusing to use or tampering with contraception, or shaming or attacking a partner's sexuality or sexual preferences.
- **Financial:** Financial abuse is quite common and is often one of the primary reasons that a partner may remain in a relationship where there is violence or abuse. Financial abuse can include an abusive partner interfering with or not allowing their partner to work, withholding or taking money, and denying their partner access to a shared vehicle or financial records. As a result, someone

who experiences this form of abuse may become financially dependent on the abusive partner and feel they have no choice but to stay in the relationship.

- **Other:** Other forms of violence or abuse may be based on culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability. An abusive partner may shame or mock partners based on these aspects of their identity, or keep them from expressing or participating in them.

Cycle of violence

Partners who are violent or abusive can be like two different people, loving some of the time and cruel some of the time. If they were cruel all of the time, it would be easier to leave the relationship. The cycle of violence, as shown below, explains a pattern that often emerges in relationships where there is abuse. It can be helpful for someone experiencing relationship violence to recognize this cycle in order to break the pattern, but only when they are ready or feel safe to do so. Most people who experience relationship violence need support in breaking this cycle.



- **Tension-Building Stage** is when the person feels as though they are “walking on eggshells.” They are hyper-alert, trying not to upset the abusive partner. The abusive partner is easily upset (on edge), and is critical of their partner.
- **Explosion** is when acts of abuse take place. This can range from yelling insults and threats of violence, to physical violence or sexual abuse.
- **Calm Stage** is when things return to “normal” or when the tension is temporarily lessened. Sometimes the abusive partner is apologetic or feeling guilty after the explosion. Both partners may rationalize or find excuses for the violent episode. This stage often brings out aspects of the relationship that feel positive and remind the person of why they chose to be in the relationship.

As time passes, this cycle progresses more quickly. In many abusive relationships, the calm stage eventually stops altogether and the cycle will alternate between tension building and explosion. In addition, the explosion phase also tends to become more violent over time.

Impacts of relationship violence

- **Defining relationship violence:** Many people struggle or are hesitant to define their relationship as violent or abusive. This may be because of feelings of shame or embarrassment around experiencing abuse. Others may minimize or deny relationship violence to protect their partner or because they are afraid others will try to make them end the relationship. Someone who is experiencing abuse in a relationship may or may not choose to identify with a number of terms such as relationship violence or abuse, dating violence, intimate partner violence, or domestic abuse.
- **Safety:** An individual experiencing relationship violence may be concerned for their own physical or emotional safety or the safety of loved ones. Various support services such as the U of A Sexual Assault Centre can provide options and work with the individual on developing a safety plan.
- **Ending the relationship:** Some people who experience relationship violence may wish to end their relationship. This can be a big decision and may require a great deal of support from friends, family, or support services. Many people make several attempts to change or end an abusive relationship over the course of months or years.
- **Trust:** For someone experiencing relationship violence, their trust in someone very close to them has been abused and betrayed. As a result, they may have a very difficult time trusting other people who are close to them. It is normal for an individual to feel unsure about who is worthy of trust in the future because their trust in their partner was violated.

Options and Resources

Many services and options exist for individuals experiencing relationship violence. These may be difficult choices, so it is important that individuals do not feel pressured and are supported in making whatever decision is right for them, as it may require taking action that could have serious impacts.

- **Police.** It is important to know that physical and sexual assault are criminal offences and can be prosecuted under the law. There may be some hesitation to do so, possibly because of fear of retaliation after the relationship has ended, or the potential impacts on the individual's life, such as relocating to a safe place. Even if the person experiencing abuse does not want to press charges, the police can offer protection and assistance in an emergency.
- **U of A Protective Services.** If the individual experiencing relationship violence is a member of the University of Alberta community, Protective Services might also be an option. They will discuss options for the individual on campus, as well as other safety possibilities or resources. Even if Protective Services cannot press charges under the Code of Student Behaviour, they can offer protection and assistance.
- **Peace Bonds/Restraining Orders or Emergency Protection Order.** These documents can be obtained in certain circumstances. Although they do not guarantee safety, they can be an option for additional protection or to increase a

sense of safety. The Sexual Assault Centre can provide more information about criteria for each of these options.

- **Safety Planning.** Whether or not an individual pursues charges, if they are at risk of any violence and especially if they are considering leaving the relationship, a safety plan should be established. A safety plan consists of outlining how to survive violent episodes, preparing an emergency bag and establishing an escape plan. Safety plan templates are available at the U of A Sexual Assault Centre.
- **Emergency Accommodation.** There are many options for emergency accommodation within the Edmonton area, such as shelters. These are generally short-term options during which other resources or options can be accessed. Shelters can arrange interpreters, legal aid, financial assistance, counselling, and aid in obtaining new residence. The U of A Sexual Assault Centre may be able to help with finding additional emergency accommodation options for U of A students of all genders who are experiencing relationship violence.
 - **Women's Shelters in Edmonton and Area** (24 Hour Emergency Numbers)
 - **WIN House** (Edmonton): 479-0058
 - **Lurana Shelter** (Edmonton): 424-5875
 - **A Safe Place** (Sherwood Park): 464-7233
- **Counselling.** Through counselling, an individual who has experienced relationship violence can find support and understanding as well as work on addressing the impacts of the abuse such as issues with self-esteem, trust, future relationships, and other concerns.
 - **U of A Sexual Assault Centre:** Free crisis and short-term drop-in counselling, located in 2-705 Students' Union Building, 780-492-9771, www.sac.ualberta.ca
 - **U of A Counselling and Clinical Services** (for University of Alberta students): Counselling services free of charge for students, by appointment, located in 2-600 Students' Union Building, 780-492-5202, <https://uofa.ualberta.ca/current-students/counselling>
 - **Faculty of Education Clinical Services:** Low cost counselling services, located in 1-135 Education North Building, 780-492-3746
 - **Family Violence Prevention Centre:** Information, emotional support, advocacy and referrals, located at #401, 10010-105 St, 780-423-1634, www.johnhoward.org
 - **YWCA Counselling Services:** Sliding scale individual counselling and group support, located at #100, 10350-124 Street, 780-423-9922 ext. 222, www.ywcaofedmonton.org