



ABUSE

IS

WRONG

IN ANY CULTURE:
FOR FIRST NATIONS
AND MÉTIS PEOPLE



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La maltraitance est inacceptable peu importe la culture : Premières nations et Métis du Canada

Justice Canada acknowledges the assistance of the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence in the preparation of this booklet.



**"You carried on the traditions of alcohol and violence
The city stripped you clean of your culture, hopes and dreams
The penn wall continues to remind you of your girl's screams**

**It was love no doubt
But how you do it burned out
Long ago in you
Should have stopped the cycle from carrying through
Now the son who you've created saw the things you do
And will probably pick up where you left off too
She wanted to save you so bad
Should have saved herself first
What could have been the best thing you had
Took a turn for the worst
But don't live on regrets
She's gone, move on, but don't forget.**

**Too sick to stop the cycle
Hammer this nail into my head
Living in the cost of culture loss
Some say I'm better off dead."**

From "Too Sick" reproduced with the permission of Eekwol

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is written for First Nations and Métis people who are hurting because of violence in their lives. However, everyone who is being hurt, or who is hurting others—woman or man, old or young, First Nations and Métis or not—is encouraged to get help.

When we say First Nations and Métis in this booklet, it includes all Indigenous people, but a separate publication in this series is available for Inuit.

Read this booklet if you:

- are living with violence or abuse at home —in your relationship, or in your family;
- want a healthier, happier home for you and your children; or
- are worried about another person in your family or community who is living with violence or abuse at home.

This booklet will help you understand:

- the dynamics of abuse and family violence; and
- that violence and abuse are not part of First Nations or Métis culture.

If you know someone who is hurting, you can tell them they are not alone ... and you can show them this booklet in a safe place.

Disclaimer—The information in this publication is not a substitute for legal advice. To receive legal advice about your specific situation, you need to speak to a lawyer.



FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN BE STOPPED

Remember that:

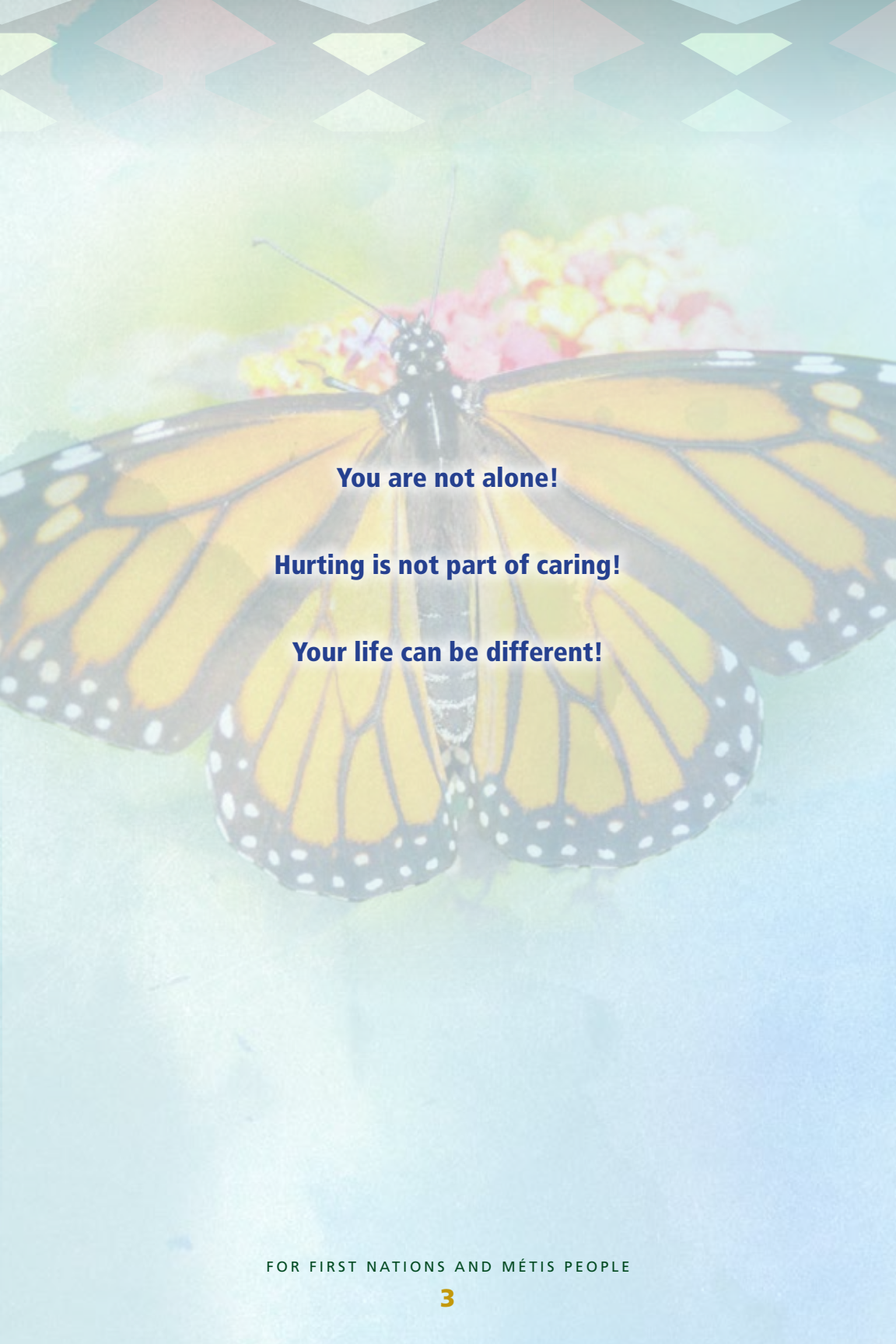
- asking for help is not a sign of weakness—choosing to break cycles of violence and abuse is a sign of strength.
- feeling alone, ashamed or afraid of talking about what is happening to you are part of being abused.
- people around you may tell you to stay quiet for the sake of the family, or that abuse is normal in families. They may even tell you that the violence is all your fault. It's not true!

Ending family violence happens one step at a time. Many people have found ways to start leading happier lives for themselves and their children.

This booklet is a starting place. It will answer some of your questions, and let you read the real words of First Nations and Métis women and men who have faced violence and then moved away from it to a better life. Their stories may help you find your own path.



ABUSE IS WRONG IN ANY CULTURE



You are not alone!

Hurting is not part of caring!

Your life can be different!

IN AN EMERGENCY

- Find a way to make you and your children safe—that comes first!
- Call the police, or ask someone you trust to call them.
- Run to a friend's house, the police station, health centre, community centre or a church, if you can.
- Scream or yell, or run outside, so the neighbours will see you or hear you, and call the police.



FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS PEOPLE IN CANADA

“...believe it or not we are the future of history so stop living your life like it was a mystery...”

Reproduced with the permission of Christie Lee Charles, aka Miss Christie Lee

First Nations and Métis people live all across Canada—in communities, on reserves, in rural and remote regions, in towns and cities.

In every community, there are those who live in fear of violence every day—not from strangers, but from the people they love, sometimes in their own homes. Thousands of First Nations and Métis people—from young people through Elders—live with hurting bodies and broken hearts.

We know that Indigenous women and men experience violence at higher rates than other people in Canada, and that they are more likely to know their assailant. A 2009 Statistics Canada survey found that Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) people are more than twice as likely to report experiencing violent victimization by someone other than their spouse as non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal women are two and a half times more likely to be violently victimized by a current or former spouse than non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women also reported experiencing more severe forms of violence, with more serious injuries. A recent comprehensive review of police records conducted by the RCMP along with 300 police forces across Canada also found that Aboriginal women are over-represented as the victims of homicide, and as missing persons on record.

There are many reasons for this. Every year, though, many First Nations and Métis women and men **DO** choose to get help so they can leave violence and abuse behind.

It's not easy to take the first step. The everyday lives of First Nations and Métis people across Canada often include many sources of stress—such as poverty, poor health, language barriers, lack of education, inadequate housing, poor nutrition, lack of jobs or low-paying menial jobs and racism. These extra stresses make it hard to believe that change is possible.

You **CAN** choose to get help to break the cycle for yourself and for your children, so that your life, your children's lives and their children's lives can be different.

WHAT IS ABUSE?

“...all the women in my family have been abused, some way or another, whether it was mentally, spiritually, or physically. I’ve always felt it was normal to be in that kind of relationship. That it was just the way it was. Somewhere in my mind, I knew it wasn’t. It wasn’t normal at all.”

*(from **Strengthening the Circle to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women, The Summit III to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women—Final Report**, published by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, June 2009).*

- When someone hurts you deliberately—not accidentally—it’s abuse.
- Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or financial.
- Abuse happens the first time you are hit, kicked, shoved around or threatened with violence, and every time it happens again.
- Abuse and violence in families happens in all cultures and in all nations.

Many types of abuse are also **crimes**.

One woman said,

“I almost got killed last year. He tried to choke me to death, but I managed to get away.”

*(from **Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence**, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).*

She was describing a crime.

Physical abuse happens when someone uses force to hurt your body. Some examples of physical abuse include:

- strangling or choking
- pushing or shoving
- punching or hitting
- burning
- kicking
- pulling hair
- locking you in a room
or holding you against your will.

All forms of physical abuse are crimes.

Sexual abuse is any sexual touching or sexual activity that you don't want. Being kissed, fondled or forced to have sexual intercourse (even with your spouse) *if you don't want it* is sexual abuse. Being ignored when you say "Stop" is also abuse.

It is also sexual abuse to have sexual intercourse with:

- your child, grandchild, brother or sister; or
- a child who is legally too young to agree, such as when they are under 16 (unless the two people are close in age), or under 18 where the partner is in a position of power (such as a teacher, minister or recreational supervisor).

It is also sexual abuse to exploit a child under 18 through pornography or prostitution, including situations where sex is traded for drugs, alcohol, nice clothes, etc.

All forms of sexual abuse are crimes.

"I let him hit me so he doesn't kill one of the kids."

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence*, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).

Emotional abuse is also sometimes called **psychological abuse**. This happens when someone damages your self-worth, or tries to control, frighten or isolate you. It often leads to anxiety, depression and feelings of helplessness.

Some emotional abuse may also be a crime, including:

- threatening to kill or harm you, or someone you know or love;
- breaking or destroying your things, hurting your pets or threatening to hurt them;
- following you around, watching you, and causing you to fear for your safety or for the safety of someone close to you (this is called criminal harassment or stalking).

“... they put you down and then they tell you they love you.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

Other types of emotional abuse may not be crimes, but they still hurt. Sometimes emotional abuse may be followed by physical or sexual violence if it isn't stopped. No one should insult you and put you down, yell at you and tell you that you are useless or humiliate you in front of others, such as your family or friends.

In healthy relationships, partners discuss things. They may try to influence what the other person does or how they handle certain situations, but they will not try to control you. For example, no one should make fun of your beliefs or try to stop you from spending time on activities that interest you or with friends who are important to you. (Of course, if you are a child, your parents have a duty to care for you and they have an obligation to make sure you are safe and not hanging out with friends or participating in activities that are a serious threat to you.)

Emotional abuse can take many forms. Intimidation and control are two common forms but so is manipulation. For example, some abusers will threaten to kill themselves when their partner tries to leave. This kind of manipulation is a form of abuse.

“Physical violence is bad and it hurts on impact, but verbal abuse stays and it destroys.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

Do not ignore emotional abuse. It leaves deep and lasting scars.

Financial abuse happens when someone uses money to try to control you. They try to make sure you don't have the money to leave them or stand up to them. Sometimes they make it difficult for you to work, or if you are already working, they make it hard for you to keep your job.

Some financial abuse may be a crime, such as:

- taking your pay or pension cheque or faking your signature to cash your cheque;

- stealing from you;
- not providing necessary food, shelter, clothing or medical attention to you, your children under 16 years of age or another dependent family member.

Other financial abuse may not be a crime, but is still harmful, and it's wrong for anyone to:

- pressure you to share your home, your car or your bank account;
- put all the bills in your name so you become responsible for them;
- refuse to let you keep any of the family money for yourself.

One of the most important things about abuse is that it is often a **pattern** of behaviour meant to gain power over you by:

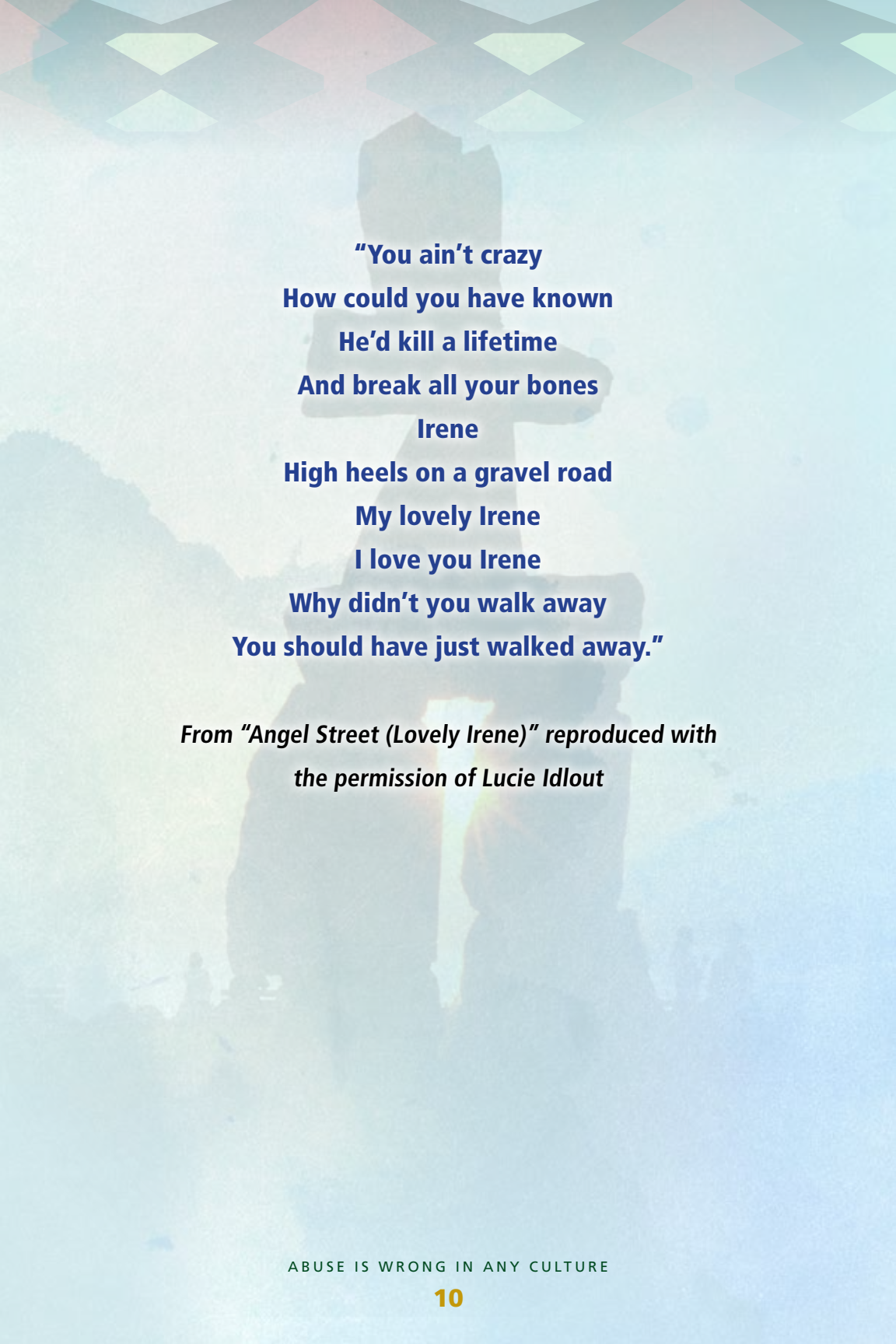
- making you feel afraid, confused, guilty, ashamed or uncertain about what will happen next;
- stopping you from leaving when you don't want to stay;
- not letting you speak or express yourself, telling you to keep quiet.

“First I went to his mom’s house. She said I was a bad wife and I deserved to get beat. ... All my relatives tell me to keep quiet ’cause it’s “family business.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

Abuse is never okay because you said something or did something “wrong”, or because someone “lost control” of themselves, or was drunk or “high”. If someone tries to tell you that “you asked for it,” they’re wrong.

Adults are responsible for their own words and actions. Abuse is a choice—a bad choice—and often a crime.



**“You ain’t crazy
How could you have known
He’d kill a lifetime
And break all your bones
Irene
High heels on a gravel road
My lovely Irene
I love you Irene
Why didn’t you walk away
You should have just walked away.”**

*From “Angel Street (Lovely Irene)” reproduced with
the permission of Lucie Idlout*

THE “CYCLE OF ABUSE”

Many people have found that abuse and violence get worse over time if there is no help. The diagram below shows how this can work. Tension builds and the person who is being abusive starts attacking in a “mild” form—maybe with accusations, insults or put-downs. The victim may try to keep things calm, or may respond and argue. Either way, this continues to build until there is an explosion of violence. Afterward, the person who was violent is often regretful—promising that it won’t happen again, promising to get help, or even threatening to kill himself if you leave him. The tension, however, usually starts to build up again, and the cycle repeats. As time goes on, the cycles may happen more often, and the violence may get worse.



A First Nations woman who lived through domestic violence, said *“Domestic violence—it’s every little bit that someone gets away with, they get away with putting you down in front of your friends, they get away with tapping you a little bit, punching you on the arm, hitting you, or pulling your hair, holding you against the wall. You know, it’s all wrong. It’s like a disease, I think, that progressively gets worse.”*

Are you feeling “torn”?

You want the hurting to stop, but it’s difficult to believe that talking about it or asking for help will make things any better.

“Once I pulled a gun out and cornered her and the kids. ... ‘I know you love me,’ she said, ‘but one day you could love me to death.’”

*(from **Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).***

Many people who are abused just want the violence and abuse to stop, but they’re afraid of what will happen if they try to change things—to them, their family or even the person they love who is hurting them. They may be afraid that their family and friends will not help them, and sometimes family and friends don’t help at first. But remember, this is not only happening to you. Your children and those closest to you, and even the person who is violent, are all locked into this cycle until someone decides to ask for help. You can choose to start to make your life and that of your family better.

Relationships, like people, can be healthy or unhealthy. Sometimes you need the “right medicine” that can include counselling.

It is not healthy for anyone to live in a violent relationship. You may love someone, and they may love you, but if they are still violent and abusive toward you, and you’re afraid, be very careful. In healthy relationships, there is no fear.



WHAT IS HAPPENING TO MY CHILDREN?

“It’s emotional hell for the children. The children don’t have the skills to deal with it. Kids wonder if they are the cause, they’re in the middle.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

You must put your children’s needs first. They can be shown by your example how to break the cycle of violence if they find themselves in violent relationships later in their lives.

Children are key to breaking the cycle of violence. Seeing or hearing you being abused hurts your children—it changes how they feel about both you and your partner and about themselves. And they may learn from watching the person who is violent to you that they don’t need to respect you.

Children know that you are being abused, even if you hope they don’t notice.

How are children harmed?

The cost to children of living with violence and abuse in their families is often hidden. Children can develop serious health problems from witnessing abuse. Children can grow up to be violent toward themselves and others. They may also learn to put up with being abused because they’ve gotten used to it by watching your relationship with your partner.

Many feel insecure, don’t like themselves, cannot pay attention in school, and “act out” in harmful ways like destroying property, bullying others and hurting themselves. Some children may avoid going home, turn to drugs, solvents or alcohol; they may cut themselves or attempt (or commit) suicide. They may have relationship problems, as they grow up believing that it is normal for people in families or relationships who “love” each other to hurt each other. They may also suffer long-term physical or mental health problems.



Often children suffer in silence. Some try to be invisible and others work at being “super good.”

“When they live in that environment, the children only see that, they only live that. For them, it’s normal.... It stops them from living their childhood.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

When you’re being abused, it’s extra hard to take care of your kids. You’re probably so exhausted all the time, it feels impossible to give them what they need.

Encourage your children to reach out and spend time with a trusted relative, Elder or friend who can give them support while you make the necessary changes in your life.

If your children are also being hurt, get help for them right away. Child abuse is against the law. If you are being abused and have children in the home, the law requires you and anyone else who knows to contact child protection authorities.

Children must be protected from abuse!



WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

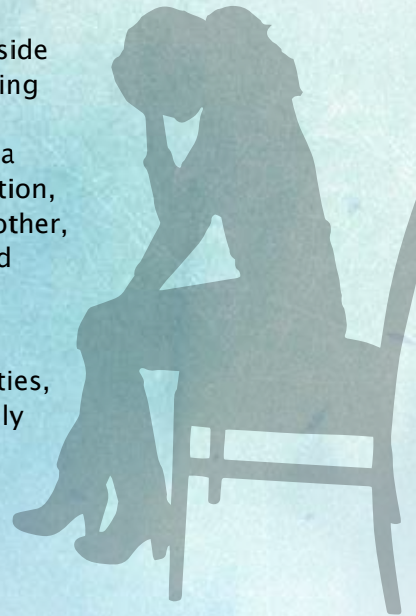
Abuse is wrong within all families and communities, including First Nations and Métis families and communities. Although violence and abuse exist across many societies and cultures, tolerating abuse has no part in First Nations and Métis culture or values.


In history, Indigenous cultures depended on the contributions of every man, woman, Elder and child. Everyone had a place in the circle that was respected and valued. Women held powerful positions within their societies. They were respected for bringing forth new life and for caring for families and entire communities.

“...the colonization process ... saw communities losing control over family and culture. ... The impacts of forced removal of children from their families and communities and the abuse many endured in residential schools have been passed down generationally ... “set[ting] in motion an intergenerational transfer of trauma that continues to cause significant downstream damage to Aboriginal families, their children, and their grandchildren.”

(Aboriginal Victimization in Canada: A Summary of the Literature, Justice Canada, Victims of Crime Research Digest No. 3, April 2010).

- Racism and the legacy of the residential schools contribute to the patterns of violence, which we see being repeated in many First Nations and Métis families and communities today.
- Studies have pointed to these changes from outside that affected age-old Indigenous societies, causing trauma from the loss of traditional teachings, culture and language. The impacts of this trauma have been passed on from generation to generation, affecting the ability to trust and support one another, and resulting in the feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness among many First Nations and Métis people today.
- The result is that, in many Indigenous communities, family violence involves more than just one family or individual, and so will require healing for





the community, one individual and one family at a time. This is something that we need to understand because it can help us make positive and healthy changes in our own lives.

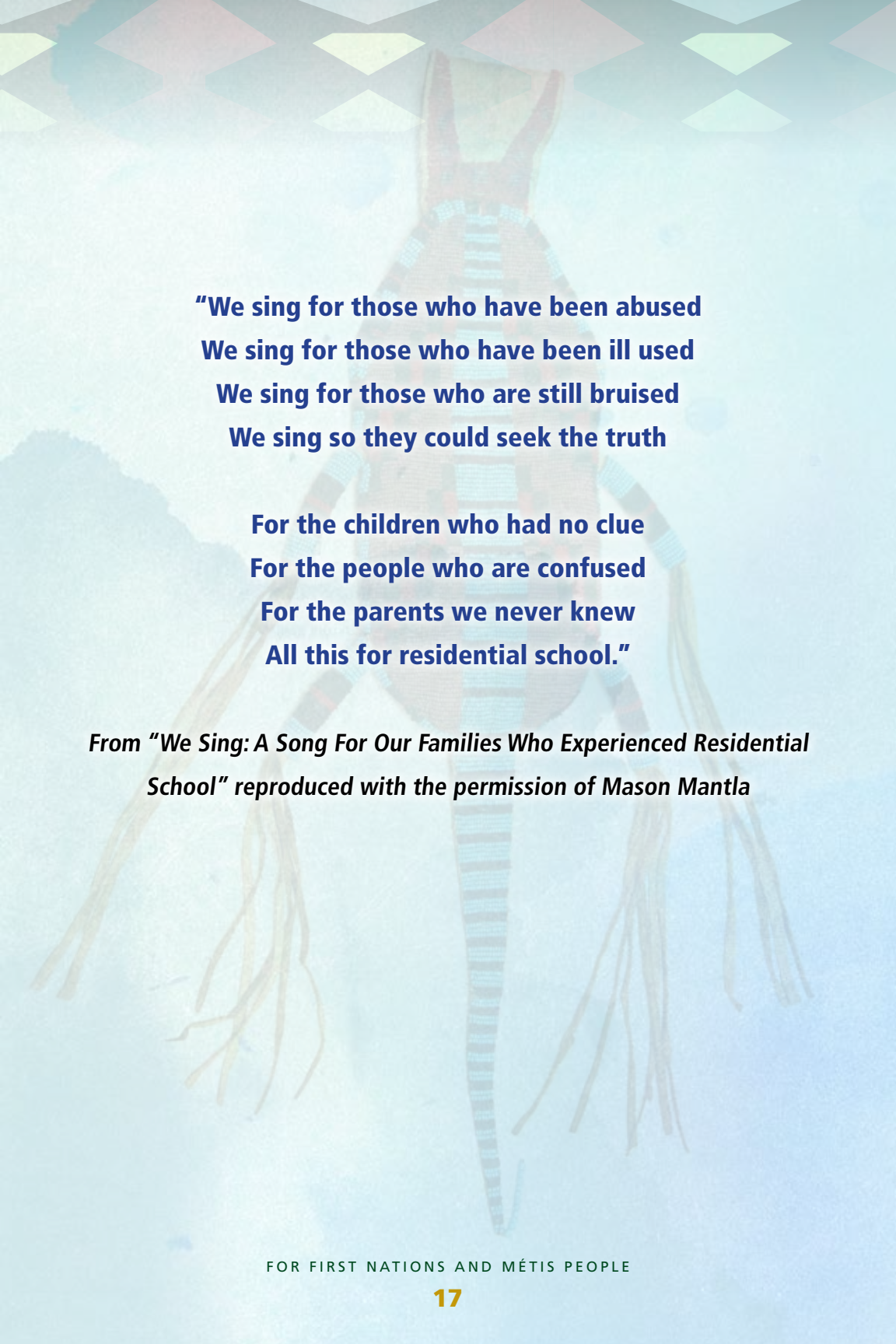
- Damage to children when they suffer and witness abuse within the home feeds into continuing cycles of violence and abuse from one generation to the next. From the examples they see, it is easy for girls to expect abuse and to believe it is just part of a woman's life, and for boys to think that men are expected to act violently and abusively toward the women in their lives, whenever things go wrong or they are afraid or unhappy.

This is not to say that all children growing up in family violence will be abusers, or victims of abuse. Children can develop *resilience* that infuses a sense of security and safety in ways that will never leave that child; as adults, they may have the strength to choose to be neither abusers, nor let themselves be abused. Parents and other adults need to nurture the resilience of their children, and all the children in the community. Developing good character in children is vitally important whatever our life circumstances might be.

But it is often impossible for the abuse to stop by itself. The family will need counselling to break the cycle of violence and abuse, to work toward achieving well-being and personal peace.

Violence and abuse may be triggered by money problems, anger issues, jealousy, a lack of individual self-control or by any number of everyday situations. Many First Nations reserves and Métis communities do not have adequate housing, and overcrowding adds to the stresses of daily living. For some people, unemployment, a feeling of loss of control, and physical and psychological changes stemming from alcohol and substance abuse all contribute to unhealthy living that often includes behaviours such as abuse and violence.


However it starts, abuse and violence in families and between partners continues because some people believe they—their feelings, wants, needs, hurts, uncertainty—are “more important” than those of others, even someone they say they love. So they “allow” themselves to hurt that other person, often someone who cannot, or will not, fight back, such as a spouse, child or Elder. While the person causing the hurt may not understand why they are doing this, it is no reason for mistreating or violating others, and it never justifies these behaviours toward anyone.



**“We sing for those who have been abused
We sing for those who have been ill used
We sing for those who are still bruised
We sing so they could seek the truth**

**For the children who had no clue
For the people who are confused
For the parents we never knew
All this for residential school.”**

From “We Sing: A Song For Our Families Who Experienced Residential School” reproduced with the permission of Mason Mantla



Studies have shown that many residential school survivors learned strategies to protect themselves, such as being silent, denying their experiences and not calling attention to themselves. These lessons had serious consequences for themselves and their children, including a reluctance to talk about family or community problems or to ask for help. There is confusion, too, because of the loss of cultural teachings, about how to apply Elders' teaching in today's society.

“Everybody knows about it, nobody does anything.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

Young people who grow up in violent homes are sometimes told, “Don’t talk about it”. They learn not to expect help from the adults around them, and may think it is useless to try to change patterns of violence. Refusing to talk about violence and abuse can only lead to continued suffering.

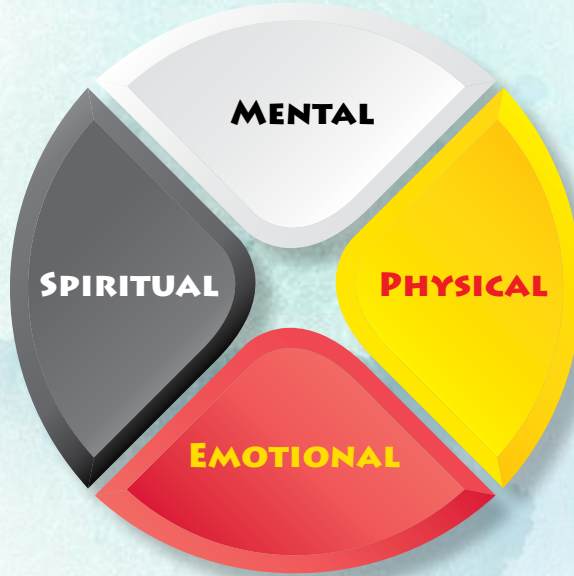
You are not protecting or helping someone who has hurt you by not talking about it.

Family violence cycles must be broken by both men and women before more children are affected.

Healing must come from strengthening families through greater cultural awareness.

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS

Many First Nations and Métis people view health and well-being through spiritual teachings, such as the *Medicine Wheel* teachings. In the Medicine Wheel, all four sections are connected and work together to achieve health, well-being and balance. Each colour represents a different direction (North, East, South, West) and a different area of human development.



I am your relative; my father is Sun, the source of life; my mother is Earth, who provides life with nourishment; my grandmother Moon, who provides light when there is darkness; and my grandfather is Morning Star, providing the guidance to a new day.

The Medicine Wheel can help identify the behaviours and feelings associated with family violence and can be a useful tool in exploring solutions to relationship violence.

The Mental section: Learning about your Nation's history, the dynamics of family violence or improving your education are very helpful in keeping your mind healthy and active.

The Spiritual section: Taking part in your traditional practices, such as cleansing and sweat-lodge ceremonies or cultural dance is healing to your soul and spirit.

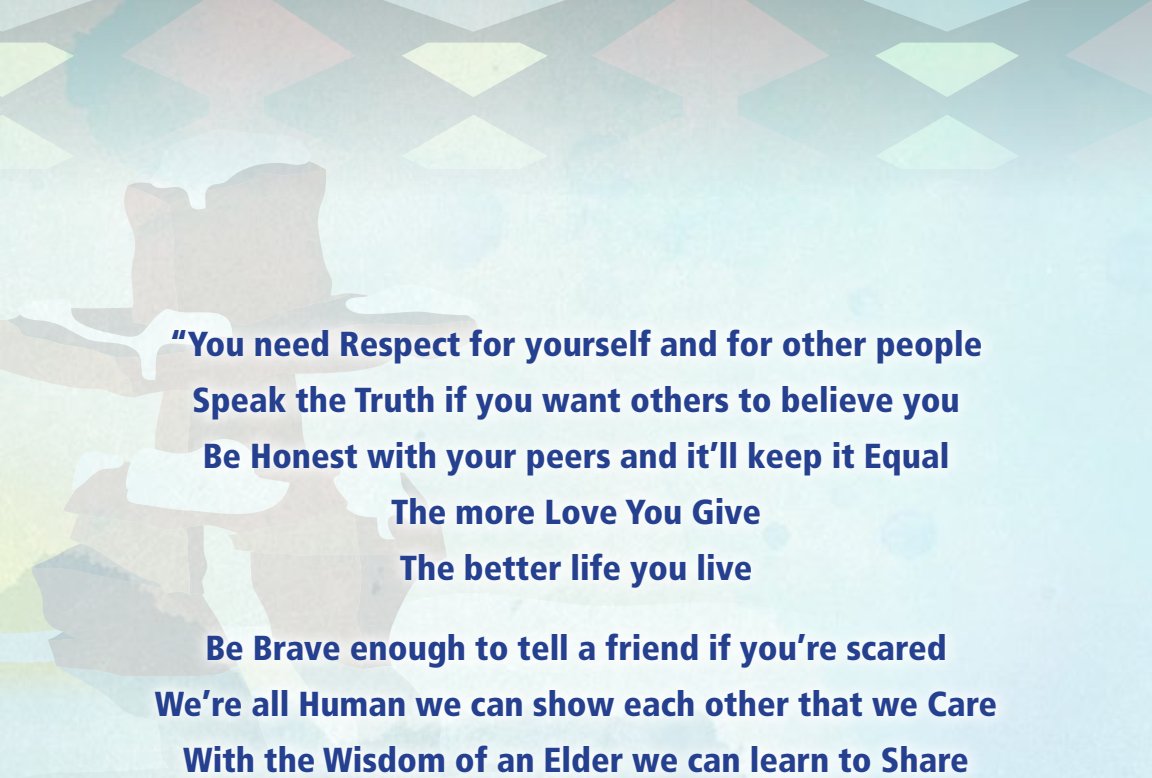
The Physical section: Taking care of your body through medical help, exercise or other activities you enjoy helps your body become or keep fit. Alcohol and substance misuse are not good for anyone's body.

The Emotional section: Keeping the company of people you enjoy (such as those you can laugh with) is healthy and healing; talking to Elders can stabilize your emotions, and help put life experiences into a realistic perspective.

If you live in an abusive relationship, you and your children cannot achieve the health, well-being and balance that are the root of Medicine Wheel teachings.

Other spiritual teachings, such as the Seven Grandfathers teachings, also talk of respect, honesty and truth as the basis for a healthy relationship.





**“You need Respect for yourself and for other people
Speak the Truth if you want others to believe you
Be Honest with your peers and it’ll keep it Equal
The more Love You Give
The better life you live**

**Be Brave enough to tell a friend if you’re scared
We’re all Human we can show each other that we Care
With the Wisdom of an Elder we can learn to Share
The more Love You Give
The better life you live.”**

*From “Love You Give” reproduced with the
permission of Minwaashin Lodge*

IS IT BETTER TO STAY OR LEAVE?

First make sure your children, and you, are safe.

You may choose to leave for a short time, or even permanently. These choices do not mean you have to end your marriage or relationship—but they do mean you have to make some changes.

You might be afraid that your family and friends will blame you for breaking up the family. Let them know that leaving your spouse or partner is not an easy decision but hiding the actions of someone who is abusing you will not help that person to heal. You have to save yourself first before you can save someone else.

Letting your children think that violence in families is okay will affect their future. If you leave, you are showing your children that you can do something about violence in your life.

Remember that if you feel unsafe and afraid in your relationship, you are in an abusive relationship. If you have been battered once, it is likely there will be a second and third time...and more. Violence and abuse usually gets worse unless it is faced and the family gets help.

In making your decision, ask yourself:

- Is the person abusing me getting more violent?
- Has the person:
 - ever used a weapon, like a knife, stick, or gun to hurt me?
 - physically or sexually abused my children?
 - threatened to kill me or the children?
 - threatened to kill themselves?
 - forced me to have sex?
 - taken drugs or drunk a lot?
- Am I taking drugs or drinking to deal with the pain in my life?
- Am I afraid for my children?
- Are my friends and family afraid for me?
- How is this stress and violence affecting me and my kids?
- How controlling or jealous is the person abusing me?
- Is the person willing to take counselling or get help?

WHAT IF I DECIDE TO STAY?

Sometimes you may be told that you have to keep the family together particularly if you are a woman ... no matter what happens, or how bad things get. You may be told that is what your parents and grandparents always did. Women, and sometime men, face pressures to stay with violent or abusive partners, from their own family and from their partner's family. They may be told that it is against God's will for them to leave, or against their cultural teachings.

In many communities, people are blamed and put down if they talk about abuse or if they leave their partner. In many places, no one tells them that abuse is wrong and that it's most often a crime. It is hard to leave, even for a short time. It's really hard to take children out of their own homes, and in small communities, there can be nowhere else to go to be safe.

It's hard to leave *when you still love them*. You're not alone if you feel this way, and it isn't wrong or bad to keep loving them. Many people want to stay with their partner ... they just want the violence to stop. They hope with all their heart that they will just change into a caring and loving spouse or partner. You and your partner will need help to change so that you can both stay together and be safe.

If you are injured, you should get medical treatment. You do not have to tell anyone what caused the injuries. But it's easier to treat your injuries if you tell the nurse or doctor exactly what happened. They will also be able to tell you where to get help and support for your home situation.

It is a good idea to start thinking about, and planning, an Emergency escape—in case you need to leave quickly.

Your children's lives and your own life may depend on it!

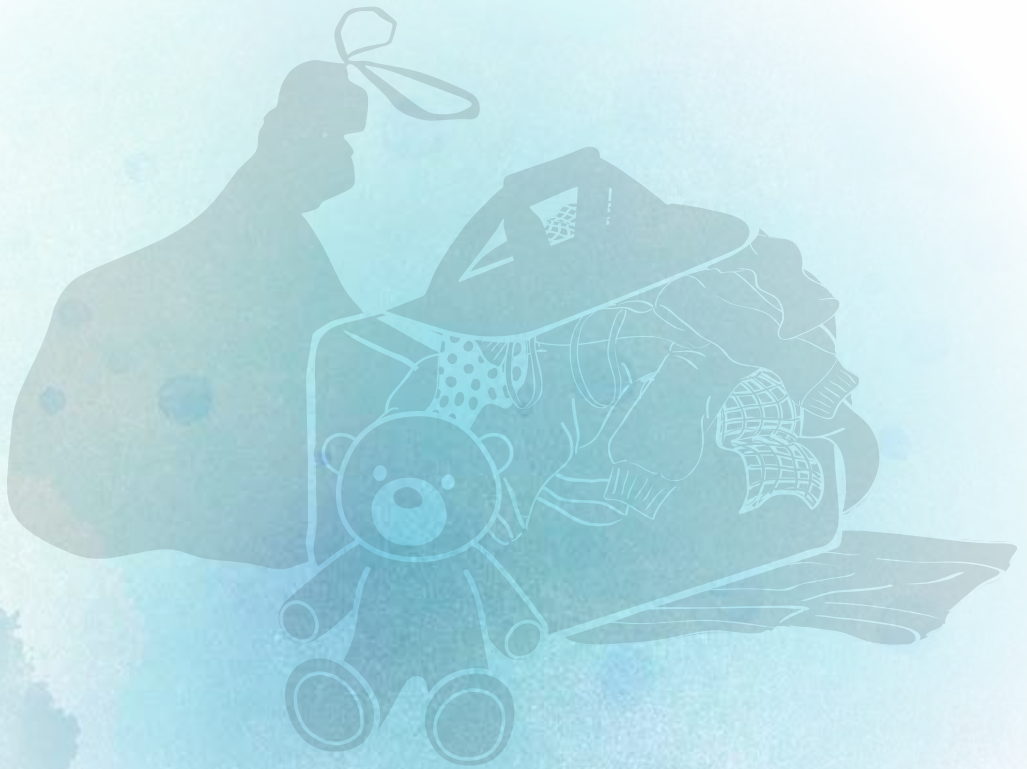
WHAT IF I DECIDE TO LEAVE?

Whether you decide to stay or to leave, make an Emergency Plan.

Why? Because once a person who is abusive knows that his or her partner is even thinking of leaving, the violence and abuse can increase. Research shows that leaving and the time just after that are very dangerous times for women in particular. And as the violence usually gets worse, you may at some point have no real choice but to leave quickly.

Think carefully about how you can leave.

The better you prepare, the easier the transition will be for you and your children. For example, you may need a Court Order for protection before you leave.



EMERGENCY PLANS

An Emergency Plan means knowing what you will do when the next attack comes. It means you will be ready before that next attack.

Sometimes, you can figure out how to leave before an attack, if you know the signs of when there is going to be violence. Those who have survived abuse say how important it is to have a plan because of the high stress you will experience during an attack. Women and children are particularly vulnerable immediately following a separation.

A few things to think about

- Where will I go? How will I get there? How long can I stay?
- What do I need to take with me?
- Who can I call for help for me and my children?

Checklist:

What to take

- Proof of identity, such as your Social Insurance Number (SIN), your and your children's birth certificates, Indian status cards, Métis identification, health cards, your driver's licence.
- Cash, debit cards, credit cards, cheque-book, bank statement.
- Medicines that you and your children normally use.
- Cell phone.
- Important phone numbers, and/or addresses, for close friends or family members or community resources.

Hint: Save small amounts of money here and there, and keep it hidden for times of need.

Hint: Photocopy important papers like court orders, restraining orders, and bank statements and keep them at a trusted friend or family member's place.

Hint: Memorize the phone number of the police and women's shelter. If you don't get a response right away, don't give up, keep trying!

In an emergency, leave as quickly as possible!

Do not stop to collect the things on this list ... just go!



WHO CAN I ASK FOR HELP?

“I didn’t realize the women’s shelter was for me.”

(from *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence, Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008*).

If you, or someone you know, are in immediate danger, **call the police**. They will come to stop the violence and deal with the person abusing you, and tell you what your rights are.

You can still get help if you decide not to leave.

If you are a woman experiencing abuse, you can contact a **women’s shelter** if there is one in your community (in many places, they can find someone to pick you up). If there isn’t one, you can ask the police, nurse or victim services worker about going to the nearest **temporary emergency shelter** or **safe home** until other arrangements can be made.

The temporary emergency shelter or safe home (or women’s shelter or transition home) is a safe place where you and your children can stay, often for a few days or weeks. Many women’s shelters have staff 24 hours a day, and most have some type of security system to keep out people who are being abusive.

You can call a women’s shelter or a crisis line to ask questions or to tell your story. You do not have to tell them your name. Some women’s shelters have toll-free numbers. Many women’s shelter workers have been in violent relationships themselves so they will understand your situation.

The staff at the women’s shelter will give you, and your children, a safe place to stay, and can help you get food, clothing, diapers, toys, information and support. They will be able to help direct you to services such as medical treatment, financial help, legal advice, and a new place to live, if that is what you want. The staff at the women’s shelter will not tell the person who is being abusive, or anyone else, where you are unless you agree to it.

The phone numbers of women’s shelters are available through the crisis lines.

You may need counselling services for yourself and your children as your family is making changes. Your health and well-being are very important.

- **Social services** can help you with managing finances, finding appropriate housing, accessing culturally responsive services (such as counselling), and finding places where your partner can still visit the children in a safe environment (if this is what you agree to or what the court orders).
- **Women’s resources centres** can also assist you, especially those that serve Indigenous clients, or have Indigenous services.
- Most communities have **nurses and community health workers** who can help you and your children. They can offer a range of services, including for those who have suffered from physical and sexual abuse, trauma, depression and family violence. In some areas, a registered psychiatric nurse or community mental health worker may also be available.
- Some communities have **victim services workers**. They can help you and your children find a safe place to stay, or help you get an emergency protection order, a restraining order or a peace bond. Victim services workers can also help you get medical treatment and legal assistance. They can explain your rights and help you find the resources you need. Victim services workers can go with you to the police or the hospital. They will support you as you try to decide what to do. **Indigenous courtworkers** can also help direct you to the services you need.
- As well, every region of Canada has access to **crisis lines**, with toll-free phone numbers. You do not have to tell them your name. They can direct you to places where to get help. They will also listen if you want to talk about what is happening, and how you feel. Many people who answer the crisis line phones have been through abuse themselves.
- Legal help is available from a **lawyer or a legal aid office**, and in some situations, is free of charge. Contact a legal aid office, a law line, an Indigenous courtworker or victim services worker to find out where you can get legal help, and if you can get it free of charge.

IMPORTANT: If you call one of these organizations from home and your phone has a re-dial feature, then call some other number after calling that number. If you called from a cell phone, don’t forget to clear the number from your list of past calls. That way the person who abused you will not know who you have just called, or what you plan to do. Many abusive people “check up on” the telephone calls of the people they are trying to control.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CALL THE POLICE?

Police should always give you the opportunity of speaking separately, away from the person who is abusing you. If you are a woman, you can also ask to be seen by a woman police officer, but this option is not always available, or you may need an interpreter.

- The police will, first and foremost, protect you and your children, and help you leave safely. If you have been assaulted or another crime has been committed, they may arrest the person who hurt you.
- Police can arrange for medical assistance. They can call an ambulance for you or take you to a hospital, nursing station or health centre.
- Police can offer you support and reassurance, and help you identify and access service providers who can help you. They can arrange transportation if you want it.

If the person who was violent is arrested, they might stay in jail until they appear in court at the bail hearing. In larger centres this can be only a few hours. After that, they may be allowed to leave, unless the court decides there is reason to keep them in jail.

If you are afraid for your safety, tell the police before the person who abused you is released. The court may set conditions before they can leave jail. For example, the court may order that they cannot call you, or see you. If they do not obey those conditions, the police can arrest them again.

If you are afraid the person will harm you when they are released, you may want to find a safe place to stay, like a temporary emergency shelter or safe home.

Also, you can ask for an “emergency protection order”, or a “restraining order” or a “peace bond”. These orders put conditions on what the person who was violent is allowed to do in relation to you and/or your children. For example, the order can say that they are not allowed to contact you or communicate with you for some time, or that you and your children can remain in the house, and they have to leave.

If the person who hurt you does not follow these rules, they can be fined or go to jail.

If the judge or justice of the peace wants more information before granting an order, he/ she might ask you, and the person being abusive, to come to a hearing. Each of you will have a chance to tell your side of the story. You do not need a lawyer for this hearing, unless you want to have one, but the police will be there and you can let them know if you are afraid for your safety.

It is often hard for people who were abused to ask for help. They feel loyal to family members and often count on them for everyday living. But an emergency protection order, restraining order or peace bond can be very helpful to you and your children.



WHAT HAPPENS IF THE POLICE CHARGE THE PERSON BEING ABUSIVE?

Arresting someone who is being abusive can stop them from re-offending, at least for a short time. Perhaps your partner does not know that their behaviour is a crime. An arrest can show them that the police are there to uphold the law and that they should take responsibility for what they have been doing. People who abuse others must understand that violent behaviour is **never** acceptable.

Being arrested does not always lead to charges, but if there are charges, legal procedures are followed to **prosecute** the person for assaulting you. The process may vary somewhat in each province or territory, but it is basically the same.

You may still not be safe, or protected in the long-term, so you must keep thinking carefully about how to improve your and your children's safety. It is better for you and for your children to live in a home free from domestic violence. There is help available to make the changes you need to live without abuse and violence.

If the person who is being abusive pleads guilty to, or is found guilty of, assaulting you or your children, the court will sentence them. The sentence may be a fine, probation, time in jail, or a combination of these things. The person who is being abusive may have to get counselling as part of probation.

Whether the person gets jail time or not will depend on a number of things such as whether or not this is a first offence and how bad the abuse was. If you are afraid, tell the Crown Attorney or the victim services worker. The court can set conditions on their release, such as not contacting you. Or, if you're afraid jail will mean that you and your family have no food, then the court may agree to another punishment, such as having the person spend time working for the community.

If the person who is being abusive says they are not guilty, you will have to be a witness at the trial. You may be allowed to provide your testimony from behind a screen or from another room by closed-circuit television so that you do not have to see your abuser while you tell your story. You may also be able to have a support person near you, to make you more comfortable while you testify.

It may be several months before the trial starts. If the court finds the person who hurt you guilty, they will be sentenced. The Crown Attorney can tell you about victim services in your province or territory and he/she can help you and explain the court processes.

If the person being abusive is found guilty by the court, they may be ordered to serve their sentence in the community under a “Community Sentence Order”, sometimes called “house arrest”. The judge can include many conditions in the order to help you and your children stay safe, such as that the person keep the peace, not drink or use drugs, stay in their residence and not call or see you. Ask the Crown Attorney and victim services worker before the trial starts what can be done.



WHAT ABOUT MY CHILDREN IF I DECIDE TO LEAVE?

If you leave an abusive situation, you can still apply for custody of your children. You don't lose custody just because you had to leave without them.

If you think your children might be in danger, contact the police and ask them to escort you and your children to a shelter or a location where you will be safe. If you can't take them, tell the police about the danger your children are in.

If you have time before leaving home, you should speak with a lawyer about the best way to protect yourself and your children. A lawyer can help you apply to the court for a custody or parenting order.

If you are worried about your children's safety, your lawyer can ask the judge for an order that would allow your spouse to have only supervised visits with the children, or no contact at all. Judges base their decisions on what is best for the children. Keep in mind that it is rare for a judge to order no contact between a child and a parent. Even if visits are not supervised, you can always arrange for someone else to be with you for pick-up and drop-off to avoid problems.

Your safety and the safety of your children come first. Do not stay in a dangerous situation because you are worried about how you will support your children on your own. Shelters can provide you and your children with short-term help while you look for housing and long-term support. Your lawyer can also help you ask the judge to order the other parent to pay financial support for you and your children.

If you have a custody or parenting order, it is a good idea to keep a copy with you in case there is a problem. You can also give a copy to your children's school or daycare.

If you are concerned that the other parent or someone else will try to take the children out of the area, or even out of Canada, tell your lawyer. A judge can make an order that one or both parents not be allowed to remove the children from a specific area (such as a town, province, territory or Canada). The judge can also order that the children's passports be kept by the court. More information on what to do if you are concerned about the children being taken out of Canada (called "international child abductions") can be found at this site:

<http://travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-info/child-abduction-welfare>.

HOW CAN I GET THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH TO DEAL WITH ALL THIS?

One woman who survived family violence shared a truth from her own life: “The more education we have, the more awareness and new things we can learn, and we can all stand to learn more things to make our lives better.” She was firm, too, that through her education she learned more about her own traditions and culture. These helped her find strength to leave her life of violence, and move on into a much healthier life. She began to remember all the teachings from her grandparents, and began to hear the words that her ancestors had always spoken about leading a good life.

If you are experiencing, or have experienced, abuse or violence, remember that your culture gives you **resilience**. This is your strength!

If you are having trouble deciding what to do, and feel confused, you can start now to build up your own courage and strength.

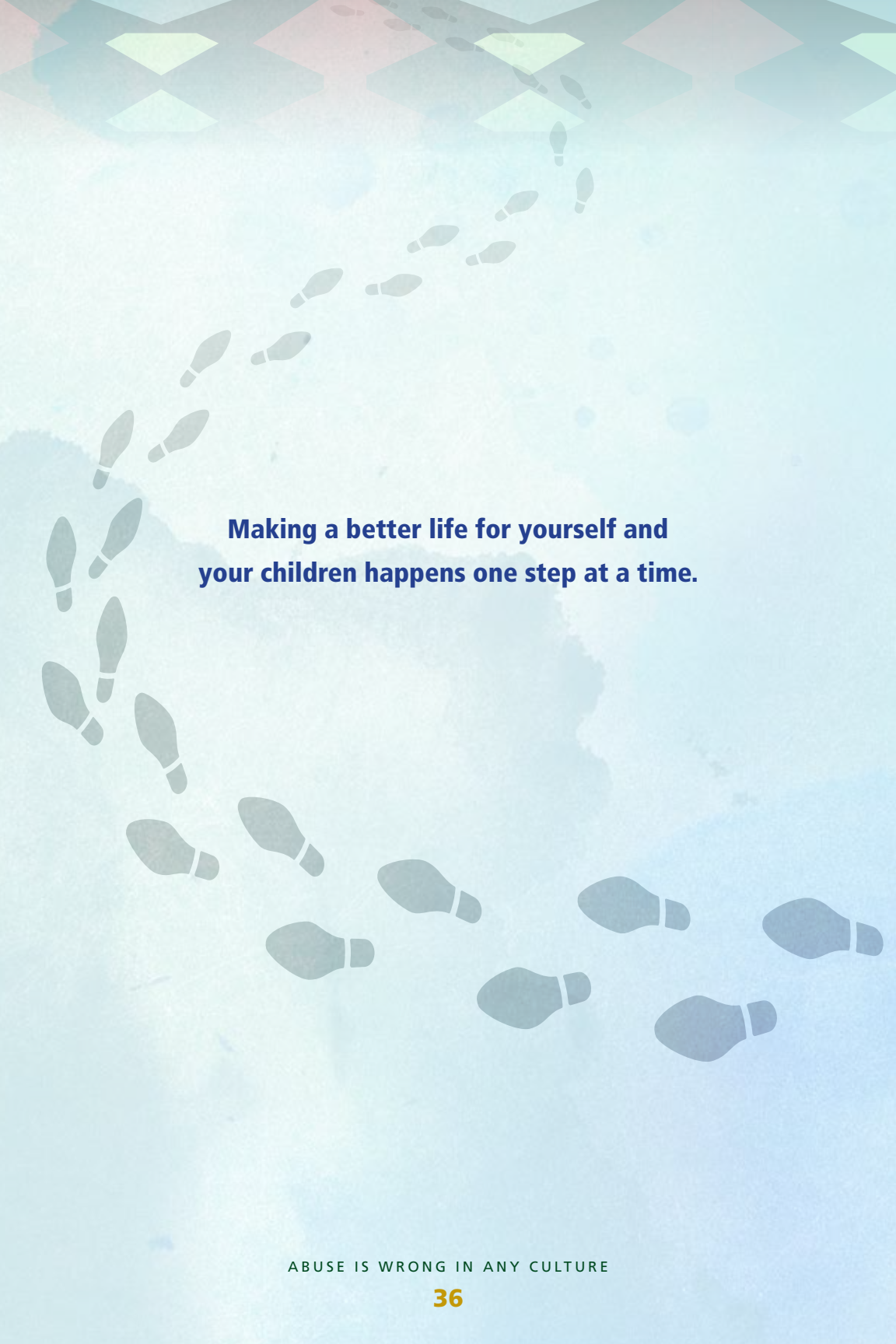
There are many things you can do to feel stronger, more hopeful and independent:

- Talk things over with someone you really trust ... you do not have to tell them everything, just what you feel comfortable with sharing.
- Almost every town has recreation programs, sewing groups, “moms and tots” groups, AA and Al Anon groups, adult education programs, Friendship Centre programs and a library. Going to these places and group get-togethers gives your mind and heart a break from all the worry, self-doubt, guilt and fear you may be experiencing ... you will go home with renewed strength and self respect.
- Spend some time on the land by yourself, or with your children and trusted friends or family. Everyone says time away from town gives them courage, hope and inner peace. It can be a time to “connect with yourself”.
- Many people have found that spiritual practices such as traditional ceremonies, prayer, healing circles, and going to church give them courage. These activities help them see their situation more clearly, and make good choices.
- If you think you have an addiction problem, you can see the local addictions counsellor and ask about the treatment programs that are available.

If you cannot find the strength to change your life for yourself, then think about your children and their lives and futures. As one woman said

**“My kids pulled me forward.
Just like when you see them pulling at their mother’s hand.
Well, they pull at our minds, as well.
Then, we all move forward.”**





**Making a better life for yourself and
your children happens one step at a time.**

WORDS USED IN THIS BOOKLET

Disclaimer: Although these explanations can help you understand, they are not complete legal definitions. These are common every-day working definitions. If you need more complex definitions for your own situation, please see a lawyer or Legal Aid.

assault

An assault happens when someone uses force, or the threat of force, on someone else without that person's consent. Consent that is forced or given out of fear is not true consent.

bail hearing

This is a court proceeding that takes place after a person has been arrested and charged. The court decides whether the person should be released with conditions, such as not being in contact with you. Or, the judge at the bail hearing could decide if the abuser should be held in jail until the charges are dealt with by the court. Bail is also called "interim judicial release".

court order

If you are afraid for your safety, but do not want to call the police for help, you may be able to get an order from a Civil or Family Court stating that the abuser must stay away from you; these are often known as *restraining orders*. You should get legal help to find out what types of civil or family court orders are available in your province or territory that might be useful to you. Emergency Protection Orders or *emergency intervention orders* are civil protection orders that are available in most provinces and territories under specific family violence legislation. They can grant the victim temporary exclusive occupation (only you and your children can live there – not the abuser) of the home; remove the abuser from the home; set limits on contact and communication with the victim and other remedies. You should get legal help to find out what types of family court orders or civil court orders are available in your province or territory and whether these are relevant to your situation.

criminal harassment

If you are scared because someone is repeatedly following you or contacting you when you don't want them to, or watching you or behaving in a threatening manner toward you, or your children or family, that person may be committing an offence known as criminal harassment. This is sometimes called *stalking*.

Crown Attorney

This is the lawyer (also sometimes called *Crown Counsel* or *Crown Prosecutor*) who represents the government (known as “the Crown”) on your behalf. The Crown Attorney presents the case to the court when a crime has been committed, and may require the victim, or a witness, to tell their story to the Judge. The person who is charged will usually have his own lawyer, called the Defence Attorney or Defence counsel.

custody order (or parenting order)

If you have custody of your children, you are legally responsible for making the major decisions about their lives (such as their upbringing and schooling). When you have custody, your children usually live with you, but will likely visit the other parent. Child custody can be sole custody, where one parent makes the major decisions about the children, or joint custody, where the parents must make the major decisions together. Another term, such as “parenting order” may be used in your province or territory. A parenting order sets out how decisions about the child are to be made, and how the child’s time is shared between parents.

peace bond

If you are afraid for your safety, you may be able to get a peace bond, also called a “recognizance”. This is a criminal court order that sets conditions on the person who is being abusive. For example, that person may be forbidden to see you, write to you, or telephone you. If he disobeys the order, the police may arrest him. If you want to know more about a peace bond you can ask the police or a lawyer.

probation

This is a court order that can be part of a sentence for an offender. A person on probation will have conditions set on release, such as having to go to counselling.

sentencing

After judges find someone guilty of a criminal offence, they sentence that person to jail, called a custodial order, or to serve their sentence in the community, called a community sentence order. In instances when someone must serve his sentence in the community, there are conditions placed on that person, such as not leaving their house except at certain times of day or for specific reasons, sometimes called “house arrest”. Or he may be ordered to work for the community, such as helping out the Elders.

