



# You are not alone

## Myths and Facts

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### MYTH

Domestic/intimate partner abuse is a family matter.

### FACT

Abusing, battering, assaulting or raping another person is a criminal offence. Domestic/intimate partner abuse has far-reaching social implications for everyone, affecting the abused person's ability to lead a productive life and encouraging children brought up in an abusive home to repeat the cycle themselves and having a detrimental impact on their emotional and sometimes physical well-being. A lot of doctors and hospital time and funds are needed to help those who have been abused or beaten.

### MYTH

Abuse only happens in certain "problem" families, ethnic minorities, uneducated or poorer areas.

### FACT

People from many different backgrounds are abused. Abuse cuts across race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation and cultural lines. People experiencing abuse have different levels of education and incomes, come from all age groups, races, and religions and have different levels of ability.

## MYTH

Lesbians, bisexual women, gay men, bisexual men and transgender men and women don't get battered or abused.

## FACT

Gender identity and sexual orientation doesn't make any difference. Abuse is about control within a relationship and can occur within any relationship where one partner believes they have the right to control the other. Whether they are married or living together, of the same or opposite gender, have been together for a few weeks or many years really doesn't make much difference – abuse can and does occur.

## MYTH

Domestic/intimate partner abuse is caused by excessive alcohol or the use of drugs.

## FACT

A lot of research is going into the link between drug or alcohol use and violence. However, although some abusers are more prone to being violent when drunk, many more abuse when completely sober. Alcohol and drugs may increase the violence, but they do not cause it. Alcohol and drug abuse are separate issues from abuse, though they may overlap. Once again, blaming chemical dependency for abuse is missing the point; abusers are responsible for their actions.

## MYTH

Domestic/intimate partner abuse is a one-off incident.

## FACT

Very rarely is abuse a one-off. Most often it is part of an ongoing means of establishing and maintaining control over another person. Abuse tends to increase both in velocity and extent over a period of time.

## MYTH

It can't be that bad or she/he would leave.

## FACT

There are many emotional, social, spiritual and financial hurdles to overcome before someone being abused can leave. Very often the constant undermining of the person's self-belief and self-esteem can leave him/her with very little confidence, socially isolated and without the normal decision-making abilities. Leaving or trying to leave will also often increase the violence or abuse, and can put both the abused person and any children in a position of fearing for their lives. Leaving is the ultimate threat to the abusers power and control, and the abuser will often do anything rather than let the abused person go.

## MYTH

Abusers are always coarse, nasty, violent men and easily identified.

## FACT

Abusers are often seemingly charming, generous and well-presented people who can hold positions of social standing. Abuse is kept for those nearest to them, in the privacy of their own homes. This Jekyll and Hyde tendency of the abuser can further confuse and frighten the person being abused, as the person in private is so very different to the person everyone else sees. It can also mean that when the person being abused finally does try to tell friends, family or acquaintances of the abuse, they are not believed because the person they are describing simply doesn't fit the image portrayed in public.

## MYTH

Abusers just have a problem expressing anger. They need counselling or anger management courses to learn to resolve disputes without violence.

## FACT

Most abusers have no problem resolving disputes with their boss or other outside person without resorting to violence. They chose to use violence and other forms of abuse against their partner as a means of maintaining their power over them.

## MYTH

The abused person provoked the violence.

## FACT

The abuser is completely responsible for the abuse. No one can say or do anything that warrants being beaten and battered. Abusers often try to deflect their responsibility by blaming the partner via comments, such as:

- “You made me angry.”
- “You made me jealous.”
- “This would never have happened if you hadn’t done that.”
- “I didn’t mean to do that, but you were out of control.”

Those who are abused need to be assured that the abuse is not their fault.

## MYTH

Domestic/intimate partner abuse is a private matter and it’s none of my business.

## FACT

We all have a responsibility to care for one another. Say something. If you don’t, your silence is the same as saying abuse is okay. Because you care, you need to do something... before it is too late.

## MYTH

The partners need couples counselling.

## FACT

It is the abuser alone who needs counselling in order to change behaviour. Couples counselling is an inappropriate intervention that further endangers the abused person. It encourages the abuser to blame the other person by examining their ‘role’ in the problem. By seeing the couple together, the therapist erroneously suggests that the partner, too, is responsible for the abusers behaviour.

## MYTH

Violence between two men or two women in a same-sex relationship is a "fight" between equals.

## FACT

Domestic/intimate partner violence is not the same as a consensual fight, no matter who is involved. Loving, healthy relationships do not include physical fighting. Domestic/intimate partner violence is about control and domination of one person by another; either person could be male, either person could be female. Abusers do not have to be bigger or stronger than the person they abuse.

## MYTH

When you leave your abusive relationship your risk decreases.

## FACT

Once you leave, your partner's abusive behaviour may continue for a while, or get worse. Separation (before, during and after) can be a time of high risk for someone leaving an abusive relationship. This is an important time to have a safety plan for you and your loved ones. You are strongly encouraged to speak to someone about safety planning and measures you can take to increase your safety. If you think you are at risk of being harmed by your partner, call police. Their role is to make sure that everyone is safe.

### Why is it so hard for people to leave an abusive relationship?

People remain in abusive relationships for a variety of reasons.

Reasons people stay include:

#### **Love**

The person feels that the relationship is not all bad.

#### **Hope**

The person hopes that the relationship will improve.

#### **Financial Concerns**

The person is financially reliant on the abuser or does not have adequate funds to leave.

#### **Children**

The person is concerned about the well-being of his/her children.

#### **Fear**

There are threats to harm the person, the person's children and/or the person's family.

Source:

1. Toronto Employment & Social Services. Domestic Violence Initiative. November 2012.