

KANAWAYHITOWIN: TAKING CARE OF EACH OTHERS SPIRIT

Traditional Approach to Working with Aboriginal Men Who are Abusive



Are you concerned about someone you think is abusive to his partner, but don't know what to do? This brochure describes the warning signs and how you can talk to abusive men about their behaviour.

In situations of abuse, community members often report that they knew about or suspected a family member or friend was suffering, but didn't know how to best assist her in being safe, and how to help him make changes in his behaviour.

Kanawayhitowin is an Aboriginal initiative to raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse so that people who are close to an at-risk woman or an abusive man can help. The initiative reflects a traditional and cultural approach to community healing and wellness.

Everyone in the community has a role to play in helping to prevent woman abuse. You can reach out to organizations in your community to support you.

"Silence in our communities has been mistaken for acceptance."

This initiative is a partnership between the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Kanawayhitowin through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

Warning Signs of Abuse

You may suspect abuse is happening to a neighbour, friend or family member, but do not know what to do or how to talk about it. You may worry about making the situation worse, or be concerned about what to do. By understanding the warning signs and risk factors of woman abuse, you can help.

If you recognize some of these warning signs, it may be time to take action.

He puts her down.
He does all the talking and dominates the conversation.
He checks up on her all the time, even at work.
He tries to suggest he is the victim and acts depressed.
He tries to keep her away from you.
He acts as if he owns her.
He lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities.
He acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home.

She may be apologetic and make excuses for his behaviour or becomes aggressive and angry.
She is nervous about talking when he's there.
She seems to be sick more often and misses work.
She tries to cover her bruises.
She makes excuses at the last minute about why she can't meet you or she tries to avoid you on the street.
She seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid.
She uses more drugs or alcohol to cope.

Signs of high risk

The danger may be greater if...

He is a victim of Residential School abuses or other historical trauma and has not received help.
He has access to her and her children.
He has access to weapons.
He has a history of abuse with her or others.
He has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him: He says "If I can't have you, no one will."
He threatens to harm her children, other family members, her pets or her property.
He has threatened to kill himself.
He has hit her, choked her.
He is going through major life changes (e.g. job, separation, depression).
He is convinced she is seeing someone else.

She is a victim of Residential School abuses or other historical trauma and has not received help.
She has just separated or is planning to leave.
She fears for her life and for her children's safety or she is in denial and cannot see the risk.
She is in custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship.
She is involved in another relationship.
She has unexplained injuries.

He blames her for ruining his life.
He doesn't seek support.
He watches her actions, listens to her telephone conversations, reads her emails and follows her.
He has trouble keeping a job.
He takes drugs or drinks everyday.
He has no respect for the law.

She has no access to a phone.
She faces other obstacles (e.g. she does not speak English, lives in a remote area).
She has no friends or family, or none close by.

It was found that Aboriginal women were three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than were those who were non-Aboriginal (21% versus 7%). The 1999 GSS found that Aboriginal victims of spousal violence experience more serious forms of violence at the hand of their intimate partners than do non-Aboriginal spousal violence victims (Johnson and Hotton, 2001). (Health Canada, 2005, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile).

(While abuse most often occurs within an intimate heterosexual relationships, it also occurs within gay and lesbian or two-spirited relationships. The suggestions in this brochure can apply to all.)

A Traditional Approach to Healing

A traditional approach to working with an abusive Aboriginal man is about keeping him responsible and accountable – to his victim, his family, his community and himself – through a restorative justice program that works to heal the community and all its members, rather than simply punishing the abuser.

In order for a traditional approach to work, there needs to be strong role models, respected Elders and traditional people and strong Aboriginal women to walk alongside these men. The healing model must also be rooted in the Seven Grandfather teachings. The teachings are gifts the Seven Grandfathers gave to the people in order to help them live in harmony with Creation.

They are:

- To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.
- To know love is to know peace.
- To honour all Creation is to have respect.
- Bravery is to face the foe with integrity.
- Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave.
- Humility is to know your self as a sacred part of Creation.
- Truth is to know all of these things.

All of these teachings are useful in talking with Aboriginal men about taking responsibility for their actions and choosing not to abuse women:

Wisdom – This teaching provides the knowledge of the many different forms of abuse and helps men to gain the understanding and knowledge required to change their behaviour.

Love – Once men have learned to love and respect themselves, they will be able to love and respect others. To live with love is to show kindness and respect.

Respect – This teaching tells men to respect all of Creation and not to be judgemental. To listen to and respect women, to safeguard their dignity and individual rights.

Bravery – By gathering their courage, men can bravely speak out against woman abuse and become a positive role model to other men and boys.

Honesty – Men can practice honesty by being truthful about their actions and behaviours. As well as being open to learning how their actions affect others, and being upfront with everyone about their intentions, without any ulterior motives.

Humility – This teaching tells men to have sensitivity towards others, to have the self-awareness to know their own strengths and limitations, and to know they have the capacity for growth and change.

Truth – This is to know all of the Seven Grandfather teachings and to live by them – knowing how to prevent and end woman abuse, and committing to promoting change within their home and community.

How to Talk to Men Who are Abusive

Sometimes people around an abusive man overlook his behaviour and only focus on supporting the abused woman. At other times, people may sympathize with the abusive man, which may inadvertently escalate his abuse. Talking to an abusive man is an important part of preventing woman abuse, but it needs to be done carefully. Abusive behaviour won't go away on its own. There are services to help him in his community.

Here is what you can do when you recognize the warning signs of abuse:

- Choose the right time and place to have a full discussion.
- Approach him when he is calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen.
- Tell him that his behaviour is his responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments about him as a person. Don't validate his attempt to blame others for his behaviour.
- Inform him that his behaviour needs to stop.
- Don't try to force him to change or to seek help.
- Tell him that you are concerned for the safety of his partner and children.
- Never argue with him about his abusive actions. Recognize that confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse and put her at higher risk.
- Call the police if the woman's safety is in jeopardy.

If he denies the abuse.

- Men who are abusive will often minimize the impact and deny that they have done anything wrong. They may state that it isn't that bad or blame the victim for their actions. This type of behaviour deflects his own responsibility for his actions.
- Keep your conversation focused on your concerns for his family's safety and well-being and reiterate that abuse is never an answer.
- Keep the lines of communication open and look for opportunities to help him find support.

Always keep yourself safe. Don't get in the middle of an assault. Call the police in an emergency

Learn the warning signs, take them seriously.

For further information, contact your local Friendship Centre, Metis Council, Woman's Shelter, or Aboriginal Service Provider.

Call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at:
1-866-863-0511
(1-866-863-7868 TTY)

In an emergency, call the police.

For further information, visit our website at:
www.kanawayhitowin.ca

Contact your:



Local service provider contact information



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