

# KANAWAYHITOWIN: TAKING CARE OF EACH OTHERS SPIRIT

## How You Can Identify and Help Women at Risk of Abuse



Everyone in the community has a role to play in helping to prevent woman abuse. This brochure describes the warning signs and the steps you can take to help.

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.

*“As an Aboriginal woman, I am a survivor of family violence since the date of my conception.”*

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

**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 become 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**She** seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid.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.

*(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.)*

### Indicators for risk of future harm – 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.)

**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 a custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship.  
**She** is involved in another relationship.

**He** is convinced she is seeing someone else.  
**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 unexplained injuries.  
**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.

## Ways to support Her

*Here are some of the ways you can help when you recognize the warning signs of abuse.*

- Talk to her about what you see and let her know that you are concerned.
- Tell her you believe her and that it is not her fault.
- Encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected.
- Offer to provide childcare while she seeks help.
- Offer your home as a safe haven to her, her children and pets. If she accepts your offer, do not let her partner in. Know the level of risk.
- Encourage her to pack a small bag with important items and keep it stored at your home in case she needs it.
- Know that you or she can call for help at the Assaulted Women's Helpline, Aboriginal service provider, your local shelter or, in an emergency, the police.

*If you want to get further advice about a situation, contact a local women's shelter or support program. They can help. They may suggest you get more involved as a trained volunteer to help other women in your community.*

*If she denies the abuse.*

- Assure her she can talk to you any time.
- Don't become angry or frustrated with her decisions. It is important to understand that she may be afraid or not ready to take next actions.
- Try to understand why she might be having difficulty getting help. She may feel ashamed.
- Offer to go with her if she needs additional information or support.
- If she has children, let her know gently that you are concerned about her and her children's safety and emotional well being. She may be more willing to recognize her situation if she recognizes her children may also be in danger.

## Overcoming Your Hesitation to Help

*Here are some concerns you may have about whether you should help.*

### Points of Concern

You feel it's none of your business.

You don't know what to say.

You might make things worse.

It's not serious enough to involve the police.

You are afraid his violence will turn to you or your family.

### Points to Consider

It could be a matter of life or death. Violence in the community is everyone's business.

Saying you care and are concerned is a good start.

Doing nothing could make things worse.

Police are trained to respond and utilize other resources.

Speak to her alone. Let the police know if you receive threats.

### Points of Concern

You think she doesn't really want to leave because she keeps coming back.

You are afraid she will become angry with you.

You are afraid he will become angry with you.

You feel that both partners are your friends.

You believe that if she wanted help, she would ask for help.

You believe if that if he wanted help or wanted to stop his behaviour he would.

You think it is a family matter.

### Points to Consider

She may not have had the support she needed.

Maybe, but she will know you care.

Maybe, but it gives you a chance to offer your help.

One friend is being abused and lives in fear.

She may be too afraid and ashamed to ask for help.

He may be too ashamed to ask for help.

It isn't when someone is being hurt.

## 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](http://www.kanawayhitowin.ca)

Contact your:



Local service provider contact information



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