

Relationship Violence

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

Occurrences

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 factor rarely exists in isolation: the abusive partner who uses different forms of violence in order to maintain a sense of power over their partner or control in the relationship.

Types of Violence and Abuse

Emotional

Emotional or psychological abuse is an unseen form of violence that may involve yelling, swearing, putdowns, 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. Individuals who experience 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 forms of violence and abuse. Those who experience it often have difficulty coming forward for support because this type of violation 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 disrespecting 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 why 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, individuals who experience this form of abuse may become financially dependent on the abusive partner and feel as though they have no choice but to stay in the relationship.

Relationship Violence

Types of Violence/Abuse *continued*

Other

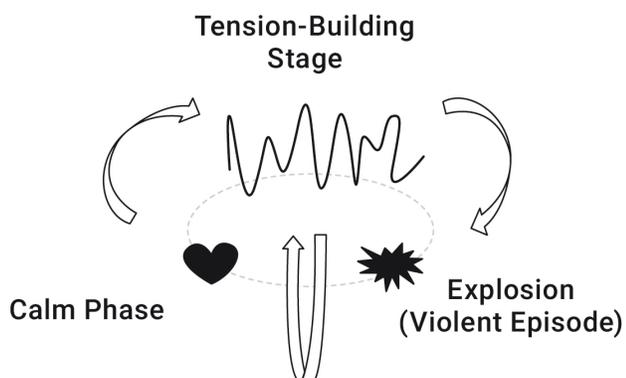
An abusive partner may mock, shame, or control their partner's ability to express and participate in aspects

related to their identity, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or capabilities.

Cycle of Violence

Partners who are violent or abusive can seem as though they are two different people. If they were cruel all of the time, it might be easier to leave the relationship. Instead, they appear loving some of the time and cruel at other times which, for some, can make it more difficult 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. In most cases, people who experience relationship violence need support in breaking this cycle.



- **Tension-Building Stage:** The survivor feels as though they are “walking on eggshells.” They are hyper-alert and try not to upset the abusive partner. During this stage, the abusive partner is easily upset (on edge), and is critical of their partner.
- **Explosion:** The abusive partner behaves violently or abusively towards their partner. Acts of abuse can range from yelling insults and threats of violence, to physical violence or sexual abuse.
- **Calm Stage:** The tension between the abuser and partner is temporarily lessened as a period of perceived “normalcy” returns. Both partners may rationalize or find excuses for the violent episode, and the abusive partner may feel guilty and/or apologize. 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 of violence progresses more quickly. In many abusive relationships, the calm stage eventually stops altogether and the cycle alternates between tension-building and explosion, with the explosion phase becoming more violent over time.

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Impacts of Relationship Violence

Defining relationship violence

Individuals who experience relationship abuse may or may not identify with or describe their own relationship using specific terminology (e.g., relationship violence or abuse, dating violence, intimate partner violence, or domestic abuse). Many people struggle or hesitate to define their relationship as violent or abusive because they may feel shame or embarrassment around their experience of abuse. Others may also minimize or deny their encounters with relationship violence to protect their partner, or because they are afraid others will try to make them end the relationship.

Safety

People who experience relationship violence might be concerned for their own physical or emotional safety or the safety of loved ones. Fortunately, various support services are available, such as the

U of A Sexual Assault Centre, where staff can discuss available resources, options, and safety plans in a confidential and safe environment.

Ending the relationship

Some people who experience relationship violence may wish to end their relationship. This can be a big decision and can require a great deal of continued support from friends, family, or support services. In some instances, it may take an individual several attempts to change or end an abusive relationship over the course of several months or years.

Trust

Those who experience partner violence may have a difficult time trusting other people, even those close to them, because their trust was abused. It is normal for an individual to feel unsure about who they can trust because their previous experience left them feeling violated and betrayed.

Options and Resources

Many services and options exist for individuals who experience relationship violence. These may be difficult choices and might require taking actions that could have serious impacts. And so, throughout this process, it is important not to pressure or judge survivors for the decisions they make.

The following are some support services that may be of assistance:

Police

It is important to know that physical and sexual assault are criminal offences and can be prosecuted under the law. Even so, some may hesitate to seek help because, for instance, the fear of retaliation after the relationship has ended, or the potential impacts

on the individual's life (e.g., relocating to a safe place) might deter their willingness to report. However, 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 (U of A) community, Protective Services (UAPS) might be another helpful resource. UAPS personnel will discuss the available options on campus, as well as other safety considerations and resources. Even if UAPS cannot press charges under the [U of A Code of Student Behaviour](#), they can offer protection and assistance.

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Options and Resources *continued*

Peace Bonds/Restraining Orders or Emergency Protection Order

These documents can be obtained in certain circumstances. Although they do not guarantee safety, they can provide additional protection or increase a sense of safety. To learn more about the criteria for each of these options, contact the U of A Sexual Assault Centre at 780-492-9771.

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. To access safety plan templates, visit the U of A Sexual Assault Centre in the Students' Union Building, room 2-705.

Emergency Accommodation

There are many options for emergency accommodation in Edmonton and surrounding areas. These options are generally short-term (e.g., shelters), but access to further resources or services is available. For example, shelters can arrange interpreters, legal aid, financial assistance, counselling, and help survivors obtain new residence. As well, the U of A Sexual Assault Centre may be able to assist U of A students who are experiencing relationship violence find additional emergency accommodation options.

Women's Shelters in Edmonton and Area (24-hour emergency numbers)

- WIN House (Edmonton): 780-479-0058
- Lurana Shelter (Edmonton): 780-424-5875
- A Safe Place (Sherwood Park): 780-464-7233

Counselling

Counselling can provide an individual who has experienced relationship violence with additional support and understanding. As well, survivors can work on addressing the impacts of the abuse (e.g., issues related to self-esteem and trust), future relationships, and other concerns.

- **U of A Sexual Assault Centre**
Free crisis and short-term drop-in counselling
2-705 Students' Union Building (SUB)
780-492-9771 | uab.ca/SACentre
- **U of A Counselling and Clinical Services
(for U of A students)**
Free counselling services (by appointment)
2-600 SUB | 780-492-5202 | uab.ca/ccs
- **Faculty of Education Clinical Services**
Low cost counselling services
1135 Education North Building | 780-492-3746
- **Family Violence Prevention Centre**
Information, emotional support, advocacy
and referrals
#401, 10010-105 Street | 780-423-1635
[https://johnhoward.org/programs-services/
family-violence-prevention-centre](https://johnhoward.org/programs-services/family-violence-prevention-centre)
- **YWCA Counselling Services**
Sliding scale individual counselling and
group support
#400, 10080 Jasper Avenue | 780-970-6501
[www.ywcaofedmonton.org/programs-and-
services/counselling-centre](http://www.ywcaofedmonton.org/programs-and-services/counselling-centre)