

When you witness violence, it is normal to feel anger, fear, inability to understand, pity and frustration... It is also important to realize that your comprehension of the situation is different than the victims'. This is why it is important to talk about it and get support from specialized services.

Resources

SOS Violence conjugale

- 24/7 telephone support
1-800-363-9010
www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca

CAVAC - Crime Victims Assistance Center

1-866-532-2822/1-866-LE CAVAC
www.cavac.qc.ca

Kids Help phone

- 24/7 support line for young people
1-800-668-6868
www.kidshelpphone.ca

Ligne parents

- 24/7 support line for parents
1-800-361-5085
www.parentsline.net

Because the violence she has suffered is not her fault. Nobody deserves to be treated like this.

Websites:

Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale
www.maisons-femmes.qc.ca

Fédération de ressources d'hébergement de femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec
www.fede.qc.ca

Shelternet.ca
www.shelternet.ca

Institut national de santé publique
www.inspq.qc.ca/violenceconjugale

Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en

CONJUGAL VIOLENCE

An information guide for family and friends



CAVAC

CRIME VICTIMS ASSISTANCE CENTER

Support, Help and Resources

"If my sister hadn't been there, I'd have fallen into his arms again. The blackmail and manipulation were so powerful that I felt like I was caught in a spider web."

Why women endure for so long the abuse, and fail to report the ongoing abuse to the authorities?

For fear of rejection, retaliation, the fear of financial constraints and also, not being believed. The women lives in violence, and self-doubt, she feels she is to blame; she lives in guilt and shame. She justifies the aggressions and slowly isolates herself from her family and her support network. All the while, she keeps hoping that her spouse will change.

"I could only see two ways out: the cemetery or the insane asylum!"

Coupled with black mail and threats, women who are victims of conjugal violence tend to see their future as bleak and desolate.

What is the difference between conjugal problems and conjugal violence?

Power and control are signs of violence. Marital problems are often part of conjugal violence, but the opposite is not true. Furthermore, the relationship is characterized by a cycle of violence that enables the partner to continue the domination. Violence can never be justified. Violence occurs in different forms, physical, psychological, economic, sexual, etc. In Quebec, physical or sexual violence are criminal acts, a crime against the person.

How do these victims get to the point where they decide not to put up with the violence any longer?

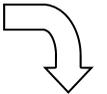
Each victim has her own threshold of tolerance. When it is crossed, or when she feels that she must react to protect herself or her children, she comes to realize the situation she is in and decides to take steps to get out of it.

The cycle of violence...



TENSION: excessive anger, periods of heavy silence, intimidation, threatening looks.

ANXIETY: it feels like things could go very wrong, I'm afraid, I'm very careful with everything, I'm worried, I'm paralyzed.



RECONCILIATION: the honeymoon, he talks about suicide, therapy, asks for help...

HOPE: he's making efforts, I'll give him a chance, I'm seeing the man I love again. I'll change my attitude towards him.

AGGRESSION: verbal, psychological, physical, sexual, economic.

ANGER AND SHAME: humiliation, sadness, feelings of injustice, shame.



JUSTIFICATION: he finds excuses, explanations for the crisis, it isn't his fault...

TAKING THE BLAME: I want to help him to change, I feel guilty, I feel I'm to blame for his anger, I'll change, I accept his justifications.



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Myth	Reality
Conjugal violence is a “loss of control.”	Conjugal violence is one person “taking control” of another person.
The violent husband is aggressive in all areas of his life and tries to dominate everyone around him.	The violent husband is often a pleasant co-worker and a charming neighbour. He takes it out on his family, his wife and his children because he feels he has the right – he owns them and they belong to him.
Women who stay with violent husbands are masochists.	They are not masochists. They are trapped in the “cycle of conjugal violence.”
Conjugal violence is a private problem.	Conjugal violence is a social concern. It is a crime and is punishable by law.
Drugs, alcohol and stress are the main causes of violence.	No substance or stressful situation can make someone become violent against their will. The real cause of violence is the desire to dominate someone whom they refuse to see as their equal.
Children are strong. They end up forgetting the trauma of being exposed to conjugal violence.	More than half of the children victims of conjugal violence have all the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.
The violent husband has psychiatric problems.	A small percentage have psychiatric problems. Violence is not an illness.

Is your daughter, mother, friend or someone else close to you a victim of conjugal violence? She has not come right out and told you but you have seen it, witnessed, heard... You want to do something, you want to help her, and you ask yourself how?

These are the five essential elements:

1. Listen

Listen respectfully without passing judgement. Women who are victims of violence have their reasons for keeping to themselves what is going on in their lives. They may be worried about the legal consequences (like being deported), they may be afraid, they may blame themselves, they may be embarrassed... Listen so you can fully understand the situation; let her know that she is not alone anymore and that you believe her. Above all, do not pass judgement on what she tells you, she is not to blame!

2. Respect

Every woman is unique. Ask her how you can help her and respect her choices even if you do not agree with her decision. Don't try to take control of the situation – her spouse already does that! Tell her that you will support her as best as you can, no matter what decision she makes. Above all, respect her own pace.

3. Confidentiality

Provide confidentiality and respect, do not involve her family, unless she asks you to, it can be a matter of safety! However, you should know that if a child is at risk of being abused the law requires you to notify the department of Youth Protection (Direction de la Protection de la Jeunesse)...

4. Information

It may also be appropriate to encourage her to get information about her rights and those of her children so that she can see all the options and possibilities available for her. In fact, there are various community organizations that can provide support or services to help her escape and be protected. Encourage her to break out of her isolation.

5. Safety

Finally, keep in mind that safety must remain your first priority. Ask her if she is in danger and what she needs to be safe. For her protection, prepare an escape plan with her.

Sources:

Baker, L et Cunningham, A. (2005) *Apprendre à écouter, Apprendre à aider*, Centre for Children & Families in the Just System, London Family Court Clinic, Inc
 Biron, S. et coll. (2006) *La violence conjugale... c'est quoi au juste?* Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, 58 p.
www.sosfemmes.com/violence/violences_voisine_victime.htm
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“Social tolerance is when the police won't arrest him, when the welfare officer doesn't want to give me a check because I'm not separated, when the neighbour doesn't say a word when he hears me screaming, when my family acts as if there's nothing wrong...”

CHILDREN...

Children who live in a climate of violence against women may be abused and or at risk of being injured during a violent episode. This type of environment is harmful to a child's development. Children have the right to grow up in a safe, caring and peaceful environment. These children may also be at greater risk of developing trauma related symptoms (nightmares, for example).

Children are victims of conjugal violence when:

- They see their mother being abused and humiliated;
- They hear loud arguments and the sounds of violence;
- They see the fall out and the injuries;
- They are part of the violent planning of the parent who is the aggressor;
- They are deprived of the financial support to which they and their mother are entitled...

Children often worry about what may happen because of the violence so they try to solve the problem or take steps to protect themselves or their siblings, physically as well as emotionally. You need to know that it is hard for children to reveal a family secret. If they do, work on the basis that they have decided that they need help. It is important to fully evaluate the risks associated with the steps you take and their consequences for the child. He or she might not talk to anyone else about it for a long time and could become the victim of escalating abuse. It is probably just a matter of time before the child can appreciate what you have done – he or she will also need time in order to adapt to his or her new situation.



HOW DO YOU ADDRESS THE ISSUE?

Ask open questions. For example, ask the child if someone has hurt them, without specifying any act of violence. They may deny it because they are afraid that the violence will increase, afraid of being taken away from their family and afraid of being threatened... It may also be because they feel responsible. In fact, some children think that they are the “cause” of this violence. In other cases, indifference may also be a way of coping with those around them and the violence appears completely normal to them. Let them tell their story, reassure them and validate their emotions. Do not criticize the aggressor and, above all, do not make any promises that you cannot keep! For example, do not promise to keep it a secret if their safety is compromised or, again, do not promise that “everything will work out fine...”