



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# When staying home is not safe

## Domestic violence may increase during the COVID-19 pandemic

*Trigger Warning: this content may trigger unpleasant feelings or thoughts of past abuse.*

Violence, domestic and sexual violence (also known as assault, abuse, and exploitation) are rooted in control and power. Domestic violence can worsen during a disaster. This current pandemic is no exception. Remember, there is never any reason or excuse for abuse.

### FACTORS THAT CAN INCREASE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Stress
- Loss / separation of friends, family, co-workers
- Loss of livelihood / financial hardship
- Loss of homes and resources
- Personal loss
- Uncertainty / anxiety
- Change in housing arrangements
- Breakdown of norms, including loss of routines
- Loss of control

Abusers typically try to achieve isolation of the victim so that the victim is without social supports. This pandemic, which has necessitated quarantining, physical distancing, and in some cases self-isolation, has made it easier for abusers to isolate their victims from friends, family, and work. And if both the abuser and the victim are working from home or are at home without work, it is even more difficult to seek help.

### PHYSICAL SAFETY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SELF-ISOLATION

Physical distancing (i.e. staying six feet/two metres apart) does not mean *social* isolation. We need each other more than ever right now, so if you are isolated, try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so. Also try to stick to your daily routines as much as possible.

The loss of control experienced during a disaster can lead to abusers looking for control in at least one area of their lives, and this can be in their own homes. We know that women are disproportionately victims of intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, if you are already experiencing domestic violence, you should be aware that it is likely to get worse during the pandemic. Power inequities, forced transactional sex due to disaster-related economic downturns and loss of livelihood, as well as impacts on family custody arrangements, can all occur.

There may also be a lack of available services to report abuse or provide shelter from it. Some organizations have changed the way they are providing services. For example, counselling has, in many cases, been moved to telephone, text, or online video appointments.

## WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO:

- **Awareness:** All community members must be aware that vulnerable people will be more vulnerable during a crisis.
- **Community involvement:** We are all connected and need to be aware of how we are all doing, especially during a time like this. When one of us is in danger, we need to join together as best we can as a community member, family member, friend, or co-worker. If you think someone is being abused, you can call shelters for advice (see below). You can also be the voice for someone being abused if they ask you to call for help for them.

Many women will not report their abuse due to fear of their partner, the outcome, stigma or shame. Again, checking on each other is vital! Let the pandemic be a reminder for us to take care of each other.

## TO REPORT ABUSE:

- If you are in immediate danger, or think someone else is, please call 911.
- You can call shelters or support lines. If phones are shared or you can be overheard or are being monitored, you could try asking general questions about isolation and coping to avoid worsening abuse. Or try to connect with the shelter or organization by text or email (see below) or through another person.
- You can still see or talk to a doctor, although many are carrying out their duties by phone appointment because of the pandemic. If phones are shared or you can be overheard, try to connect with the doctor's office by text or email or through another person. We understand that for some this may be difficult.
- If it's safe, try to be the family member who goes grocery shopping or to the pharmacy and call for help from there.

*"Trauma may happen to you but it can never define you."*

~ Melinda Longtin, survivor of domestic violence, author.

## SOME NUMBERS TO CALL:

### **KUU-US Crisis Line Society:**

Aboriginal-specific 24/7 crisis line serving all BC.  
Toll-Free: 1-800-588-8717  
Youth Line: 250-723-2040  
Adult Line: 250-723-4050

### **Battered Women's Support Service:**

Text 604-652-1867. Email: intake@bwss.org  
Phone 604-687-1867 / Toll-Free 1-855-687-1868  
Hours are: Mon – Fri: 10:00am – 5:00pm &  
Wed: 10:00am – 8:00pm

**Rape crisis line (24 hours):** Phone 604-872-8212

### **Women against Violence against Women:**

Phone 604-255-6344 / Toll-Free 1-877-392-7583

**VictimLink BC:** Phone 1-800-563-0808

**VictimLinkBC:** To call collect, call the Telus Relay Service at 711. Text 604-836-6381. Email VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca. TTY 604-875-0885

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