



Kwantlen Counselling Services Present . . .

FAQs on Domestic Violence

What is Domestic Violence?

The following is a commonly used definition of family violence developed by the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:

Family violence is abuse of power, abuse of trust or abuse of dependency within the family. It can occur in many forms including emotional abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, destruction of property, injury to pets, physical assault, sexual assault, and homicide.

- Domestic violence usually involves one person in a relationship using a pattern of behaviour to control the other person.
- Domestic violence is present in all types of relationships – whether straight, gay or lesbian, or whether the parties in the relationship are married, separated, living together or just dating.
- Anyone can be a victim. Domestic violence can impact anyone, regardless of their age, gender, race culture or religion. However, most often women and children are the victims of domestic violence.
- Many people who are victims of domestic violence do not see themselves as victims, and most of those who abuse do not see themselves as abusive.

What are Common Examples of Abuse?

- Pushing, hitting, slapping, kicking or biting.
- Verbal threats either to someone, their children, other family members or pets.
- Verbal threats to commit suicide as a method of coercing someone to do something.
- Use of, or threatening to use, a weapon against someone.
- Keeping or withholding someone's pay /salary / money.
- Constant verbal put-downs, or constantly making someone feel guilty.
- Forcing someone to have sex or to perform sexual acts.
- Preventing someone from seeing their friends, family or from going to work.

What Happens in Abusive Situations?

Generally, violence occurs in a 3-stage cycle:

1. The Tension-Building Stage: The abuser becomes increasingly angry and controlling, which leads to a build-up of tension in the relationship and environment.

2. The Abuse Stage: The abuser blows up, resulting in an explosion, a fight and/or violence.
3. The Honeymoon Stage: After the blow-up, the abuser calms down, apologizes, and promises that the violence will never happen again.

If the relationship continues, the cycle usually repeats itself. The time periods between the three stages get shorter, and the intensity of the abuse escalates.

What are the Effects of Family Violence?

Domestic violence can inflict severe psychological and physical damage on a victim. Regardless of whether someone is the recipient of the abuse or a witness to the abuse, the harm can be just as detrimental. For example, research shows that children who witness parental violence may be as adversely affected as children who are direct victims of physical or sexual assault. Even if a child is not physically harmed, statistics show that children who live in homes where abuse occurs are more likely to develop emotional and behavioural problems.

Short-term effects of abuse can include the following:

- Physical injuries.
- Psychological damage.
- Emotional difficulties including fear, anxiety, depression, anger, hostility, post-traumatic stress disorder.
- A decrease in ability to concentrate and perform in academic settings.

Long-term effects of abuse can include the following:

- Chronic mental illness.
- Substance abuse.
- Emotional instability.
- Depleted self-esteem.
- Abusive actions inflicted on others.

What are the Effects on Women?

It is most often women and children who suffer from the effects of domestic violence. Domestic violence has a different but equally profound impact on women and children.

Many of the physical injuries sustained by women as a result of domestic violence seem to cause medical difficulties as women grow older. Some examples of those medical conditions that arise are arthritis, hypertension and heart disease.

Studies report that abused women are at higher risk of miscarriages, stillbirths, and infant deaths, and are more likely to give birth to low birth weight children, a risk factor for neonatal and infant deaths.

Domestic violence also causes social problems for women. Women who face domestic violence often lose their jobs because of absenteeism as a result of the violence. They often lose family and friends. First, the abuser isolates them from family and friends, then, women become embarrassed by the abuse inflicted upon them and withdraw from support people to avoid embarrassment.

Domestic violence can severely impair a parent's ability to nurture the development of their children. Mothers who are abused may be depressed or preoccupied with the violence. They may be emotionally withdrawn, numb or irritable or have feelings of hopelessness. The result can be a parent who is less emotionally available to their children or unable to care for their children's basic needs.

What are the Effects on Children?

More than half of the school-age children in domestic violence situations show clinical levels of anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder. Without treatment, these children are more prone to delinquency, substance abuse, poor academic performance perhaps leading to dropping out of school, and difficulties in their own relationships.

Children may exhibit a wide range of actions and emotions in reaction to violence:

- Younger children may not understand the meaning of the abuse they observe and may believe that they "must have done something wrong". Self-blame can precipitate feelings of guilt, worry, and anxiety.
- Children may become withdrawn, non-verbal, and exhibit regressed behaviours such as clinging and whining, eating and sleeping difficulties, concentration problems, generalized anxiety, and physical complaints.
- Pre-adolescent children may show a loss of interest in social activities, low self-concept, withdrawal or avoidance of peer relations and rebelliousness.
- It is also common to observe temper tantrums, irritability, frequent fighting at school or between siblings, lashing out at objects, treating pets cruelly or abusively and threatening of peers or siblings with violence.
- Girls are more likely to exhibit withdrawal and run the risk of being "missed" as a child in need of support.
- Adolescents are also at risk of delinquency, substance abuse and poor academic performance perhaps leading to dropping out of school.
- Research suggests that children who are victims of domestic violence are more likely to become abusive adults in their family relationships.

What Can You Do?

Domestic violence is a serious problem, and it can happen to anyone. If you are in an abusive relationship, you probably are afraid and confused, and you may be accusing yourself. Please keep in mind that this is not your fault. You are not responsible for the abuser's actions.

If you, or anyone you know, are in an abusive relationship, please seek help. Abuse continues and grows through denial and secrecy; therefore it is important that you tell others around you what is happening in order to stop the abuse. Every individual has the right to peace, safety, and protection.

Kwantlen Counsellors are trained health professionals who will give you support and resources so that you are able to make an informed decision for yourself. Our services are free and confidential. To make an appointment, please contact us at:

Surrey Counselling:	(604) 599-2044	Room C160
Richmond Counselling:	(604) 599-2600	Room 1640
Langley Counselling:	(604) 599-3213	Room 1077
Newton Counselling:	(604) 599-2900	Room 3-120

What are Some Additional Supports and Resources to Check Out?

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV): www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence

BC Institute on Family Violence: www.bcifv.org

Battered Women's Support Services: www.bwss.org

MOSAIC: www.mosaicbc.com

24/7 Victim Information Line: 1-800-563-0808