

Information sheet

Faith communities and family violence

What is family violence?

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. Family violence can include spousal abuse (married or common-law), older adult abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and exposure to abuse of others in the family.¹

Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse and spiritual abuse. Victims of family violence include dating couples, spouses (married or common-law), people in LGBTQ* relationships, children, teens, people with disabilities and older adults.

Get Help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911**.

For help in your community or for more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca.

What you can do

You can help families who are experiencing family violence by working together with others whose expertise is in understanding and responding to family violence situations. Those experiencing abuse will benefit from your connections to family violence and abuse experts. You can find such expertise by contacting your local Child and Family Services, your local police or local emergency shelter.

Understand the issues

Did you know:

- In 2016, Alberta ranked fourth highest in police-reported family violence by province (289 per 100,000 compared to 239 per 100,000 nationally).
- Alberta had the third highest rate of police-reported violence among the provinces in the following types:
 - intimate partner violence (403 per 100,000 compared to 310 per 100,000 nationally).
 - family violence against seniors (same as Manitoba – 84 per 100,000 compared to 62 per 100,000 nationally).
 - Alberta ranked third highest of the provinces for Canadians who self-report spousal violence.²

Visit endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca, or phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818**, toll-free in Alberta.

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Shape attitudes

Over the years, religion has helped to shape many attitudes about human relations. Faith communities can provide an informed and supportive environment to help both victims of family violence and those who are abusive. This can be accomplished in these ways:

- Believe the victim's story.
- Offer rituals and meditation in consultation with family violence professionals.
- Understand that the victim and their children are in real danger.
- Help the victim survivor find needed resources.
- Hold the abuser accountable. Do not accept excuses or allow religious texts to justify violence and abuse. Use religious texts that emphasize respect and positive interactions.
- Urge the abuser to seek appropriate treatment. Help is available.
- Assure the victim that the faith community will not abandon them.
- Increase your knowledge of family violence in order to better help your community members.

Educate your community

Faith leaders have respect and influence in their communities. The overarching message in most faith teachings about males and females is centred on love and respect. Equal value is granted to men and women. As a spiritual leader, you have the opportunity to talk about family violence and to teach that choosing violence is never acceptable. You can include discussions about family violence as part of education opportunities and in pre-marital courses. You can provide resource material in your place of worship. Create opportunities to quote religious texts that address safety and respect. You can teach peace.

Get involved in prevention

Besides educating people and inviting discussion about attitudes that contribute to family violence, faith leaders can strengthen their family life education programs in their place of worship. This can be done by focusing on equality and nonviolent conflict resolution, particularly in programs for young children and marriage preparation courses. There are communities around Alberta that have active family violence and bullying prevention committees. Representation from local faith leaders is very important. To find out if there is an active committee in your area, contact your local Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) office through your municipality.

If you suspect child abuse, neglect, or exposure to family violence – report it.

If you suspect that a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services, or the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.

Do not tell the child's parent or guardian.

If you suspect that someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police.

Material adapted from: Ngeth, P. and The Venerable Sophan Seng (2007), *Cambodian Community Domestic Violence Information and Prevention Resources*. Calgary: FaithLink. 1 Alberta Children and Youth Services (2004). *Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying: Finding solutions together*. Edmonton: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/3022637> 2 Burczykca, M., Conroy S. (2018) *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2016*. (Catalogue no. 85-002-X). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Retrieved April 25, 2018 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54893-eng.htm>

*Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer identities

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