

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STARTER GUIDE:



How to support individuals in abusive situations

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is defined as, “The attempt, act, or intent of someone within a relationship, where the relationship is characterized by intimacy, dependency or trust, to intimidate either by threat or by the use of physical force on another person or property. The purpose of the abuse is to control and/ or exploit through neglect, intimidation, inducement of fear, or by inflicting pain.”

*(Source: Calgary Domestic Violence Collective).*

## WHO DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECT, AND HOW?

It can affect anyone—domestic violence doesn’t discriminate based on race, gender, socio-economic class, or any other factor. It negatively impacts people’s physical and mental well-being, and can push individuals and families toward poverty, especially if financial resources in the relationship have been limited or controlled. When young children are exposed to the traumatic events of domestic violence, their brain development can be affected and they are more likely to become abusers themselves or believe that threats and violence are a normal part of relationships. No one is immune to domestic violence; the impacts can be long-lasting, and it hurts entire communities.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP BREAK THE CYCLE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

80% of people experiencing domestic violence tell someone in their social network first, according to Sageesse. Chances are, you are already close to—or know someone impacted by—an abusive relationship or domestic violence. Whether you’re a friend, family member, neighbour, colleague, or classmate, you’re part of someone’s social network, and you are vitally needed.

It’s important to know how to have a thoughtful conversation about domestic violence, because the way you respond when someone opens up to you can make a big difference in whether they seek further help. You can help break the cycle of domestic violence with just a few words—see more on the REAL Talk website, developed by Sageesse.

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence isn’t black and white, and there isn’t a clear list of signs to look for.

Everyone’s experience with domestic violence is unique, but every case has one thing in common: there is always an element of control or exploitation. Coercive control, which occurs in domestic violence situations, is an act or a pattern of acts used to regulate and dominate another person’s daily life. These acts could take different forms of abuse, including verbal, sexual, psychological, spiritual, or financial.

## FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Alberta has the **THIRD HIGHEST** domestic violence rates in the country
- Only **25%** of Albertans in an abusive relationship will contact the police
- The Calgary Police responded to **21,000 CALLS** concerning domestic violence in 2018—that’s two per hour
- Studies show that just **ONE POSITIVE CONVERSATION** with an informal support (someone in their social network) is likely to lead someone to seek further help

## HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



When starting a conversation about domestic violence with someone who may be in an abusive relationship, remember the acronym “REAL” Talk (developed by Sagesse): **RECOGNIZE**, **EMPATHIZE**, **ASK** and **LISTEN**.



### RECOGNIZE

This step is about picking up on a pattern of behaviors that doesn't seem right—recognizing when people are acting differently, or afraid or fearful.

#### TOP TIPS:

- Be willing to engage when something feels off.
- Mirror language. Language matters and the choice for how to identify is personal and should be respected. Follow the lead of the person who is sharing their experience with you.



### EMPATHIZE

This step is about checking in with your gut feeling and believing the person who is confiding in you or sharing an experience with you.

#### TOP TIPS:

- Understand their perspective. Accept how they feel, and try not to put a silver lining around what they're going through.
- Recognize that you can't fix the situation, and sometimes the best you can do is to acknowledge that what that person is going through is painful and difficult.
- Show gratitude. Many people struggle with vulnerability because they've been hurt before. When someone chooses to open up to you, let them know you appreciate them sharing and acknowledge that it might have been hard to do so.



### ASK

This step is about asking questions that give you a better sense of the situation and how best to support the person in the abusive relationship. It's not about what you want or need.

#### TOP TIPS:

- Be curious. Ask questions about the other person's perspective, and try to build a shared understanding.
- Try asking “Are you okay?”, “Are you afraid?”, “How can I help?” or “What do you need?”
- Don't try to “fix” the situation, but remind them that you are there, and that they are strong.



### LISTEN

This step is about creating space for someone to define their own experience without judgement. No one understands the realities of domestic violence better than the person being impacted by it.

#### TOP TIPS:

- Acknowledge that violence is happening. It's important not to dismiss or deflect.
- Remove the blame. Never suggest that it's their fault they are being abused.
- Honour their experience. Acknowledge all they've done to resist violence and stay safe.
- Honour their choice—even if that means staying in an unhealthy relationship. Leaving doesn't always make the violence stop, and it is not always the safest option.

### DIVE DEEPER

Want more on REAL Talk? Visit the [REAL Talk](#) website developed by [Sagesse](#), one of United Way of Calgary and Area's partner agencies committed to ending the cycle of domestic violence. Inquire about Sagesse's [Stand By](#) workshop, which equips individuals with deeper knowledge about how to support victims of domestic violence.



### DO YOU NEED HELP?

If you, or someone you know, is impacted by domestic violence, please contact the 24-hour family violence help line: **403-234-SAFE (7233)** or toll-free **1-866-606-7233**.