

# real talk

**Domestic abuse is at an epidemic level.  
Break the cycle of domestic abuse with just a few words.**

  
**sagesse.**  
Heal. Learn. Grow.



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**REAL Talk** is a guide to help us understand and talk openly about domestic abuse in Alberta. Chances are you are close to or know someone impacted by domestic abuse. Break the cycle of domestic abuse with just a few words.

**real talk**

# Domestic abuse in Canada

DOMESTIC ABUSE IS AT AN EPIDEMIC LEVEL IN CANADA, WHICH MEANS YOU ALREADY KNOW OR ARE CLOSE TO SOMEONE IMPACTED. GET THE FACTS.



**1 in 3  
Canadians**

1 in 3 Canadians will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.



**80%**

80% of people experiencing domestic abuse tell someone in their social networks first.



**One  
conversation**

Studies show that just one positive conversation is likely to lead someone to seek further help.

**let's get  
real**

# How to have REAL Talk

## Recognize

Domestic abuse isn't black and white, there isn't a clear list of signs to look for. People experience abuse on a spectrum through many different forms of power and control.

## Empathize

When someone confides in or shares an experience with you, check in with your gut feeling and believe that person. Your response will affect how that person seeks help again in the future.

## Ask

Ask questions that give you a better sense of the situation and how best to support the person experiencing abuse. You aren't the expert, try to build a shared understanding.

## Listen

Listening means creating space for someone to define their own experience without judgment. Remember it's not about you.



# Recognize

**Domestic abuse isn't black and white. There isn't a clear list of signs to look for.**

Even when we see domestic abuse happening, we can't see what's going on beneath the surface. Recognizing abuse is about seeing a pattern of behaviours that don't seem right, people acting different than usual, or afraid or fearful. It's about checking in on our assumptions about people and their relationships, and being willing to engage when something feels off.

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## **There isn't a checklist.**

Recognizing domestic abuse isn't about looking for a list of things, but about recognizing if a pattern of behaviours doesn't seem to fit for someone, if people are acting different than they usually do, if they are afraid or fearful.

## **Forget your assumptions.**

Recognizing is about checking in on our assumptions about people and their relationships. If something feels off, there's a chance something is going on.

## **Show gratitude.**

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.

RECOGNIZE

**Domestic abuse is 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.**



## **Domestic abuse is like an iceberg.**

People experiencing domestic abuse may seem fine on the outside, but that doesn't mean there aren't deeper issues beneath the surface.



## **Domestic abuse is like an invisible cage.**

People experiencing domestic abuse lack complete freedom, but no one around them can see the bars.



## **Domestic abuse is like a jenga tower.**

People experiencing domestic abuse get caught in a cycle where each move is meant to undermine and destabilize the other person.

RECOGNIZE

**Coercive control is an act, or a pattern of acts, used to regulate and dominate another person's daily life and remove personal agency. These acts could include verbal, sexual, psychological, spiritual or financial abuse. Everyone's experience with domestic abuse is unique, but the use of abusive behaviours are ways in which one person is trying to control or exploit another.**



## **Coercive control is frequent.**

The person in control uses repeated tactics to dominate another person.



## **Coercive control is low-level.**

Control tactics are often subtle, quiet ways of manipulation.



## **Coercive control is cumulative.**

These are little actions and behaviours that add up over time.



## **Coercive control is not obvious.**

Controlling behaviour isn't always easy to spot.

RECOGNIZE

**People use many words to describe themselves and their experiences of domestic abuse. Follow the lead of the person who is sharing their experience with you. Language matters and the choice for how to identify is personal and should be respected. Mirror their language.**



## Victim vs. Survivor

These are words that might be used to describe someone who is experiencing abuse. The word *victim* is often used to describe a person in the context of the law or in court proceedings. *Survivor* is a word that acknowledges that person's trauma and helps to empower their choice to move forward from an abusive relationship.



## Person experiencing

Experiences of abuse do not define us. Just because someone is impacted by some form of abuse today, doesn't mean they'll be using or experiencing abuse in the future. Everyone has the potential to change and labels that presuppose otherwise can be harmful. First-person language reflects the idea that people are always so much more than their experiences of abuse.

# Empathize

**You're already a support person to someone.**

Chances are you already know someone impacted by domestic abuse. Whether you're a friend, family member, neighbour, colleague or classmate, you're in this person's natural support network.

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## Recognize their perspective.

Empathy means taking the perspective of another person, to acknowledge how they feel. Try not to sugar coat it or put a silver lining around what they're going through, because you can't fix it. Sometimes the best you can do is to recognize that what that person is going through is painful and difficult.

*I'm sorry you are going through this.*

*Wow, that really sucks.*

*I hate that this happened.*

*That must be hard.*

*I can see how that would be difficult.*

## Remove judgment.

Remember this conversation isn't about you or your experience, but the connection between you and another person. You don't have to understand or agree. Empathy is about being willing to connect within yourself to better understand something within another person.

*Wow, I don't know what to say.*

*I can't imagine what you must be going through.*

*My heart hurts for you.*

*It makes me really sad to hear this happened.*

## 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.

*Thank you for telling me.*

*I'm glad you told me.*

*Thank you for trusting me with this.*

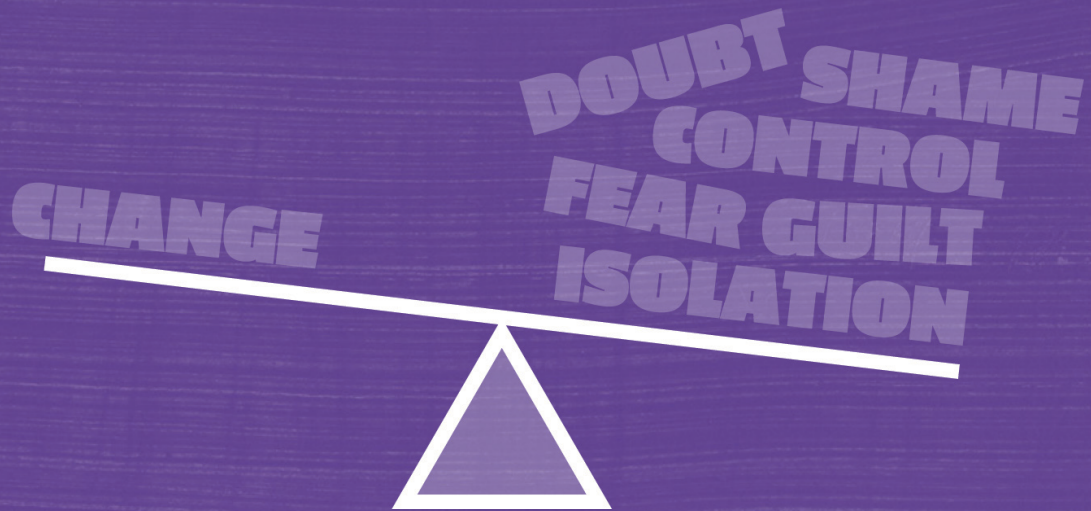
*This must be hard to talk about.*

*You're not alone.*



EMPATHIZE

**There are many trade-offs people consider when deciding what actions to take in a relationship where they are experiencing abuse. One of the best ways to acknowledge those trade-offs is by respecting the person's choice and finding ways to support them with the issues that are of most concern for them.**



**CHANGE**

**DOUBT SHAME  
CONTROL  
FEAR GUILT  
ISOLATION**

EMPATHIZE



## Leaving doesn't make the abuse stop.

Everyone wants a safe and healthy relationship but sometimes the cost of leaving feels too high. Leaving can actually be the most dangerous time, either because their partner is dangerous or because they're facing homelessness, deportation, loss of status or financial catastrophe if they choose to leave. Leaving isn't always the safest option.



## Social stigma is real.

There are many social stigmas around domestic abuse that can make someone fear they will be shamed for their experience, not believed, or not be supported for their decisions.



## Shame is real too.

Whether this person is the one experiencing or using abusive behaviour, the cost of reaching out for help or changing their behaviour comes with a trade-off. By asking the right questions, you can offer support to people using abuse too, and help understand the root cause leading them to abuse.

EMPATHIZE



## Taylor and Dave

*Taylor and I were out for our regular Saturday morning stroll when they told me their partner Dave threatened to harm their dog. I asked if everything was OK. That's when Taylor told me things had been escalating for a while and that they were afraid to leave Dave in fear of what he might do.*

## Brett and the kids

*I was cutting my client Brett's hair when they told me they were afraid to leave their partner because they were the sole financial provider in their family. They have a couple of kids and Brett stayed home to raise them. Brett didn't want to ask their parents for help because they felt too embarrassed. Their mother never liked their partner and often warned this would happen.*





# Ask

**Break the cycle of domestic abuse  
with just a few words.**

REAL talk isn't fancy or complicated. Most times it starts with a simple question, and one positive conversation usually leads to another.

**real talk**

## Are you okay?

Domestic abuse isn't always obvious, you won't know whether someone is okay unless you really ask them.

## Are you afraid?

We can never promise a safe space from domestic abuse, but we can empower someone to speak up about their experience.

## How can I help?

Leaving isn't always the safest option. Ask questions to better understand what else that person might really need from you.

## What do you need?

Rather than telling someone what to do or how to manage their situation, empower that person to speak openly about their needs and priorities.



ASK



## Greg and Miranda

*One Sunday Miranda came to church alone. She seemed distracted and off. After the service I asked if everything was OK. We have been friends for a long time and started going to the same church in our teens. She met her husband Greg one Sunday and they ended up getting married there a few years later. Greg was highly respected within the community because he was always the first one to volunteer for a church event and made newcomers feel welcome. She told me she felt guilty about having mixed feelings about Greg. Things hadn't been going so well at home, but she was ashamed to talk about it with the pastor and even her parents.*

**#realtalk**



## **Be curious.**

Ask questions that give you a better sense of the situation and how best to support the person impacted by the abuse. Be curious and seek to understand the perspective of that person. It's not about you or your experience.

## **Be encouraging.**

When someone we care about is experiencing a bad time, we often want to “fix” it even though we can't. That doesn't mean you can't be encouraging. Instead of saying, “it will get better” or “here's what I would do,” tell them you are here to listen and that they are strong.

## **Lose the ego.**

Remember you are not the expert in this situation. Instead of looking for answers, look for a shared understanding. Asking questions is about the other person's perspective, not what you want or need.



# Listen

## **You are not the expert.**

When someone opens up to you, it's important to make it about them. Listening means creating space for another person to share their experience without judgment. No one understands the realities of domestic abuse better than the person being impacted by it right now.

**real talk**

## **Acknowledge the abuse.**

When someone is talking to you about their experiences of abuse, it's important to acknowledge the abuse and the impact that it is having on them.

## **Remove blame.**

Many people experiencing abuse receive messages suggesting it's their fault their partner is abusive to them. When we listen, we're showing that person we don't blame them for what is happening.

## **Honor their experience.**

As listeners it's important to acknowledge and honour all that a person has done to resist abuse, to try and protect themselves and/or their children and to stand up for their own dignity and integrity.

## **Honour their choice.**

People tend to resist abuse, which sometimes means staying in an unhealthy relationship. Leaving doesn't always make the abuse stop, so staying is a choice too.



ABOUT US

**Sagesse empowers people, organizations and communities to disrupt systems and patterns of domestic abuse by curating environments to heal and develop tools to lead safe, healthy lives.**

We work each day to support individuals impacted by abuse, while also challenging norms and advocating for large-scale societal change that will eradicate abuse in Alberta. At the heart of our programming is a commitment to innovation in all facets of our organization.



## OUR VALUES

### **Courage**

We are compelled to create space for connections, creativity and ideas – regardless of our individual beliefs and ideals. To us, it's about showing up and saying what needs to be said, even when it's uncomfortable.

### **Vulnerability**

We lean into the discomfort that comes with practicing authenticity and living wholeheartedly.

### **Curiosity**

We believe that in order to make sense of the world, we need to look a little harder and dig a little deeper.

### **Trust in the messiness**

Our work is framed in a series of constellations, which are non-linear and continually evolving (some would say messy). Yet we trust in this and the fact that our clients, volunteers, partners, and ourselves, are exactly where we need to be – and we work from there.

OUR PROGRAMS

**Capacity building workshops and training offered through Sagesse focus on domestic abuse education, from learning more about recognizing domestic abuse to supporting someone as an ally.**



## **Real Talk**

This workshop is available to anyone interested in learning how to recognize domestic abuse, understand its impact on an individual and the community, and develop comfort in responding to domestic abuse disclosures, including providing appropriate support and referrals to services. Additionally, specialized versions of REAL Talk for men, faith groups and other communities are available and can be customized for particular groups.

*Offered virtually and in-person across Alberta.*

## **Rainbow Ready**

This capacity-building program aims to provide organizations and community agencies the knowledge and skills to provide safe, inclusive service to 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experiencing domestic abuse. *Offered across Alberta.*

OUR PROGRAMS

**Peer support groups and mentorship are for people who have experienced domestic abuse, are at risk of being abused or are involved in sex work.**





## **Step Forward**

This unique program offers individual support to people impacted by abuse by connecting them with a peer mentor. Peers connect in-person, by phone or via email to discuss issues that are relevant to their current situation and experiences. *Offered across Alberta.*

## **Finding our Voices**

This six-week group program focuses on issues related to self-esteem and the importance of effective communication. *Offered across Alberta.*

## **Growth Circle**

A 14-week group program that delves into the experience of domestic abuse. *Offered across Alberta.*

## **BElieve in YOU (BE YOU)**

A 20-week peer support program for people who are, or have been, engaged at the intersections of domestic abuse and sex work. *Offered across Alberta.*

## **Stand By**

If someone you know is experiencing abuse, this informal, peer-based group provides an opportunity to talk to a Sagesse facilitator and other informal supporters. *Offered virtually.*

# Join the movement

**Together, we can stop abuse before it starts.**

Through REAL Talk, you've learned to recognize and talk about abuse. Now, it's time to take the next steps in ending abuse in our community:

- Share REAL Talk with colleagues, friends, family and neighbours, and encourage them to attend a session.
- Are you supporting a loved-one impacted by abuse? Sign up for Stand By to find encouragement, assistance and relief.
- Support the most vulnerable in our community by investing in Sagesse's programs. Whether you donate once, or every month, your support is vital to delivering our programs across Alberta. Give today through the QR code below.
- Donate your time by volunteering at Sagesse's events, becoming a mentor or facilitating one of our programs. Find out more at [sagesse.org/volunteer](https://www.sagesse.org/volunteer)



[www.sagesse.org/give](https://www.sagesse.org/give)



# Notes:



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