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# **Counselling Programs for Men Who Are Violent in Relationships:**

**Questions and Answers for Practitioners  
in the Health, Social Services and  
Criminal Justice Systems**



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in the Health, Social Services and  
Criminal Justice Systems**



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**Counselling Programs for Men Who are Violent in Relationships:  
Questions and Answers for Practitioners in the Health, Social  
Service and Criminal Justice Systems** was prepared by the Dale  
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# Introduction

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The Violence Against Women Survey conducted by Statistics Canada (1993) indicates that one in six ever-married women reported that she was subjected to violence by her spouse. Twenty-five years ago, there were no programs in Canada for men who had assaulted their partners; currently, there are over 200.\* Increasing numbers of men, and the women they are abusing, are asking for help, yet lay counsellors and helping professionals are often unsure how to provide appropriate and safe information to both the victims and perpetrators of violence in the home.

## Objectives

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This booklet contains information regarding effective intervention with assaultive men that is useful for professional and lay counsellors working with victims and perpetrators of violence in the home. Highlights include:

- background information on violence against women
- overview of the major theories relevant to counselling abusive men
- what to look for and what to avoid in seeking qualified counselling for men
- a summary of research findings on the effectiveness of programs

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\* This booklet will focus on the issue of men's violence against women in relationships. This is not intended to ignore the problems of violence against people in same-sex relationships, or of vulnerable males in heterosexual relationships. The author has chosen to speak of men as the perpetrators and women as victims because those are the facts in the overwhelming number of cases of interpersonal violence between intimates.

- referral information for each province and territory
- a bibliography of suggested reading.

This publication does not include information on protection and safety planning for the victims; one source for information relevant to victims is the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Health Canada, 1-800-267-1291.

## **Intended Audience**

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This booklet will be useful to all professionals and lay counsellors working with members of a family in which violence, as described above, has occurred. Users might include family doctors, nurses, emergency room staff, health clinic staff, psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health workers, social workers, crisis line workers, street workers, shelter workers, women's advocates, private counsellors, immigrant counsellors, alcohol and drug counsellors, assaultive men's counsellors, Aboriginal counsellors, school counsellors, teachers, correctional officers, probation and parole officers, parole board members, lawyers and clergy.

## **What is Violence Against Women in Relationships?**

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Violence against women in relationships is physical or sexual assault or threat of assault. Violence may occur within ongoing or "separated" relationships, regardless of marital status. Other behaviours such as intimidation, stalking, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and spiritual abuse should be recognized as part of the continuum of

power and control that men use against young and elderly women alike (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Attorney General, 1996). The following is a list of some examples in each of these categories.

1. **Physical assault** includes grabbing, restraining, slapping, punching, shoving, choking, biting, kicking, shaking, burning with a cigarette, throwing hot liquids, tying up, using weapons (knives, guns, sticks and other objects). Physical abuse also includes the removal of basic necessities (e.g. medications, health care, crutches, food, sleep) and forced alcohol or drug use.
2. **Psychological abuse** includes expressions of excessive jealousy, mistrust, control, threats, verbal abuse and destruction of property. Examples of controlling behaviours include forbidding a woman to go to school, learn English or have a driver's licence. Men who are psychologically abusive may try to limit whom their partners visit or talk to on the phone, so that the women become isolated from friends and relatives. They may even harass the women at work with repeated phone calls and visits. Examples of threatening behaviours include threatening to use violence against her or her children, to take away the children, to have her deported, to commit suicide if she does not comply with his demands or to have her institutionalized. Non-verbal forms of psychological abuse may include glaring, fist shaking, physical intimidation and hitting doors or walls. Verbal abuse consists of yelling, degrading comments, put-downs, blaming and unfounded accusations about her loyalty or sexual behaviour. It is important to remember that, although a woman who experiences frequent psychological abuse often lives with ongoing fear of her partner, she may never have been the victim of an act that could have brought the man before the courts.

3. **Sexual abuse and sexual assault** are non-consensual, violent acts that compromise the sexual integrity of the victim. These acts include rape, demands for sex in a way that degrades the victim, use of penetrating objects and any form of physical abuse directed at the sexual areas of the body or done during sexual activity. Sexual abuse can also include deliberate infection with HIV or with other sexually transmitted diseases (either refusal to use a condom or failure to reveal the possibility of infection), forcing her to prostitute herself, refusing to take “no” for an answer, initiating sex after violence.
4. **Financial abuse** includes denying a woman access to or knowledge of the family’s money, preventing her input regarding purchases, forbidding her to have a bank account, denying access to her own money, not paying child support, not allowing her to work or launching legal actions so as to deplete her economic resources.
5. **Spiritual abuse** occurs when a woman’s spiritual beliefs are ridiculed or attacked or when she is prevented from attending the religious services of her choice. The man may demand that she attend his religious gatherings or pray in the manner that he dictates. Her children may be raised in a different faith or tradition against her will.



# What Major Theories Explain the Cause of Men's Violence Against Women?

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There are a variety of theories explaining men's violence toward their partners. The following are five of the major approaches to understanding men's violence in relationships. Many counsellors and programs are influenced by more than one of the following views:

## 1. Psycho-dynamic/Insight Theory

Early theories as to the cause of men's violence against women emphasized psychological problems related to childhood trauma, developmental difficulties or mental illness. Problems include immature personalities, personality disorders, poor impulse control, fear of intimacy and/or abandonment and psychiatric illnesses (Stordeur and Stille, 1989).

Some counsellors express concern that attributing men's violence to individual pathology tends to remove responsibility for the behaviour from the perpetrator and place it in the hands of a professional who is to provide treatment (Adams, 1988). Dr. Anne Ganley, a pioneer in the field, indicates that she did not find a higher proportion of mental illness among men who assault their partners than among men who did not. However, she did provide a separate counselling group for men who suffered either from a mental illness requiring medication or had some form of organic brain syndrome. This approach is based on the view that once the organic problem is managed through medication, the man can learn to take responsibility for his abusive behaviour and learn respectful ways of communicating.

Sonkin indicates that for some men, individual therapy can provide an awareness of powerful unconscious emotions, an important first step in taking control of their violence. The

danger is that awareness may not necessarily translate into a cessation of violence and the use of power and control at home. If these actions continue to go unchallenged by the criminal justice system, a man's sense of power over her may increase (Stordeur and Stille, 1989). Other critics of this approach argue that it may not deal with immediate safety issues and ignores the control that the violent behaviour exerts over the victim. Responsible individual counselling focuses on safety concerns first, then explores attitudes that condone violence against women, and finally examines childhood trauma issues.

## **2. Ventilation Theory**

Although used infrequently as an intervention with assaultive men, the risks associated with this approach warrant mentioning here. Research does not support this theory's main assumption that the ventilation of anger will result in less anger and stress. Tavriss reported that venting anger can become addictive to the user. Straus found that verbal aggression is strongly associated with increases in physical aggression. Ganley expressed concern that when assaultive men release their anger using a punching bag or chopping wood, it can result in reinforcing the behaviour through repetition. In addition, it provides the message that the only way to deal with anger or conflict is through a physical explosion. Ventilating anger suggests that violence is only an anger management problem. This ignores the fact that many men are just as angry in other situations in which they are not violent or controlling.

### 3. Family Systems Theory

Usually implemented through couple's therapy, family systems theory (FST) views both victim and perpetrator as participating in maladaptive ways of interacting. Violence serves a function of maintaining distance or reinforcing certain family dynamics already in place. Several therapists maintain that FST can be used appropriately with assaultive men and their victims if certain precautions are followed as discussed below (Geller and Wasserstrom, 1984).

During a workshop entitled "Families and Violence: A Feminist-informed Systemic Approach" (Vancouver, 1993), Virginia Goldner described herself as taking a feminist-informed, systemic approach to working with couples. She excludes couples for which (1) violence has been frequent and severe, (2) the woman has no independence, social network or financial support, and (3) the man is not taking responsibility for his abuse. She maintains that the violence must stop before the therapy starts, and that although both parties are participating in therapy, this does not imply that they are equally responsible for the violence.

Many feminists voice concern that FST undercuts the seriousness of violence by taking the responsibility for the violence out of the hands of the perpetrator. In addition, FST may ignore the power differences between men and women in our society. Viewing the cause of violence as systemic may indirectly reinforce the view that the woman is responsible for her husband's feelings and actions (Stordeur and Stille, 1989). Real communication is not possible as long as violence, or the threat of violence, continues (Ganley, 1981).

## **4. Cognitive-behavioural and Psycho-educational Theories**

These approaches make the violence in the relationship the primary focus of intervention. Because violence is considered to be a learned behaviour, non-violence can be learned as an alternative. The techniques used in a psycho-educational approach include “anger logs” to separate thoughts, feelings and behaviours; time-outs to stop aggressive behaviour; stress management techniques; the identification of dysfunctional thinking that escalates anger; and interpersonal skills training such as communication and assertiveness techniques. This model has been criticized for “taking too narrow a view of men’s abusive behaviour and not addressing the function of this behaviour in maintaining power and control over women by individual men and by men as a class” (Stordeur and Stille, 1989, p. 31).

## **5. Pro-feminist Theory**

Men’s violence is a way to maintain power and control over women. The ways men oppress women through the use of violence include rape, physical aggression and threats (Bograd, 1988). Violence, according to this theory, includes psychological abuse that can undermine the self-esteem of the victim. Two principles have been identified, fundamental to a feminist view of violence against women: “(1) No woman deserves to be beaten, and (2) men are solely responsible for their actions” (Stordeur and Stille, 1989, p. 32). The pro-feminist model supports teaching anger management and communication skills but stresses the need to challenge men’s sense of entitlement regarding women and children. Without a challenge to the power imbalance between men and their families, new skills can be misused by men as more sophisticated means to maintain control (Adams, 1988). From this perspective, work with assaultive men must seek to change social, legal and economic systems that support the oppression of women. Critics of the feminist approach suggest that it ignores individual personality issues that contribute to violence (Dutton and Golant, 1995).

## Conclusion

Most counsellors and programs will use more than one of the above theoretical models. In Canada, there is a strong trend toward the use of a psycho-educational model, based on a feminist analysis of men's use of power. Many counsellors are influenced by the work of Alan Jenkins, which assumes that men will change more quickly when they are respected as individuals. In the context of a respectful relationship with a counsellor, a man can be challenged to face the violent and controlling behaviours that, in the long run, are damaging to him as well (Jenkins, 1990).

Counselling for assaultive men is just one strategy being promoted in support of the goal of ending violence against women and children. Counselling programs are frequently situated within the community as one part of an overall community intervention approach to ending violence in families. The groundbreaking work of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project promotes this type of integrative approach (Pence and Paymar, 1993). It stresses the use of a coordinated community response involving the cooperation of the criminal justice system, women's shelters and counselling agencies, assaultive men's intervention programs, and other community members and agencies concerned with ending violence against women in relationships. Community work may include intervention to stop or prevent child abuse, workshops for students of all ages about non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, and campaigns to educate the public about the frequency and severity of violence against women in relationships.

## General Questions

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### *What part do alcohol and drugs play in men's violence against their partners?*

Alcohol does not cause violence, although it may intensify its nature. A belief in male privilege over women forms the foundation for violent and controlling behaviours. Being drunk or on drugs provides an excuse for many men who say, "I'm only violent when I'm high so I'm not really a violent person." Although some men are only physically violent when drinking, their use of other forms of power and control generally continues or may escalate when they stop drinking.

A man who has a problem with alcohol or drug abuse and has been violent, even once, may have two separate problems: one with substance abuse and a second with violence and controlling behaviours. When the immediate threat of violence is removed or reduced through criminal charges, separation, incarceration or other means, it is important that the man begin substance abuse counselling *first*. If he begins an intervention program for his violence before substance abuse counselling, he is at risk of resorting to drugs or alcohol as an escape from the stress of confronting his abusive behaviour.

A residential treatment centre can provide intensive treatment of his substance abuse and, as a by-product, significantly reduce the risk to his family members. Chemically dependent, assaultive men may enter a substance abuse program assuming that it will also end their violence. In many cases, these men will continue to be abusive even after successfully completing such a program if they do not confront their use of violence and control in relationships.

Research shows that men who drink regularly are more likely to abuse family members. For example, one study shows that fathers who drank to excess were six times as likely to use violence against their own children compared to those who

were not heavy drinkers (Groenveld, 1989). This study shows that the rates of wife assault for women living with men who drink regularly (at least four times per week) is triple the rate of those women whose partners do not drink at all. The national Violence Against Women Survey indicates that in one half of all violent partnerships, the perpetrator was drinking before an assault (Statistics Canada, 1993). Women whose partners frequently consumed five or more drinks at one time were at six times the risk of violence compared to those whose partners never drank.

The victim may also have a substance abuse problem. Although this may have pre-dated the violent relationship, it may be linked to the man's violence and abuse. He may pressure his partner to drink or use drugs or she may use drugs or alcohol as a means to numb the physical and emotional pain she experiences as a result of ongoing abuse. Women in these situations are especially vulnerable to abusing prescription drugs. She may receive these from a physician who is treating her for depression or anxiety caused by the violence she is experiencing at home. If she is abusing drugs or alcohol, it may leave her more vulnerable to his violence by compromising her ability to assess danger for herself and her children. Furthermore, some women prefer to believe that their partner is not violent but only has a drinking problem. It may be hard to face the fact that the man she loves, or at one time did love, is abusive. She will need information and support to help identify other forms of power and control that he may be using when he is not under the influence of alcohol.

### ***When is marriage counselling appropriate?***

Marriage or relationship counselling is based on the assumption that each person feels safe to say what she or he thinks and feels. There are documented cases of couples in marital therapy in which the man threatened or assaulted the woman after a session for saying something that he wanted kept secret, often his violence against her (Adams, 1988). If either

party feels coerced into attending marital therapy, the person should consider individual counselling. When a therapist hears of, or suspects, violence in the relationship, it is important to assess the level of risk by speaking with each partner separately. If there continues to be a risk of violence and controlling behaviours, the perpetrator should be referred to group or individual counselling focused on dealing with these issues before relationship counselling continues.

Some counsellors place value on keeping the marriage together over the well-being of the individuals in the marriage. The therapist and the husband might imply that, “for the sake of the children,” the woman should remain with her husband. Research shows that staying together “for the sake of the children” can be more detrimental than divorce if there is a significant degree of conflict between the parents. Amato and Keith (1991) reviewed a large number of studies examining the effects of divorce on children. Higher rates of problems were evident among children whose parents were in more conflict, whether the couple was still together or divorced, than among children of parents in less conflict.

### ***How will a man’s violence against his partner affect children in the home?***

It has been estimated that approximately 500,000 Canadian households experience marital violence each year and that anywhere from 40 to 80 percent of the children in these households witness this violence (Cooper, 1992). These children suffer a wide range of problems that involve either internalizing or externalizing feelings. Internalizing can include feelings of sadness and depression, hopelessness or powerlessness, withdrawal, somatic complaints, fear and extreme anxiety. Children who externalize their feelings exhibit aggression, cruelty to animals, destructiveness, suicide attempts and deficits in social competence. Girls tend to internalize feelings most frequently, while boys exhibit



both types of symptoms. As boys grow older, they may start to become aggressive with girlfriends as well as with their mothers and sisters.

In one out of three families in which the mother is assaulted, the children are also physically abused (Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, 1990). Research indicates that children who have been both abused and exposed to parental violence suffer the most severe reactions, followed by those who have only been abused, and then those who are only exposed to violence (Hughes and Parkington, 1989).

In some regions of Canada, there are programs for children who are exposed to abuse. Even if a specialized program does not exist, a skilled child therapist can help children cope with feelings related to the abuse and help them realize that they are not to blame.

### ***What safety issues should be addressed when there are children in the home?***

As the above research indicates, exposure to violence has a profound effect on children. In some provinces, exposure to violence in the home is included in child welfare legislation. In responding to the needs of a family in which woman abuse has occurred, it is important to keep in mind the needs of the children for safety and security. When professionals suspect child abuse, they have a legal duty to report to child protection authorities. The father's access may have to be restricted or supervised in situations where children have witnessed violence or been the victims of abuse. Professionals should be aware that children may need support and/or counselling after these visits. The woman may need extensive support, both legal and emotional, to resist allowing the father contact with the children when it is not in their best interest.

## ***What questions should be asked when choosing an appropriate program or counsellor?***

Several provinces now have a professional association of counsellors who work with assaultive men. These associations also have, in many cases, formal standards of practice. See the resource section at the end of this booklet for further information.

To help you identify some basic issues, obtain a copy of the standards from the association in your province or territory. These associations often maintain lists of member counsellors of programs who subscribe to the standards of practice. If there is no such group in your province or territory, important questions to ask prospective counsellors and programs include:

- Does the counsellor make the safety of women and children the first priority when working with violent men?
- Does the counsellor understand that couples' counselling is not appropriate until the threat of violence is removed and the woman feels safe to say what she thinks?
- Does the counsellor challenge men to examine and change their attitudes that support violence against women?
- Does the counsellor contact the abused partner to (1) make sure she has support and a safety plan, and (2) better understand the history of the violence and abuse that she has experienced to make an accurate assessment of the man's violence?

- Does the counsellor refuse to advocate for men in legal proceedings? *By working as the man's advocate, a counsellor may allow the man's needs for reconciliation with his family or a clean criminal record to become more important than the need for safety of the woman and children.*
- Does the counsellor contact the woman and the criminal justice system to report non-attendance if the man is attending under court order?
- Does the counsellor coordinate with those who provide services to assaulted women?

Ganley (1981) identifies seven important characteristics of effective treatment programs for men. These characteristics can help to identify a program that takes a safe and appropriate approach to stopping men's violence:

- a clear and consistent primary goal of ending violence
- a focus on the man taking responsibility for his behaviour
- the use of confrontation (keeping the man focused on his use of violence, power and control in the relationship)
- the use of group counselling for the abusive man
- a psycho-educational approach
- a structured format
- a directive approach by the counsellor.

## *Are programs for assaultive men effective?*

The answer depends on how one defines “effective.” Edelson surveyed published program evaluations and found definitions of effectiveness that range from “typically significant positive change” to a total transformation described as “men...prepared to take social action against the woman-battering culture” (Edelson, 1995, p. 1). A reasonable measure lies between these extremes. The Domestic Abuse Project in Minneapolis, Minnesota refers to a successful outcome as “the complete cessation of physical violence and threats of violence as reported by his woman partner” (Edelson, 1995, p. 3).

Rosenfeld reviewed 25 studies of court-ordered treatment programs and concluded that “the studies reviewed here cast doubt on the assumption that mandatory psychotherapeutic treatments are effective in reducing future incidents of violence between spouses” (Cooper, 1995, p. 32). On the other hand, Burns and Meredith, two Canadian researchers, were more positive. They stated that “these studies encourage the belief that it is possible to eliminate physical violence, or decrease all forms of abuse with treatment programs, at least over a period of time” (Cooper, 1995, p. 32). Gondolf looked at five reviews of 30 published single-site program evaluations and summarized the reviews as indicating “a cessation of violence in a substantial portion of program completers (60-80%) and a less impressive (but less well documented) reduction in threats and verbal abuse” (Gondolf, 1995, p. 33). These studies are encouraging, but some caution is advised. It has been found that attrition rates can be as high as 50 percent (Burns et al., 1991). This is one of many good arguments for court-mandated treatment of assaultive men, as fewer men drop out of programs when there is a risk of legal sanctions for non-compliance. Few studies have looked at long-term recidivism rates, which likely increase over time (Rondeau, 1994).

A program's effectiveness is not isolated from the community in which it exists. It is likely that the most effective programs are those that are part of a total community intervention response that includes arrest, active prosecution, victim services, community education, court-mandated treatment and criminal justice consequences for non-participation.

### ***Will the man need other kinds of counselling as well?***

Men who are violent and abusive in their relationships have the same variety of problems that non-violent men do. Some men will benefit from individual therapy as well as group therapy. Before embarking on counselling for their assaultive behaviour, some men will require substance abuse counselling first. During group counselling, traumatic childhood issues may arise and the men may require individual counselling as well. Men who suffer from a mental illness will require psychiatric assessment and treatment for the mental illness, in addition to group counselling for violence. When the abusive and controlling behaviour has stopped and the woman feels safe, the two may wish to participate in relationship counselling.

Men who are veterans or immigrants from war-torn countries may need additional help with issues related to torture or other experiences that may have produced post-traumatic stress disorder.

### ***Can any man who has been violent with his partner be helped by these programs?***

Responsible programs screen out men who are not likely to benefit. Criteria for exclusion may include the following: active and untreated substance abuse problems, severe mental illness, high lethality, extreme denial, and brain injury. Entering a group therapy program can increase risk in some

cases, as some men meet any challenge with violence or intimidation. Counselling programs should not be a substitute for jail. Men who have spent some time in jail for assaulting their partner often report that the experience of going to jail helped them stop and think twice about using violence again.

### ***Are counselling programs for assaultive men the same as anger management?***

Although anger management skills are taught in most counselling programs, they are not the same. Anger management can be described as focusing on “three main areas: (1) stress management and relaxation training, (2) identification of emotions and cognitive restructuring, and (3) interpersonal skills development” (Stordeur and Stille, 1989, p. 58). Anger management can help a man to stop his violence and recognize that he can control his anger and be responsible for his behaviour. However, counselling that focuses mainly on anger management misses the point that violence may only be resorted to by a man when other techniques to maintain control over his partner have not been effective. Furthermore, many men feel just as angry with others in their lives but do not “lose control” and become violent. It is important for counselling programs to assist men in confronting the attitudes about women that make her feelings, needs and ideas less important than his. The Victoria Family Violence Project suggests that anger is often the result of a man feeling that (1) his partner is responsible for his happiness, (2) she owes him sex because she is his wife, and (3) she will be unfaithful if not watched.

## ***Are there culturally specific programs for assaultive men?***

One example of culturally specific programs are those led by Aboriginal people. These programs often stress the need to understand the violence of an Aboriginal man in the context of “colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide” (The Aboriginal Family Healing Joint Steering Committee, 1993, p. 10). Culturally appropriate programs seek to heal the man within his community.

Some ethnic communities run their own programs that address culturally specific conditions contributing to violence and allow men to express themselves in their own language. These programs should be accessed whenever possible. Programs for specific ethnic communities will address the same core issues as programs for the dominant culture, but will present these in culturally sensitive ways. When men of visible and ethnic minorities enter mainstream programs for assaultive men, it is important that counsellors are aware of the impact that immigration, extended family issues and differing beliefs, attitudes and values have upon these clients.

## ***What will it cost?***

Program costs will vary. Some are totally subsidized by the provincial or territorial government; others require individual payment. Many programs have a sliding fee scale based on the client's income and ability to pay.



## Answers to the Common Questions That Women Ask

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### *How can she get her partner to attend a program?*

Men generally attend and complete a program either because they are required by court order or because their partner has indicated that reconciliation is not possible unless he attends and completes a counselling program. It is important for the victim to realize that the problem is the man's, that it is his responsibility, and that ultimately she cannot "fix" the problem for him. The woman's efforts are best used in looking after her needs and those of her children.

### *What should she expect during her partner's counselling?*

The man's counsellor or another staff person from his program should be in touch with the partner of an abusive man. Initially, the practitioner will want to talk to her about the relationship and the history and nature of the violence and abuse. At this time, she should be given information about formulating a safety plan, if she does not already have one. She should be referred to counselling, support, and legal services for herself and her children. Periodically, she should be contacted to ascertain whether there has been any recurrence of violence or threats. Without this type of follow-up, there is no mechanism by which to gauge the effectiveness of the program. Every woman should know that she has a right to her privacy and may, at any time, refuse to respond to requests of information by the program. If she chooses, the woman may be apprised of her partner's attendance, the length and content of the program, but not the details of the discussions that take place during her partner's counselling. Some communities will not have programs for



assaultive men but will have counsellors who provide standard counselling services only to individuals. The woman has the right to expect the above basic information from any counsellor.

### ***How can she tell if her partner is benefitting from the program?***

A change in a violent man's behaviour is dependent on whether he acknowledges his violence and takes responsibility for ending it. Simply because a man has begun counselling for his violence, a woman should not feel obliged to stay in the relationship. The woman should be cautioned that there is no guarantee he will stop being abusive. She should not make his attendance at counselling her safety plan. It is not uncommon for men to begin counselling simply and primarily as a strategy to persuade the woman to return or keep her from leaving. Once this goal is achieved, a man may drop out of counselling before he has truly acknowledged his responsibility for the violence and taken any steps to change his patterns.

Counselling is not an "instant fix." However, his use of physical violence and threats should stop immediately. If not, the degree of his commitment to change may be questionable. A woman should anticipate that he will begin to remove himself from the home or take "time-outs" when he starts to get angry, and that he will stop other abusive, intimidating and controlling behaviours. In time, he should be able to listen to her concerns and demonstrate respect for her as an individual with needs and wants which are different from his own. Women should be cautioned that some men may stop violent or threatening behaviours that could have legal consequences but escalate other controlling or manipulative tactics to maintain a position of domination in the relationship.

### ***What should she do if he continues to abuse her while he is in counselling?***

First, she should take any actions to protect herself and her children which may include calling the police, leaving, etc. Second, she should let his counsellor know what has happened. She has the right to expect that what she says to a counsellor will be confidential unless her children are at risk or have been abused. It is in her best interest to clarify the limits of confidentiality with her partner's counsellor before giving any information.

### ***Should she reconcile with him because he is attending counselling?***

A man's attending counselling is not a guarantee that he will stop his use of violence and controlling behaviours. We stress that she should not use his participation in group or individual counselling as a safety plan. If she would like to reunite but does not feel entirely safe, a graduated reconciliation, starting with visits in a public place, will give her time to see if he can respect her and treat her as an equal. As she finds that he respects her feelings and boundaries, she can gradually increase her time with him. Some men will pressure her to get back together by saying, "I'm going to counselling like you wanted. Isn't it time you did your part by trusting me again?" Some men are especially generous with gifts and romantic dinners. These behaviours may be part of what Lenore Walker identified as the cycle of violence. This cycle involves three phases that characterize many violent relationships: the tension-building phase, the violent behaviour, and the "honeymoon" or loving contrition phase (Walker, 1993). If the man has not taken responsibility for his abusive behaviour and started to change the attitudes that support his use of control, then he is nearly certain to return to violence in the future, regardless of how remorseful and loving he may appear when he is asking for her return.

## ***What should she do while he is in the group? Should she seek counselling?***

Underneath a thin veneer of normalcy, women who have been victims of violence often feel isolated, confused and powerless, and suffer from low self-esteem. Supportive counselling by a woman-centred agency or counsellor experienced in working with assaulted women can help the victim understand that the violence is not her fault. It can help her decide how she can take steps to protect herself and her children and what legal means are available to her. Because a man has completed a counselling program, it does not mean that she “owes” him reconciliation. Pressures to reunite, in the form of promises to change, gifts and tears, threats over child custody or support, and demands to accept his apology, are examples of his continued abuse and attempts to exert control over her life.

## ***What if counselling does not help?***

Even though there are groups for assaultive men in every major Canadian city and in many rural areas, not all men can or will change their violent and abusive behaviour. A woman may want the counsellor to tell her if her partner is safe to live with again, yet she is really the best judge of her own safety. Some men make good use of a group program and can become respectful and caring partners. Others may appear to learn and participate in the group, but maintain a domineering approach to their partner and children in the home. Even if the counselling appears to have helped the man, it is still important to provide the woman with support and information about a safety plan, legal means (such as restraining orders or Peace Bonds) and where to go for counselling for herself and her children.

***If he is attending a program as one condition of a court order, what will happen if he does not attend?***

His probation officer can recommend to the Crown prosecutor that he be charged with a breach of the terms of his probation. If the Crown charges the man and he is found guilty, the consequences are determined by the judge. These will vary from one jurisdiction to another. A judge may send the man to jail, order a fine or community service, or extend the probationary period.



## Answers to the Common Questions That Men Ask

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### *If she is violent too, why doesn't she have to go for counselling?*

This question is usually asked in the form of a complaint by a man who is required, by court order, to attend a group for assaultive men. This is one way that he blames his partner for his violence and avoids taking responsibility for his own behaviour. It may be useful to ask this man, "Who is most afraid of whom and who could do the most damage in a physical fight?" The majority of men will agree that their partner is most afraid of them and they could do the most damage to her.

When women are violent toward their partners, it is often self-defence. In some cases, the woman is the one to initiate and sustain the violence. Although there is an ongoing debate over the extent to which women use violence in relationships, many more women are seriously harmed and killed by their spouse than are men. In British Columbia, the Policy on Violence Against Women in Relationships is intended to cover "vulnerable males" as well as the assault of women (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of the Attorney General, 1996).

### *If this is the first and only incident of violence, is it appropriate for him to be in a group of "Wife-Beaters?"*

It is important to know who says this is the first incident. Men commonly minimize the frequency and severity of violence and abuse. Women may do so as well, unable to acknowledge the frequency and severity of the abuse they live with, or in response to his demands to keep it a secret. It is important to realize that physical violence is just one form of power and

control and that financial abuse, psychological abuse, intimidation, isolation, sexual pressure and sexual assault can have an equally damaging impact on the victim. For these reasons, even a man who has truly used physical violence for the first time should receive counselling that focuses on his use of power and control in his relationship.

### ***What will happen in the groups?***

Some groups have an educational and skill-based focus. Skills that may be taught in these groups include: 1) time-outs, 2) anger control techniques, 3) relaxation exercises and 4) communication and healthy relationship skills. Education may focus on the use of power and control in relationships, gender roles and the sexist structure and culture of society. Other groups are more interactive and process-focused. Men are asked to talk honestly about themselves and to confront their use of violence and abuse in relationships. Most programs use a combination of education, skill development, confrontation and support. Although many men are angry when required to attend a group, the majority who finish such a program consider it beneficial.

### ***What kind of men come to a group?***

Men from all occupations, ethnic groups, ages and income levels attend programs for assaultive men, discovering that they share similar difficulties.

### ***Will he need to take medication?***

There is no pill that stops violence and the use of power and control. Some men who are violent may also have a mental illness that requires medication. However, there is no higher level of violence among the mentally ill than in the general population. In a small number of cases, violence can be caused or exacerbated by organic problems that require medical assessment and intervention.

## ***Is individual therapy enough?***

Individual psychotherapy can help an assaultive man explore issues from his past, examine attitudes that contribute to his domination of women, and learn skills to establish healthy relationships. However, group therapy with other men who share the same problems can reduce isolation, denial and minimization and provide a positive experience of real peer support. Men who are hostile and resistant to the idea of going to a group for “wife-beaters” will often open up more quickly and begin to take responsibility for their actions when they interact with a group of men who have similar problems. Other group members can often be more effective at confronting men than can a counsellor. By attending group counselling, men can learn different ways of relating to other men, including honestly discussing feelings and issues and showing respect when discussing women, rather than stereotyping them. In communities where appropriate group therapy for assaultive men is not available, individual therapy with a professional with the appropriate knowledge and skill is the next best alternative.

## ***How long will he have to go to counselling?***

The majority of programs run from three to six months. Just because a man has completed a program of any length is no guarantee that he is safe and respectful in his relationships with women. For this reason, several programs have a policy of expelling men who either do not participate or actively maintain a closed and hostile attitude. No number of sessions will help change a man who continues to blame his partner and/or the criminal justice system for his behaviour or who refuses to make a commitment to change. When a man realizes that improving his ways of relating to everyone in his life is a life-long process, he is on his way.

# Conclusion

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Violence against women in relationships is defined as physical or sexual assault, or threat of assault. Other behaviours such as psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse or spiritual abuse form part of a continuum of the power and control that men may use against their partners. Counselling for assaultive men can be effective in ending men's violence and threats of violence, but not in all cases. Appropriate intervention with assaultive men will make the safety of women and children the number one priority. Counselling that focuses on men stopping their violence, taking responsibility for their behaviour and changing attitudes that support control of women is just one component of community intervention to stop men's violence. Victim services, women's shelters, programs for children who are exposed to violence, arrest, active prosecution, community education, court-mandated treatment and incarceration of men who are unwilling to change their criminal behaviour can all work together as a complete community response to ending men's violence against women.

**For a list of programs for assaultive men see:**

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. *Canada's Treatment Programs for Men Who Abuse their Partners*. Ottawa: Health Canada, 1998



# Provincial and Territorial Contacts: Programs for Abusive Men

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## **Alberta**

Director of Office of Prevention of Family Violence,  
Department of Family and Social Services, 11th Floor,  
7th Street Plaza, 10030 107th Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4  
phone 403-427-7599, fax 427-2039

## **British Columbia**

Policy Analyst, Corrections Branch, Ministry of Attorney  
General, P.O. Box 9278, Station Provincial Government,  
Victoria, BC V8W 9J7  
phone 250-356-8732

## **Manitoba**

Director of Family Violence Prevention Branch, Ministry of  
Family Services, 1430-405 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, MB  
R3C 3L6  
phone 204-945-7259

## **New Brunswick**

Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence,  
Department of Health and Community Services,  
P.O. Box 5100, Fredericton, NB E3B 5G8  
phone 506-457-4916, fax 453-2082

## **Newfoundland**

Director of Corrections and Community Services,  
Department of Justice, St. Johns NF  
phone 709-729-3880, fax 729-4069

## **Northwest Territories**

Director of Community Justice, Department of Justice,  
Government of NWT, P.O. Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT  
X1A 2L9  
phone 867-873-7002, fax 873-0299

## **Nova Scotia**

Director of Community Outreach Services, Department of  
Community Services, P.O. Box 696, Halifax, NS B3J 2T7

phone 902-424-5099, fax 424-0708

## **Ontario**

Victims Services Unit, Policy Division, Ministry of the  
Solicitor General and Corrections, 2 Carlton Street, #1817,  
Toronto, ON M5B 1J3

phone 416-325-3266, fax 325-3196

## **Prince Edward Island**

Manager, Probation and Family Court Services,  
Community Affairs and Attorney General,  
42 Great George Street, Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7N8

phone 902-368-4697, fax 368-5295

## **Québec**

Soutien aux organismes communautaires, Ministère de la  
Santé et des Services sociaux, Gouvernement du Québec

phone 514-759-4445

## **Saskatchewan**

Saskatchewan Health, Community Care Branch,  
3475 Albert Street, Regina, SK S4S 6X6

phone 306-787-3862, fax 787-7095

## **Yukon**

Coordinator, Assaultive Husbands Program, Family  
Violence Prevention Unit, Department of Justice,  
P.O. Box 2703, Whitehorse, YT Y1A 2C6

phone 403-667-3581, fax 393-6240

# Provincial Associations for Counsellors of Assaultive Men

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## British Columbia

British Columbia Association of Counsellors of Abusive Men  
2541 Empire Street, Victoria, BC V8T 3M3  
phone 250-380-1955, fax 385-1946

## Quebec

Association des ressources intervenant auprès des hommes violents (ARIHV), 216 Beaudry Nord, Bureau 104 Joliette, QC J6E 6A6  
phone 450-759-7799, fax 450-759-4445

## Suggested Readings

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*Accountability: Program Standards for Batterer Intervention Services*, by Barbara J. Hart, Reading, Penn.: Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1992.

*Confronting Abusive Beliefs: A Group Treatment Program for Men Who Abuse Their Partners*, by Mary N. Russell and Jobst Froberg, Vancouver: School of Social Work, University of British Columbia, 1994.

*The Domestic Assault of Women*, by Donald Dutton, Toronto: Allyn & Bacon Inc., 1988.

*Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model*, by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, New York: Springer Publishing Company Inc., 1993.

*Ending Men's Violence Against Their Partners: One Road to Peace*, by Richard A. Stordeur and Richard Stille, Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications Inc., 1989.

*Invitations to Responsibility*, by Alan Jenkins, Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1990.

*Learning to Live Without Violence: A Handbook for Men*, by Daniel Sonkin and Michael Durphy, Volcano, Calif.: Volcano Press, 1989.

*Men's Work: A Complete Counseling Plan for Breaking the Cycle of Male Violence*, by Paul Kivel, Center City, Minn.: Hazelden Education Materials, 1993.

*You Can Be Free: An Easy-to-Read Handbook for Abused Women*, by Ginny NiCarthy and Sue Davidson, Seattle: The Seal Press, 1989.

## Suggested Videos

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*The Crown Prince* (video cassette, 1988, 38 min.), National Film Board of Canada.

This dramatized film looks at the problem of violence against women in relationship from the perspective of the children, especially the problem of an adolescent male starting to mirror his father's behaviours and attitudes.

To purchase, contact: National Film Board of Canada, Sales and Customer Services, D-10, P.O. 6100, Station Centre-ville, Montreal, QC H3C 3H5

phone 1-800-267-7710, fax 514-283-7564, Website [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca)

*One Hit Leads to Another* (video cassette, 1990, 15 min.),  
Victoria Women's Transition House Society.

This dramatized video depicts scenes of partner assault and discusses the role of transition houses.

To purchase, contact: Kinetic Films, 511 Bloor Street West,  
2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1Y4

phone 1-800-263-6910, fax 416-538-9984, Website  
[www.kineticvideo.com](http://www.kineticvideo.com)

*Profile of an Assailant* (video cassette, 1992, 42 min.),  
Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

Interview with a batterer (assailant) discussing his arrest, conviction and process of change. Also included are accounts by six formerly battered women discussing the characteristics of a batterer.

To purchase, contact: Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention  
Project, 206 West 4th Street, Duluth, Minn., 55806

phone 218-722-2781, fax: 218-722-0779

*Seen But Not Heard* (video cassette, 1993, 30 min.), The  
B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses and Friday Street  
Productions Co.

A docu-drama for general audiences and those who work with children, abused women and assaultive men. It explores the many serious emotional and physical effects on children who witness violence in their homes. This video combines documentary interviews with dramatized scenes and focuses on the point of view of the child who witnesses violence.

To purchase, contact: Kinetic Films, 511 Bloor Street West,  
2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1Y4

phone 1-800-263-6910, fax: 416-538-9984, Website  
[www.kineticvideo.com](http://www.kineticvideo.com)

*Themes of Defence: Understanding Men Who Assault Their Partners* (video cassette, 1995, 60 min.), Dale Trimble and Bartlett-Lerose Productions.

Nine dramatic vignettes of abusive men trying to rationalize or deny their violent and abusive behaviour. Each scene is followed by a discussion with the author, Dale Trimble, who describes effective responses to each defence and discusses issues related to the safety of the victims.

To purchase, contact: B.C. Institute Against Family Violence, #551 – 409 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 1T2

phone 604-669-7055, fax 604-669-7054, Website  
[www.bcifv.org](http://www.bcifv.org)

*Time to Change: Treatment Options for Abusive Men* (video cassette, 1992, 26 min.), Victoria Family Violence Prevention Society and Hilary Jones-Farrow.

This dramatized sequel to “One Hit Leads to Another” discusses treatment programs using individual and group counselling to help men accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours and to help formulate non-violent approaches to conflict.

To purchase, contact: Kinetic Films, 511 Bloor Street West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1Y4

phone 1-800-263-6910, fax: 416-538-9984, Website  
[www.kineticvideo.com](http://www.kineticvideo.com)

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