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What is family violence?

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Family violence is any form of abuse or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have an intimate relationship. It is an abuse of power by one person to hurt and control someone who trusts and depends on them.

All family violence is wrong. Some of it is against the law.

Many terms with similar meanings

The different terms used for family violence can have slightly different meanings depending on where and how they are used, such as in a courtroom or a hospital. For example, **domestic violence** can sometimes mean family violence and sometimes it means intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence refers to physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse and can also be called **dating violence** between couples who are not married. The terms **violence against women** and **gender-based violence** are also used. **Child abuse** is sometimes called **child maltreatment or neglect**, and **elder abuse** is sometimes referred to as **neglect**.

Family violence affects Canadians in all types of families and relationships—no matter how old they are, where they live, or how much money, education or type of job they have. It can affect people of every race, religion and sexual orientation.

Violence can happen between anyone in a family or in a close intimate relationship (e.g., boyfriend, girlfriend or fiancée), including children, parents, grandparents, siblings, intimate partners and extended family—like uncles or step-parents. It can happen in opposite sex and same-sex couples.

Examples of family violence:

- child abuse, including neglect and childhood exposure to intimate partner violence
- intimate partner violence, including dating violence
- elder abuse and neglect
- early and forced marriage, and "honour"-related violence
- female genital mutilation

Some common forms of family violence include:

Physical abuse—physical injury or death of a family member or intimate partner caused when someone:

- pushes, shoves, hits, slaps or kicks
- pinches or punches
- strangles or chokes
- stabs or cuts
- shoots
- throws objects
- burns
- holds someone down for another person to assault

- locks someone in a room or ties them down

Sexual abuse—forced sexual activity on a family member or intimate partner, when someone:

- touches another in a sexual way without consent
- has any sexual activity without consent
- continues sexual activity when asked to stop
- forces another to commit unsafe or humiliating sexual acts

Sexual abuse can also happen in intimate partner relationships. Even if you are married or engaged, your partner cannot force you to have sex.

Children under the age of 16 cannot give informed consent, so any sexual contact between an adult and a child is a crime. Children under the age of 18 cannot legally give consent to sexual activity that exploits them. [Find more details.](#)

Emotional or psycho-social abuse—words or actions to control or frighten a family member or intimate partner, or destroy their self-respect, when someone:

- makes threats
- intimidates or bullies
- puts down, insults or calls a person names
- yells or criticizes all the time
- isolates a person from friends and family
- destroys belongings
- hurts pets

Financial abuse—control, or misuse of a family member's or intimate partner's money or property, when someone:

- takes another person's money or property without permission

- prevents a person from going to work or otherwise obtaining money or other resources
- withholds or limits money
- pressures a person to sign documents
- forces a person to sell things or change a will

Neglect—not meeting the basic needs to provide care for a dependent family member or intimate partner, when someone:

- does not provide proper food, warm clothing, health care, medication or appropriate hygiene
- does not protect another person from physical harm or provide proper supervision
- abandons another person

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