

# “Stay with them”

Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence  
Share Insights on How Friends and  
Family Can Help

Western



Centre for Research & Education on  
Violence Against Women & Children

LEARNING NETWORK

Canadian Domestic Homicide  
Prevention Initiative  
with Vulnerable  
Populations



[www.cdhipi.ca](http://www.cdhipi.ca)

# Introduction

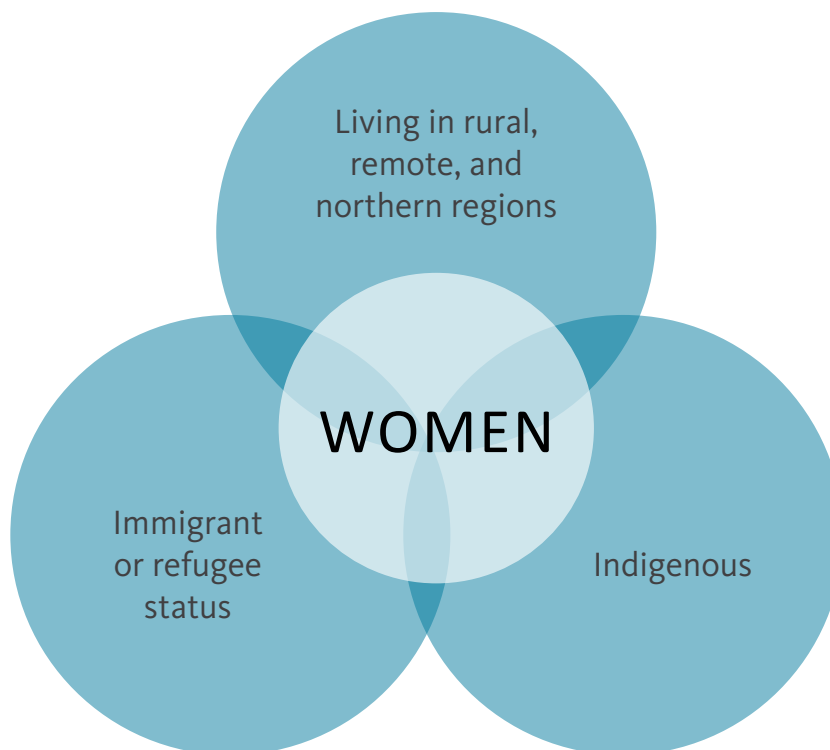
The Learning Network in partnership with the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPVP) is honoured to amplify the voices of survivors and share their advice to family and friends of those who are experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Each piece of advice is directly informed by what survivors shared, and quotes from survivors are included here.

We recognize that responses to IPV must be informed by survivors. We appreciate the bravery of survivors in sharing their declarations and continuing to advocate for change.

*“It’s like being a prisoner on a desert island and seeing a boat. And the boat comes really, really, really close to you but then it goes... And every time the boat gets really, really close to you, you try to think of a way of sending a signal. But you got to be careful because if you send a signal, he’s there watching you and he knows when you’re sending a signal.”*

More than 80 survivors across Canada shared their knowledge in interviews conducted as part of the CDHPVP. CDHPVP researchers interviewed women who had experienced IPV to learn from them how they managed the abuse and violence in their relationships, how they sought safety, and what advice they would give to others experiencing violence. The survivors were no longer in an abusive relationship, felt they were safe when they participated in the interview, and were no longer involved in any criminal proceedings.

**Women interviewed came from diverse communities and experiences including:**



The advice shared is broadly applicable to survivors of all gender identities although those interviewed exclusively identified as women. Sharing the voices of women survivors of IPV is important given the high rate at which women, especially marginalized women, face IPV and the barriers they encounter in seeking support. We recognize the necessity of and look forward to more efforts to center the voices of survivors of all identities.

**Please share this document widely and join us in preventing IPV and [intimate femicide](#).**



Website: <https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/lnandkh>

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CREVAWC>

*Open a space to talk about what is happening.*

*Stay with her and be patient.*

*Offer to help while following her lead and guidance.*

**Advice from Survivors  
to Family and Friends  
of Women Experiencing  
Intimate Partner Violence**

*Believe her!  
Tell her it is  
not her fault.*

*Listen and  
respond without  
pressuring or  
judging her.*

*Find organizations  
in your community  
who support people  
experiencing violence  
and seek their advice.*

*“Nice people can be abusive. It was her brother, and you don’t want to acknowledge that someone that you love or care about or is a family member can do those horrible, horrible things... I think you want to see him as the person that you know him as. But it doesn’t mean that you need to hate him or say he’s a horrible person. But it doesn’t help to allow him to continue abusive behaviours.”*

**Believe her!  
Tell her it is not her fault.**

*“To the friends and family – just stick by her. It’s not her fault.”*

*“What my mom could do and maybe what I was hoping she’d do is believe me by not minimizing my experience and just provide a listening ear.”*

*"If a friend told me they were in a similar situation I would say 'You don't have to admit anything to me, I'm not asking you to say anything, but if someone were to hit you or scream at you, I want you to know that that's never okay and that you can tell me.'"*

*"I think the main issue is to offer space. Once you've been on that side of it [experiencing abuse], you hear people ask: 'Tell me more about that? What do you mean he got mad and threw something? What happened?' Maybe ask open-ended questions that gives them the opportunity to talk about it [what happened], even though they may not think that it's abusive. Point out: you deserve better than that, it's not okay, and you don't have to tolerate that behavior."*

## Open a space to talk about what is happening

*"If they know that somebody's in a domestic violence relationship... they should intervene at least quietly by privately asking if that person is okay. And if not, try to offer support to them... try to get them out of that house or the other person out of the house."*

*"They knew – his friends said what he was doing, and they said they heard me crying in the background telling him to stop. They could have stopped by. [It] is a very small town, they know when someone is gone and not only that, they could have saw me walking down the side of the road and stopped by and offered me some resources and not tried to intimidate me."*



*“Not giving too much advice, as much as it is good in a way that it gives structure. Sometimes I’m already in fight or flight mode. I’m already in attack mode. I’m nervous and anxious. So sometimes, just holding that space is so important. The person is not in my shoes to understand what it is that I’m doing so [they should] hold space and make sure I feel safe. Safety is a big one.”*

Listen and respond without pressuring or judging her

*“It’s so easy to sit back and pass judgement on other people but the reality of it is that this woman – even though she’s being abused – really loves the man, which is so difficult.”*

*“I needed somebody that I could trust that was going to support me and not criticize me for what I was thinking, what I was doing to help myself. Gentle acknowledgements like you can go over to the domestic violence centre; you know I’m always here; or yes, you could hide your car in my garage. [Acknowledgements] without the criticism of: ‘What are you going to do about this? How long is this going to go on for?’”*

*“Just do what the abused person is saying. If the abused person was saying do not phone me at this time or do not text me or don’t call the police or stop posting pictures of me on [social media], do what they say.”*

*“Sometimes the other person can help to do very practical stuff that you might not think of doing because you’re in the situation. If you need to go to the police and file a restraining order or something, as a friend you can recall things – like take screenshots of text messages, record phone conversations, whatever evidence they can show to the police.”*

**Offer to help while following her lead and guidance**

*“Bullying a bully isn’t going to work either. I couldn’t afford to have people that would say things like ‘I’ll just kick his ass’ or ‘I’ll just have a chat with him’ or... don’t do that. Please don’t say that because he’s not going to do anything to you; that plays out badly for me.”*

*“People... especially somebody that cares about you, wants to protect you... but it can’t just be a spur of the moment thing. I kept saying to my friends, you can’t be one more thing I have to manage. I have enough right now with him. He’s all I could manage. And I can’t now afford to manage you.”*



*“Remember it’s much more difficult for this woman because she’s emotionally involved. She loves him. Even though you’re giving really good advice, it might be difficult for her to take it, because it’s not black or white for her. There are so many grey areas and for a third party it’s black and white—you either leave and live in peace or stay and be abused. It’s so clear for someone on the outside. But for someone on the inside, she’s going to miss him. I would just say to a third party, be forth right, be honest but also know that it’s not going to be so easy as just packing a suitcase and leaving, right? There’s a lot of emotions involved.”*

## Stay with her and be patient

*“Offer emotional support and keep checking on that person because for me, it took a long time to heal from these relationships.”*

*“Be ready for her to not listen to you. I wanted to stay in that relationship. I was getting something out of it that I kept going back for even if it was warped. She may not listen, but as long as you’re supportive and listen and have resources available, you’re doing a good thing.”*

*“Stay with them as long as you can just to ensure their safety and to offer that emotional support and to reassure them.”*

*"Back then I thought 'oh they must not like me, it must be because of this and that.' But it was because they were scared of him and they didn't want anything to do with me because they didn't want to be involved in any wrath that he gave out. I didn't realize that at the time but I think everyone was just quite scared of him. So, I guess that puts people in an uncomfortable situation but there would have been, you know, a professional that they could have talked to about it."*

Find organizations in your community who support people experiencing violence and seek their advice

*"Maybe they can find something, gather resources pertaining to a particular person. Because it's going to be really hard for them to do it themselves without getting caught."*

*"Educate yourself on the resources, reach out yourself. There are so many resources you can call and say, 'I have a friend who's in an abusive relationship, she's talking to me and I want to give the best information possible.'"*

# Resources

## Recognizing different forms of violence

### [What is Woman Abuse? – Luke’s Place](#)

This list highlights the most common tactics of abuse in intimate relationships.

### [Warning Signs of High Risk \(Risk Factors for When Women are Killed\) – Neighbors, Friends & Families: Immigrant and Refugee Communities](#)

The 10 most common risk factors for lethality within a relationship are shared based on the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of Ontario 2016 report.

## Identifying warning signs

### [iDetermine – Led by The Redwood](#)

Do you feel fearful or unsafe of a current or ex-partner? Are you worried that your relationship is not healthy? If your relationship does not feel right, you may be confused about what to do. This website can help you determine your next steps.

### [Taking Care of Each Other’s Spirit- Kanawayhitowin](#)

The Kanawayhitowin initiative supports the end of violence against Indigenous women by raising awareness of the signs of abuse in communities.

## Making a safety plan

### [Individualized Safety Plan: A Step-By-Step Course of Action – WomenatthecentrE](#)

This safety plan was developed by and for survivors of interpersonal violence. It outlines various safety strategies that can potentially increase survivor safety and/or better prepare survivors in the event that violence continues or escalates.

### [Creating a Safety Plan – Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse](#)

This booklet was put together by women who have survived abuse. They offer their guidance on creating an emergency escape plan, creating a safer environment, and safety planning with children. It is available in 14 languages.

### [You Are Not Alone: A Toolkit for Aboriginal Women Escaping Domestic Violence – Native Women’s Association of Canada](#)

This toolkit helps survivors to recognize their inner strength and to see that, with the help and support of those people and organizations who care about and love them, they can stand strong and build a better future for themselves and their children.

## Supporting Friends

### [How Can I Help My Friend? – Battered Women’s Support Services](#)

This resource shares tips on helping a friend who may be experiencing intimate partner violence including increasing your knowledge and taking care of yourself.

# Support

## **Assaulted Women's Helpline (24/7)**

With assistance in English and over 200 other languages.

1-866-863-0511

TTY: 1-866-863-7868

[www.awhl.org](http://www.awhl.org)

## **Femaide for Francophone Services (24/7)**

1-877-femaide (336-2433)

TTY: 1-866-860-7082

[www.femaide.ca](http://www.femaide.ca)

## **Good2Talk Line for Post-Secondary Students (24/7)**

1-866-925-5454

[www.good2talk.ca](http://www.good2talk.ca)

## **Kids Help Phone (24/7)**

1-800-668-6868

Chat

[kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

## **Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line (Sunday to Friday from 4:00 pm to 9:30 pm ET)**

1-800-268-9688

Text: 647-694-4275

Chat with Peer Support Volunteer

[youthline.ca](http://youthline.ca)

## **Nisa Helpline (Monday to Friday 10:00 am to 10:00 pm ET)**

Nisa Helpline is a peer-to-peer counselling helpline available to Muslim women of all ages.

1-888-315-NISA (6472)

[nisahelpline.com](http://nisahelpline.com)

## **Shelter Safe (24/7)**

Online map that will let you know where the closest shelter is in your community.

[sheltersafe.ca](http://sheltersafe.ca)

## **Support Service for Male Survivors of Sexual Assault (24/7)**

1-888-887-0015

[www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/male\\_support\\_services](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/male_support_services)

## **Talk4Healing (24/7)**

A culturally grounded, fully confidential helpline for Indigenous women available in 14 languages across Ontario.

1-855-554-HEAL

Chat

[talk4healing.com](http://talk4healing.com)

## **Trans Lifeline (24/7)**

Hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people.

1-877-330-6366

[www.translifeline.org](http://www.translifeline.org)