

2024
EDITION

SOS-info

Everything you need to know
about intimate partner violence...
or almost

Tools for victim-survivors and their allies

2024 edition

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SOS-info : everything you need to know about intimate violence... or almost

SOS violence conjugale, Montreal

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) always involves a potential for danger and a high degree of powerlessness for all persons involved. Because of this complexity, we are frequently called upon to answer questions about IPV by family members, interveners, journalists, decision-makers and victims-survivors themselves.

For the past few years, SOS violence conjugale has been developing a series of articles to answer these frequently asked questions in a simple and concise manner. This document is designed so that each article can be printed and shared individually if needed.

The articles are divided into three main sections:

Understanding: This section provides information on the various components of IPV: its dynamics, violent behaviours, the power relationship and the stakes involved for victim-survivors.

Supporting victim-survivors: This section gives tools and ideas to know what to do and say and what to avoid when wanting to help someone or to intervene in a context of IPV.

Safety first: This section helps to develop strategies to promote safety for victim-survivors and for their children.

A note before we begin

Although IPV also affects some men, gays and lesbians as well as people from all gender identities, it still predominantly affects women in heterosexual relationships. The texts presented in this document are as gender neutral as possible, but some expressions or formulations may still “fit” better to women. Every notion

presented in this document can be applied to both female and male victims, cisgender or transgender, and regardless of the gender of their aggressor or the form of the intimate relationship. SOS violence conjugale’s services are also available to all people affected by IPV.

Mission statement

SOS violence conjugale is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help ensure the safety of victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) and that of their children throughout Quebec, by offering free, bilingual, anonymous and confidential referral services. Our services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provide direct access to information, support or shelter.

Contacting SOS violence conjugale allows a person to find resources to be heard, defended, protected and understood. Whether someone was born here or not and regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation or physical condition, SOS violence conjugale is equipped to find the best answers to all needs related to IPV.

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Explore your
situation

Is there control in my relationship?



Ten questions to identify if different forms of control are present in your relationship with your partner or ex-partner.

- To explore your situation objectively
- To put words on your reality
- To help someone take a step back

Imagine a situation where...

For the past few months, your partner has been participating in an activity that is doing them a lot of good. You accompany them a few times, but you soon realize that you don't wish to continue participating in this activity.

Based on your experience with your partner...

UNLIKELY
SLIGHTLY LIKELY
MODERATELY LIKELY
VERY LIKELY

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you told them you no longer want to accompany them ?

You meet someone you knew back in high school by chance. This person invites you to go for coffee to catch up. You have nothing on your schedule for the next few hours and your partner is at a friend's house.

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you went for coffee with this person?

Imagine a situation where...

Your boss offers you a management position that you had hoped for since you started working at this job. With this promotion, you will get a very significant pay raise and much more interesting duties. There will be no change to your schedule or other working conditions.

You receive a message from your child's school asking you to intervene because your child has been rude to their teacher. Your partner is away on business overnight and you cannot contact them.

Your partner wants access to your social media accounts because that's how they operated in their previous relationship. You have nothing to hide, but you prefer not to share access to your accounts.

Your mother invites you over for dinner and says she wants to talk to you alone. Your partner would have liked to go with you. You choose to respect your mother's request and to go alone.

Based on your experience with your partner...

UNLIKELY
SLIGHTLY
LIKELY
MODERATELY
LIKELY
VERY
LIKELY

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you accepted this promotion?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you decided not to wait for them and you intervene with your child by yourself?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you chose not to share your passwords?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you decided to go alone?

Imagine a situation where...

It's your office party tonight! You are getting ready when your partner expresses doubts about your choice of outfit. You listen to their opinion, but choose to wear the original outfit you had selected.

You suffer from a health problem that causes you a lot of discomfort. Following your research and the advice of various people, you choose a treatment. Your partner believes that another course of treatment would be preferable.

Your childhood friends want to organize a reunion weekend at a lake house. You don't have children and you're available on the dates suggested. You decide to start planning this activity with your friends.

You have a disagreement with your partner about which party should win the next election. You discuss this throughout the election campaign and when the time comes, you choose to vote according to your initial preference.

Based on your experience with your partner...

UNLIKELY
SLIGHTLY
LIKELY
MODERATELY
LIKELY
VERY
LIKELY

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you chose not to change your outfit?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly if you chose to follow the treatment that you initially selected?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly when you tell them about these plans?

How likely is it that your partner would react badly when you inform them that you did not vote for the same party as they did?

Have you identified some control in your relationship?

In a healthy relationship, each partner is free to exercise power over their own life and decisions, in comfort and security. Of course, some decisions concern both partners (the choice of a couple's activity, an apartment, a vacation spot, etc.), and we then have a duty to take the other's point of view into account and to communicate our own point of view with respect.

On the other hand, some decisions concern only one member of the couple. This is the case of the situations presented in this exercise. In a healthy relationship, we should be able to feel comfortable making these decisions without feeling the pressure that inevitably comes with anticipating a negative reaction from a partner.

If you've identified that your partner is likely to react negatively in some of the situations presented above, it's possible that a dynamic of control is present in your relationship, and that this is having a negative impact on your sense of freedom.

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Are there violent behaviours in my relationship?



Twenty five questions to identify if different forms of intimate partner violence are present in your relationship with your partner or ex-partner.

- To explore your situation objectively
- To put words on your reality
- To help someone take a step back

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Hold you responsible for the problems in the relationship or have a sanctimonious attitude towards you.

“If you kept your mouth shut, this never would have happened!”

“What about you? You’re beyond reproach? Look at yourself before judging others!”

“You seem to be doing this deliberately to make me lose my temper!”

“You’ve been completely unreasonable ever since we separated!”

Reject your perceptions or question your vision of reality or your mental health.

“That is NOT how it happened. You’re mixed up!”

“I worry about how you process things in your head...”

“You’re out of touch with reality.”

“You’re crazy...”

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Reflect a negative image of you, make fun of your decisions, or insult you.

"I can't believe that you really think that..."

"Lucky for you I am a patient person... because you sure aren't quick-witted!"

"Without me, you're nothing."

"Intelligence isn't your strong point, is it?"

Threaten (openly or tacitly) to leave you, to cheat on you or to betray you.

"I'm not sure our relationship will last if things continue this way..."

"If I cheat on you, it'll be your fault!"

Raise their voice or use swear words in order to impose their will.

"Don't tell me what tone of voice to use!"

"DAMN, you get on my nerves!"

Trigger negative emotions in you (anger, fear, sadness, shame, etc.) to then blame you for how you feel.

"You freak out over nothing!"

"Why are you crying again!"

"I can't take your hysterics anymore!"

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Threaten (openly or tacitly) to hurt you, to kill you or to commit suicide.

"You have no idea what I am capable of..."

"If you leave me, you'll have my death on your conscience."

"If you think I wouldn't dare let you die there you are very much mistaken! Anyway you're sick, nobody will suspect me!"

Express a negative opinion about your friends or relatives, or make it hard for you to be in contact with them.

"Messages from your mom? I don't recall. Anyway, I'm not your secretary!"

"Your friendship with that girl is so weird, it's like she's your guru... she fills your head with her ideas and you have no criticism"

"You'll have to choose: them or me."

Present a negative image of your behaviours or of your mental health to others.

"Be careful. She is a liar..."

"You really have a mental problem. In fact, your sister agrees with me."

"I know she is blind but she really asks too much of me, I think it is pure laziness on her part..."

Force you to follow certain spiritual or religious practices or question your beliefs or values.

"You really need to sort out your priorities..."

"That church is a farce ! Don't you ever go back !"

"From now on, our family will respect the doctrine I have chosen, in the way I have chosen."

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Exert disproportionate power over the family's spending and financial management.

"It's as though you never learned to manage money. It's a good thing I'm here."

"I want receipts for ANY AND ALL purchases you make with the support payments that I give you..."

"If you really loved me and wanted to help me, you'd agree to ask for a personal loan."

Control your professional choices or use financial arguments to influence your decisions about the relationship.

"I don't think that job is right for you. I wouldn't apply if I were you."

"You're going to have to find a way to cut your hours or change jobs, because this isn't working out for our family."

"You're never going to get a single CENT from me, ever!"

"You know they will never hire a cripple ! "

Read your private messages without your consent or force you to share your passwords or geolocation with them.

"The fact that I read your texts shouldn't stress you out! Do you have something to hide?"

"Yes, I put a GPS tracking app on your cell... you aren't giving me any options, I can't trust you anymore!"

Put pressure on you to agree to certain sexual practices that you dislike or are not interested in.

"Come on! Everybody does it!"

"You only think of yourself and your damn boundaries. You're so self-centred, I can't believe it!"

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Put pressure on you or physically force you to have sex.

“Do what I say or things are going to get messy for you.”

“You weren’t really sleeping. I could tell that you wanted it!”

“You knew I had needs when we started going out!”

“It’s the least you can do, with everything that I have to do to help you !”

Share (or threaten to share) private images of you without your consent.

“I took that photo! I can do anything I want with it!”

“Don’t forget that I have a very, VERY interesting video to show everybody.”

Use (or threaten to use) violence against a child (or a beloved pet) to force you into something, to seek revenge or to punish you.

“If you leave, I’ll take off with the kids and you’ll never see them again.”

“I gave you that dog, I can take it back anytime...”

“I can’t stand listening to that child cry anymore. You need to make him stop crying or I’ll take care of it.”

“No one will ever believe that you can care for our children with your handicap. Leaving me means losing them !”

Harass you, follow you, spy on you, show up at your place of work uninvited.

“It just happened that I was there! You’re imputing motives!”

“Answer me or I’m coming over there and you won’t like it!”

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Lie to (or threaten to lie to) police officers or social workers or legal advocates.

“If you leave, you’ll see that I also have a lot of stories to tell about you!”

“Nobody is going to believe you because I have plenty of people willing to testify for me.”

Fail to comply with court orders or judgments.

“If you don’t say anything about my being here, no one will know.”

“You think a judge can tell me what to do? Just watch—you haven’t heard the last of me!”

Clench or pound their fists or stamp the floor in anger.

“I’m seriously about to lose it.”

“Lucky for you, I have self-control!”

Break or throw objects, hit walls or drive dangerously in your presence.

“Look at what you made me do!”

“It was the wall or your face.”

“If you keep annoying me, I’m going to have an accident and it will be your fault!!!”

Does your partner or ex-partner...

YES

NO

Physically restrain you, keep you from going out or block access to the exit.

"I'm talking to you and you take off!"

"Stay right where you are. I'm not done."

"See how far you'll go without your chair's battery !"

"I can't trust you so I don't want you to go out without me anymore."

Bite you, pinch you, pull your hair, slap you, hit you or push you.

"You make my blood boil!"

"You really asked for it this time!"

Choke you, strangle you or otherwise injure you.

"I lost my temper. You push me over the edge!"

"I never reacted this way before I met you."

Have you identified some violent behaviours in your relationship?

Identifying certain violent behaviours in one's relationship does not mean that a dynamic of intimate partner violence is always present. However, it is a very important indicator, especially if more than one are identified, if they are used repeatedly or if they present a greater degree of intensity or risk.

In order to get a clearer picture, it can be very helpful to take a moment to discuss your situation with a counsellor who can help you identify your situation and offer you support, anonymously and confidentially.

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Understanding



Intimate partner violence, conjugal violence, domestic violence... what are we talking about ?

Intimate partner violence (aka conjugal violence or domestic violence) refers to situations where a partner uses different kinds of violent behaviours to establish power and control over the other partner's life and choices. It can occur in any type of intimate relationship (married, common law, boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.), regardless of sexual orientation or age. It can affect women or men, although women are still more often victimized by this particular form of interpersonal violence.



Intimate partner violence is characterized by a series of repetitive acts, which generally occur in an upward curve. (...) Intimate partner violence includes psychological, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, as well as acts of economic domination. It is not the result of a loss of control but, on the contrary, is a means chosen to dominate the other person and assert power over him or her. It can be experienced in a marital, extra-marital or intimate relationship at any age.

— GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC, 1995

Violent behaviours

Violent behaviours aim to gain power and to coerce the other victim into something. They can be non-physical (swearing, screaming, insulting, putting down, guilt tripping, belittling, humiliating, prohibiting, obligating, ridiculing, blaming, threatening the person, isolating from family or friends, destroying objects, etc.) or they can be physical (hitting, pushing, pinching, restraining, spitting, hitting with an object, sexually assaulting, etc.). In addition, violence may be directed against children, loved ones and pets (lying or manipulating children or loved ones, harming a pet out of vengeance). Violence can also be economic (criticizing financial management, incurring debts in the victim's name, stealing money, manipulating financial information, limiting access to financial resources, preventing the victim from working or studying, etc.) or spiritual (ridiculing the victim's spiritual beliefs, forcing or preventing the victim from practising her religion, using religion as a pretext to justify violence, attacking the victim's deepest values and aspirations, etc.). The use of the judicial system against the victim is also often

present (filing a false criminal complaint or reporting the victim to youth protection services, lying to lawyers and judges, maintaining post-separation control over the victim through multiple legal actions in Superior Court, etc.).

Some forms of intimate partner violence are criminal (all forms of physical violence, sexual assaults, death threats or threats of physical harm, confinement, harassment, attempted murder, murder), but many of the daily forms of violence committed within a couple are not criminal despite their destructive impact.

Domination, power and control

In the context of intimate partner violence, these violent behaviours all have the same goal : establishing and maintaining power and control over the other person. The abuser wants to make their needs and desires the focus of the relationship and of the family. In practice, the abuser choses to constrain their partner in order to impose their will. Examples of this include imposing opinions, forcing the partner to do or not do something, preventing them from going out, controlling their money, or insisting on having the last word in an argument. Essentially, the abuser wants to take control and to eliminate the partner's right to self-determination.

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Unmasking intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) happens when a variety of violent behaviours are used to install and maintain power and control over a partner's life. Manifestations of violence can be very subtle or very overt. Regardless of its forms, intimate partner violence is often very difficult to identify, because it is camouflaged under a wide variety of masks that blend into the background of the relationship. Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)

Power and control

Imposing their will, making unilateral decisions ; Imposing their presence, friends or activities ; Imposing certain tasks or responsibilities ; Punishing the victim when they do not comply.

Emotional violence

Intentionally creating emotional pain and suffering; Scaring the victim, making them cry, startling them ; Threatening, ridiculing, blaming or insulting the victim ; Making the victim feel guilty or humiliated ; Giving hope that things will change without any real intention of following through ; Keeping the victim in a constant state of alert or high stress.

Psychological violence

Creating a state of internal imbalance within the victim ; Constantly questioning or doubting them ; Making fun of them or criticizing their decisions ; Imposing a bad mood or a climate of tension ; Holding the victim responsible for the couple's problems ; Dismissing the victim's opinions, manipulating their perception of reality (gaslighting) ; Reframing violent events in a way that prevents the victim from identifying the violence for what it is; Questioning the victim's mental health.

Spiritual violence

Attacking the victim's deepest values or the meaning they give to their life ; Imposing beliefs or preventing the victim from practising her religion ; Challenging or undermining the victim's efforts to reach her dreams or ambitions.

Indirect physical violence

Intimidating through physical violence expressed in the victim's environment, but not reaching their physical integrity ; Blocking access to the exit ; Throwing or breaking objects ; Punching walls, destroying property ; Driving dangerously.

Violence by proxy

Threatening or hurting someone else in order to influence the victim; Hurting a pet in order to punish or to coerce the victim. Manipulating the perception of loved ones or social/judicial workers against the victim.

Direct physical violence

Acting in an abrupt or coercive manner, in a way that affects the victim's physical integrity; Spitting, biting, hitting, kicking, pinching, pushing, shoving, restraining, grabbing arms, pulling hair, choking...

Cyberviolence

Using technology to maintain or increase power and control ; Reading her emails, messenger or text messages ; Filming her without her knowledge ; Monitoring the victim's whereabouts using geolocation features ; Listening in on private conversations ; Harassing the victim by phone, text messages or social media.

Sexual violence

Imposing sexual will or using sexuality to control or degrade the victim; Making humiliating comments about the victim's physical appearance ; Verbally pressuring or manipulating the victim to have sex ; Accusing the victim of infidelity ; Sharing intimate photos or videos without the victim's consent ; Forcing the victim to accept certain sexual practices, forcing them to watch pornography ; Forcing the victim into prostitution ; Initiating sexual relations while the victim is unable to give consent e.g., when she is sleeping ; Physically forcing the victim to have sexual relations or contacts.

Judicial violence

Diverting or using legal proceedings in order to gain power over the victim; Bringing false charges against them with police or youth protection agencies ; Lying to social and legal advocates; Accusing the victim of parental alienation ; Dragging out legal proceedings unnecessarily; Disregarding court agreements, orders or rulings.

Isolation

Controlling the social environment to restrict contact with people who might offer support to the victim ; Interrogating the victim whenever she goes out ; Fostering conflict with loved ones ; Expressing jealousy towards friends or coworkers ; Imposing a move far away from friends and family ; Prohibiting or restricting the victim's access to social media.

Violence by proxy... the particular case of children

Using the children as a means to hurt the victim ; Threatening the victim to harm the children ; Abusing the children to punish the victim ; Encouraging the children to ignore the victim's authority and disrespect her ; Using access rights or custody proceedings as a way to keep control after the separation.

Financial violence

Restricting access to financial resources in order to limit the victim's power to act ; Controlling spending and financial management ; Stealing money ; Stealing the victim's identity ; Limiting access to financial information ; Controlling professional choices ; Using money as leverage to keep the victim in the relationship.



As time goes on, IPV causes devastating harm to the victim's psychological, emotional and physical health. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to see the link between a victim's symptoms and the violence she has endured. Psychological violence undermines the victim's self-esteem, confidence, power to act and sense of safety. Emotional violence forces her to experience fear, pain, anger, anguish and despair. Spiritual violence destroys her beliefs, her dreams, and the meaning she gives to her life. Physical violence harms her health, depletes her resources, injures her body and can be life-threatening. Sexual violence ravages the most intimate parts of herself. Cyberviolence monitors, listen to and follows her everywhere. Judicial violence ruins her financially and prevents her from exercising her rights. Financial violence ruins her credit and undermines her ability to provide for herself and her children. Isolation destroys her credibility, steals her family and isolates her from her network. Violence via children forces her to submit in order to protect them.

— SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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Power and coercive control in situations of intimate partner violence

Considering intimate partner violence (IPV) by only looking at the violent behaviours can be misleading, as it is but one aspect of the situation. It is also necessary to understand it from the perspective of power, control and the restriction of freedom.

Domination, power and coercive control

In a dynamic of IPV, violent behaviours are used to gain control and power over the victim. Essentially, the violent partner imposes their will, opinions, way of doing things and way of thinking, by using violent behaviours to force the other person to submit. The abuser thus deprives the victim of her freedom and her right to decide for herself, in comfort and respect.

A victim who doesn't "let it happen"

Contrary to popular belief, the victim will attempt to restore the balance of power. Several strategies may be present: rationalization (trying to explain, argue), negotiation (offering compromises), appealing to morality (trying to show the other person that their reactions are excessive or that their expectations are unreasonable), appealing to love (begging, imploring in the name of the relationship), etc. In a relationship where the other is not trying to impose their will, these strategies would be effective to restore balance, but in a relationship where the abuser wants to establish domination, the victim's attempts are doomed to failure, over and over and over again.

The victim's reactive violence

When what is at stake is important for the victim and that they are unable to influence the situation, their strategies may increase in intensity, to the point of using coercive or violent behaviours: shouting, insulting, physically defending themselves, etc. This is called reactive violence or violent resistance. It is important not to confuse the violent behaviours of the abuser (which aims to gain illegitimate power) and the reactive violence of the victim (which aims to regain legitimate power or to protect oneself).

From powerlessness to guilt

It is important to realize how much the continual failures a victim faces with her partner are detrimental to their self-esteem and self-confidence. They are left with a very strong sense of powerlessness that may spread to all areas of their lives. Moreover, since the violent partner increases the intensity of their violence as soon as the victim tries to regain power, and uses the reactive violence to show the victim that they are “not doing any better”, the victim is likely to feel responsible for the situation.



*Just before my office holiday party, he grabbed me by the shoulders and held me in front of the mirror. He told me that I had put on make-up like a “tramp”. I begged him to stop. He said I wanted to impress someone. I told him that it wasn't true, I tried to reason with him, I told him that he was the one I wanted to look good for, but he just kept going. I felt like I was suffocating. I ended up shouting at him and I scratched his hand trying to get him off my back. He let go of me and called me a “crazy b*tch”. Later, at the party, a colleague came up to me and told me that my partner was showing everyone his scratch and asking them how they felt about me at the office, because I was aggressive at home and he didn't know what to do with me anymore...*

— WOMAN, 51 YEARS OLD · SURVIVOR

Breaking free

Survivor's testimonies clearly show how “getting out” of IPV is about liberation and regaining power. Most importantly, their stories make it obvious that liberation happens gradually rather than in a single pivotal moment. The process begins well before an eventual breakup, and continues for a long time afterwards before the person is truly safe. Each time a victim makes a choice for themselves, each time they regains a little more power, increase their safety or comfort, find understanding... it is a link that is broken, one less thread in the spider's web, one more step towards freedom.

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8 tactics of psychological violence used by abusers in intimate relationships

Psychological abuse is an integral part of the strategies used by an abuser to exert power in an intimate relationship. These are strategies in which the abuser targets different components of a person's identity and psychological health: self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, dignity, psychological functioning and mental health. In this way, the abuser can destabilize the victim and weaken them in their very core, to make it easier to gain a psychological hold on them.

Love bombing

Love bombing involves showering the victim with excessive and unexpected compliments, affection, attention, appreciation, gifts and gestures of love, often very early on in the relationship. The abuser's aim is to create an intense emotional bond to encourage rapid attachment and then major commitments on the part of the victim. The abuser may then demand some form of reciprocity and foster a sense of indebtedness in the victim, and thus begin to impose certain things on them. Love bombing usually occurs at the beginning of the relationship, but can also be used at the point of remission in the cycle of violence, to catch a victim who begins to question the relationship, often following a more overtly violent event.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which the abuser attempts to impose a false version of reality on the victim. To achieve this, the abuser may discredit the victim's perceptions (*You're exaggerating again! I didn't even scream!*), question the victim's memories (*It didn't happen like that! You just remember what works for you!*) or disqualify their interpretation of reality (*It was just a joke!*). An abuser may deny that an event really happened or that something was said, when in fact it did (*I never told you that! You're making it up!*). Conversely, the abuser may also claim that an event did happen or that something was said, when it didn't (*You told me you agreed last week! How could you forget that!*).

Negging

Negging means disguising an insult or criticism in a statement that appears, on the surface, to be a compliment. This tactic is used to destabilize the victim, to make them doubt themselves in order to gain power over them. Negging often take the form of a seemingly positive statement, but that is expressed with a hint of irony or sarcasm, making it clear that the aggressor thinks the opposite of what they are saying. Negging can take the form of comparisons (*You're really pretty there, but you should have seen my ex*), false compliments (*You're far too intelligent to think that, don't you think*), false constructive criticism (*You're really good at skiing, but I've got to tell you, it's really peculiar the way you go down the moguls*), or misleading messages (*My mother told me you had good hips for carrying children!*). Negging will often lead to a negative reaction from the victim towards the abuser, who will then have an opportunity to invalidate them and question their interpretation of the facts (*I'm being super nice, always complimenting you, and you freak out!*).

Emotional manipulation

Emotional manipulation is a form of psychological abuse that involves influencing a person's emotions in order to hold them under control. The abuser tries to induce emotions of fear, terror, pain, suffering, shame, embarrassment, anger, etc., knowing that this will cause the victim to act as they wish, lose credibility with others, or lose power over the situation. The abuser can use a variety of means to achieve this: threatening, intimidating, reproaching, denigrating, blaming, ridiculing, blackmailing, insulting, deceiving, invalidating, infantilizing, and so on.

Cold Shouldering

Another form of psychological abuse is cold-shouldering is a form of emotional deprivation, also referred to as the *silent treatment*. Cold shouldering means that the abuser denies the victim affection, validation, support and love, for the purposes of control, coercion or punishment. The abuser may show indifference to the victim's emotional needs, deliberately ignore or deprive them of emotional contact. Conversely, the abuser may later *reward* the victim's submissive behaviors by giving them the affection and attention they had previously deprived them of.

Social restriction

Abusive partners will often try to isolate their victim, i.e. limit their access to those close to them in order to weaken them psychologically. The victim ends up cut off from the relationships that fuel their inner strength, provide validation and support, and could help them to see their situation more clearly. In addition to isolation, social restriction can also take the form of exclusion, i.e. a partner may deliberately exclude the victim from certain social circles where the victim should normally be welcome (family, a circle of friends, etc.), often by manipulating the members of those circles against the victim. The abuser may even use this exclusion in his emotional manipulation later on, to stir up particularly painful feelings of humiliation and rejection in the victim. The victim then risks self-exclusion to avoid feeling these emotions... which will also contribute to her isolation, in a particularly vicious circle. Social restriction enables the aggressor to become the victim's only point of reference, amplifying their hold on them.

Sleep deprivation

An abuser may deliberately deprive the victim of sleep, with the aim of making them more vulnerable. The abuser may startle her awake just as she's about to fall asleep, refuse to let her sleep to settle an argument (often deliberately started at bedtime), or wake her up incessantly during the night. He may also demand that his partner conform to their sleep schedule, without regard for the victim's reality. The victim may then find themselves in serious sleep debt if they have no choice but to go to bed at 3am and get up at 6am to get the kids ready for school and go to work. The victim then loses a lot of stamina and finds themselves greatly weakened, both psychologically and physically.

Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender (DARVO)

The acronym DARVO stands for Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender (Freyd, 1997). This is a very common tactic, in which the aggressor uses different elements of reality to cast the victim in the role of abuser and position themselves as the victim. To achieve this, the abuser will use many of the consequences of the violence that they themselves have created in the victim to discredit them and make them appear aggressive, unstable and violent: their legitimate anger, their defensive behaviours (particularly reactive violence) and many manifestations of post-traumatic stress, such as mistrust and irritability.

This strategy enables the abuser to gain a great deal of power over the victim, by manipulating their own perception of the situation (the victim feels responsible, and sees themselves as the abuser), as well as the perceptions of those close to them and the various interveners involved in the situation (police, therapists, advocates, lawyers, youth protection workers, etc.). This also enables the abuser to threaten the victim with legal action, should they choose to leave or to lodge a complaint. This method is widely used, as evidenced by the wave of parental alienation accusations against victims of IPV, the rates of cross-complaints to the police and the many court cases where partners accused of violence respond with their own accusations, which can lead to the impression that this is a "severe conflict" where both parties are involved, rather than a situation of IPV.

Consequences

The psychological impact of these forms of violence on victims is very significant. They may become confused, systematically doubt their memory or perceptions, or feel that they are exaggerating or over-sensitive. They may experience severe emotional distress, with a great deal of anxiety or anger, or, on the contrary, be cut off from their emotions and in a state of depression. They may experience intense confusion about what they think, feel or want and **this makes it very difficult for them to trust themselves, which is very detrimental to their ability to question the violent situation, and to their subsequent recovery.**

The psychological repercussions of such violence could easily be interpreted through a wide range of mental health diagnoses, or even personality disorders. It's important to recognize that these are *wounds* caused by violence, and to focus on a post-traumatic understanding of the reactions of victims of intimate partner violence. These reactions are normal in the circumstances. The important thing to remember is that these psychological wounds can heal, with support, validation, understanding and time.

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6 forms of financial violence

In the context of intimate partner violence (IPV), abusers use various means to establish their power and control the victim's choices. Violent behaviours aimed at controlling the victim's finances are very common because they are very effective to limit the victim's choices. Such forms of violence can be very subtle at first, gradually shoring up the abuser's control until he controls the family's financial decisions and wealth. This results in financial dependency and may affect the victim's ability to meet her own basic needs and those of her children in the event of a separation.

Controlling spending and financial management

Criticizing the victim's purchases ; monitoring personal credit card statements ; ridiculing the way the victim manages their money ; imposing financial decisions concerning the victim and the family.

Stealing money

Taking cash without permission ; using a bank card or credit card without the victim's consent ; using money from a joint account in violation of the initial agreement ; demanding money using force or threats.

Identity fraud

Using known information (birth date, mother's maiden name, etc.) to impersonate the victim and obtain credit cards, incurring debts in their name, etc.

Limiting access to financial information

Lying about their own personal financial situation or the family's financial situation; concealing personal income; hiding important bills and notices; etc.

Controlling professional choices

Pressuring the victim to quit working or reduce their work hours (often through guilt about the children's needs); limiting the victim's professional development by preventing them from studying; controlling which jobs they can apply for, forcing them to refuse promotions; creating problems for them at work, including absenteeism or difficulty concentrating; forcing the victim to work in their own business for little or no money; etc.

Using money as leverage to keep the victim in the relationship

Threatening to "cut off" the victim financially or to quit a job to avoid paying alimony or child support, stop paying joint debts, etc.



He gradually shut me out of all financial decisions and access to my own money because he said I was "mismanaging". I had an "allowance" of \$200 a week for my "personal expenses", i.e. groceries for the five of us, the pharmacy, my gas, clothes for our three children... even though I had a good salary. It was largely insufficient. When I asked for more, he made me believe that we had debts and that it was impossible, or told me that I should simply manage better...

— WOMAN, 43 YEARS OLD · SURVIVOR

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4 targets of intimate partner violence by proxy

Abusers aim to exercise undue power in their intimate relationship. Because the victim is the direct target of this desire for power, they are most often the target of the violent behaviours as well. However, an abuser who wants to affect a victim may also choose to strike elsewhere in order to hurt them. This is what is known as indirect violence or violence by proxy. Very common in situations of intimate partner violence (IPV), this strategy is extremely effective because it targets those who are dear to the victim, or who have power over their situation.

Children

The fact that the abuser creates a climate where the other parent is forced into submission is a form of child psychological abuse in itself. Moreover, some children can also be directly targeted by the abuser in a bid to hurt the victim. For example, they may be threatened or assaulted when the abuser tries to force the other parent into submission. Parental alienation, the act of manipulating a child to interfere with his or her relationship with the other parent, is also a common aspect of indirect violence via the children. After the separation, indirect violence involving the children may sometimes result in the victim returning to the abuser in order to protect them.

Family pets

Pets may be threatened or subjected to acts of animal cruelty by the abuser, as a means to force the victim into submission. An abusive partner may also deprive the victim of the presence of a beloved pet (or threaten to do so), by forcing them to get rid of the animal, letting it escape, having it euthanized, or worse. The presence of pets who are at risk of reprisals can make victims hesitate to leave out of fear that her animal will pay the price of their decision.

Family and friends

Family, friends, colleagues and neighbours are often victims of skillful manipulation. By lying and presenting them with a biased image of reality and of the victim, the abuser tries to influence them against the victim and to discredit the victim in case she confides in them. Elderly parents living in the family unit and who support the victim in exercising power over their own life are particularly vulnerable and can also become victims of the abuser's violence in an effort to influence the victim. They may be the subject of threats to "kick them out", to no longer offer them care related to a medical condition and may even be subjected to physical violence.

Advocates and professionals

Those who work in the psychosocial and legal fields are particularly affected by violence by proxy. Because of the manipulation and lies they are subjected to, it can be very difficult for them to accurately assess the situation, hear the victim's version, and develop a positive relationship with them. Unfortunately, this type of indirect violence can have devastating consequences on the victim's life, especially when it comes to child custody and divorce.

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5 forms of intimate partner violence that target the victim's social network

To establish and maintain his power over the victim, the abuser uses different strategies to limit the victim's social network's ability to help them and to restrain access to friends and family. Here are some examples of behaviours that target a victim's social network.

Sabotaging communications and ties with family & friends

Failing to convey messages, erasing text messages and emails ; Preventing the victim from going out to meet friends ; Expressing jealousy ; Creating conflict between the victim and her loved ones.

Discrediting the victim

Presenting a distorted picture of the victim by portraying them as overly emotional, unstable, unreasonable, aggressive, or suffering from a mental illness ; Presenting themselves as helpful, trustworthy, reasonable and willing to work hard to "help" the victim and "give her a chance" ; The abuser may even go so far as to pretend to be the victim in the situation.

Imposing their vision of events to loved ones

Presenting loved ones with a false picture of what's going on by lying or distorting facts in order to blame the victim and absolve themselves of any responsibility.

Using friends and family to monitor the victim

Getting loved ones to monitor the victim and report on her actions, often by claiming concern for the victim, her physical safety or her mental health.

Stealing the victim's family and friends

Becoming overly involved with the victim's family and friends in order to establish themselves as the most important person in the relationship; Excluding the victim from relationships with their friends or family.



I've been separated for 4 years. During our marriage, my ex-husband got really close to my parents, so much so that they "adopted" him. At the time, he convinced my parents that I had mental health problems and that my "refusal to get help" was very hard on him. When he and I separated, my parents took his side and even testified on his behalf in Court. I haven't seen them since. It breaks my heart to think about my ex spending Christmas with my parents, while I'm all alone.

— FEMME, 45 ANS · SURVIVANTE

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6 Forms of post-separation Violence

Contrary to what we might hope, separation is not always a guarantee of safety for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), at least in the short term. Victims may be subjected to post-separation violence and continue to suffer severe consequences on themselves and their children. Post-separation violence has different goals : to convince the victim to return, to continue to exert control, to prevent the victim from exercising her rights, to exact revenge for what the abuser sees as a final provocation... or simply to “win” and have the last word.

Manipulation and threats to convince the victim to come back

“Falsely” putting on their best behaviour, “love-bombing” the victim, expressing love and remorse; Expressing a will to change or to go to therapy without true intention of changing their behaviours ; Blackmailing the victim or using various threats (to seek custody of the children, abandon the children, cut them off, disappear, commit suicide, etc.) ; Manipulating children, relatives or friends to get them to advocate on their behalf.

Harassment and surveillance

Watching the comings and goings of the victim and the children ; Contacting the victim continuously despite their wishes to the contrary ; Contacting the victim's family and friends to seek information about the victim ; Questioning the children about the victim's new life.

Violence via legal proceedings

Unduly multiplying or prolonging separation proceedings ; Making false accusations (of violence, parental alienation, etc.) ; Breaking no-contact or restraining orders ; Harassing and intimidating socio-judicial workers ; Suing the victim for defamation ; Filing complaints against workers and professionals involved in the case.

Financial violence and voluntary self-impoverishment

Withholding alimony or child support payments on unreasonable grounds ; Initiating unnecessary legal proceedings to inflate the victim's legal fees ; Challenging or refusing to pay their share of joint costs ; Hiding income or quitting their employment to avoid paying alimony or child support.

Control via shared-parenting

Demanding information or photos of the children above what is necessary ; Imposing educational strategies when the child is not in their care ; Challenging the victim's parenting skills and decisions ; Withholding information about the child ; Manipulating or alienating the child from the victim ; Imposing their presence during the victim's custody time ; Not returning the child to the victim when expected.

Escalation of physical violence

In situations of intimate partner violence, separation may increase the risk of serious injury or death for the victim AND their children.



Given the risks associated with separation, it is imperative to ensure that victims of intimate partner violence have access to a place in a shelter (first or second stage) and to any other measure that could increase their safety and that of their children, as long as the danger persists.

— SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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From bad to worse: the escalation of violence

The goal of intimate partner violence (IPV) is to gain and then maintain power in the relationship. Of course, this dynamic does not happen overnight. IPV tends to develop gradually and increase over time.

Scaling up through engagement

At the beginning of the relationship, the partner shows affection, interest, patience, gentleness, openness, generosity, etc. Unfortunately, this expression of love is not entirely genuine and disinterested as it would be in a healthy relationship, but rather it aims to prepare the ground for violence and control. It is therefore already a form of psychological. Indeed, the term love bombing is used to describe this technique of manipulation through seduction. Later on, the fact that the victim has seen her partner in this better light will contribute to feed their hope throughout the relationship, and to maintain them in the relationship.

The search for sensitive areas

By fostering attachment and investment in the relationship, the partner makes the victim open up. The victim confides different past experiences, talks about their dreams, their fears, their regrets, their failures. Through these discussions, the abuser gains access to all the information needed to gain power over the victim: their frailties, their difficulties and their vulnerabilities. The abuser is then able to target those sensitive areas to slowly install a hold on the relationship.

Slowly but surely : gaining power over the relationship

The abuser begins, very slowly, to “force” his partner’s boundaries in order to put her in a state of inner imbalance and begin to gain power over the relationship. For example, an abuser who knows that his partner is sensitive to rejection might use distance or silence tactics when he wants to get something. If he knows she is insecure about her weight, he may use “heavy” looks or make comments about other people’s weight. If he knows that she is shy, he may voluntarily make comments about her in front of friends to amplify her social discomfort. Because he targets very sensitive areas, he can use very subtle violent behaviours, but it will still be effective in affecting the victim. Of course, the relationship is also characterized by the ups and downs of the cycle of violence and the victim is increasingly hurt by the violence she experiences, which also contributes to building and maintaining the hold on the relationship.

Scaling up through engagement

When the relationship is more seriously invested by the victim through various events that mark their commitment (making promises of eternity, publicly showing oneself as a couple, having long-term plans, moving in together, following the partner to another city, buying a car or a house, getting engaged, getting married, having a child, etc.), the violence often increases more markedly and suddenly becomes more intense and more frequent.

Because of the increased commitment of the victim, the abuser can use more overt violence because it becomes increasingly difficult for the victim to break off the relationship. Undue pressure becomes rules and then obligations, innuendoes become insults or threats, dark looks turn into punches, harsh words become shouts and then blows, etc. The most striking evidence of this process is the fact that it is often during pregnancy or after a child is born that physical violence first occurs.

All the way to murder ?

IPV can escalate to extreme forms of violence, and can become a threat to the victims’s physical safety and even to their life. However, because it is unstable and unpredictable, it is impossible to guess how far violence can go in a given relationship. Nor can it be assumed that the situation is still relatively “safe” if the violence has never been physical, because escalation can occur very gradually, as it can happen all of a sudden. However, one factor is known to be particularly conducive to a sudden escalation: when the victim questions the violence or the relationship. This is why it is far preferable that a separation in a situation of IPV be prepared rather than precipitated, and why it is essential to respect the victim’s feelings and instincts regarding this sensitive decision.

The trap of hindsight

When victims of IPV examine their relationship after the fact, it is often fairly easy for them to identify the subtle violence and manipulation they experienced early in the relationship. They may then feel shame and guilt for not having realized the trap that was building around them or for not having reacted quickly enough. It can be very painful, especially since it’s one of the most common misconceptions when it comes to IPV: “I would never have accepted that!”

It is important to help victims to realize that it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to identify IPV at the beginning of the relationship, since the subtle violent behaviours were skillfully camouflaged through expressions of love. It is only by knowing what happened next, in hindsight, that the psychological abuse and manipulation of the early stages of the relationship become visible.

It is also important to remind victims that it is normal (and healthy) to have believed in a partner's good faith, to have given them the benefit of the doubt, to have accepted apologies, and to have believed in their potential for change. It is the abuser who chose to use the victim's qualities of openness and trust against them... and thus the abuser remains solely responsible for the situation of IPV.

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Aggression, remission, tension : the cycle of violence

It is very difficult for a victim to see clearly into a situation of intimate partner violence (IPV), since its dynamic is very unstable. Sometimes things are going well, sometimes less so but without manifest violence, and other times it is hell. This instability is explained by the cycle of violence. This cycle is often described in three phases: crisis/aggression, remission and tension. Violence and control are present in all three phases, but take on different forms.



Sometimes it was fine, really good even. He became the person that I loved... and that I missed. It's not easy, the ups and downs. I was constantly catapulted from drama to tenderness, from panic to relief, from disillusionment to hope...

— WOMAN, 46 YEARS OLD · SURVIVOR

Crisis/aggression phase

The crisis phase, or aggression, generally occurs when the victim tries to exercise power over a decision that affects the family or her own life, and the abuser uses violence to “win” and impose their will. No matter what form the violence takes (psychological, verbal, physical, sexual, etc.), it has great repercussions on the victim: fear, pain, doubt, confusion, etc. The victim doesn't understand why their partner reacted so harshly and how the situation got so out of hand. The victim feels helpless, because their efforts to appease the partner do not work. The victim may also react with violence in order to defend themselves or to try to regain legitimate power over the situation. After the crisis, the victim is destabilized and may question their partner's violence or the relationship.

Remission phase

To prevent the victim from leaving the relationship, the abuser must do something to influence their perception of the situation and give them hope for the future. The abuser may thus begin by recognizing certain wrongs, promising to improve and may even apologize and express remorse. However, they do so in a way that minimizes the severity of the violence. The abuser may show affection for the victim,

take care of them and be on their best behaviour. The victim's suffering subsides, they regain hope and are immensely relieved that their partner did not want to hurt them on purpose.

At the same time, the abuser also challenges the victim's perception of the crisis, to give them a share of responsibility for the situation. The abuser twists the events and explains why the crisis happened in a way that blames the victim. The abuser convinces the victim to be more careful. This part of the remission gives the victim a false sense of power over the situation, because they understand why the crisis happened and know what to do (or what not to do) in order to make things better in the future. The feelings of helplessness and confusion that the victim felt during the crisis ease.

Tension

After a while, the remission fades and the abuser uses subtle violence to reassert their power over the relationship (sighs, irritated looks, silences, veiled reproaches, disapproval...). The tension mounts but the victim has difficulty putting it into words because the behaviours remain subtle. The victim feels anxious and apprehensive and redoubles their efforts to keep the peace. The victim adapts to the situation without realizing that they are losing more and more power... until the day they try to exercise power over a decision that affects the family or their own life... and a new crisis begins.

Violence is present in all phases

One might think that violent behaviours are only present at the moment of crisis/aggression, because that's when it's more obvious, more "striking". On the contrary, psychological violence is very intense during remission (manipulation, gaslighting, lies, false promises, etc.) and coercive control is very present during the tension phase. Each phase actively contributes to maintaining the hold that the partner has on the situation, and the victim never really gets a break from intimate partner violence.

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Children : witnesses and victims of intimate partner violence

When a dynamic of intimate partner violence (IPV) is present in a family, children are directly impacted by the situation. This is why we no longer simply consider them to be witnesses but rather as being exposed and therefore directly victimized by the presence of IPV.

IPV as a form of childhood psychological abuse

To develop normally, children need to be physically and psychologically safe. Growing up in a world where one parent is violent towards the other creates a situation of extreme insecurity and is, in itself, a form of psychological abuse against children. In addition, it is important to remember that when there is IPV in a family, direct psychological, physical or sexual violence against the children themselves, as well as IPV exercised “by proxy” through the child, are often also present. We can therefore consider it to be a dynamic of family violence, in addition to the dynamic of IPV by one parent towards the other parent.

Ce que les enfants comprennent

IPV is a complex issue that is difficult to identify and understand for the victims themselves, for their loved ones and even for professionals. Therefore, we cannot expect children to be able to see it clearly, especially when they are very young. Children talk about IPV in their own words and with the references they have in their limited life-experience. For example, a child might talk about IPV by saying that the victim “got picked on” or “got in trouble”.

Although they are not able to conceptualize IPV clearly, children are very good at sensing power in relationships. For example, they quickly sense who is popular and who is rejected in a schoolyard. When there is IPV in a family, children sense that there is a boss-parent who has power and a reject-parent who is in danger. Children adjust their own behaviour to these unequal power relationships, in order to protect themselves from the violence of the “boss” and to avoid “getting in trouble” like the victim.

Some children may refuse the victim's authority, refuse to comply with her instructions, and may even throw tantrums, hit or bite in order to do so. When children react this way, it is not because they are imitating the abusive parent, but rather because they are trying to adapt to the situation and protect themselves from violence. It is an avoidance reaction that is normal, and it's neither the child's fault nor the victim's fault... although they usually both feel guilty about it.

Consequences of IPV on children

In addition to the impact on a child's sense of security and on the power relationships within the family, IPV has many other consequences on children. They witness major and repeated events of violence that frighten them terribly. Children fear for themselves, for their siblings, for the victim and for the integrity of their family. They may even fear for the life of a parent or for their own lives. They face an increased risk of injury and stress-related health problems. They may be very confused about how they feel about the victim and the abuser. They may feel responsible for protecting the victim or think that they caused the violence. They may have behaviour problems, have difficulties at school or in their social relationships. They may have difficulty building a good self-image, self-esteem, or self-confidence.

Children exposed to IPV are often in a state of post-traumatic stress but are at risk of receiving other labels or diagnoses that do not take into account the exposure to IPV: difficult, demanding, hyperactive, troublemaker, delinquent, etc.

If they report IPV (or violence against themselves) or refuse to see an abusive parent, children may not be believed and, in some situations, may be perceived as alienated from the abuser. They may then be forced to maintain contact with an abusive parent, which becomes a significant revictimization for a child who is already traumatized by the violence.

Children are also at risk of facing negative views and prejudices about IPV. Some children, boys in particular, may fear becoming violent because they have been repeatedly exposed to this stereotypical image of boys whose fathers were violent.

What can we do to help ?

In order to help a child who was exposed to IPV, the first step is to support the victim in regaining control over their life. We must believe victims and their children, put in place effective means to improve their safety, and take into account the presence of IPV and family violence in all interventions. We can help restore the power relationship between the child and the victim by ensuring that we do not exercise undue power in the relationship with the victim, by avoiding judging them in their parental capacities and by validating that the victim is worthy of their love, respect and trust.

The recovery of an exposed child can also be fostered by remaining available to them, by providing a space for self-expression, by offering comfort, pleasure and respite, or simply by taking care of them. It is important to remember, however, that the non-violent parent is the best person to help a child, and that whereas a family member, friend or worker can help, they should be careful not to take their place.

Since IPV can evolve into post-separation violence, strategies must be put in place to protect children and victims over the long term. For example, we must avoid at all costs that the child ends up becoming the parents' spokesperson. The child who speaks for the victim could receive violence from the abusive parent, and the child who speaks for the abuser could become the tool of his violence against the victim.

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9 Consequences of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a huge ordeal that has numerous repercussions on a victims' physical, social and psychological wellbeing and that of their children, their loved ones and society. Public awareness of these consequences is necessary because it gives us a better understanding of victims' reactions and makes it possible to provide them with appropriate assistance. The reactions of victims of IPV are normal. The violence is what isn't normal.

Emotional pain

Violence has numerous consequences on victim's emotional health, including distress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, anxiety, panic attacks, sadness, shame, guilt, internal tension, stress, anger, despair, etc.

Confusion

IPV occurs in a cycle, which means that the situation is never the same. The victim goes through periods of tension when they don't really know what's going on followed by incident of violence and then by a period of remission when the partner apologizes, while manipulating the victim so that they will see themselves as partially (or completely) to blame for what happened. Because of this cycle, the victim may go from moments where they are able to see what is going on to moments where they are overwhelmed with doubt, often to the point that they no longer recognizes the violence for what it is.

Post-traumatic stress

Many victims of IPV and their children exhibit the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, just like war veterans. These symptoms include intrusive thoughts and memories, nightmares and flashbacks that can cause the victim intense physical and emotional distress. They may attempt to protect themselves through emotional withdrawal, drugs or alcohol, refusing or being unable to talk about the situation, forgetfulness, suicidal ideations, self-injury, etc. Always being on alert also has other effects including jumpiness, difficulty concentrating, depression, irritability, etc.

Deteriorating physical health

Being extremely stressed over prolonged periods affects the victims' physical well-being, and may result in sleep and eating disorders, loss of energy, weakened immune system, etc. Victims may also suffer various stress-related illnesses such as chronic pain, skin or digestive problems, frequent headaches, etc.

Physical injuries

Physical violence can cause injuries such as bruises, fractured bones, broken teeth, perforated eardrums, concussions, etc. Victims can be seriously injured and even killed because of IPV. Some injuries, such as traumatic brain injuries that can result from repeated concussions, can also have lasting impacts on a victim's quality of life and may even shorten their lifespan.

Damage to relationships with friends&family

IPV negatively affects the victim's support network; it can cause interpersonal conflict and the victim may lose the trust and esteem of loved ones and may even lose contact with them. Isolation caused by IPV can be very intense. The situation also has repercussions on friends&family themselves: exhaustion, stress, feelings of powerlessness, etc.

Damage to relationships with children

In a family where there is no violence, parents share power and exert parental authority together. In the context of IPV, the abuser controls the family and the victim has lost nearly all of her own power. This power imbalance has important impacts on children and teens, who often respond by refusing to acknowledge the victim's authority. Such unequal power relations can also make some children feel a duty to protect the victim, which may become very dangerous for them.

Financial losses and poverty

IPV exacts a heavy financial price on victims: lawyer's fees (often for interminable and repeated legal proceedings), moving and reorganization costs, medical treatment, psychotherapy (frequently long-term, for the victim and for her children), sick leave, inability to work for prolonged periods or permanently, etc. Most victims of IPV are impoverished, regardless of their initial social status or education.

Social costs

IPV puts a heavy strain on the social solidarity, healthcare and social services systems and generates hefty public safety costs, as well as high legal costs through criminal, civil and youth protection court proceeding. It also impacts employment insurance, income security benefits, etc. Employers are also affected by the impacts of IPV on victims: absenteeism, reduced productivity, loss of skilled employees, increased costs related to group insurance plans, etc.



Recovery from the consequences of IPV takes time. When violence persists after separation, it is even more difficult to deal with its repercussions. Victims of IPV need ongoing support and concrete assistance to help them regain power and control over their own lives. Support should remain available for as long as it takes for them to feel safe and at peace.

Being there for a victim is important. Staying there as long as the consequences of violence are present in their lives is even more important.

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Reacting to stress : fight, freeze or flight

Living in a context of intimate partner violence or post-separation violence is extremely stressful. Victim-survivors and their children are literally living on a tightrope, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.



I feel extremely tense, all the time... and when something happens, when I feel his dark eyes on me and anticipate the worst, sometimes I freeze... literally. My mind goes blank, words get stuck in my throat, I can hardly move... I feel completely powerless.

— SURVIVOR, 32 YEARS OLD

Fight, Freeze or Flight

When a person is faced with a violent situation (actual or anticipated), defence mechanisms are activated in response to the intensity of the stress. Three types of reactions can occur: fight, freeze and flight.

It is most important never to judge these reactions to stress, since they all have the same purpose : self-preservation. However, each of these coping strategies can both promote and hinder one's safety, depending on the context.

When the **fight** response is activated, one can feel a sense of urgency and feel propelled to decisions or actions. It is a prompt and motivated reaction. Its advantage: it gives energy, grit and strength for action. Its risk for safety : it can be difficult to stop and assess the situation when you feel such a strong motivation to act. It can also promote reactive violence on the part of the victim-survivor, which becomes a risk to their safety when the abuser increases the intensity of their own violence to maintain power over the situation.

When the **freeze** response is activated, one may feel frozen or paralyzed, internally or physically. The freeze reaction is rooted in the consideration of danger. Its advantage: it promotes caution and safety in the immediate future. Its risk to safety: it can push the person into helplessness and prevent them from taking certain actions that could promote their safety in the long term.

When the **flight** response is activated, one may feel detached from the situation, unable to think or talk about it, or cut off from their emotions. The person may escape the pain through denial, work, drugs or alcohol, or by the careful planning of daily life and absolute self-control, in order to avoid violence as much as possible. The flight response is rooted in the need to protect oneself from suffering. It can be very present when one has to endure long periods of violence, as is often the case in intimate partner violence or post-separation violence. Its advantage: it provides an emotional shield, by cutting off some of the emotions related to the violence (fear, anger, outrage, pain...). It allows the victim to avoid,

to resist and to survive. Its risk for safety: by cutting off emotions, it can hinder the ability of the victim to assess the risks they are facing.

Avoiding judgement by understanding

It is important to know that a victim-survivor doesn't choose the type of reaction that is triggered by stress, and that their reactions are normal, no matter what. Also, a person may react one way at one time, and another way during another episode of violence. Recognizing these stress reactions for what they are, protection/defense mechanisms, helps us to better understand the person and can also help with safety planning.

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#UsToo: 10 forms of sexual violence in intimate partner relationships

Sexual violence is very frequently part of the picture of intimate partner violence (IPV) and of post-separation violence. Despite this, it is not a topic that is talked about much, or in as much detail, compared to forms of violence committed in other types of relationships. Because of this, it is often very difficult for victims-survivors of IPV to identify and address the sexual violence that they suffered within an intimate partner relationship.

BEHAVIOURS THAT ARE OFTEN CRIMINAL

Many forms of sexual violence committed within intimate partner relationships are criminal. From the moment that an act is performed without free and informed consent on the part of the victim, it constitutes a criminal offence for which a complaint can be filed with law enforcement.

CAUTION, SENSITIVE CONTENT

The following content describes forms of sexual violence in detail. It may be difficult to read for those who have experienced sexual violence, in an intimate relationship or in another context.

Implied consent and the imposition of privileges

Giving oneself sexual rights in the name of the intimate relationship or of one's gender; Considering the involvement in the relationship as a guarantee of consent at all times; Imposing a rhythm to sexual relations, a minimum number of times per week for example; etc.

Psychological and emotional sexual violence

Denigrating the victim's physical appearance, verbally or otherwise; Ridiculing the victim sexually; Using sexuality to control or degrade the victim; Making sexual comments to humiliate the victim in front of others; Comparing the victim's sexual "prowess" to that of previous partners or to that of porn; Threatening to cheat on the victim; Manipulating the victim to have sex; etc.

Sexual harassment

Whispering or using sexualized nicknames despite the victim's discomfort; Displaying pornographic, degrading or sexist material in the environment; Insisting on answers to indiscreet subjects that the victim does not wish to discuss, such as her past sex life; Making impromptu physical gestures, such as touching or tapping an intimate part of a victim's body when it is not desired; etc.

Sexual gaslighting

Making the victim believe that they had previously consented to sexual activity when they had not; Using false accusations of infidelity in order to gain the right to control or monitor the victim; etc.

Sexual cyberviolence

Filming or taking photos of a person in a sexual context without consent; Sharing or selling intimate images without the consent of the person in the image; If the person is under 18 years of age, creating or sharing intimate images constitutes production, possession and distribution of child pornography, regardless of consent; Revenge porn ; Sextortion, demanding money in order to NOT share intimate images; etc.

Sexual exploitation

Pressuring the partner to participate in sexual acts with acquaintances or friends; Using the pretext of a romantic relationship in order to gain power over a person and then to force them to offer escort services, to prostitute themselves or to participate in pornography (pimping); etc.

Imposition of unwanted sexual practices

Controlling how, where, how much and how long sexual activity takes place; Refusing to wear a condom; Forcing or preventing the use of contraceptives; Violating sexual intimacy: allowing oneself to engage in extramarital relationships or imposing a relationship model that involves others such as polyamory or an "open couple"; Imposing one's will on the nature of sexual activities: forcing to watch pornography, to participate in sado-masochistic activities, to perform or receive unwanted sexual acts, etc. Not respecting prior agreements or safe words meant to put a limit on sexual activities; etc.

Sexual abuse by proxy

Threatening to sexually assault another person; Sexually assaulting the victim's child; Threatening or harming someone else or a pet if the victim refuses sexual activity; etc.

Sexual intercourse without consent

Withholding information that could affect consent (e.g., a sexually transmitted disease); Initiating sex when the victim is unable to give consent, while they are sleeping, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, etc. Using certain substances such as GHB without the victim's knowledge to sexually assault them; Removing a condom without the victim's knowledge; Continuing sexual activity after the victim withdraws consent; Verbally threatening to force sex; Physically forcing sex; etc.

Reproductive coercion

Pressuring the victim to have a baby; Sabotaging the victim's desired contraception, e.g., by piercing a condom or hiding her birth control pills; Forcing the victim to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term, through manipulation or threats; Preventing the victim from accessing health services related to contraception or pregnancy; Forcing the victim to have an abortion; Physically injuring the victim in order to cause her to miscarry; etc.



It took me several years to realize the extent of the sexual abuse my ex put me through. He was so good at making me feel like I was the problem, that I was “old-fashioned”, that I didn't have enough desire, that I wasn't open-minded enough, that I wasn't cool enough, that I wasn't feminine enough, that I was too much of a prude, too self-centered... and in the background, the constant threat of him going to satisfy “his needs” somewhere else if I didn't comply with his every wish. Today, I realize that this sexual hold was the driving force behind his hold on the other areas of my life. It is also one of the deepest wounds that I still carry today, in my body, in my intimacy and in my soul.

— SURVIVOR, 43 YEARS OLD

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14 criminal offenses in contexts of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) takes many shapes. While all forms of IPV contribute to the hold that a partner has over the other and that they all have significant consequences on the victim, not all are recognized in the criminal code of Canada.

HARD TO IDENTIFY

Stereotypical images of criminal violence, as it is depicted in movies and the very numerous “CSI” series, can be detrimental to identifying criminal violence in situations of IPV. Just like all other forms of IPV, criminal violence can be very subtle. For example, we have become accustomed to recognizing physical abuse when it hits or when it inflicts physical injuries, but it may be difficult to recognize that holding someone’s arm against their will, pinning them against the bed or pulling their hair are also manifestations of physical criminal violence.

In addition, although they may appear striking from the outside, it is important to know that criminal forms of violence, like all other forms of IPV, can be very difficult for the victim to identify as being violent.

The following are the criminal offenses most frequently seen in situations of IPV and post-separation violence.

Stalking / Harassment

Calling, texting or following the victim in person or virtually, incessantly and repeatedly; Showing up at the victim’s home or work when it is clear that it is against their will; Spying on the victim; etc.

Unauthorized use of a computer

Installing software to track the victim’s computer or to intercept communications; Activating geolocation functions on a cell phone without the victim’s knowledge, to track them in real time; etc.

Uttering threats

Threatening to cause death or bodily harm to the victim or to a third party; Threatening to burn, destroy or damage property; Threatening to kill, poison or injure a pet; All of this, even if the threat was received by another person (e.g., one's children), etc.

Sharing intimate images

Publishing, sharing or selling intimate images without the consent of the person in the image; If the victim is under 18 years of age, this constitutes the production/possession or distribution of child pornography, regardless of the victim's consent.

Sexual assault / voyeurism / indecent acts

Touching the victim's private parts without consent; Forcing the victim to have sex without consent; Initiating sex when the victim is unable to give consent (e.g., while sleeping); Continuing sexual activity when the victim withdraws consent; Removing a condom without consent; Filming or photographing the victim in a sexual context without consent; Sending photos of one's private parts to the victim without prior consent; etc.

Physical violence

Spitting, biting, hitting, pinching, pushing, restraining, squeezing arms or pulling hair; Administering a drug, medication or dangerous substance without the victim's knowledge; Striking with an object, inflicting bodily harm or choking the victim; Pretending to hit the victim; etc.

Human trafficking

Using the pretext of a romantic relationship to exploit the victim, usually for sexual purposes or forced labor; Forcing the victim into prostitution or pornography; Selling the victim's sexual services to others; Forcing the victim to perform domestic tasks for others without pay and against their will; etc.

Theft, fraud and extortion

Stealing property or money; Lying to obtain a loan from the victim; Extorting money from the victim by threatening retaliation if they do not comply with demands, often by threatening to publish intimate images (sextortion) or to reveal sensitive or compromising information; etc.

Forgery and identity theft

Imitating the victim's signature; Impersonating the victim on social networks; Accessing the victim's personal accounts on the Internet (email, suppliers, bank, social networks, etc.); Selling the victim's personal information to a third party; etc.

Kidnapping and false imprisonment

Preventing the victim from leaving a room, vehicle, home, or any other place where they do not wish to be; Seizing or moving the victim against their will; Refusing to return a child at the end of a visitation, with the intent to deprive the other parent of that child; etc.

Mischief

Breaking or damaging something that belongs to the victim, or for which the victim is responsible: slashing tires, punching a hole in a wall, tearing clothing, breaking a cell phone or computer, breaking glasses, a cane, a walker or a wheelchair, burning photos; Changing passwords to social media or email accounts or deleting the accounts themselves; Deleting documents or the contents of a computer or of another device; etc.

Public mischief

Lying to a police officer or any other peace officer for the purpose of leading them to investigate and charge the victim with a crime; Making a false statement to the court; etc.

Violation of a court order, peace bond or probation order

Refusing to return a child at the end of a right of access; Showing up at the victim's home (or work) or contacting them (or their relatives) despite an order prohibiting any contact; etc.

Attempted murder, murder

Pressing charges

If you have experienced any of these forms of violence, you have the right to report it to the police so that a complaint can be filed. There is no time limit to do so, but the sooner you report it, the easier it is for authorities to prove the situation *beyond a reasonable doubt*. The denunciation made at the time of pressing charges is the cornerstone of the process and cannot be changed once filed. It is recommended to document the events and obtain the support of a worker who is specialized in IPV to prepare your denunciation and to be accompanied during the process.

In case of emergency, do not hesitate to call 911.

To speak with an IPV advocate or with a lawyer, please don't hesitate to contact us. To ask your questions about your situation directly to a Crown Prosecutor, contact the DPCP Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Hotline at 1-877-547-DPCP (3727). This service is free and confidential.

Other behaviours, other recourses

Beyond the acts recognized in the Criminal Code of Canada, other behaviours may be subject to legal recourses. For example, the notion of "defamation" refers to an infringement, through verbal or written comments, of the right to honor and reputation. In Quebec, this right is codified in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and in the Civil Code of Quebec. A civil action can then be brought to demand that the behaviour cease or to obtain compensation for any damages caused to the victim

A huge thank you to our colleagues from the Rebâtir legal information helpline, for their contribution to the writing and validation of the legal information contained in this article.

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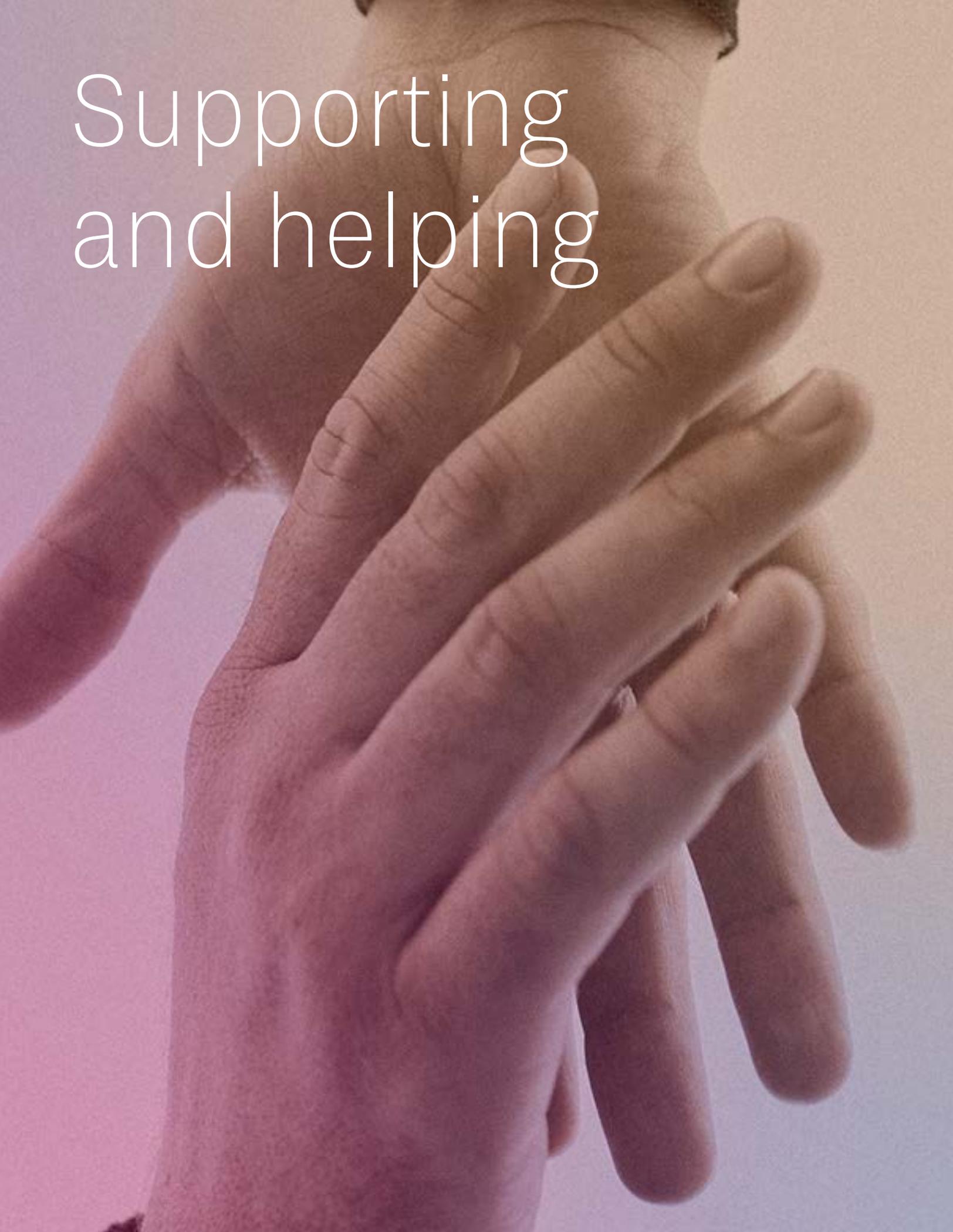
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Supporting
and helping



But why doesn't she leave? : the intimate partner violence trap

Because intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex issue, it is difficult to understand what a victim is really facing when she thinks about leaving. It can be difficult to understand why the victim is making the choice not to leave an abusive partner. In reality, leaving an abusive situation can be very difficult and involve many issues that make this decision very tricky for victims.

The ferris wheel allegory

It is often said that we must respect the victim's rhythm in terms of a possible breakup. In reality, it is not really the victim who is in cause in this rhythm, but the pace of the violence itself. There are times when leaving an abusive relationship can be more perilous than staying in it. Just like being on a Ferris wheel.

When you're on a Ferris wheel, you have limited opportunities to get off, and you have no control over its pace. If the person operating the Ferris wheel decides to stop it while it's at the top... you're stuck. You have to wait for the wheel to start again, for the basket to be at the bottom and for it to stop so that it becomes possible to get off. To make an even more realistic parallel with intimate partner violence, let's imagine that the wheel never stops at the bottom, and that it doesn't always turn at the same speed. You're more and more nauseous... but you can't get off safely. Getting out of a situation of IPV is a bit like that. The wheel often stops at the top, the operator leads the way and the passenger has little control over the situation. It may take many turns on the wheel to understand its rhythm and plan the best way to get off in the safest way possible.

IPV resources are there to accompany the victim on this ride, to help her assess what she is facing, to plan the best time to get off, and to wait for her at the bottom, putting as many mats as possible under the wheel, in case the ride is difficult.

**HERE ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT CAN TRAP
A VICTIM IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP :**

The potential for danger

The moment of separation is the most dangerous time for victims of IPV and for their children. There is a real danger of escalation and an increased risk for serious injury and, in some cases, homicide. Victims of IPV feel this potential for danger and try to protect themselves and their children as best they can.

The abusers' threats

Abusive partners generally make numerous threats to prevent the victim from leaving: "You don't know what I could do if you leave"; "If you leave you can forget about the kids, you'll never see them again"; "If you leave me, I'll kill myself and it will be your fault", etc.

Isolation

IPV victims are often very isolated. Not having access to practical assistance and emotional support from their loved ones makes it that much more difficult to imagine leaving the relationship.

Fear for their children

The fear that a violent partner will be awarded full or joint custody of the children is very common, especially if he has already made threats in this regard or if he has been violent with the children.

The repercussions of violence

When they begin to consider leaving a violent partner, many victims have been suffering from violence for months, even years. The consequences of the violence are thus already being felt: they are exhausted, their self-confidence is low, they are confused about their rights, they have stress-related health issues, they are scared and may suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Because of these consequences, it is hard for them to imagine being able to deal with everything that leaving a violent partner means.

Lack of financial resources

Chronic financial violence often means that victims of IPV do not have (or do not have access to) the financial resources that would allow them to meet their needs and those of their children, in addition to having to assume all the expenses inherent in a possible separation. In addition, the impact of the violence on their health can make it difficult for them to access paid work, sometimes for a while.



These issues (and many others) mean that it is vastly preferable to prepare a separation in a situation of IPV than to make a sudden move. It is also absolutely essential to respect the victim's decisions concerning the timing and rhythm of the separation.

— SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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8 ways to help a victim of intimate partner violence

Witnessing a violent situation is always difficult for both family members and those who work to help victims. Friends, coworkers and family members often feel helpless when they are faced with so much pain and suffering and can be fearful for the victim's safety. Counsellors, advocates, police officers and other professionals may feel powerless to help because the situation is beyond the victim's control.

Remain present in the victim's life

Preventing a victim from becoming isolated in their relationship improves their safety and that of their children.

Be alert not to be used by the abuser against the victim

Abusers often try to lie to and manipulate loved ones against the victim, in order to bias their opinion of the victim or the situation and to create conflict and isolation.

Be aware of the potential for danger

It is crucial to respect the victim's decisions concerning their relationship and their partner, because the risk of the violence escalating and becoming more dangerous, is very real.

Help the victim come to their own conclusions about the situation

A victim of IPV is forced by the abusive partner to perceive the situation in a certain way, which may result in them not recognizing the abuser's behaviour as violent. In order to help, we must refrain from

trying to impose our own perception of the situation, but rather try to help the victim come to their own conclusions, without any form of pressure.

Help the victim to regain power over their life

Victims of IPV are gradually deprived of the right to exercise their free will and make their own choices. It is thus very important to respect the decisions they makes for themselves and for their children, even when we might not understand or that we would have made a different choice for ourselves.

Act in a way that counteracts the impact of violence on the victim

Demonstrating your respect and mirroring back a positive self-image to the victim will help them to resist psychological violence and increase their resilience.

Offer your support and information about resources

Offering help, information and resources helps the victim regain control over their life, as long as the choices they makes afterward are respected. A victim may chose not to access a resource or not to accept an offer of support, but knowing that they exist and that they are available is beneficial in itself.

Avoid feeling helpless

Ask the victim if they want you to do something for them. If they say yes, help them find a way to answer that need. If they say no, take comfort in knowing that what you are already doing is meeting their current needs.

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14 messages to convey to a victim of intimate partner violence

It's normal not to know what to say to a victim of intimate partner violence (IPV). It can be hard to know how to respond to their suffering, their ambivalence and their feelings of helplessness, without pressuring them about their choices. Here are 14 simple messages that can make a big difference and help support and encourage a victim of IPV to continue talking about what they are experiencing.

"I believe you."

"I'm glad you told me."

"I'm sure you have good reasons to feel (uneasy, afraid, sad, confused, etc.)."

"You're allowed to have a different point of view from your partner."

"Regardless of the situation, your partner shouldn't have acted that way towards you."

"It's normal to have believed in your partner's good will and to have hoped that things would get better."

"It's a complex situation and I can see why it's hard for you to make sense of it."

"Your reactions are normal. What you're going through is not."

"It's physically and mentally exhausting to live under such intense stress."

"You're allowed to take your time to make the best decision possible to ensure your safety and that of your children."

“You are the best judge of your situation and of what you want to do about it.”

“I won’t do anything without your consent.”

“There are resources that can help you through all of this.”

“I trust your judgement. You’re making the best decisions possible in the context.”



It was many years before I told anyone about the violence. I was afraid my family and friends would be angry with my boyfriend... and that they might judge me for staying with him. I told my best friend first. She was very kind, understanding and respectful and I was so relieved! Thanks to her I was able to tell my mother. Together, they helped me build my strength and, with their support, I contacted SOS violence conjugale and went to a shelter a few months later. The help and moral support that my friend and my mother provided me made a huge difference for me and my children during the long process of getting to safety

— WOMAN, 37 YEARS OLD · SURVIVOR

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Safety first



Technological self-defense guide for victims of IPV

Technological tools have always been used by aggressors to gain power over their partners. What characterizes the current period is that these tools are increasingly numerous, effective, accessible and affordable. Whether via cell phones, apps, social networks, home automation or anything else, the opportunities for abusers are numerous, and it can be complex to spot technological violence in one's life and know how to protect oneself from it.



In this day and age, the question is no longer “is the person experiencing technological violence?” but rather “what forms of technological violence are they experiencing?”

— LAB 2038

IPV : A unique context

In contexts other than IPV - espionage, for example - technological surveillance activities are carried out stealthily, secretly, so that the target is unaware that they are being monitored. In the case of IPV, although surveillance may indeed be stealthy, it can also be carried out explicitly, as the abuser feels that they have a right to control their partner and therefore may not necessarily hide the fact that they are monitoring the victim. This is the case, for example, of an abuser who alludes to the information at their disposal in order to gain power over a partner.

Three goals: surveillance, manipulation and harassment

Technological abuse generally serves three functions. The first is surveillance. Tools are then used to monitor online and offline activities, in order to extract information about the victim's whereabouts, actions or communications. The second function is manipulation. In this case, the tools are used to convey messages designed to influence, convince or coax the victim into changing their mind or to create confusion. The third function is harassment and intimidation. In this case, the tools are used to

make intrusive contact with the victim, to force them to continue communications, to intimidate them or to put pressure on them.



The challenge with the diversification of connected technologies in this context is that it becomes more difficult to cut off contact, even after physically distancing oneself from an abuser.

— CDEACF

Physical access to devices

Technological abuse in the context of IPV is facilitated by the fact that violent partners often have access to the victim's devices (before the break-up) and to those of the children (before and after the break-up). Through this direct contact with computers, tablets, smartphones and electronic games, they have a golden opportunity to use these tools. They can consult Internet browsing history, e-mails, text messages, social network exchanges and more. They can also modify the security or privacy settings of the devices, or install malicious software or applications (spyware) that will enable them to continue their intrusion even if they no longer have access to the devices afterwards. They may also attempt to harm the victim by deleting important documents related to work, evidence gathering or personal life.

Monitoring devices

More and more abusers are using physical devices such as cameras, microphones, locatable devices like "air-tags" or "tiles" or even certain models of "air pods" to track someone's movements. These tools can be camouflaged in fake USB wires, or slipped into a child's bag, a satchel, a diaper bag, or even camouflaged in a home or in a car.

Unauthorized access to accounts

Abusers can use the privileged information they have access to (such as passwords or details of the victim's intimate life) to gain access to the victim's personal accounts (online accounts, applications, social networks, e-mails, etc.) and keep tabs on them. They can monitor a victim's movements, e-mails, social network messages, contacts, incoming and outgoing calls, connected devices, purchases, and so on. They can also send messages or make posts on social networks posing as the victim to harm them or undermine their credibility. All types of accounts can provide useful information for perpetrators of violence: access to a bank account allows them to monitor a victim's purchases and money inflows, access to an Uber account allows them to see where the victim travels and where they get food delivered, access to an e-mail account lets them know who the victim talks to and what they are planning, access to an Amazon account gives them access to the victim's new address, and so on.

Signs of technological abuse

- Social media posts are made in the victim's name without their knowledge;
- Presence of unknown devices connected to online accounts;

- New messages are marked as “read”;
- Files or applications appear or disappear from devices;
- The partner has information that is not available elsewhere;
- The partner seems to know things that have not been mentioned to them (where one has been, who one has seen, who one has talked to, what was bought, the content of private messages, who one is meeting up with, etc.);
- Having the sensation of being physically followed offline, in real time;
- Device batteries drain faster than usual;
- Applications use an unreasonable amount of data or memory;
- A device’s camera icon appears when the camera is not in use.

Technological self-defense tips: During the relationship

When in a relationship with someone who uses IPV, short-term safety must be the number one priority. Any action that might signal to a violent partner that a victim suspects that a device is being monitored (changing passwords, disabling geolocation functions or removing a monitoring application or device, for example) must therefore be avoided.

- Always act as if your partner actually has access to your devices and accounts;
- Avoid using devices to which the partner has access for information retrieval, documentation or any action relating to the violent situation;
- Use “anonymous” or “private” mode, on a browser that is not connected to any account (Google or other);
- Visually inspect electronic devices and make sure that every wire or device (usb or other) is original or self-purchased;
- Check for unknown devices connected to your online accounts;
- Avoid bringing home any device, cell phone or computer provided by a place of work, in order to preserve its integrity and to be able to continue using it for empowerment purposes;
- Create a secret e-mail account on a device to which the abuser does not have access, and use only this e-mail for any communication related to the violent situation (with resources, loved ones, etc.);
- Obtain the necessary materials to create a barrier that renders certain “locatable” objects harmless and can be used when needed : a large roll of aluminum foil and a container (like a Tupperware) with a rubber seal on the lid. You can also buy a pouch identified as a “Faraday bag”.
- Meet with interveners in neutral locations rather than in IPV resources (at the CLSC, for example), and prepare realistic pretexts for being in this location.

Technological self-defense tips: When leaving a violent partner

To be on the safe side, we suggest these steps be followed after leaving the home, but before arriving at a safe place or shelter, to keep its location confidential, ideally in a police station parking lot or in a public place to get help in case of danger.

- If part of a family sharing plan on mobile devices, delete the partner's account (if one is responsible for the account) or remove your account and those of your children from the family sharing plan (if one is not responsible for the account). If it's impossible to do this on a device (as is often the case if it belongs to a child), remove its battery (or discharge it completely) and avoid using it until the issue has been resolved;
- Disable the tracking functions on each device that can be tracked : cell phones, smartwatches, computers, tablets, iPods, electronic games, connected toys, etc. If necessary, remove the battery from the devices (or discharge them completely) to temporarily neutralize these functions;
- Visually inspect the car and belongings for GPS devices or other locatable items such as AirTag, Tile, AirPods or other devices;
- Use an application that detects Apple-tracked devices or Tile chips, to receive an alert if a device that doesn't belong to you moves with you;
- If a GPS, AirTag, Tile or other device is located, remove its battery to deactivate it, or wrap the item in aluminum foil (3 layers) and put it in a plastic container with a sealant on the lid to neutralize it.

Technological self-defense tips: After reaching safety

Before modifying anything, it's important to document any evidence of devices being compromised (keep screenshots, photos, locatable items, have a witness, etc.), as this could be a criminal offence that you may want to prove in court .

- Before you start, install anti-virus software and scan for viruses, spyware and malware to eliminate them from your devices and those of your children;
- Remove applications or programs that allow shared access to a device, such as Teamviewer and Anydesk;
- Restore default device settings, after backing up your data;
- Make sure you know the function of every application or program that remains on your device, and eliminate any unknown applications or suspicious files;
- Select the two-factor identification mode for all accounts you wish to keep (social networks, bank or credit card accounts, work-related accounts, certain e-mail accounts, etc.);

- Find out if unknown devices or those belonging to your partner are connected to your accounts, so that you can eject them (you can search for “connection activity” with the account name on the web to find out how);
- Change passwords, use a password manager or device (such as a Yubikey) to increase online account security;
- Close any accounts that you don’t use on a regular basis (apps, online accounts like Uber, Amazon, etc.) and re-open new ones as needed;
- If you think that certain devices or services are still compromised, you can have them checked by your employer’s IT department, in an electronics store, or with the provider of a service (e.g. cellular service);
- If necessary, to gather evidence and eliminate all risks, you can have your devices professionally appraised. This can be a fairly costly process, but can make it easier to lodge a criminal complaint, for unauthorized use of a computer or harassment, for example.



This article was written with the support of Lab 2038 and the Centre de documentation sur l’éducation des adultes et de la condition féminine (CDEACF), two non-profit organizations involved in research and intervention at the intersection of digital safety and intimate partner violence.

— SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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Safety planning : the empowerment power tool

When a person experiences violence in their relationship with a partner or ex-partner, they are constantly dealing with a certain degree of risk, which involves a lot of stress and distress.



My loved ones don't realize how COMPLICATED my life actually is. I left him 3 months ago and it seems as if I am still confronted to difficult decisions or situations every single day. When I told him that I was leaving, when I ran into him during the move, when he calls or texts me, day and night, when I have to see him for the kids, when our paths cross in Court, when I "accidentally" bump into him at the grocery store... it's all so heavy. One of the things that helped me the most was when the shelter worker suggested that I work on protection scenarios. Building my scenarios helped me prepare for these situations. I liked the fact that she didn't tell me what to do. Instead we brainstormed and found responses and reactions that suited me and that were tailored to my situation.

— SURVIVOR, 45 YEARS OLD

Building bridges to safety

In order to promote safety for a victim-survivor of violence, it is important to understand and to respect their protection and defence mechanisms in order to avoid rushing into anything that could increase risks for the person and for their children. This is the importance of "going at one's own pace". It is however possible to develop ways to increase safety in the moment and to help deal with the fear and danger that can remain present, sometimes years after separation. Helping to deal with difficult, scary and potentially dangerous situations is exactly what safety planning is about.

Safety planning aims to counteract the risks associated with a decision or with a situation. It can help when making difficult decisions and allows the victim-survivor to prepare to face different situations. It can be built by the victim-survivor for themselves (because the most important part of safety planning is to trust the person's experience and their feelings about the situation) but if possible, it helps to build them with someone who can offer support and ideas, be it a violence advocate or trusted friend or family member.

**SOS violence conjugale is available 24/7 to gives access to violence advocates throughout Quebec.*



I'm not ready to leave. I'm too afraid of his reaction if I leave with the kids. For now, I'm building strength from within with the help of a counsellor. For me, safety scenarios are a way to function as well as possible despite his violence, to protect what is most important: my children and my identity. Most of my safety strategies are in my head... mantras to keep me calm when things get heated, my advocate's voice telling me it's not my fault, a mental wall against his insults, etc. Other strategies are about what I want to say (and not say) and how I want to say it if I am ever faced with a confrontation. I can choose my reactions ahead of time and it makes me feel more in control of my life even if the violence is ongoing.

— SURVIVOR, 37 YEARS OLD

Step 1 - Identifying the potential danger

The first step to safety planning is to choose a situation that could potentially pose a risk to the victim-survivor or to their children. It could be a danger to one's physical safety or to one's emotional or psychological integrity. Ideally, safety planning scenarios are created for each event or situation that is anticipated (although one scenario can often be useful in several situations).

Here are some questions that can help identify the situation for which safety planning could be useful :

- *I would be afraid that things would go wrong if...*
- *It was really bad when...*
- *I was really afraid when...*
- *I fear the moment when...*

Step 2 - Making the risk inventory

The second step to safety planning is to identify the risks associated to the chosen situation, in the most practical way possible. This step is particularly useful when a person tends to react to stress with the fight response (see our article on stress reactions for more details), because it allows them to stop and evaluate the safety issues related to the situation before it arises.

Here are some questions that can help :

- *What could happen?*
- *How might my abuser react?*
- *What might they say?*
- *What has happened in a similar situation in the past?*
- *How far could it go?*

Step 3 - Planning for safety

After identifying the possible risks, the third step to safety planning is to explore strategies that could help to increase safety in the chosen situation. Different avenues can be considered, depending on the situation. This step is particularly useful when a person tends to react to stress with the freeze response, because it counteracts powerlessness.

Avoidance strategies

Sometimes work-around strategies can help prevent the risky situation from occurring in the first place. For example, exchanging children in a public or supervised place, communicating in writing (e-mail, text message, etc.) rather than in person, obtaining legal protection measures, etc. Before separation, one may also choose to comply with the abuser's requests in order to protect themselves in the short term.

Buffering strategies

Conflict mitigation strategies can sometimes help to buffer the risk of certain events. For example, what physical postures are to be avoided, what could be said, how it could be said, what could calm the situation, etc. Being strategic could also promote safety in times of crisis. For example, determining in advance which room would be the safest, which emergency exits are accessible, which objects could become weapons and should be relocated, etc.

Self-defense strategies

Psychological self-defence strategies can be useful to protect one's psychological integrity, self-esteem, self-confidence and identity. For example, mantras to counter insults and denigration can be developed, anchoring strategies can be built out of positive words from allies, small objects or keepsakes that represent loved ones can be kept close by, worn or carried for strength, etc. Physical self-defence strategies can also be helpful in protecting one's physical integrity. For example, learning how to get away when being physically restrained, practicing how to scream, learning how and where to strike, etc.

Technological strategies

Technical/technological strategies can be put in place to promote safety. For example, alarm systems, apps allowing one to share their movements with a trusted ally, panic buttons, emergency call functionalities in cell phone, etc. Conversely, it is important to become aware of ways in which technology may have been used by the abusive partner to increase their control, learning to recognize if the geolocation features of different devices are being used against their will, avoiding using devices that may have been compromised or tampered with by the abuser (personal computer, cell phone, email account, social network accounts, etc.).

Empowerment strategies

One possible way to empowerment is to collect evidence about the situation of violence for possible legal or criminal recourse later on. For example, documenting events, finding ways to record situations of violence, getting witnesses to record their observations, etc. Another way to empowerment is to prepare ways to call for help or to flee if necessary. For example, developing codes with hidden meanings that could be sent to loved ones (for example, talking about grandma could mean to call 911, talking about Toronto could mean to ask the person to come to the house and create a diversion, etc.). Building a

support network with resources, hiding personal belongings at work in case of a hasty departure or hiding money in a safe place could also be useful strategies in some situations.

Because many avenues are possible, it is useful to brainstorm, to gather all the ideas without discarding the options at first glance. The more a safety plan is rooted in one's reality and experience with one's partner, the more likely it is that it will be useful and effective in a crisis. For this reason, family members and counsellors/advocates should avoid "telling the victim-survivor what to do", but rather focus on assisting them in brainstorming ideas and giving them full power to decide what strategies they want to implement.

Here are some questions that may be helpful at this stage:

- *How could I keep myself calm in this situation?*
- *What has helped in a similar situation in the past?*
- *What could I do or say to calm or reason with him?*
- *What could I do or say to deflect the situation or escape?*
- *How would I like to express myself?*
- *How could I protect myself physically?*
- *How could I protect myself psychologically?*
- *How (and who) could I call for help if I need it? How would I do it?*

It is important to remember that when faced with violence and danger, the victim-survivor has **the right to use whatever means necessary to protect themselves**. They have the right to be inauthentic, to pretend and to lie. They have the right to say what the abuser wants to hear even if they don't really mean it. They have the right not to stick to what they have previously said or promised. They have the right to promise something even if they don't intend to stick to it afterwards. They have the right to pretend to believe the abuser. They have the right to choose NOT to stand their ground, if they feel that that would put them at more risk. They have the right to defend themselves in any way necessary, even if it means physically defending themselves if faced with a risk to one's immediate physical safety.

Step 4 - Practice makes perfect

Now that a safety scenario has been planned, the last step is to do exactly like actors do before going on stage: rehearse. The more it is possible to practice, the easier it becomes to implement the safety plan once faced with the situation. This step is particularly useful when a person tends to react to stress with the flight response, because it plunges them into action at a time when it is less difficult to do so.

While it may seem strange to approach things in such a calculated manner, safety planning has been shown to be very useful in situations of intimate partner violence. Of course, even the best of plans has its limits, but mental preparation and putting in place creative and practical measures that one might not have thought of on the spot often makes a big difference when faced with a dangerous situation.

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Preparing to leave : a delicate step

When intimate partner violence (IPV) is present in a relationship, preparing to leave involves high stakes. If you are thinking of separating or of seeking refuge in a shelter or with relatives, it is probably because you feel that your physical or psychological safety (or that of your children) is at risk. It is a difficult decision and you deserve information and support.

When loved ones worry

Your reflection about leaving may have been prompted by the concerns of friends, colleagues or family members. Those close to you may feel a sense of urgency motivated by their fears about your safety. They may think that a separation will ensure your safety and may thus become overly insistent about it. Because leaving can be a very sensitive moment and that the levels of danger can sometimes increase in the beginning, it is important for you to know that the decision to leave, how you decide to go about it, and when you do it is your decision alone.

The perception of your loved ones or that of counsellors can help you weigh everything that is at stake and help you find resources, but it is important to respect how you feel about your situation. You have the right to tell your loved ones that you are thinking about it, but that you have not yet made a decision. If need be, you can refer them to this website, where they will find information and advice for themselves in the situation.

Safety first

Nothing is more important than your immediate safety and that of your children. Leaving a situation of violence can sometimes increase danger because the partner loses control over the victim-survivor and tries to regain it by increasing the intensity of the violence. Here are some strategies that may help keep you safe and make it easier for you to move on.

Seek support while preparing to leave

If you have the opportunity to do so, it may be helpful to plan your departure with the support of an advocate who is specialized with IPV. This advocate will be able to accompany you :

- To prepare the safest possible way out (the time, the pace, announcing your departure to your loved ones, your children, your partner, etc.) ;
- To explore different means to improve your safety (Finding safety in a shelter, consulting a lawyer, making a claim to IVAC, etc.) ;
- To develop safety plans for you and your children.

These advocates are available to support you and to accompany you in the steps you choose to take. They will respect your decisions and will not pressure you into any action. They are available throughout Quebec, 24 hours a day, whether you wish to take refuge in a shelter or not. *To get in touch with one of them, contact SOS violence conjugale at 1 800 363-9010.*

Bring your children with you

It is recommended to bring children with you when you leave a relationship involving intimate partner violence. Obviously it is a personal choice, but it is important to be aware that not bringing the children at the beginning could have repercussions later on, if you hope to have custody. Shelters are designed for the well-being of families: there is a playroom, toys, cribs, high chairs... and friends! The shelter-workers always try to ensure that the stay of mothers and their children is as comfortable as possible.

Disable geolocation functions on electronic devices

If you leave with electronic devices that can be geolocated (cell phones, computers, tablets, ipods, electronic games, etc.) it is important to disable the geolocation functions of each of them once you are safe, but before you arrive at your final destination. It is important to do this because abusive partners may use these features to track you or your children. If you don't know how to do this, a counsellor can assist you over the phone.

Explore the possibility of filing a criminal complaint

Some forms of intimate partner violence are criminal (physical violence, threats, several forms of sexual violence, some forms of economic violence, etc.). Filing a criminal complaint against an abusive partner can be a way to improve your safety, but is a decision that involves high stakes. Counsellors are available to accompany you in this reflection.

In a situation of immediate danger, do not hesitate to call 911.



It took me a while before I left. At first, when I thought about it, I was dizzy. I was so afraid that it would go wrong that I was frozen in place. I called SOS and was put in touch with a shelter worker who helped me by telling me that I didn't have to do everything all at once. I talked to her a few times and I even went to see her to prepare for my departure. I hid a bag at my sister's house, which I gradually filled with everything I wanted to have when I left. I took my time to prepare and when I left, I felt ready. I stayed in the shelter for two and a half months. Today, I am free.

— WOMAN, 31 YEARS OLD · SURVIVOR

Preparing your get-away-bag

If possible, it can be helpful to take the time to prepare some personal belongings that will make your journey easier once you have left. In some situations, it may be preferable to make copies (or take photos) of certain documents rather than taking the originals, to avoid arousing the suspicions of an abusive partner. It may also be safer to leave your get-away-bag in a place where your partner does not have access, such as at work or at a friend's house.

→ If it is not possible to prepare your personal belongings in advance, either because of time constraints or because there is a risk that your partner will find out, do not do so. Violence advocates will be able to help you find ways to retrieve your essential belongings once you are safe.

None of the documents or items mentioned below are mandatory. It is a checklist to help you think about what could be useful when preparing your personal belongings and those of your children.

Identification

- Baptism or birth certificate
- Health insurance card
- Driver's license
- Social Insurance Card
- Passport

Relation

- Marriage contract or other contracts related to the relationship
- Divorce, separation or other judgments
- Family Mediation Reports
- Names and contact information of lawyers, notaries, mediators, etc.
- Evidence (photographs or other) of events of violence
- Event number (police) / name of investigator on file
- Protection orders or others (810, etc.)

Money

- Cash
- Credit and debit cards (accounts in your name and joint accounts)
- Last bank statement
- Latest tax assessment notice (federal and provincial)
- Last bill for major accounts (electricity, cable, internet, telephone, etc.)
- Documents related to the residence (purchase contract, mortgage, lease, school and municipal taxes, etc.)
- Documents related to the car (purchase contract, loan, lease, proof of insurance, registration, etc.)
- Documents related to school, employment or social assistance
- Insurance contracts (car, home, life, etc.)
- Internet access to accounts and passwords
- Wills

Immigration

- Proof of Permanent Residence
- Proof of refugee status
- Proof of citizenship (Canadian or other)
- Visas
- Work Permits
- Names and contact information of your legal representative or immigration officer

Health

- Health or vaccination record
- Drugs and Prescriptions
- Braces, orthotics, etc.
- Contact information for professionals in your file (social work, psychology, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, etc.).

Children

- Favourite stuffed animal, doll or game
- Paci, slippers, favorite clothes
- Portable video game
- School material
- Teacher's name and contact information
- Last report card

Other

- Address book
- Keys (car, house, post office box, etc.)
- Photographs of the contents and condition of the house at the time of departure
- Jewelry and small valuables
- Keepsakes

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Breaking the hold of intimate partner violence: reclaiming power over your life

When you are faced by intimate partner violence (IPV) or post-separation violence, you often find yourself in a whirlwind of events and manipulations that makes it feel as if you have no control over what happens in your life. Different strategies for regaining power over one's situation are possible and can help to eventually break the hold of IPV. It is important to know that IPV involves many complicated issues that may block certain avenues for some time. There is no right or wrong choice, no good or bad victim, no healthy or unhealthy way to deal with situations of IPV. The important thing is to make your own choices, to follow your instinct about what is safest for you and your children.

Calling 911 in case of an emergency

It is important to know that you can always call 911 for emergency assistance when violence is occurring, if you are afraid for yourself or fearful for the safety of someone else, including that of the abusive person. You can also call 911 if you want to leave a partner but are afraid of how they will react when you leave the house.

Breaking the silence and finding support

When IPV is present, the abuser often deliberately keeps the victim isolated, to prevent them from having access to moral support and concrete help, and to prevent them from having access to a vision of events in which they are not responsible for the situation. To achieve this, various strategies are usually put in place by the abuser early on in the relationship. It is often difficult to return to loved ones when

they have been pushed away, but when it is possible to reconnect with them or to open up about your situation, it can make a world of difference.

It can also be helpful to have access to a specialized IPV counselor. This person can offer support and accompaniment, no matter what you want to do with your situation. Anonymous telephone support, one-on-one meetings and support groups are available.

Making up your own mind about your situation

In situations of IPV, the abuser usually imposes their own view of things and events on the victim. This process is insidious but can make it difficult for you to form and maintain your own view of your situation.

Documenting the situation can already serve as a guide, if you come to doubt your perceptions because of the partner's emotional abuse when he tries to impose his version of events during the remission phase of the IPV cycle. Keeping evidence of what actually happened and what you understood at the time can help counter the abuser's manipulation.

You can also complete the interactive self-assessment tools available on our website to explore the different manifestations of violence and of control that may be present in your relationship.

Documenting violent events

Because of the many issues involved in IPV, it may not be the right time to press criminal charges or to leave your abuser at this time. However, it may be useful to keep a record of the violent events (whether criminal or not) in case you wish to report it to the authorities in the future or if you ever need to have the presence of IPV recognized in divorce proceedings.

To effectively document an abusive situation, you can:

- Describe the events in writing: the date, place and time of the events, as well as a detailed description of what happened. This can be done by describing it as if you were an outsider looking in, writing down what you and your partner said and did as accurately as possible.
- Keep any relevant information that can be used as evidence: writings (text messages, emails, handwritten letters, etc.), recordings (messages or phone conversations, etc.) or photos (injuries, damage to the house, etc.) that show that the event took place.
- If there are witnesses, keep their contact information and their own written description of what they saw. If children were involved however, it is best to avoid asking them to record their observations as this may be detrimental to their own recovery. You can note their presence and what they were exposed to, but it is better not to ask them to describe it.

When the relationship is still ongoing, care should be taken as to where this information is kept. If possible, it is best to keep it safe outside of your home (at work, at a friend's house, etc.) and to avoid recording it on any electronic device that your partner has access to.

Safety planning

Regardless of the forms of violence you experience, it is useful to create safety planning scenarios to prepare what you can do in a dangerous situation and to improve your physical and psychological safety (see the SOS-INFO on this topic).

Protecting yourself against technological abuse

Technological tools have always been used by aggressors to gain power over their partners. What characterizes the current period is that these tools are increasingly numerous, effective, accessible and affordable. Whether via cellular devices, apps, social networks, home automation or anything else, the opportunities for abusers are numerous, and it can be complex to spot technological abuse in one's life and know how to protect oneself from it.

Knowing your rights

There are many legal avenues available to help defend your rights and integrity. Some help protect you from violence, while others enable you to rebuild as comfortable a life as possible afterwards. It's important to have the right information, to make the best possible decisions in the context. Since 2021, victims of intimate partner violence have access to 4 hours of free legal support with the Rebâtir helpline, to find the right answers to all their questions and initiate their legal proceedings.

Exploring the idea of breaking up the relationship

Breaking up is unequivocally the most difficult decision facing a victim of IPV. **Now is often not the best time to leave a violent relationship.** The stakes are high and the path is full of dangers. **However chances are that someday, you will have an opportunity to do so safely.** It is an option that can lead to long-term safety in some situations.

You have the right to explore the idea of leaving your partner, to explore the issues involved, to think about the resources you might use, and to think about ways to mitigate the danger. The more opportunity you have to prepare for this departure, the more likely it is to go as smoothly as possible. You can do this with someone who understands the complexity of the issue and who will not put pressure on your choice by calling on a counsellor in a specialized IPV resource through our services.

Finding safety in a shelter

When you are experiencing IPV, you can go to a shelter to take a step back from your situation, to find a safe space following an abusive event, or during the process of leaving the abuser. In Quebec, there is a province-wide network of first and second step shelters that are available to help ensure your immediate safety and to help plan the best possible future for yourself and for your children.

Filing a criminal complaint

When you have been subjected to criminal offenses in the context of IPV, you have the right to file a complaint no matter how much time has passed since the event. Of course, pressing charges can be a difficult decision to make because many issues are at stake. Because of this, it can be a good idea to seek the support of a counselor who is specialized in IPV when considering this option. If you wish, you can also be accompanied when you meet with the authorities. You can also consult a lawyer anonymously and free of charge through the Rebâtir service, in order to weigh the legal stakes of this decision.

Claiming financial compensation from IVAC

In Quebec, whether or not you choose to file a complaint with the authorities, you can apply for compensation for certain forms of criminal violence. In situations of IPV as well as in situations of sexual violence or childhood abuse, you can apply for compensation no matter how much time that has passed since the event. This compensation can cover costs related to the loss of wages, care for a child born from rape, psycho-social or medical care (including for those not covered by medicaid), relocation, alarm systems, etc.

If you wish, you can be accompanied in this claim by a counsellor specialized in IPV in a shelter, or by the interveners of the Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVAC).



To get in touch with a counselor who is specialized in IPV, with a crime-victim advocate, with a lawyer, or to have access to shelter resources or any other resource that could be useful to you, we are available 24/7 by phone at 1 800 363-9010.

— SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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