

# What is Abuse?

## Abuse is when someone harms another.

Abuse or violence can occur in any family. It can happen to anyone regardless of:

- gender
- age
- income level
- ethnic background

Abuse can occur in any relationship, including a marriage, same-sex or dating relationship.

The harm can include behaviours that are:

- physical
- sexual
- psychological
- financial
- neglectful

It can be one instance or a pattern over time.

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes:

- hitting, punching, slapping, choking, burning, pushing, shoving or any other forceful physical act you do not consent to
- confining you or not letting you contact friends or family
- forcing you to take drugs or drink alcohol or do something illegal

*Abuse is  
against  
the law in  
Canada.*

*You should NOT rely on this booklet for legal advice.  
It provides general information on Alberta law only.*



Find more information about sexual violence at: [www.cplea.ca/sexual-violence/](http://www.cplea.ca/sexual-violence/)

Read more about coercive control in a LawNow article at: [bit.ly/3FkcJWe](https://bit.ly/3FkcJWe)

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes:

- any sexual activity that you do not consent to
- forcing or threatening you to do something sexual that you do not want to do
- using physical force, weapons or objects in sexual acts without your consent
- involving other people in sexual acts without your consent
- involving or suggesting involving in sexual activity a child or someone who cannot give consent (such as someone who is ill, drunk, high on drugs, being intimidated or pressured)

In any relationship, including a marriage, Canadian law says you must voluntarily consent to each sexual activity.

## Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse includes:

- controlling behaviour, such as bullying, humiliating, threatening, yelling, blaming, shaming, ridiculing, disrespecting or criticizing you
- controlling what you can or cannot do
- threatening to commit suicide
- threatening to injure or kill someone
- threatening to hurt or take away your children
- using person beliefs (such as the abuser's interpretation of religious or cultural beliefs) to manipulate, dominate or control you

## Financial Abuse

Financial abuse includes:

- keeping you dependent on the abuser
- stealing your money
- controlling your finances or refusing to share money
- not allowing you to work or go to school
- causing you to lose your job (such as by making you miss work)

## Neglect

Neglect means not providing things needed to survive, such as food, clothing, medical care, or shelter. It can also include causing a risk of serious harm by not doing something.

### LEARN MORE ABOUT ABUSE AND HOW TO RESPOND

Read the other info sheets in this series to learn more about:

- Emergency Protection Orders
- Queen's Bench Protection Orders
- Exclusive Possession Orders
- Restraining Orders
- Keeping the Abuser Away
- Going to the Police
- Gathering Evidence of Abuse
- Serving Documents on an Abusive Party
- Renting and Ending Your Lease Early
- Planning to Leave
- Help with Finances
- Children & Parenting
- Leaving an Abusive Relationship If You Are Not a Canadian Citizen
- Clare's Law

Visit [www.willownet.ca](http://www.willownet.ca) – a CPLEA website about violence and abuse laws in Alberta.

*If you are  
experiencing  
abuse, help  
is available.*



## About CPLA

The Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta is dedicated to making the law understandable for Albertans. We provide legal information on a wide variety of topics through our websites, print resources, workshops and more. For more information, visit our website: [www.cplea.ca](http://www.cplea.ca)

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FOUNDATION**



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Canada

## Resources

Find more information about domestic violence and the other info sheets in this series on **WillowNet** – a CPLA website about violence and abuse laws in Alberta. [www.willownet.ca](http://www.willownet.ca)

- **Family Violence Info Line: 310.1818**  
Get help anonymously. Available 24/7 in over 170 languages.
- **Victim Services Alberta: 780.427.3460 or [www.alberta.ca/victims-services.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/victims-services.aspx)**  
Connect with local supports.
- **Resolution and Court Administration Services: [www.alberta.ca/rcas.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/rcas.aspx)**  
Get help finding court forms or information on the court process.
- **Community Legal Clinics in Alberta: [www.lawcentralalberta.ca/clinics](http://www.lawcentralalberta.ca/clinics)**  
Get free legal advice if you earn a low income.
- **Legal Aid Alberta's Emergency Protection Order Program (EPOP): 1.780.422.9222 (Edmonton area) or 1.403.297.5260 (Calgary area) or [www.legalaid.ab.ca/services/family-violence-matters/](http://www.legalaid.ab.ca/services/family-violence-matters/)**  
Get free legal help applying for an EPO.



We want to know what you think!  
To take our one minute survey:

- capture this QR code with your phone camera, or
- go to [bit.ly/3g8tby9](https://bit.ly/3g8tby9)