



# Does domestic violence touch you?

Dr Paul Martiquet, Medical Health Officer



**So many people 'know' that** there is domestic violence in our communities. “Not to anyone I know!” is a common refrain. While we could attribute that thought to wilful blindness, it is more likely due to a disbelief that anyone close to you could possibly be inflicting, or receiving such awful treatment.

The definition of domestic violence commonly used is: “the experience or threat of physical or sexual violence or financial or psychological/emotional abuse by a current or ex-partner.” Over the past several years, the incidence of domestic violence in Canada has remained fairly constant at about 7% to 8%. Despite the evidence, so many of us keep thinking that “it cannot be happening to someone I know.”

Domestic violence follows a vicious cycle that often explodes into physical violence or other form of abuse. After the incident, the abuser is full of sadness and often promises that “it will never happen again.” But it does. And again. And again. And again. This is called the cycle of violence, and it is pretty much constantly present in domestic violence situations. The cycle will not be broken without help.

The cycle of violence contains three main phases. First there will be tension building, continuing until there is an explosion. Afterwards, the honeymoon phase will begin again, cycling eventually back to tension.

There is no typical victim or abuser in these situations. The victim may be a woman or a man, may be in a traditional heterosexual marriage or in a same-sex partnership. Domestic abuse is not particular to any

socioeconomic class — both rich and poor find themselves in the same situations. The abuse can occur during a relationship, while the couple is breaking up, or even after the relationship has ended.

Knowing what signs to look for makes it easier to identify potential cases of domestic abuse. Some of the signs include belittling or ridiculing hopes, plans and ambitions; control over whom you can visit or associate with; destruction or vandalism of your possessions; controls all the money in the relationship, including what it is spent on; jealousy of your friends or family and putting them down; hitting, slapping, punching, kicking or biting — ever. A good and simple test is: do you like yourself less after being with this person?

Look for the signs not only in your own relationship, but also in those of the people around you. You might be (unpleasantly) surprised at what you see.

What can we do? The first and most important step is to realize that domestic abuse exists, and avoid blaming the victim. Speak out when you observe abuse, and name it when you see it. Do not try to rescue the woman, you can't do it! Instead, offer support for her decisions about her life. Refuse to put up with belittling or demeaning comments or jokes about domestic violence.

Domestic abuse and violence are not acceptable. They are a scourge upon our families and community and anything we can do to reduce it benefits all of us, not just the victim. Don't laugh at that joke. Don't accept a friend being belittled in public. Name the abuse when you see it.

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