



NORMALIZING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DOMESTIC OR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

There are many reasons why we may find it difficult to talk about domestic or intimate partner violence. The barriers to having conversations can range from stigma and shame experienced by victims and survivors, cultural norms, institutional barriers, fear of confrontation or retaliation, as well as our own lack of awareness and misconceptions about domestic violence. However, normalizing conversations about domestic violence is a critical step toward creating safer, healthier communities where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to seek the help they need. This tip sheet provides information on steps you can take to normalize conversations about domestic or intimate partner violence and offer help.

Educate Yourself about Signs of Intimate Partner Violence

Take time to learn the signs and symptoms of domestic violence, how to respond appropriately and where to refer people for help. Unfortunately, there are many ways in which an intimate partner can abuse their victim, including physically, psychologically, and even sexually. As a leader in the community, you may notice that someone is:

- Making excuses for injuries/has physical injuries.
- Wearing clothes that don't fit the season, like long sleeves in summer.
- Experiencing personality changes – more withdrawn, more emotionally upset or agitated.
- Constantly checking in with their partner.
- Overly worried about pleasing their partner.
- Without access to their own money.
- Partner speaks negatively about the victim, calls them names, and tries to demean them.

Provide Staff Training

Equip your staff and volunteers with training on recognizing signs of domestic violence, responding appropriately, and what resources and supports are available in your area. Promote an understanding of the nature and effects of domestic violence and help to convey a hopeful message about healing from experiences of domestic violence.

Collaborate with Community Partners

As a community leader, you need to learn about shelters, counselling services, legal aid, and law enforcement agencies so that you can offer help to victims. Abuse Hurts can help you understand the resources and supports in the York Region and may also be able to connect you with other support organizations. Spend time learning about these support organizations to understand their services, who they serve, and how to refer a person to them.

Challenge Misconceptions

As a leader who has taken steps to normalize the conversation and provide support, you can play an essential role in the community by challenging harmful beliefs and misconceptions about gender roles, power dynamics and family structures that contribute to domestic violence or simply a lack of understanding about intimate partner violence. Through your leadership, you can promote the values of equality, respect and compassion and highlight how these factors of your belief systems support those escaping domestic or intimate partner violence.

Provide a Safe Space

Create a safe and confidential space within your institution or organization where victims can seek support and guidance without fear of judgment or reprisal. This could include establishing helplines, support groups and a mechanism for individuals to reach out and seek support. To promote emotional safety, ensure everyone takes a non-judgemental approach in all interactions with survivors and communicates clearly and consistently.

Listen and Restore Choice

Often, victims of domestic or interpersonal violence have lost choice and control over their own lives. In your conversations with victims, it is essential that you create space for them to tell their stories in a manner and way that supports them. They may require breaks from the conversation. Also, let them provide input and perspectives on how they think they need help or what help might look like for them. As a leader, exploring and using trauma-informed practices and providing opportunities for victims and survivors to share perspectives and input is important.

Be a Role Model

As a leader in the community, you play a crucial role in normalizing conversations about domestic violence. By speaking up and breaking the silence, you can reduce the stigma associated with domestic or intimate partner violence and provide support and resources to those who need it.

Learn more at www.abusehurts.ca/prevention