



# Aboriginal Journey to Healing

## Information Sheet

Family violence in Aboriginal communities impacts children, youth, Elders and families. It compromises the integrity of Aboriginal culture, traditions and values.

“Our strength is in our visions and dreams, our ability to interpret the songs, dances of the earth, sky, spirit worlds, if we can remember our purpose, we will survive.”

### Get Help

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.**

For help in your community or for more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit [www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca).

Alberta Children and Youth Services is proud to lead Alberta’s Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Initiative.

## Is there family violence in my community?

Consider these numbers:<sup>1</sup>

- Between 1999 and 2004, 24 per cent of Aboriginal women and 18 per cent of Aboriginal men reported being victims of spousal assault. These rates are three times higher than the rate of spousal assault among non-Aboriginal women and men during the same period.
- When spousal assault occurred, Aboriginal women were significantly more likely than non-Aboriginal women (54 per cent vs. 37 per cent) to experience severe and potentially life-threatening forms of spousal violence including being beaten, choked, having a gun or knife used against them or being sexually assaulted.
- The rate of spousal homicide for Aboriginal women is eight times higher than it is for non-Aboriginal women.

### Family violence

These high rates are associated with the effects of “colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide; the learned negative, cumulative, multi-generational actions, values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural patterns practiced by one or more people that weaken or destroy the harmony and well-being of an Aboriginal individual, family, extended family, community or nationhood.”<sup>2</sup>

Family violence can be perpetrated on anyone: men, women, children and Elders. It includes physical abuse (hitting, punching, kicking, choking, etc.), emotional abuse (threatened, called names, etc.), sexual abuse (forced sexual contact), child sexual abuse, incest, financial abuse and spiritual abuse.

Family violence destroys a family. It impacts children and the whole community. It impacts the Aboriginal communities’ struggle to heal trans-generational loss and grief as a result of colonization and residential schools. Family violence hurts everyone; it’s a heavy painful burden to carry alone. It is not your fault.



## *Taking the first step on your healing journey*

### **Eight things you can do if you are being abused**

Everyone is impacted by family violence. Healing will restore the harmony and balance of your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well being.

Here's what you can do:

1. First, make sure you and any children are physically safe.
  - **If you are in immediate danger call 911.**
  - Make a safety plan. If your partner has ever been violent, the violence could happen again at any time. You will need a safety plan so you can get to a safe place quickly if necessary. See "safety plan" suggestions at [www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca) or call a women's shelter or police-based Victim Services Unit for assistance.
  - If a child is being abused call the Child Abuse Hotline 24 hours a day at **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)**.
  - Call **1-866-331-3933** toll-free to be automatically redirected to a shelter nearest you.
  - The Wheatland Emergency Shelter in Strathmore accommodates abused men with or without children. Phone **1-877-934-6634**.
2. Know that you are not responsible for the abuse. You did not cause the abuse even if your partner would like you to think so.
3. Understand that the abuse and violence will continue. Abuse and violence are not likely to stop without intervention.
4. Tell someone you trust about the abuse — a community social worker/child intervention specialist, community service worker, regional health nurse, teacher, counsellor or school administrator. Secrecy gives abuse more power.
  - Connect with a trusted Elder in your community.
5. Find out more about abuse in relationships. You are not alone. Other women have had this experience and were eventually able to create new and healthy lives for themselves. Once you start looking for sources of help, you will meet people who understand your situation.
6. Get professional help from a qualified counsellor.
7. Care for yourself. Anything you do to uplift your body, emotions, mind or spirit will help you to get through this difficult situation and create the life you want for yourself.
8. Spend time with healthy people. Even if they cannot help you directly, being with healthy people will remind you that most people have kind and rewarding relationships. You can too.

Call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line, toll-free at **310-1818** or visit [www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca) for information about accessing resources and support services. Some reserves and Aboriginal rural communities have community-based domestic violence programs and support services.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2006, October). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends 2006* (Catalogue No. 85-570-XIE). Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/85-570-XIE/85-570-XIE2006001.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Family Healing (2002, June 4). *Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy*. Retrieved October 21, 2008 from <http://www.ahwsontario.ca/about/familyhealing.html>