



# What *Faith Communities* Can Do about Family Violence

## Information Sheet

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. Family violence can include spouse abuse (married or common-law), older adult abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and exposure to abuse of others in the family.<sup>1</sup>

### *Get Help*

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

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services authority or the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline: **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.

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.

You can help families who are experiencing family violence by working together with others whose expertise is in understanding and responding to family violence situations. Those experiencing abuse will benefit from your connections to family violence and abuse experts. You can find such expertise by contacting your local Child and Family Services Authority, your local police or local women's shelter.

### *Understand the Issues*

#### **Did you know?**

- Alberta has the highest reported rate of spousal abuse of Canada's provinces (ten per cent of women and seven per cent of men). In spite of similar prevalence rates, women are more likely than men to experience severe forms of violence and are two and a half times as likely to report being beaten, choked, threatened with a knife or a gun, or sexually assaulted.<sup>2</sup>
- In Alberta, exposure to family violence is the second most common form of maltreatment of children and youth (twenty-three per cent of all opened maltreatment cases).<sup>3</sup>
- Canadians over the age of 65 years had a self-reported rate of 12 violent incidents per 1,000 between 1999 and 2004. Almost half of violent incidents against seniors (both family and non-family violence) go unreported to police.<sup>4</sup>

### *Shape Attitudes*

Over the years, religion has helped to shape many attitudes about human relations. Faith communities can provide an informed and supportive environment to help both victims of family violence and those who are abusive. This can be accomplished in these ways:

- Believe the victim's story
- Offer rituals and meditation in consultation with family violence professionals
- Understand that the victim and their children are in real danger
- Help the victim find needed resources
- Hold the abuser accountable. Do not accept excuses or allow religious texts to justify violence and abuse. Use religious texts that emphasize respect and positive interactions
- Urge the abuser to seek appropriate treatment. Help is available
- Assure the victim that the faith community will not abandon them
- Increase your knowledge of family violence in order to better help your community members



Faith leaders are sometimes the only individuals in whom those who experience family violence will confide. A faith community can assist in the following ways:

- Get help
- Heal the impact of abuse
- Restore spiritual health

## Educate Your Community

Faith leaders have respect and influence in their communities. The overarching message in most faith teachings about males and females is centred on love and respect. Equal value is granted to men and women. As a spiritual leader, you have the opportunity to talk about family violence and to teach that choosing violence is never acceptable. You can include discussions about family violence as part of education opportunities and in pre-marital courses. You can provide resource material in your place of worship. Create opportunities to quote religious texts that address safety and respect. You can teach peace.

## Get Involved in Prevention

Besides educating people and inviting discussion about attitudes that contribute to family violence, faith leaders can strengthen their family life education programs in their place of worship. This can be done by focusing on equality and nonviolent conflict resolution, particularly in programs for young children and marriage preparation courses.

There are communities around Alberta that have active family violence and bullying prevention committees. Representation from local faith leaders is very important. To find out if there is an active committee in your area, contact your local Family and Community Support Services Office (FCSS) through your municipality.

## If you suspect child abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence - report it.

If you suspect that a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services Authority, or the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.

*Do not tell the child's parent or guardian.*

If you suspect that someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police.

Material adapted from:

Ngeth, P. and The Venerable Sophan Seng (2007), *Cambodian Community Domestic Violence Information and Prevention Resources*. Calgary: FaithLink.

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Children and Youth Services (2004). *Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying: Finding solutions together*. Edmonton: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from [http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt\\_opfvb\\_finding\\_solutions\\_high.pdf](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt_opfvb_finding_solutions_high.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2006). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends 2006*. (Catalogue no. 85-570-XIE). Ottawa: Author. Retrieved November 3, 2008 from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/85-570-XIE/85-570-XIE2006001.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> MacLaurin, B., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., McCormack, M., Pitman, L., Forest, N., et al (2005). *Alberta incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect, AIS-2003: Major findings*. Calgary: University of Calgary.

<sup>4</sup> Ogrodnik, L. (Ed.). (2006). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2006*. (Catalogue no. 85-224-XIE). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Retrieved November 3, 2008 from [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-XIE2006000\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-XIE2006000_e.pdf)