



The Vision of ERA is to contribute to stopping violence in relationships through province-wide provision of effective, accessible, ethical services for individuals who have used abuse in relationships. Although we wish to respond to all abuse in intimate relationships, our primary focus is on men's abuse against women given that official statistics indicate that 85% of reported incidents are of men using violence against their female partners.

## Relationship Violence Treatment: Answers to Common Questions Women Ask

*Adapted from: Counselling Programs for Men Who Are Violent in Relationships by Dale Trimble published by Health Canada*

### **How can I get my partner to attend a program?**

It is important for you to realize that the problem is your partner's, that it is his responsibility, and that ultimately you cannot "fix" the problem for him. Your efforts are best used in looking after your needs and those of the children.

### **What should I expect during my partner's counselling?**

Your partner's counsellor or another staff person from his program should be in touch with you. Initially, the practitioner will want to talk to you about the relationship and the history and nature of the violence and abuse. At this time, you should be given information about formulating a safety plan, if you do not already have one. You should be provided referral information for counselling, support, and if appropriate, legal services for yourself and your children. Periodically, you should be contacted to ascertain whether there has been any recurrence of violence or threats.

**Every woman should know that she has a right to her privacy and may, at any time, refuse to respond to requests of information by the program.** If you choose, you may be apprised of your partner's attendance, the length and content of the program, but not the details of the discussions that take place during his counselling. Some communities will not have programs for assaultive men but will have counsellors who provide standard counselling services only to individuals. You have the right to expect the above basic information from any counsellor.

### **What should I do while he is in the group?**

#### **Should I seek counselling?**

Women who have been victims of violence often feel isolated, confused, powerless, angry, and suffer from low self-esteem. If this is part of your experience, supportive counselling by a counsellor experienced in working with assaulted women can help you understand that the violence is not your fault. It can help you decide how you can take steps to protect yourself and your children and what legal means are available to you. Because your partner has completed a counselling program, it does not mean that you "owe" him reconciliation. You need to make a choice that is appropriate for you and the children.

### **If he is attending a program as one condition of a court order, what will happen if he does not attend?**

His probation officer can recommend to the Crown prosecutor that he be charged with a breach of the terms of his probation. If the Crown charges him and he is found

guilty, the consequences are determined by the judge.

These will vary from one jurisdiction to another. A judge may send him to jail, order a fine or community service, or extend the probationary period.

### **How can I tell if my partner is benefiting from the program?**

A change in a man's behaviour is dependent on whether he acknowledges his violence and takes responsibility for ending it. You should be cautioned that there is no guarantee he will stop being abusive. You should not make his attendance at counselling your safety plan. It is not uncommon for men to begin counselling simply and primarily as a strategy to persuade the woman to return or keep her from leaving. Counselling is not an "instant fix." However, his use of physical violence and threats should stop immediately. If not, the degree of his commitment to change may be questionable. You should anticipate that he will begin to remove himself from the home or take "time-outs" when he starts to get angry, and that he will stop other abusive, intimidating and controlling behaviours. In time, he should be able to listen to your concerns and demonstrate respect for you as an individual with needs and wants which are different from his own. It is important to know that some men may stop violent or threatening behaviours but continue to use other controlling or manipulative tactics to maintain a position of domination in the relationship.

### **What should I do if he continues to abuse me while he is in counselling?**

First, you should take any actions to protect yourself and your children which may include calling the police, calling the probation officer, leaving, etc. (see [www.endingviolence.org](http://www.endingviolence.org) for safety planning tools. Second, you should let his counsellor know what has happened. You have the right to expect that what you say to a counsellor will be confidential unless the children are at risk or have been abused.

### **What if counselling does not help?**

Not all men can or will change their abusive behaviour. You may want the counsellor to tell you if he is safe to live with again, yet you are really the best judge of your own safety. Some men make good use of counselling and become respectful and caring partners. Others may appear to learn and participate in the group, but maintain a domineering approach in the home.