



You are not alone

RESOURCES FOR ADULTS AND THEIR CHILDREN
AFTER LEAVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

WATERLOO



There can be practical and emotional barriers to leaving an abusive relationship.

It is important to acknowledge that you are a survivor. You and your children may have many mixed emotions about what you have been through and about the uncertain future.

Moving Forward

When leaving an abusive relationship, it is important you do so with support and engage in safety planning. You may expect to feel good about your choice to leave your abusive partner right away. However, this often takes time. You may feel confused, scared and a deep sense of loss. Your sense of self-identity and confidence is likely to be negatively affected and you may have difficulty in trusting the people around you. Allow yourself time to heal and understand that recovery is a journey and a process that takes time and energy. You have bravely taken the first steps in this process.



Yourself

There are many strategies to help you move forward, starting with the following:

REFLECT

Now that you're in a safer place where you cannot be reached by your abusive ex-partner, it is important to limit contact with them as much as possible. If there are guardianship or custody concerns, seek legal guidance on how to proceed. If you feel the need to communicate with the abusive partner you have left, write your feelings in a journal or write a letter without sending it. Getting your thoughts and feelings down on paper is an excellent way to help you release some of the very difficult emotions you are going through right now.

FIND A SUPPORT NETWORK

Ask for help and consider sharing your story. Think about joining a support group, find a counselor or therapist for yourself and for your children. Look to family and friends that have shown support and that you feel that you can trust to continue to help maintain your safety right now. There are intimate partner/ domestic violence advocates and support services that are able to help you navigate through this process and to remind you that you are not alone. A list of local support services can be found at the end of this booklet.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

It may be difficult to sleep, eat, or be active. Remind yourself that you are in a safe place and try to create a plan of care for you and your child/children's immediate needs, like sleep and nutrition. A plan can help with the transition to a new and different place and pace of life. If you are experiencing flashbacks, consult with a therapist (see resource list at the end of this booklet) to help find strategies to alleviate those feelings and images.

RECONNECT WITH YOURSELF

After leaving an abusive relationship, it is important to reconnect with yourself. Make yourself a priority and practice self-compassion, patience and self-kindness. Taking care of yourself is a way to take care of your children because as you heal, your capacity to help them heal too will grow. There

are many ways in which you can practice self-care including: positive affirmations, regular exercise, breathing, spending time in nature, and being creative through art. Note that some activities, like meditation can be challenging for survivors of trauma, and only do activities that relax you. Seeking support from a therapist can help you process what you have gone through and are still going through, as well as help you find strategies that work for you. **Take your time.**

Exposure to intimate violence can have long-term implications for children. Your children will have their own reactions and feelings to the current situation, and may experience and process it differently than you. There is help for children who have witnessed and/or experienced violence at home and many ways to support them. Their connection to you, as well as the bonds they have created with other caring adults will help them through the recovery process. Compassion and empathy are important factors when supporting children with the trauma they may have experienced and the grief they may begin to feel as they move through their own healing journey.



Remember that healing is a process and it is essential
to give yourself permission to take the time you need to recover.
Your life is your own to live.



Your Children

Here are some of the many ways that you can help to support your children:

BE PRESENT

Try to take some time every day to spend being present with your children. Give yourself permission to continue your bond with your child without distractions: connect with your child or children by reading a book, taking a walk, having a conversation, or by simply playing together. This can be difficult as you are still dealing with your own powerful feelings, but even a few minutes of time dedicated to connecting with your child or children can be beneficial to their wellbeing. Be kind to yourself.

FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

Your children may react very differently than you after leaving an abusive situation. It is not uncommon for children to express anger towards the abused parent upon leaving. Give them the time they need to work through their feelings and help them navigate the best way they can express themselves. If they are open to talking with you, do your best to listen actively and without pressure - sit beside them, repeat back what you hear, ask them to tell you more, let them know that you hear what they are saying, and try to respond with supportive words.

BE HONEST

After leaving an abusive relationship, it is important for you to help make your child feel safe and to not make promises you can't keep. Answer questions they have honestly while remembering to keep your answers age appropriate.

HELP THEM DEVELOP COPING SKILLS

Teaching your child coping skills and giving them the tools that they need to move forward and feel safe will take time. We can help children reduce stress by asking what helps them best. Some suggestions could include breathing and mindfulness exercises, creating art, writing activities, being active, and getting into nature. Connecting your child to a children's mental health therapist can be one way to help your child develop and enhance their coping skills. A list of mental health support services is provided at the end of this resource booklet.



Resources

NON EMERGENCY CRISIS LINES (EMERGENCIES DIAL 911)

These lines are available 24/7 unless other hours are specified.

Specializing in Intimate Partner/Family Violence

Assaulted Women's Helpline (available in over 200 languages): 1-877-417-8550

Live Chat (Monday - Friday, 11am - 8pm): awhl.org

Women's Crisis Services, Kitchener and Waterloo:

519-742-5894, Cambridge: 519-653-2422

Live Chat: wcsvr.org

General Mental Health Lines

Hope for Wellness Help Line: 1-855-242-3310

Live Chat: hopeforwellness.ca

Serves Indigenous peoples in English, French, Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868, Text 686868

Live Chat (7pm - 12am): kidshelpphone.ca

Talk4Healing (helpline for Indigenous women in 14 languages): Call or text 1-855-554-4325

Live Chat: talk4healing.com

*"...a safe environment for survivors and witnesses
of violence to talk about their experiences..."*

FREE SINGLE-SESSION COUNSELLING

Carizon Family and Community Services offers telephone or video counselling sessions for children (18 or younger) and their caregivers. Appointments are available on Monday - Thursday and Saturday.

Telephone: 519-749-2932

Email: intaketeam@carizon.ca

Web: carizon.ca

PROGRAMS AND ONGOING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Various agencies offer individual and/or group counselling for survivors of intimate partner and/or family violence and their children. They provide a safe environment for survivors and witnesses of violence to talk about their experiences and process their emotions. Survivors and their children may be treated together or separately depending on the program. Waitlists, age limits, and costs are noted as applicable.

Carizon Family and Community Services offers group programs and individual counselling to children (5-18) and their caregivers. Group programs include “Understanding Me”, “Moving Towards Healthy Relationships” and “Building Better Boundaries”.

Telephone: 743-6333

Email: intaketeam@carizon.ca

Web: carizon.ca

KW Counselling Services offers individual counselling and the “Strong Moms, Safe Kids” Program, which runs for ten weeks, to children (4-18) and their mothers. Interpreters are available. (~1-2-month waitlist).

Telephone: 519-884-0000 ext. 222

Web: kwcounselling.com

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region offers individual counselling and group programs to women and children (5-16). Group programs include “Safe Steps” and “Trusting Loving Connections”, which span ten weeks in duration and begin every three to four months.

Kitchener/Waterloo Telephone: 519-742-5894

Cambridge Telephone: 519-653-2422

Web: wcswr.org

PROGRAMS FOR SURVIVORS

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Program offers crisis support and six to eight sessions of counselling to men and women through St. Mary's Hospital.

Telephone: (519) 749-6994

Email: jmanuel@smgh.ca

Web: smgh.ca/patient-care-programs/sexual-assault-domestic-violence

“Give them the time they need to work through their feelings and help them navigate the best way they can express themselves.”

FUNDING ASSISTANCE FOR FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT CHILDREN

Funding assistance for a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including counselling, is available through the following programs:

Inuit Child First Initiative

Telephone: 1-855-572-4453 (24/7)

Web: canada.ca/supporting-inuit-children

Jordan's Principle

Telephone: 1-855-572-4453 (24/7)

Teletype 1-866-553-0554 (24/7)

Web: canada.ca/jordans-principle

It is not uncommon to feel shame or self-blame after leaving an abusive intimate partner relationship. Being the survivor of an abusive partner is not your fault: you are not to blame. What you and your children have been through is violence and can feel traumatic. Experiencing abuse affects how we feel and how we respond to ourselves, other people, and the world around us. Understand that you are not alone. Your children are not alone. There are many support systems in place for you and your children.

There is help.

Thank you - Artsy Vibes (cover), Green Chameleon (page 2) and Christin Hume (page 6) for photography from unsplash.com.

Disclaimer: Resources included in this booklet are for information purposes and does not infer endorsement of the organization or their practitioners.



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