



Neighbours, Friends & Families
Immigrant & Refugee Communities

SAFETY PLAN FOR DIGITAL ABUSE

How to help immigrant and refugee
women in abusive relationships



The COVID pandemic has shifted the world online. We are more dependent on devices such as cell phones and computers. Social media has also become an important way of staying connected with neighbours, friends and families.

However, technology can be used negatively to abuse, humiliate and control a woman. It can even be used to monitor the woman's communications and activities without her knowledge.

Digital abuse is now recognised as a new type of abuse. It refers to controlling, monitoring and harassing behaviours using devices such as cell phones, email, tracking apps, and social media.

Some signs of digital abuse are:

1. The abuser frequently changes the WiFi password in the house.
2. He controls when the woman can use the phone or computer, or takes them away from her whenever he wants.
3. He demands that all phone calls she makes need to be on speaker.
4. He demands passwords and pin codes and goes through her phone to check messages, emails and call logs.
5. The abuser seems to know where she is at all times.
6. He knows information about private conversations, messages, or emails.
7. He constantly texts or sends messages that are harassing, threatening or demanding, such as 'what are you doing?', 'who are you with?', 'where are you?'
8. He makes calls that are abusive or silent.
9. He posts damaging stories about her on social media.
10. He threatens to post or send intimate pictures or videos without consent.

Immigrant and refugee women are especially vulnerable to digital abuse. While cellphones and computers help women to reduce their loneliness in a new country, if their partners control how often they can use these devices or who they can communicate with, it may increase their isolation.

They may also not be fluent in English or French so they cannot read privacy settings or special instructions that could protect their safety.

Immigrant and refugee women may also be financial dependent on their abuser so may not be able to afford their own phone or computer.

Patriarchal cultures often dictate gender roles so women may be expected to share their passwords and pin codes with their partners.



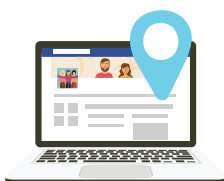
There are some things you can do to support your neighbour, friend or family member living in abusive situation. Remind her that she is not alone and there is help available.



Encourage her to get help with safety planning. Call **Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863- 0511**. They offer information about local resources 24-hours a day, seven days a week. They also provide advice and information in over 154 languages and anything you share with them is confidential.



Let her use your phone or computer or help her use a computer in a public library or another safe place.



Do not post photos of them on social media, tag them on social media, write anything about them or even mention them in comments. You may think you are showing support by being friendly, but it may give the abuser information about the woman's location or activities.

According to experts on intimate-partner violence, leaving an abusive partner puts women in potentially life-threatening danger. 26% of all women who are murdered by their partners had left the relationship.

If a woman is planning to leave an abusive relationship or has left an abusive partner, it is very important that she continue to have access to a phone or computer to find support from community organizations, and stay in touch with trusted friends and family.

You can share some safety tips about using these devices with her. Try not to judge or demand change if she doesn't follow your suggestions. She knows her situation better than anyone.



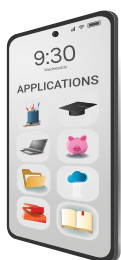
Set strong passcodes and passwords

Do not save passwords, change them frequently, and do not share them with anyone. One of the most common ways that an abuser can gain access to personal information is by using saved passwords, or by simply guessing easy passwords like birthdays or children's names. Suggest that she use security questions that the abuser would not be able to answer.



Do Not accept "friend requests" from people she doesn't know

Friends and followers can take screenshots of posts or save photos and videos and share them with the abuser.



Only use apps she knows

Ask her to make sure she knows the apps on her phone and to delete any unfamiliar app. Abusers may put tracking apps on her phone. She should also check her children's phones for unfamiliar apps. She should also turn off location services on the phone and computer.



Create a new email account to communicate with service providers, lawyers and trusted friends

The new email should not use her real name. She should keep using her old email account for day-to-day communication so that her partner doesn't become suspicious.



Be careful about what she posts on social media

The abuser may be able to track her by clues in the photos, or if she "check in". Avoid adding hashtags to posts.

Sign off and log out

Encourage her to always sign out of social media and email accounts rather than just closing the window.



Check settings regularly

Software updates can sometimes change the way privacy settings work, making posts more public than expected.

Document the harassment, threats or identity theft

This documentation can serve as evidence in court. She can use the print screen function or take a screenshot and send them to a safe email.

As technology evolves, it's important to make sure safety planning strategies are up-to-date to account for changing circumstances.

If you suspect abuse, don't ignore it. Do something about it.
Everyone has a role to play in ending woman abuse.

For more information and resources in helping immigrant or refugee women living in abusive situations, visit: www.immigrantandrefugeenff.ca

If you want more information about keeping safe, please contact **Assaulted Women's Helpline toll-free: 1-866-863-0511**. Calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and information is given in over 150 languages.

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