



Neighbours, Friends & Families
Immigrant & Refugee Communities

HELPING WOMEN SEEK HELP FOR ABUSE

How to help immigrant and refugee women in abusive relationships



Women in immigrant, refugee and ethnocultural communities may have many reasons to keep silent about the abuse they are experiencing. If you recognize signs of violence in a friend, family member or neighbour, you should find a time to talk to her about it when she is calm and alone. Let her know that there are services available to support her and help her keep safe.



In many cases of abuse, the abuser gives false information about what will happen to her if she leaves him. He may tell her that shelters are places of prostitution. He may say that if she leaves him, child welfare authorities will take away her children from her and she will never see them again. This is his way of controlling her.

You can help her by explaining the role of service providers, shelters and child welfare authorities.



Community Agencies

Some community agencies have special services for abused women including safety planning, mental health counselling, and making referrals. If she is willing to go to a service provider who can help her, you can call the **Assaulted Women’s Helpline at 1-866-863-0511**. They offer information 24-hours a day, seven days a week about services available locally. They also provide advice and information in over 150 languages and anything you share with them is confidential.

Francophone and French speaking women can call **Fem’aide for free at 1-877-336-2433** to get 24/7 anonymous crisis counselling and referral services.

Shelters

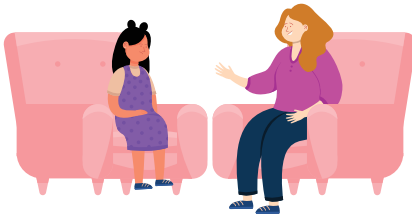
Shelters offer temporary housing to women and their children who have left an abusive relationship. One type of shelter offers crisis and emergency housing and another offers “transitional” shelters which offer longer stays (6 months to 2 years). Shelters assist women to navigate the judicial, police and social service systems in order to access support e.g. facilitating orders of protection, access to housing, and other health, financial and family resources.



Immigrant and refugee women may be concerned that the services may not be in their primary language, but shelters in Ontario will arrange for interpreters. Also, most shelters have strict safety rules about who can enter and the locations are kept confidential to protect the woman’s safety. Shelters are similar in the way they keep women protected as student hostels in girls’ schools in many countries of origin.

In general, immigration status is not considered when offering her services, but it is always a good idea to check with a lawyer before seeking any services.

You can look for a shelter close by on the website ShelterSafe at <https://sheltersafe.ca/> or call Assaulted Women's Helpline.



Children's Aid Societies

Children's aid societies are responsible for investigating reports or evidence of abuse or neglect of children under the age of 18, and when necessary, taking steps to protect children. The majority of children and families involved with a Children's Aid Societies receive services that protect and support children while they remain with their families in the community. However, each case is unique so it is better to consult a lawyer.



Legal Help

You can tell her to call **Legal Aid Ontario**. Lawyers will give two hours of free advice to any woman who is living in an abusive situation, regardless of her immigration status.

You can call 1-800-668-8258 from anywhere in Ontario for free.



Medical Help

If the woman is severely hurt, she can also go to one of 35 hospitals across Ontario that have an **Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**.

Each centre has a specialized team of doctors, nurses and counsellors that provide emergency medical treatment and emotional support to all persons who have experienced sexual assault or domestic violence. Their services are confidential and free of charge. They will arrange an interpreter for women who do not speak English.

The best way to find a centre near you is to visit their website or you can call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863-0511 for information.



Police

The abused woman may also want to report the incident to the police. Ask for an officer who is trained in woman abuse, as the information could later result in charges being laid.

She can also ask them about providing a panic button or a cell phone that she can hide from her partner

If there is an emergency or if there is a life-threatening situation, call 911.

For more information about culturally responsive and language-specific services provided for immigrant and refugee women, please visit the websites of the participating partners.

COSTI Family and Mental Health Services www.costi.org

Abrigo Centre www.abrigo.ca

Afghan Women's Organization afghanwomen.org

Community Family Services of Ontario www.cfso.care

For You Telecare Services www.futfs.org

Kababayan Multicultural Centre www.kababayan.org

Settlement Assistance & Family Support Services www.safss.org

TESOC Multicultural Settlement Services www.tesoc.org

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

COSTI Immigrant Services would like to thank Abrigo Centre, Afghan Women's Organization, Community Family Services of Ontario, COSTI Family and Mental Health Services, For You Telecare Services, Kababayan Multicultural Centre, Settlement Assistance & Family Support Services, and TESOC Multicultural Settlement Services.

**This project is funded by
the Government of Ontario.**

