

**If you are a  
woman with  
a disability,**

**this brochure  
may be for you.**

# Is this you?

- I need technical or human assistance to function in daily life.
- I rarely leave the house.
- I have difficulty communicating in English or French.
- I lack self-confidence.
- I don't see many people besides my spouse.
- I feel guilty toward my spouse because he helps me.
- I have sponsored immigrant status.
- I'm limited in what I can do because there aren't enough services and accessible places.
- I have never been able to hold a job.
- I have a job I am overqualified for and that is poorly paid.
- People don't listen to me or take me seriously because of my disability.



**In this brochure, the word “spouse” indicates any person with whom you have or have had an intimate and committed relationship.**

# Is this someone you know?



## **I stay with my spouse because:**

- I love him and he loves me.
- I'm afraid of ending up with no money and no home.
- He makes my life easier by helping me with interpretation, eating, getting around, and other things.
- I'm afraid I'll never find anybody else either because the community is so small or because of people's ideas about beauty.
- Marriage is really important to me.

# Do things like this happen to

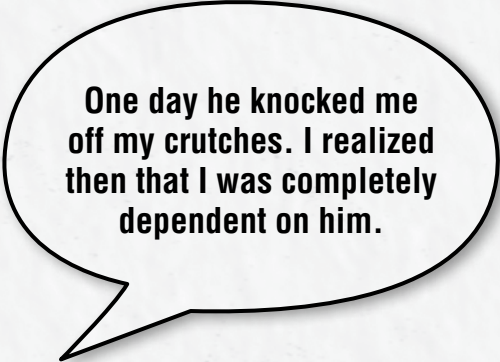
## **My spouse:**

- Puts me down and humiliates me in public, says I'm crazy, or reprimands me.
- Makes fun of me in front of my children, ridicules things that I say or do.
- Threatens to send me back to my country of origin.
- Won't let me accept help from a stranger.
- Breaks or threatens to break objects I like or things I need, such as my wheelchair or braille printer.
- Always wants to know where I am.
- Criticizes my friends or loved ones.
- Always speaks to my children in English or French and won't use sign language.
- Controls my spending or spends all my money.
- Threatens to send me to an institution or not take care of me.
- Always speaks for me to say what I need.

**YES?**  
These behaviours are all  
This brochure

# you?

## Have you seen them happen to someone else?



**One day he knocked me off my crutches. I realized then that I was completely dependent on him.**

**examples of domestic violence.**

**is for you.**

### **My spouse:**

- Is constantly contacting me by telephone, text, or email, or following me around even though we are no longer together.
- Threatens to make me lose my place in the community.
- Makes fun of me when I speak in sign language.
- Makes me wait in humiliating positions before coming to help.
- Pushes, slaps, pinches, chokes, burns, or kicks me, ties me up, or is rough when helping me.
- Threatens to hurt or kill me.
- Threatens to hurt people I love or take away my children.
- Forces me have sex or engage in unwanted sexual behaviour or threatens to go to prostitutes.

# Domestic violence and insidiously undermines intimate

Your spouse repeatedly and constantly says and does things that hurt you.

He tells you what to do. He demands obedience. He makes all your decisions for you. His goal is to control you and have power over you.

To keep you from leaving, he promises to change but continues to humiliate you and be violent.

To control you, your spouse makes you doubt yourself and tries to confuse you by saying things are your fault or that you are violent.


To dominate you, your spouse is verbally and physically violent.

**He used to help me walk; I always found him to be a caring man. Then I put on weight because of the cortisone and he started saying mean things to me. He'd say he couldn't stand looking at me anymore, that no one could find me attractive. And I'd look at myself in the mirror and I'd think "He's right."**

**Domestic violence can occur in heterosexual or same-sex couples.**

**Domestic violence**  
**Time or love**

# starts gradually and committed relationships



**My partner kept telling me  
my voice was horrible. That  
I sounded like a squealing pig!  
He used to prevent me from  
talking and would make all  
my decisions for me.**

**doesn't stop by itself.  
won't stop it either.**

A violent spouse looks like any other man and may hold a respectable position in society.

He may be well liked and nice with everyone else.

He does not necessarily have mental health, alcohol, money, or work-related problems.

He may be of any religion or none at all.

He may be disabled or he may not be.

# Domestic violence

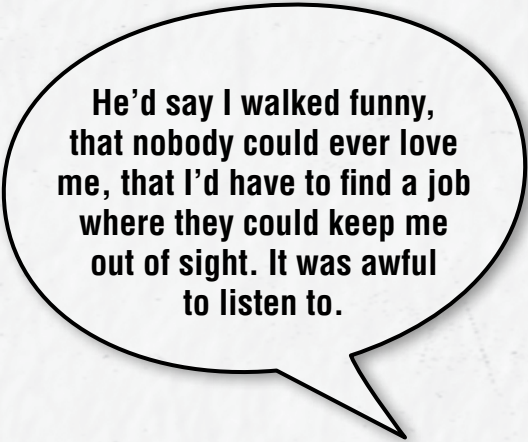
## beatings and

### **Psychological violence is less visible, but just as devastating.**

- Being repeatedly put down, called crazy, or ridiculed about your body or sexuality.
- Having your movements controlled.
- Being prevented from seeing your friends or loved ones.
- Being threatened with institutionalization.

### **These are forms of domestic violence.**

Psychological violence destroys your self-esteem. You end up believing what your spouse says. You feel stupid or crazy. You think you are the one to blame.



**He'd say I walked funny, that nobody could ever love me, that I'd have to find a job where they could keep me out of sight. It was awful to listen to.**



# is not just physical injury

**Economic violence is less well known, but just as humiliating.**

- Having to beg for money.
- Having your spending controlled.
- Being forced to pay for everything.
- Being prevented from getting a job.
- Having your money stolen from you.

**These are also forms of domestic violence.**

**Repeated spousal neglect might seem unintentional, but it isn't.**

- Having to wait to go to the bathroom or for other needs.
- Being deprived of your medications or being overmedicated.
- Being left for long periods in uncomfortable situations (on the toilet, for example).

**These, too, are forms of domestic violence.**

**If you experience psychological or economic violence or are a victim of neglect, ask for help.**

**See the last page for organizations that help women with disabilities who experience domestic violence.**

# Among all some are

- **Threats**  
Such as threats to harm or kill you.
- **Physical violence**  
Such as arm twisting, hitting or shoving.
- **Criminal negligence**  
Such as being deprived of medication that you need to survive, food or care to the point where your life is at risk.
- **Sexual violence**  
Such as being forced to engage in sexual relations or unwanted sexual behaviour.
- **Harassment**  
Such as being constantly phoned or followed so that you fear for your safety.

- **Forcible confinement**  
Such as being locked in a room or prevented from leaving the house.

If you experience any of these forms of violence, you can call 911 to report it and get protection.

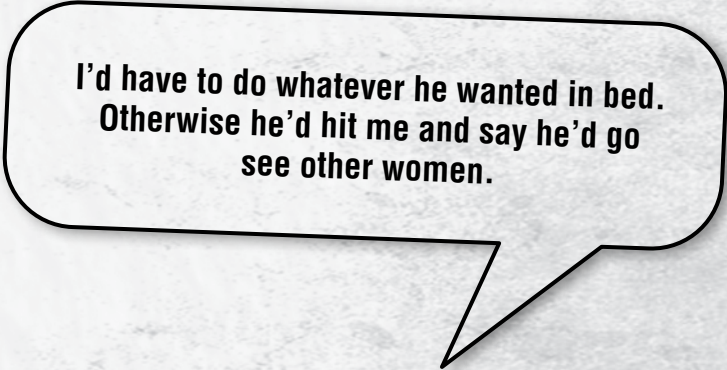
**You have a right to security and respect.**

**These rights are guaranteed by the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

# forms of violence considered crimes

Over time, forms of violence may evolve and add to one another.

Over time, the frequency and severity of violence can increase.



**I'd have to do whatever he wanted in bed.  
Otherwise he'd hit me and say he'd go  
see other women.**

# Here are some that might make you

- I don't want to face this alone anymore.
- It would be a relief just to talk to someone.
- I want to get my confidence and self-esteem back, and stop feeling guilty and ashamed.
- I want to find a way out.
- I want to feel safe.
- I want my children to be safe.
- I want to find ways to protect myself, like arranging a signal to send to someone I trust to call 911 in an emergency.
- I want to stay alive.

**If your safety or the safety  
don't hesitate**

# of the reasons decide to seek help

I knew I had a long way to go and it wasn't going to be easy. For years he had taken care of me—if you can call it caring. I couldn't stand it one day longer. I had to get my dignity back.

of your loved ones is **threatened**,  
to call 911.



**Don't face it alone.**

**Talk to someone you trust.**

**Even if you confide in someone,  
you still have the right to make your own choices.**

**No one can force you  
to leave your spouse or stay with him.**

# Do you know a woman with a disability who If she trusts you,

## Listen without judging

### **Believe her**

Women with disabilities may have trouble confiding in another person or revealing domestic violence for a number of reasons.

They may be:

- Afraid of being treated like a child
- Afraid of not being taken seriously
- Afraid of being rejected by their community if they report one of their own
- Ashamed of living with a violent spouse

It takes a lot of courage to talk. The best way to help is to listen without judging and try to understand the obstacles she faces.



# is experiencing domestic violence? you can help

## **Tell her it's not her fault**

Women with disabilities have often been over-protected and have learned to go along with it. They may be accustomed to being treated badly. They have not necessarily learned to say no or to stand up for themselves and fight back. This experience can feed a sense of guilt over the violent treatment they have received.

Victims often feel responsible for their spouse's violent behaviour. Violent spouses are often experts at blaming the victim and denying their own violent behaviour.

Tell the victim that it's her spouse who is responsible for his violent actions.

## **Respect her choices and let her go at her own pace**

Domestic violence is devastating. The road to restoring self-confidence and taking back control of one's life can be long.

Here are some of the things that can lead a woman with a disability to tolerate violence:

- The hope of restoring a loving relationship
- Difficulty asking for help or escaping because the means of communication or transportation are not available
- A disability that prevents her from protecting herself, dialing a phone number, or contacting someone
- The fear of being abandoned without care if the spouse is the main caregiver

Try to understand her experience and respect her choices. Whether she leaves her spouse or not, you can point her toward specialized resources to help her understand her situation better. (See the last page of this brochure.)

## **Support her**

Isolation plays a big part in domestic violence. This isolation is often greater for women with disabilities because many of them are excluded from the job market, community life, and recreational groups. Some women have fewer opportunities to learn about domestic violence and fewer resources to help. Think of deaf women for whom English or French is a second language for example. They need interpreters to communicate in American or Québec sign language or get information.

Offer the victim your support. Talk with her. Let her know she has the right to confidential assistance. If she wants to know more, show her this brochure. If she wishes, offer to go with her when she seeks help.

## **Fight prejudice and invisibility**

Women with disabilities are often infantilized. And physical disabilities are often confused with intellectual disabilities.

Due to standards of female beauty, many people can't imagine women with disabilities having a spouse, children, a love life or sex life. They fail to consider the possibility of domestic violence. Yet these women are at greater risk of domestic violence than others.

The more isolated the victim, the more abusive her spouse can be. Be open, and above all, don't turn your back on her.

**Remember, domestic violence  
feeds on indifference...**

## RESOURCES CALL FROM ANYWHERE IN QUÉBEC 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

### SOS domestic violence 1-800-363-9010

(calls from outside Montréal) (Voice and TTY)

**514-873-9010**

(in Montréal) (Voice and TTY)

### SOS domestic violence knows where women with disabilities can find help.

This free, confidential, and anonymous telephone service specializes in domestic violence. With one call, victims, their loved ones, and witnesses can **immediately** get information, counselling, and accommodation services.

Produced by the **Secrétariat à la condition féminine**.  
Written by the **Table de concertation en violence conjugale de Montréal**,  
with the collaboration of:

- Action des femmes handicapées (Montréal) ([www.afh-montreal.org](http://www.afh-montreal.org))
- Maria Barile, inclusive design consultant
- Conférence des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN)
- La maison des femmes sourdes de Montréal ([www.mism.org](http://www.mism.org))

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### 911 Emergency services

For immediate assistance if you are in danger or are a witness to violence.

**911** (Voice) (TTY available in some regions)

**310-4141** (in municipalities where 911 is not available)

**\*4141** (for cell phone calls)

### Info-Santé

For information and referrals, such as CLSCs and other health and social services centres (CSSSs)

**811** (Voice)

This brochure is available in French, English and Spanish as well as in large print and grade 1 Braille French versions, as an audio recording, and as a Québec Sign Language video. Please contact the Secrétariat à la condition féminine (SCF) at **418-643-9052**.

These brochures are also available on the SCF ([www.scf.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.scf.gouv.qc.ca)) and the Table de concertation en violence conjugale de Montréal ([www.tcvcm.ca](http://www.tcvcm.ca)) websites in PDF or Word format in English, French and Spanish, and as an MP3 file and a Québec Sign Language video. They can be found on the SCF website under the Publications tab.