

## Handbook for Parents

This handbook is for parents and guardians (e.g. grandparents, aunts and uncles, older sisters and brothers). It comes with METRAC's RePlay Video Game. It explains the game's messages about equal, respectful, and healthy relationships and how to prevent violence in the lives of children and youth aged 8 to 14. The handbook gives parents and guardians ideas about how to help their children live violence-free lives.

### The RePlay Video Game

The RePlay Video Game promotes relationships based on equality and respect between youth. During the game, players go through their neighbourhood to find a missing friend in an unhealthy relationship. They have to use positive communication to get through conflicts that come up along the way. As they play the game, players also learn about real-life community resources to help them deal with abuse. Although people disagree about children playing video games, these games are popular and research shows they can help youth think about the world in new ways. RePlay can help children and youth:



- Envision a world with healthy, equal relationships between girls, boys, and peers;
- Learn how to act positively in difficult situations;
- Know how to support friends who are in

- unhealthy relationships
- Learn about community services and help; and
- Learn how they can build healthy, equal relationships.

*Video games are popular and they can help youth think about the world in new ways*

We hope that you will play the RePlay video game yourself by visiting [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org). That way, you can understand what your children can learn from it. (Pictures in this handbook are from RePlay.)

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## About METRAC

The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) is a not-for-profit, community-based organization that is dedicated to preventing violence against women, youth, and children.

## Violence Towards Women and Girls

Violence against girls and women is a serious problem in Canada. Statistics show that this form of violence usually happens between people who know each other and is often done by men against women. Violence against women and girls comes in many different forms.

**Emotional violence:** someone criticizing, insulting, or making fun of you; making you feel worthless; treating you badly; bullying, ignoring, or stalking you; threatening to tell your secrets; manipulating you to get what they want.

**Physical violence:** someone hitting, pushing, kicking, pulling hair, or biting; holding you down; not taking care of someone when they depend on others; forcing you to do drugs or drink; threatening to hurt your kids (if this happens, the law says you must contact your local Children's Aid Society); threatening to hurt your service animal (e.g. seeing-eye dog).

**Sexual violence:** any unwanted sexual activity, such as forced kissing, touching, or rape; someone threatening or manipulating you to make you do sexual things; incest (sexual abuse of children in families); forcing you to

watch something sexual.

**Financial abuse:** someone stopping you from getting money so you'll be dependent on them; not letting you get a job; harassing you at work; forcing you to miss work; taking your money away; forcing you to pay all the bills.

**Spiritual abuse:** disrespecting your beliefs or religion; stopping you from practicing your beliefs; making you eat or do things that aren't a part of your beliefs; forcing you to take on somebody else's beliefs.

Violence against women and girls happens because women and girls don't always get the respect and rights they deserve in our society. It's a result of **sexism** (mistreatment of, power over, and discrimination against women and girls because of their gender), in society and between individual people. Since violence against women and girls happens in most places and communities in the world, we have to work together to prevent it in the lives of our children. We have to end the cycle of violence.



## How Common is Violence Towards Women and Girls?

One-half of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16, and four out of ten Canadian women will experience sexual assault (Statistics Canada, 1993; Johnson, 1996). Girls and young women are most at risk. For example, children make up 61% of reported sexual assaults, and 79% of this number are girls (Statistics Canada, 2004).

*One-half of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16*

According to Statistics Canada's 2006 report, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile":

- Nearly 28,000 cases of violence between people married or living together were reported to the police in 2004. 84% of victims were women.
- Women were more likely than men to report being targets of 10 or more violent incidents.
- Police reports showed that men were much more likely to commit violence against their partners. Men were also more likely to abuse their partners over and over again.
- Women were twice as likely to be injured as a result of this violence.

Statistics show that violence against women and girls is about power and control. People try to blame women and girls for it, but it's not their fault. It's not caused by a man just "losing his temper" and it's not just "between

him and her". It hurts everybody - children, families, parents, grandparents, and whole communities.

Some women and girls are more vulnerable to abuse and have a harder time finding help to deal with the violence. They get even less respect and rights because of the other parts of who they are, such as their immigration status, income, age, sexual identity and orientation, disability and Deafness, and ethno-racial background. At the same time that they face sexism because they are women and girls, they face additional forms of discrimination such as racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism that can make things worse. For example:

**83% of women with disabilities** will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime (Stimpson and Best, 1991, "Courage Above All: Sexual Assault against Women with Disabilities").

**Up to 75% of survivors of sexual assaults in Aboriginal communities are young women** under 18 years. 50% of those are under 14 years, and almost 25% are younger than 7 years (McIvor and Nahanee, 1998, "Aboriginal Women: Invisible Victims of Violence", 3

in Bonnycastle and Rigakos, eds. “Unsettling Truths: Battered Women, Policy, Politics and Contemporary Research in Canada”).

**Women of colour may be more vulnerable to sexual assault** because of racist sexual stereotypes, and these stereotypes from the legal system means that they may have less access to justice (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2002, “Factsheet: Women’s Experience of Racism: How Race and Gender Interact”).

**Poverty and unemployment make women more vulnerable to violence**, especially added to stigma, stereotypes, control from authorities, and a lack of social support like affordable housing (Jiwani, 2002, “Mapping Violence: A Work in Progress”).

**For more information, visit:**

- [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org)
- [dawn.thot.net](http://dawn.thot.net)

**Quiz: Realities of Violence Against Women and Girls**

1. Fill in the blank: less than \_\_\_\_ of all sexual assaults get reported to the police?
  - a. 40%
  - b. 80%
  - c. 10%
  - d. 20%
2. True or false: young women are at greater risk of sexual assault, physical assault, and murder than older women.
3. Fill in the blank: statistics show that women most often get stalked by their ex-partners. Over 60% of stalking victims were followed for more than one \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. week
- b. month
- c. season
- d. year

4. What percent of victims of spousal violence report that their children witnessed the violence against them?
  - a. 11%
  - b. 24%
  - c. 37%
  - d. 18%
5. Fill in the blank: poverty and lack of financial resources are barriers for many women who are trying to leave an abusive relationship. One out of \_\_\_\_ Canadian women are living in poverty today.
  - a. seven
  - b. thirteen
  - c. twenty-five
  - d. eighty-four
6. Which barriers to safety do women living in rural and remote areas often face?
  - a. harder to find transportation to get around
  - b. less privacy from abuser
  - c. less services in their area
  - d. all of the above

(Answers and sources are provided on page 11 of this handbook.)

## **What is a Healthy Relationship?**

Healthy relationships can be between different people, like friends, family members, acquaintances, workmates, people dating each other, and spouses. When people talk about healthy relationships, they're usually talking about people who are dating or partners, seeing each other, intimate, living together, or married. When someone is in a healthy relationship, they feel respected, cared about, appreciated, and good about themselves. They feel like they have dignity and support. They don't feel nervous, scared, uncomfortable, disrespected, blamed, or pressured. In a healthy relationship, people:

**Communicate with respect and care** for each other's feelings. They don't insult their partner, make fun of them, or make them feel bad about themselves through words. Even if they argue or disagree with each other sometimes, they treat their partner like a human being.

**Are honest and open.** Don't hurt, manipulate, or lie to their partner just to get what they want.

**Respect their partner's spiritual beliefs** and faith community.

**Are glad that their partner has their own friends and family.** They don't stop their partner from communicating with friends or family or going out. They don't isolate their partner and make them feel like they have no one else in the world.

**Respect their partner's body and space.** They don't force or pressure them into sex or sexual behaviour. They don't refuse to use birth control or protection. They don't hit, push, or slap. They don't stop someone

from moving or hold them down. They don't stalk their partner (follow them around and contact them all the time).

**Respect their partner's finances.** They don't trick their partner into giving up their money and they don't keep money away from their partner when they need it. They don't prevent their partner from working or using money to support their kids.

**Take care of each other.** They don't keep medicine away or refuse to take care of their partner. They don't use their partner's disability or Deafness to belittle or control them.

**Speak well of each other.** They don't spread rumours about their partner or tell their partner's secrets to hurt or get back at them.



**Respect the relationship they have.** They don't date others if their partner isn't okay with it. They don't flaunt affairs or threaten to have affairs to make their partner feel afraid or uncertain.

**For more information, visit:**

- "Love Is ... Love Isn't" ([www.lawc.on.ca/ResourceLoveIsLoveIsnt.htm](http://www.lawc.on.ca/ResourceLoveIsLoveIsnt.htm))
- [www.equalityrules.ca](http://www.equalityrules.ca)

## Gender Stereotypes

Research shows that addressing violence and sexism with young girls and boys can help a lot. Children learn stereotypes about what it means to be a "real man" and "real woman" from a very young age, and these **gender stereotypes** can lead to violence against women and girls. Almost everything in our society - such as media, schools, policies governments, institutions, sports, families, and friends - teach that girls and boys are supposed to act a certain way because of their gender.

*Gender stereotypes can lead to violence against women and girls*

**Boys and men are supposed to be:**

- Strong, tough, good at sports
- Limit their emotions, only show anger
- Muscular, tall, short hair
- Aggressive, in control
- Heterosexual and "good in bed"
- List your own: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Girls and women are supposed to be:**

- Pretty, skinny, light-skinned, long hair
- Sexy, but not *too* sexy

- Submissive, "lady-like"
- Heterosexual, attractive to men
- Good with housework, childcare, and cooking
- Smart, but not *too* smart
- List your own: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

These stereotypes are so well known that people think they're normal and okay. But they affect how children see themselves and how they grow up. Girls and boys **internalize** society's gender stereotypes, just like they internalize other stereotypes about things like race, class, sexuality, age, and ability. Unfortunately, gender stereotypes make it seem natural and acceptable for men to control women through abuse and violence. They make girls and women seem less important, smart, valuable, and deserving than boys and men.

**Have you ever heard:**

- "Be a man."
- "You throw like a girl!"
- "Boys will be boys ..."
- "Girls are made of sugar and spice ..."
- "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus."

How are these sayings related to gender stereotypes?

## The Challenges of Communicating with Your Kids

It can be difficult to communicate to your children about these things. You may not know what to say. You may worry that bringing up sensitive topics will make things worse. You may think they won't listen to you. You may feel nervous because you've struggled with having healthy, equal relationships in your own life. It's okay to feel this way. Most parents and guardians find it hard too. Try to remember:

**It'll be good coming from you.** Children and youth learn stereotypes about women, men, and gender everywhere. They can feel confused and they don't always know where to turn. But getting a different message from you will really mean something.

**Everybody struggles with gender stereotypes and abuse.** Gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls are all over the place. Everybody has struggled with them somehow. One reason why violence against women and girls keeps happening is that children notice it in the lives of their parents/guardians and it gets replayed in their own adult lives. But if you have experienced violence or sexism or if you've been violent or sexist to someone else, you can get help. You don't have to deal with it alone and the cycle of violence doesn't have to continue. Many people who have dealt with abuse have moved on to make a better life for themselves and their kids.

**It's a process.** Things might not change very fast, but starting to discuss things with your children will help you all later on. It will be hard at first, but it will get easier.

A safe and fair world starts with you. It's sad, but your children will face hard things as they grow up. They may face things you have gone through -

*A safer, fairer world is a good gift to offer our children*

such as poverty, trouble with the law, abuse, war, discrimination, illness, and harassment. Discussing things with them now can help them deal with these tough realities. You can help them know that they're not alone. You can help them learn how to survive and make a difference. A safer, fairer world where all people are treated with love and respect is a good gift to offer our children.

**If you or someone you know needs help** dealing with violence against women and girls, contact The Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863-0511 or 1-866-863-7868 (TTY). Other community services and phone lines are listed on page 11.



## Activities to Reinforce Healthy Relationships

As a parent/guardian, you can be the biggest influence in your child's life. Communicate values and beliefs that will help your son or daughter build healthy relationships free from violence. You can make a difference that will last a lifetime.

**Learn about the issues.** It will help you talk with your kids. Learn about what healthy and equal relationships are and how to build respect, trust, and friendship. Show them that being in relationships where people are treated like equals feels great.

*As a parent or guardian, you can be the biggest influence in your child's life*

**Play RePlay with them.** You can ask them to show you how to play and watch what they do. You can ask them to help you make choices in the game. Use RePlay to start a discussion with them. Don't worry if you lose or don't do as well as you'd like - you can play again!

**It's never too early.** Talk to your children about healthy relationships before they start dating or going out. Fight stereotypes about "real men" and "real women" with positive ideas about opportunities for everyone. Show that girls are as valuable as boys by treating your kids fairly. You can give chores by age instead of gender. If your 12-year-old daughter has to do laundry, the same rule would apply to your son when he turns 12.

**Keep communicating.** The more often you bring up the issues, the more comfortable your kids will be talking with you. Find ways

and times to discuss the attitudes and behaviours that lead to healthy equal relationships. Discuss what you see on TV, the internet, and in movies - ask them to think about healthy and unhealthy relationships they've come across in the media themselves.

**Create the space.** Make an open and safe place for your son or daughter to talk about relationships. Try to always listen to what they say and answer their questions. Talk *with* them instead of talking *to* them. Ask questions like, "What kind of person would make a good girlfriend or boyfriend?" and "How do you show someone you like them?" Try to listen patiently, ask questions, and let them share what their ideas.

**Get interested.** Find out about the music, videos, TV shows, magazines, websites, and video games your kids like. Find out about their favourite activities (e.g. sports, games, clubs) and try to visit some of their favourite places (e.g. community centres). Your kids will know that you care about their life. Tell them that they can hang out with their friends in your home. You'll learn more about what they're dealing with and what they learn about relationships.

**Set an example.** Show your kids how to have a healthy relationship and show them how conflicts with friends and family can be solved through respectful discussion. Parents can feel stressed out and at their limit. The constant needs children have can overwhelm them. Even the most loving parent can make a mistake and lash out at their child with words or actions. But parents can learn to listen their children and think about what they say. Treat your child with respect so they'll learn to respect others. Try not to call them names, put them down, or hit or beat them. It won't help them understand and it makes things worse. Any abuse and violence hurts and can teach kids the wrong things.

**Important: anybody in your home may not respect the best interest of your child and can abuse them emotionally, physically, or sexually.** It doesn't matter how well you know them. Talk to your children about inappropriate touching, actions, and secrets. Let them know that you will always listen to their fears and hopes. If you know or even suspect that your child is being abused, please get help immediately. You can make an anonymous call to your local children's aid society (p. 11) and they'll give you information to help you decide how to protect yourself and your child.



**Practice makes perfect.** Your kids can learn how to deal with difficult things before they happen. What will your daughter do if she feels pressure to have sex? What will your son do if he feels pushed to control or disrespect girls? Come up

with real examples with your kids and work with them to figure out how they can respond.

**Work with your sons and daughters.** Both boys and girls learn gender stereotypes that make women and men seem unequal. That can lead to abuse and violence when they grow up. Show your sons and daughters that it's great for men to be sensitive and for women to be independent. Teach your children that boys and girls are of equal value.

*Teach your children that boys and girls are of equal value*

**Watch out!** Look for the warning signs that your teen is in an abusive relationship. Get to know who they're dating by inviting them home. Pay attention to how your teen and her/his boyfriend or girlfriend act. Watch for controlling or mean behaviour, criticism, and jealousy. Pay attention to your teen's behaviour. Some girls who are in unhealthy relationships get anxious, quiet, depressed, or feel bad about themselves. They can stop doing the things they love. Some boys who are in an unhealthy relationship get angry easily, unpredictable, or moody.

**Know what to do.** If you think your son or daughter might be in an abusive relationship, don't be afraid to talk to them about it. Tell them that you're worried and let them know that you're there to help them. Ask how they feel about their relationship and listen without judgment. Focus on your child's feelings. If they don't want to talk to you, help them to find another trusted adult. Provide them with other places they can go, like confidential counselling services and numbers for crisis lines.

**For more information:**

- [www.ontariowomensdirectorator.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorator.gov.on.ca)
- [www.speerssociety.org](http://www.speerssociety.org)
- "The Single Mother's Book" (2nd edition), Joan Anderson, 2004, Peachtree Publishers
- "HomeWise: A Guide to Build Better Relationships between Youth and Parents", City of Toronto Public Health Drug Abuse Prevention Program

**Personal Survey: Addressing Healthy relationships with your Children**

1a. Have you ever discussed issues of healthy, equal relationships with your children?

- Yes     Sometimes     No

1b. Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What hesitation do you have in discussing these things with your kids?

- I feel scared or embarrassed
- I don't think they'll really listen to me
- I'm worried that they've already experienced abuse
- I may have already set a bad example
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Did your parents/ guardians discuss issues of abuse and healthy, equal relationships with you when you were younger?

- Yes     Sometimes     No

4. Do you think it would have helped you in your adult years if they did? How? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What could you do to work on getting more comfortable talking with your kids?

- Contact a family centre/service
- Learn more about the issues
- Ask a friend/family member how they do it
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Help and Resources

**Call 911 or your local police if you are in immediate danger.**

**The Assaulted Women's Helpline** (24-hours, confidential, 154 languages)  
1-866-863-0511  
1-866-863-7868 (TTY)

**Kids Help Phone**  
1-800-668-6868

**Sexual Assault Centres**  
[www.occcc.ca](http://www.occcc.ca)  
(for local centres, look in your local telephone book)

**Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**  
[www.satontario.com](http://www.satontario.com)

**Shelters for Women and Children**  
[www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca)  
(for local shelters, look in your local telephone book)

**Femaide** (French crisis line)  
1-877-336-2433  
1-866-860-7082 (TTY)

**Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies** (information on child abuse and local child services)  
[www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)

**Family Service Canada** (lists local family service associations)  
[www.familyservicecanada.org](http://www.familyservicecanada.org)

## Answers to Quiz (Page 4):

Question 1: (c) Less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police (Statistics Canada, 2006, "Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends").

Question 2: True - reports show that young women are at greater risk of many kinds of violence (e.g. Statistics Canada, 2006, "Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006").

Question 3: (d) Women report being stalked for an average of one year (Statistics Canada, 2005, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile").

Question 4: (c) 37% of spousal violence victims reported that their children witnessed the abuse (Statistics Canada, 2005, "Family Violence").

Question 5: (a) One out of seven Canadian women are living in poverty today (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2005, "Women and Poverty").

Question 6: (d) All of the above are common barriers (METRAC, "Rural Women's Justice Guide").



**Metropolitan Action Committee on  
Violence Against Women and Children**

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More info and statistics: [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org) | [www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)



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