

>>> Santé mentale et dépendances - Prévention en pratique médicale

Violence against women ([Français](#))

Steps in detection

1. Systematically ask yourself

Is it possible that this woman is subject to violence at the hands of her partner?

2. Observe and recognize

Indicators and signs of conjugal violence

Behavioural indicators

- Frequent visits with vague symptoms
- Displays of controlling behaviour by the partner: answers questions for the patient, insists on being present*
- The patient is reluctant to speak or looks at her partner before speaking*

** Assess these indicators in light of cultural differences*

Psychological signs and symptoms

- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Emotional instability
- Anxiety, palpitations
- Suicidal behaviour
- Escape, shame

Physical signs and symptoms

- Diffuse pain in the pelvic region, chest, head or face
- Non-specific headaches
- Contusions in various stages of healing
- Injuries to the arm or neck
- Perforated ear drum

3. Ask questions

Put at ease and ask questions just as you would about living habits. Allow the patient to talk about her conjugal life

- Has a partner already injured, pushed or mistreated you?
- Do you sometimes feel unsafe with or afraid of your partner?
- Does your partner call you names or try to dictate your every move?

Minimum Intervention

In the presence of signs or indicators, the physician must first create a trusting relationship to encourage the patient to break her silence about her situation.

1. Help the patient recognize the violence sustained and the seriousness of the problem

- Help the patient talk about the violence to which she is subjected
 - *"I'm concerned about your state of health." (physical and psychological consequences)*
 - *"The signs and symptoms I've noted are disturbing."*
 - *"I'm also concerned about your children's health. Does it relate to this situation?"*
 - *"Have your children witnessed the violence?"*
 - *"Is it the first time or are these acts repeated often?"*
- Avoid talking to the patient about conjugal violence in the presence of her partner.

A proposal to meet with the couple is not usually recommended during the first stages of the intervention.

2. Assess the situation

- Conduct a complete medical examination and note in the file observations on or indications of violence.
- Use the patient's own words to record or describe a violent event.
- Assess the level of dangerousness:
 - intensity of fear, use of tranquilizers, suicidal ideation
 - intensity of the threat and the risk for the patient of serious injury
 - recent increase in the frequency or seriousness of the violence.

3. Offer support and propose various options to facilitate decision-making

- Emphasize that you understand the situation and that you are always available if she needs help
 - *"You're not responsible for your partner's behaviour."*
 - *"You can change your situation. There are resources available to help you."*
- Clearly take a stance on conjugal violence
 - *"Violent behaviour is unacceptable."*
 - *"Conjugal violence is a criminal act."*
 - *"No-one deserves to be mistreated or battered. I can help you."*
- Provide information on existing resources

- *"Resources are available to help you."*
- *"Is there someone you can talk to about it?"*
- *"If you need to leave home quickly, have you thought about an emergency plan?"*
- *"Is there someone you can count on, a place where you can seek shelter?"*
- Establish the means of maintaining contact with the patient
 - The continuity of medical follow-up and discussions concerning the patient's fears, needs and priorities are measures that will help her recognize the abuse and facilitate decision-making now and in the future.

4. Respect the patient's pace and decisions and do not be judgmental

- The inability to defend herself and take charge of her life is an important consequence of violence.
- It can take some time before the patient recognizes violence, rejects it and finally acts to halt it.

5. Acknowledge your limitations with respect to intervention

- Allowing the patient to break her silence concerning the situation and overcome her isolation is already a valuable form of assistance.

The contents of this fact sheet are based on training material developed by the committee on the priority of conjugal violence within the context of the regional priorities on and promotion-prevention.

[Click for resources](#)

Collaboration

[Association des Médecins Omnipraticiens de Montréal](#)

Update : July 1999

[Up](#)

Québec 

© Gouvernement du Québec, 1996-2010