



# CREATING A SAFETY PLAN

Adapted by:



Ministry of  
Public Safety  
and Solicitor General



BC Housing

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## acknowledgments

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This booklet was put together by women who have survived abuse. They offer their guidance to you through this resource.

We thank them for their strength and their wisdom.

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A light gray silhouette of a woman walking, positioned on the right side of the page. She is facing right, with her left leg forward in a walking stride. Her hair is short and styled. The silhouette is semi-transparent, allowing the text of the table of contents to be seen through it.

# I.

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet was designed to provide women with strategies to increase their safety.

Whether you are living in a violent relationship, thinking about leaving a violent relationship, or have already left a violent relationship, there are a number of ways in which you can increase your safety and that of your children.

Whenever the potential for violence is identified in a woman's life, it is important to develop a safety plan. Creating a safety plan involves identifying action steps to increase safety and to prepare in advance for the possibility of further violence.

Since abusive situations and risk factors can change quickly, it is recommended that you become familiar with and review and/or revise your safety plan regularly.

It is very important that your abusive partner not find out about your safety plan. Be sure to keep this document and your safety plan in a safe location unknown to the abuser.

In creating a safety plan, it is important to remember that:

- You are not to blame for the violence or for your children's exposure to it.
- You are not responsible for your (ex) partner's abusive behaviour.
- You cannot control your (ex) partner's violence, but it may be possible to increase your own safety as well as the safety of your children.
- The safety of you and your children is always the most important thing.
- You are not alone. There are resources available in the community to provide support in a number of ways (e.g., counselling, housing, financial assistance, etc.).

# II.

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

One of the most crucial, yet frequently overlooked, aspects of safety and safety-planning is taking care of yourself. This includes your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. It is important to understand some of what you, as a woman who has experienced violence, may be dealing with. You may be:

- experiencing ongoing violence, threats of violence, or surviving the impacts and trauma of past violence.
- fearful for your safety and your children's safety.
- dealing with practical problems such as finding housing, financial support, and/or employment.
- in the process of criminal and/or family law proceedings.
- feeling isolated, alone, overwhelmed, helpless and/or hopeless.
- feeling blamed for the violence and/or your children's exposure to it.
- fearful of being an outcast in your family or community.
- fearful of losing your children because of their exposure to the violence.
- accused of being an unfit mother.
- experiencing additional barriers such as racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, language barriers, etc.

Trying to survive in or escape a violent relationship can be exhausting and emotionally draining. There are a number of things you can do to help you cope in difficult times. These are just a few suggestions:

- Always remember that safety – your own as well as the safety of your children – is what matters the most.
- If you have left the relationship, are feeling down and are considering returning to a potentially violent situation, call a friend, relative, counsellor, etc. for support.
- Get connected to community resources. There are lots of organizations that can help you and assist you in navigating the way to services and supports that will meet your needs.
- When you have to communicate with your (ex) partner, in person or by telephone, arrange to have a trusted and supportive person present.
- Attend individual or group counselling sessions if you can.
- Become involved in community activities to reduce feeling isolated.
- Take steps to improve your finances (e.g., consider a part-time job or applying for social assistance, upgrade your skills, etc.).
- Join women's groups to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people.
- Take time for yourself (read, meditate, play music, etc.).
- Fulfill your spiritual needs in whatever way is appropriate for you.
- Give yourself permission to feel angry. Find constructive ways to express it.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and are supportive .

- Take part in social activities (e.g., programs at your local community centre, dinner with friends, etc.).
- Try to get adequate sleep and rest.
- Eat regular healthy balanced meals.
- Write or talk about your feelings, especially when you are feeling low or vulnerable.
- Take time to prepare yourself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with your partner, meeting with lawyers, or attending court, etc.
- Try not to overbook yourself - limit yourself to one appointment per day to reduce stress. Write down the dates, times, and locations of your appointments.
- Be creative and do whatever makes you feel good.
- Focus on your strengths.
- Stay active. It will boost your energy levels and increase your overall sense of well being.
- Remember that you are the most important person to take care of right now.

### III.

## AN EMERGENCY ESCAPE PLAN

The Emergency Escape Plan focuses on the things you can do in advance to be better prepared in case you have to leave a violent situation very quickly.

The following is a list of items you should try to set aside and hide in a safe place (e.g., at a friend or family member's home, with your lawyer, or in a safety deposit box):

**A) Make a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place, away from the originals. Hide the originals someplace else, if you can.**

- Passports, birth certificates, Indian/First Nations status cards, BCID, citizenship papers, immigration papers, permanent resident or citizenship cards, etc. for all family members
- Driver's license, registration, insurance papers
- Prescriptions, medical and vaccination records for all family members
- School records
- All income assistance documentation
- Work permits
- Marriage certificate, divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, protection orders, or other legal documents
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage documents

- Bank books
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of spouse/partner and any children
- Health cards for yourself and family members
- All cards you normally use, for example, credit cards, bank cards, phone card, Social Insurance Number (SIN) card

**B) Try to keep all the cards you normally use or copies of them in your wallet:**

- Social Insurance Number (SIN) card
- Credit cards
- Phone card
- Bank cards
- Health cards

**C) Try to keep your wallet and purse handy and containing the following:**

- Keys for your home, car, workplace, safety deposit box, etc.
- Cheque book, bank books/statements
- Driver's license, registration, insurance
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of spouse/partner and any children
- Emergency money (in cash) hidden away
- Cell phone

**D) Keep the following items handy so you can grab them quickly:**

- Emergency suitcase containing immediate needs or a suitcase that you can pack quickly
- Special toys and/or comforts for your children
- Medications
- Jewelry and items of special sentimental value
- A list of other items you would like to take if you get a chance to return to your home to collect more belongings later

**E) Other Considerations:**

- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank statements or other calls be made to you. Or, arrange that mail be sent to a trusted friend or family member.
- Save and set aside as much money as you can (e.g., a bit of change out of grocery-money if/when possible). Locate your local food bank so you can save money on groceries.
- In a place you can get to quickly, set aside \$20 to \$30 for cab fare, and quarters for a pay phone.
- Hide extra clothing, keys, money, etc. at a friend/family member's house.
- Plan your emergency exits, taking into consideration mobility and accessibility concerns, as well as appropriate modes of transportation and how to arrange it (e.g., taxi, bus, HandyDART, etc.).
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly, and learn them well.
- Keep an emergency packed suitcase hidden or handy/ready to pack quickly.
- Consider getting a safety deposit box at a bank that your partner does not go to.

**F) When Dialing 911:**

- Remember that there is no charge when dialing 911 from a pay phone. The call is also free from cell phones.
- Remember that if you call from a land line, you can leave the phone off the hook after you have dialed 911 and the police will come to your location. However if you call from a cell phone, the police cannot tell where you are calling from, so be sure to give them your address immediately.
- For TTY access (telephone device for the deaf) press the spacebar announcer key repeatedly until a response is received.
- If you do not speak English, tell the call-taker the name of the language you speak. Stay on the line while you are connected to interpreter services that will provide assistance in your language.
- Try to remain on the line until the call-taker tells you it is okay to hang-up.

**G) Additional Notes:**

- When you leave your home, take the children if you can. If you try to get them later, the police cannot help you remove them from their other parent unless you have a valid court order.
- If you have left your home, the police can escort you back to the home later to remove additional personal belongings, if it is arranged through the local police department. At this time, you can take the items listed above as well as anything else that is important to you or your children.
- Police involvement will usually result in the involvement of Child Protection Services if children reside with you. The goal of this involvement is to reduce the risk to a child, not to remove the child from the care of the non-offending parent/caregiver. Child welfare workers can provide support to you and advocate for you when you attempt to access financial, residential, and other practical services.

## IV. CREATING A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

There are many things a woman can do to increase her safety. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step-by-step over time. Here are a few suggestions:

### A) AT HOME

*If you are living with your abusive partner:*

- Get your Emergency Escape Plan in order and review it often.
- Create a list of telephone numbers including local police, nearest women's transition house/shelter/safe home, crisis line (or VictimLink BC 1-800-563-0808), family members, friends, counsellors, children's friends, etc.
- Make arrangements with friends or family so that you can stay with them if necessary.
- Notice what triggers your partner's violence. This can help you try to predict the next likely incident and give you a chance to prepare (i.e., by making plans for the children to be sent to friends/family in advance).
- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to stored numbers such as the last number you dialed or received a call from. You can also regularly erase stored numbers.
- Check your vehicle for a Global Positioning System (GPS) which your abuser may have installed in or under your car to track your movements.

- Teach your children to use the telephone (and cell phone, if you have one) to contact the police, ambulance, or the fire department.
- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a trusted friend if your partner takes the children.
- Create a code word with your children and/or family/friends so they know when to call for help.
- Plan your emergency exits and teach them to your children.
- Teach your children their own Safety Plan (See page 19).
- Consider a plan for the safety and wellbeing of your pet(s) such as making arrangements with friends or family to care for them if need be.
- Be aware of any weapons in the home or your partner's access to weapons
- When using the computer, be aware that your abuser may track the websites you have visited. For information on hiding your tracks, see Appendix A (page 21)

*If you are not living with your abusive partner:*

- Tell those who know of your whereabouts to tell your abusive partner, if asked, that they do not know where you are or how to contact you.
- Change the locks on the doors, windows, garage and mailbox. Install a peephole in the door that your children can see through as well. If possible, install an alarm system.
- Keep doors and windows locked at all times.
- Have a pre-recorded anonymous message on your telephone answering service rather than your own voice and do not identify yourself by name.
- If possible, trade in your car for a different make and model.
- Check your car for a Global Positioning System (GPS) which your abuser may have installed in or under your car to track your movements.
- Instruct your children to tell you if someone is at the door and to not answer the door themselves.

- Carry a cell phone and a personal alarm.
- If the police arrest the abuser, find out if he/she will be held in custody or released. You can provide input into release conditions to the investigating officer. Ask for a copy of the conditions of his/her release.
- Keep a copy of your protection order near you at all times. Inform your friends, colleagues, family that you have a protection order in place.
- If your protection order is destroyed or lost, you can obtain another copy from the Victim Safety Unit (1-877-315-8822), who can also provide you with ongoing notifications regarding an accused/offender who is being supervised by BC Corrections either in custody (jail) or the community (e.g., bail, probation).
- If your partner violates the protection order or is threatening you in any way, immediately call the police to report the violation. Key things to identify to the police are whether there has been a pattern of violence, whether your partner owns weapons or has access to them, your partner's use of drugs/alcohol, and any concerns in regards to mental health or significant stress (i.e., related to recent job loss or life changes, etc.)
- Record all phone calls/messages; save all emails/text messages and Facebook contacts; and document all in-person contacts made by the abuser.
- Make sure that the school, day care, and police have a copy of all court orders, including protection orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive partner.
- Request the police to put a 'caution code' on your abusive partner's file in PRIME. This will provide additional information and security for officers responding and alert them of a potentially dangerous history of relationship violence.
- Notice what triggers your partner's violence and abuse. This may help you predict the next likely violent incident and give you a chance to prepare.

- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to the stored numbers (e.g., last number dialed).
- Have your telephone number unpublished, as it is harder to track than when it is unlisted. You can block your number when calling out by dialing \*67 before the number you are calling. Dialing \*69 will trace the last call you received, although this service may include a cost.
- Consider getting a cell phone and preprogram numbers of people to call.
- Contact your local victim service program to inquire about the availability and your eligibility for the D.V.E.R.S. emergency response system/home alarm program. Victim services can also assist you with emotional support, safety planning, accompaniment to criminal court and information about the criminal justice system and the court process.
- Consider rearranging your furniture as this is something your partner may not anticipate, and it may cause them to bump into it and give you some warning.
- Put your kitchen utensils and knife block in the cupboards so they are not as easily accessible.
- If you live in an apartment, check the floor carefully when getting off the elevator. Look in mirrors when turning corners in hallways and be aware of doorways in hallways. Speak to your building manager/security to request increased safety measures in your building.
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors if possible.
- Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for each floor.
- Consider the advantages of getting a dog that barks when someone approaches your house or get a "Beware of Dog" sign.
- Install a motion detection lighting system outside your home that lights up when a person is coming close to your house.
- Do whatever you can to increase security, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors/windows, an electronic system, etc., and keep trees and bushes trimmed – anything to provide added security.

- Electronic security measures when using the computer may also be helpful including changing your passwords, creating new email addresses for yourself and your children, blocking unwanted emails and/or senders, etc.
- If you agree to see your partner, meet in a public place and limit your isolation. Make sure someone knows where you are and when to expect you to return.
- If your abusive partner has legal access to your children, talk to a lawyer about getting supervised access or having access denied.
- If your abuser has visitations with your children, arrange for transportation for your children so that you do not have to have contact with the abuser.

## B) IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Tell your neighbours that you would like them to call the police if they hear a fight or screaming in your home.
- Tell people who take care of your children, including schools and daycares, which people have permission to pick up your children.
- Tell the school, daycare, babysitter, and people who have permission to pick up your children that your (ex) partner is not permitted to do so and ask that they not give your contact information to anyone.
- Tell people in your neighbourhood that your partner no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if your ex-partner is seen near your home. You may wish to give them a photo and description of your ex-partner's car.
- Ask your neighbours to look after your children in an emergency.
- Hide clothing and your Emergency Escape Plan items at a neighbour's house.
- Use different grocery stores and shopping malls and shop at hours that are different from when you were living with your abusive partner.
- Use a different bank or branch and take care of your banking at hours different from those you used with your abusive partner, or take care of your banking online.
- If possible, change your doctor, dentist and other professional services that you would normally use.
- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory or mailbox.

## C) AT WORK

Each woman must decide for herself if and/or when she will tell others that her partner is abusive and that she may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help protect you. However, each woman should consider carefully which people to ask for help. If you are comfortable, you may choose to do any or all of the following:

- Show a picture of your (ex) partner and provide a description of their car to colleagues, neighbours, and building security personnel to make them aware and alert to your safety needs.
- Tell your boss, the security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work about your situation, and ask that they refrain from giving anyone personal information about you.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work or use voicemail to screen your calls. Document any unwanted calls from your abuser.
- Discuss the possibility of having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your (ex) partner.
- Block unwanted emails or send them to a folder where you do not have to read them.



## *When arriving at or leaving work:*

- Let someone know when you'll be home and when to expect you to arrive at work, and that you will call them when you have safely arrived.
- Carry your keys in your hands.
- Get a remote or keyless-entry car door opener.
- Walk with someone to your car.
- Scan the parking lot.
- Walk around your car, look under the hood to check if anything has been tampered with and check your brakes. Keep your car seats forward so you can easily look into your car from the outside. When parking, reverse the car into the parking spot or driveway so it is possible to make a quick exit if necessary.
- If your partner is following you, drive to a place where there are people to support you, e.g., police station.
- If problems occur while you are driving, use your cell phone (with a hands-free device), honk your horn continuously, and drive directly to a well-lit, open, populated place or directly to a police station.
- If you have underground parking, consider parking somewhere else as underground parking lots can be dark and secluded.
- Keep a sign in your car saying "call police".
- If you are walking, take a route that is populated and well-lit.
- Change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and the routes you take.
- If you see your partner on the street, try to get to a public place such as a store or call attention to yourself and request help if you feel in danger.
- If you use public transit, sit close to the front near the driver and have someone you know meet you at the bus stop to walk home with you.
- Once you have arrived home/at work, call a friend or relative to let them know you have arrived safely.

## V. DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

The following is intended for anticipating an escape from violence in the home. Here are a few tips:

- Remind yourself that you have an Emergency Escape Plan, and go over it in your mind.
- Start to position yourself to get out quickly or near a phone so you can call 911, if necessary.
- Try to move to a space where the risk is the lowest. Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without access to an outside door.
- Make as much noise as possible (set off the fire alarm, yell "FIRE", break things, turn up the stereo or TV) – so that neighbours may call the police for you.
- If you are being physically assaulted, curl into a ball to protect your head and face. Be aware that scarves or anything else worn around your neck may be used by the abuser to hurt you.
- Use your code word with your children so they can call for help.
- Use your judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, you may decide to placate or agree with the abuser to protect yourself until you are out of danger.

- During or after an assault, call the police at 911 if you can. Tell them you have been assaulted and that it is an emergency. Leave the phone off the hook after your call.
- Once you are in a safe place, have a friend/family member take photographs of any injuries you sustained during the assault. This can also be done at the hospital if you choose to seek medical attention. Note that bruises can often take several days to appear.
- Take photographs of damaged clothing and/or property to be used as evidence.
- If you have been sexually assaulted, and if you choose to seek medical assistance, don't bathe or shower. Go directly to a hospital where a trained professional will examine you and be able to collect evidence. Keep the clothes you were wearing during the assault (don't wash them) and provide them to the investigating officer for use as evidence.

## VI. A CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

This plan was developed to help mothers teach their children some basic safety planning.

It is based on the belief that the most important thing that children can do for their mothers and their families is to get away from the area of violence. Although children often try to stop the violence by distracting the abuser or directly interfering in the violent incident, it is important to tell children that the best and most important thing for them to do is to keep themselves safe.

Children who experience or are exposed to violence can be profoundly affected. It is very traumatic for them to be faced with violence directed at them or at someone they love. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families are experiencing violence. Children should learn ways to protect themselves.

There are several ways to help you develop a safety plan with your children:

- Have your child pick a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door and a phone. The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the violence is occurring.
- Stress the importance of being safe, and that it is not the child's responsibility to make sure that his/her mother is safe.
- Create a code word to use with your children so that they know when to run to safety and to call for help.
- Teach your children how to call for help. It is important that children know they should not use a phone that is in view of the abuser. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbour's phone or a pay phone if they are unable to use a phone at home. Remember that there is no cost when dialing 911 from a pay phone or cell phone.

- If you have a cell phone, teach your children how to use it.
- Teach them how to contact the police by dialing 911.
- Ensure that the children know their full name and address.
- Rehearse what your child/children will say when they call for help.

For example:

Dial 911.

*An operator will answer and say: "Police, Fire, Ambulance."*

*Your child should say: Police.*

*Then your child should say:*

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I need help. Send the police.

Someone is hurting my mom.

The address here is \_\_\_\_\_.

The phone number here is \_\_\_\_\_.

- It is important for children to leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking. The police may call the number back if they hang up, which could create a dangerous situation for yourself and your children.
- Pick a safe place to meet your children, out of the home, so you can easily find each other after the situation is safe.
- Teach your children the safest route for them to take to the planned place of safety.
- Practice and role-play this safety-plan with your children including what to do and where to go if something violent happens.

## VII.

### APPENDIX A – TRACKING WEBSITE ACTIVITY

Be aware that someone who has access to your computer may be able to see what websites you have visited, or read your email messages.

There are steps you can take to make it more difficult for someone to track your activities, however, your abuser may still find ways of tracking your activities on your home computer that are difficult to prevent. If your abuser knows a lot about computers, it might be better for you to use a computer outside the home - at a library, school, internet café, at work or at a friend's house.

- There are a few easy ways for someone to find out what websites you have visited. Computers have what is called a cache file. The cache (pronounced "cash") automatically saves web pages and graphics. Anyone who looks at the cache file on your computer can see what information you have viewed recently on the internet. Also, most web browsers (the software on your computer that lets you search the internet and display internet pages – like Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox) keep a list of the most recent web sites and links that you have visited in a history file. You can look at your own history by clicking on the history button on your toolbar (the bar at the top of your screen).
- While it is possible to clear the cache and history files so that your computer doesn't keep a list of the sites you have visited, **YOU SHOULD BE VERY CAUTIOUS ABOUT DOING THIS.** If your abuser is comfortable with computers and sees that you have cleared all the cache and history files on your computer (including the sites the abuser has visited), this could make the abuser suspicious or angry. If that is a possibility, it would be better for you to use a computer that they cannot access - for example, at a library, school, internet café, a friend's house, or at work.

- If you do decide to clear your browser history, instructions can be found at [www.domesticviolencebc.ca](http://www.domesticviolencebc.ca). Scroll to the bottom of the screen and click on the "Use This Site Safely" link.
- Your abuser may have ways of tracking your activities on your home computer that are difficult to prevent.
- If you are concerned about the safety of using your home computer, if possible, use a computer at a public library, a school, an internet café, or at the home of a trusted friend.

## VIII. RESOURCES FOR WOMEN IN CRISIS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

EMERGENCY (POLICE, FIRE, AMBULANCE) 911

24-HOUR CRISIS AND REFERRAL LINE 1-800-563-0808

### VictimLink BC

Free and confidential services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in over 100 languages. Visit [www.victimlinkbc.ca](http://www.victimlinkbc.ca) for more information.

### SUPPORT SERVICES (SHELTERS, VICTIM SERVICES, COUNSELLING)

Call VictimLink BC (1-800-563-0808) to receive a referral to a local victim service program, transition house program (shelter), or violence against women counselling or outreach program. Programs are free of charge and are available in communities across the province.

For more information on services available visit “Domestic Violence – It’s Never OK” at [www.domesticviolencebc.ca](http://www.domesticviolencebc.ca).

For more information on women’s transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing visit: [www.bchousing.org](http://www.bchousing.org)

### CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) provides medical expenses, counselling services, protective measures, income support and other benefits to assist eligible victims of crime and their immediate family members to recover from the impacts of crime. For more information on CVAP please call 1-866-660-3888 (toll-free) or visit [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/financial/](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/financial/).

### VICTIM NOTIFICATION PROGRAM

The Victim Safety Unit (VSU) provides ongoing notifications regarding an accused/offender who is being supervised by BC Corrections either in custody (jail) or community (e.g., bail, probation). For more information on this program, please call 1-877-315-8822 (toll-free) or visit [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/victim-safety/](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/victim-safety/).

### LEGAL SERVICES

For information on legal services, including criteria and eligibility for legal aid, contact the Legal Services Society by visiting [www.lss.bc.ca](http://www.lss.bc.ca) or calling 1-866-577-2525 (toll-free).

### HEALTH SERVICES

HeathLinkBC is a provincial resource for health information and advice. Call 811 if you would like to speak with a nurse or pharmacist any time of day or night, every day of the year. You can also visit [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) for more information.

### SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Children Who Witness Abuse programs provide individual and group counselling services for children who have been exposed to violence in the home. Support is also provided to the child’s non-offending parent or caregiver. To connect with a program in your area, call VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808.

The Helpline for Children is a toll-free number that connects with a child welfare worker (social worker) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 310-1234 (no area code required) if you have reason to believe that a child may be abused, neglected, or is for any other reason in need of protection.

You can let your children/youth know that they can call the Kids Help Phone anytime if they need to talk to someone about what’s going on at home or school. The Kids Help Phone can be reached at 1-800-668-6868 and is free, anonymous and confidential. For more information visit [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca).



