

# A Guide For Speaking to Men Who Have Used Abuse For Ontario Resettlement Assistance Service Providers

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## Introduction

*“I would like to see men taught about how to live in Canada without abusing their wives and without emasculating them in the process.” RAP Worker*

### The Issue

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is by no means unique to refugee communities. It is an unfortunate reality in families of all backgrounds and circumstances. Yet, women who are refugees often face additional challenges which can lead to acceptance, silence, and continued risks to her safety and well-being.

In 2016, the Recognizing and Responding to Intimate Partner Violence for Ontario Resettlement Assistance Programs (RAP) asked RAP workers to describe some of the challenges that they experience regarding this issue. One respondent said, “Women face intersecting barriers & oppression. Violence in the home is one thing, but it is then compounded by racism, poverty, language barriers, lack of support networks, etc.”

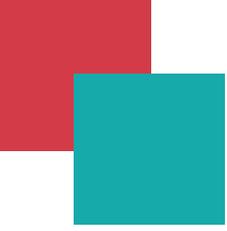
Another respondent noted, “When the partner mentions that the government will deport her if she doesn’t stay with him. They are afraid to be deported or afraid to share her situation with someone.”

It has become essential for the resettlement sector to acknowledge cultural influences which do not cause IPV, but which can often serve to perpetuate and justify certain behaviours. It is important to provide key information to engage both men and women in an effective service delivery process.

### The Need

*“We need to have this conversation on the table with any new client that we have.” RAP Worker*

Providing effective, responsive settlement services requires that RAP service providers work simultaneously with women and their partners while keeping safety in mind at all stages of the



support journey, from the entry point onwards. The degree to which each partner can be engaged will vary, however some level of involvement is critical. In some cases a response to problematic behaviour will be inevitable. With this in mind, RAP workers are urged to enrich their capacity to provide education, cultural insight, accountability, and dialogue with their refugee clients. During the first few days of their arrival, clients attend mandatory orientation sessions where they receive vital information about their settlement process. This takes place prior to the IRCC interview. RAP workers can benefit from this opportunity to deliver information regarding behaviours that constitute domestic violence and legal responses and consequences in Canada. Child abuse could be covered in the same manner, informing refugees about women's and children's rights to be safe from any violence or abuse. This approach could be key in preventing men who are refugees from using abuse in their intimate relationships and provide an opportunity to assess risk for women and their families. Refugee women can be empowered through education about their rights. This will act as a preventative measure against abuse in some of these families.

One RAP worker shared the experience of a refugee client, “he was scared to hit me after the first orientation; he knew he cannot hit me anymore”.

At a very critical time for refugee families, RAP workers are conducting assessments and referrals to respond to the immediate needs of clients and this includes the occurrence of IPV. They are, by no means, assuming the position of a specialized domestic violence intervention service provider but need to be adequately equipped to address the full spectrum of needs of their respective clientele.

## The Project

*“Settlement & resettlement workers need to develop confidence and competence in responding to gendered violence within their client base.”*  
RAP Worker

In July 2016, Rexdale Women's Centre and the Recognizing and Responding to Intimate Partner Violence for Refugee Resettlement Assistance Programs in Ontario proposed the development of distinct, gender-based, and culturally appropriate tools to address the needs of refugee women who have or are currently experiencing violence. The mission of the project was to advance the current capacity of resettlement assistance programs in Ontario to identify and respond to incidents of abuse within the context of service provision. Through the training curriculum, resource guide, and protocol development activities, the project worked to improve organizational response to violence against refugee women in a uniform yet highly targeted and culturally-sensitive way.

URL: [rapworkers.com](http://rapworkers.com)

## The Document

*“Many men have built a mentality and habit that it (IPV) is permissible and we have to support them to break these old habits by educating and enforcing the laws. Education plays a huge role in preventative measures.”* RAP Worker

The project has responded to the training and support needs reported by the RAP sector including the capability to speak to refugee men about their abusive behaviour. The primary goal is to dismantle power imbalances which maintain patterns of domination for refugee men and their families. This document offers a framework for these important and complex discussions.

## The Framework:

The following guideline serves to summarize key elements for situations where RAP workers are considering dialogue with refugee men who are suspected of or reported to have used abuse in their intimate partner relationships:

### Applying the EARS OPEN approach to speaking with men:

Explore incidents and experiences of abuse with all refugee clients

Ask open-ended questions

Record relevant information

Safety should be considered at all phases

Outreach for consultations, referrals, or reporting as necessary

Policies and procedures guide efficient service practices

Evaluation and revision of organizational processes should be ongoing

Notice existing biases and identify personal training and development needs

This approach does not require a specific, defined order and it will not be a linear process. For example, RAP workers might have to consider safety before asking questions or consider consultations prior to other aspects of the process.

### Why is it Important to Speak with the Men?

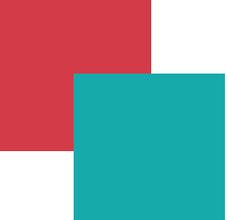
- Women's lives could be in danger
- Refugee women are likely to stay with their partner for a number of reasons.
- Refugee women might need support and information to identify risks and the impact of her experiences. She may not label her experience as abuse.
- There are often children to be considered in this situation who might be exposed to and/or at risk themselves within an abusive environment.
- It is possible that her partner might respond to early intervention and referral options that are available.
- The partner's behaviour could escalate if there are no attempts to engage with him.
- IPV is a considerable safety and integration challenge that can hinder successful transition to a new country.

### What is Intimate Partner Violence?

The term "intimate partner violence" describes physical, sexual, emotional, financial, spiritual, or psychological threats or actions by a current or former intimate partner.

An intimate partner refers to an association or a personal relationship that can include an emotional connection, physical/sexual contact, and/or partners who identify themselves as a couple. The relationship can pertain to spouses or dating parties and IPV can occur between same-sex or heterosexual couples.

It is important for RAP workers to understand that IPV can vary in frequency as well as severity. It can be described on a continuum, ranging from one incident to ongoing behaviours that occur and sometimes escalate over the course of years.



Intimate partner violence ranges from emotional abuse, such as name calling, to repeated physical or sexual assaults and homicide (Heise and Garcia-Moreno, 2002). It affects women across all racial, national, social, and economic groups.

The World Health Organization reported that 40–70% of female homicide victims were killed by a current or former intimate partner. (Pan & Daley, 2006)

In this work, RAP workers will need to consider the underlying motivation for using violence. The foundation of IPV is power and control over another person. Unfortunately, refugee status can be an optimal tool for the abusive partner to exert power and control. Examples include:

- Taking her passport and other legal documents (i.e. Confirmation of Permanent Residence)
- Threatening to report her for deportation
- Threatening to take children out of the country
- Lying about or misleading her about her status in the country
- Isolating her so she cannot build a social network or attend ESL classes to learn the language
- Threatening to contact the authorities and deprive her of her rights to see or be in contact with her children

These are all be warning signs of abuse and warrant further, thoughtful exploration with the family.

## Culture

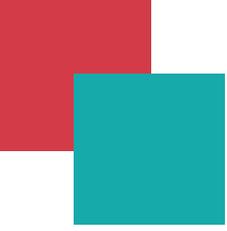
It is important to understand the cultural influences that support and frame experiences of intimate partner violence. Heise and Ellsberg noted that in many cultures, violence against women is often rationalized as justified when women do not follow traditional gender roles or norms. Differences between the cultural values of a family's native country and the new country can cause a great deal of conflict within refugee families. In some cultures, leaving the intimate partner is an unacceptable option that can lead to social isolation.

Research also illustrates that refugees' culture and context can offer valuable resiliency factors which programs and policies can use to better serve these families.

RAP workers will need to recognize that women might place high value on the traditional family unit and gender roles and that some men will find support for respectful, equality-based relationships from their extended family and communities, while others might find that members of their social networks reinforce their perceptions and abusive behaviours. (Anita Raj, Jay Silverman March 1, 2002)

Acknowledging a multilayered experience of culture when intervening with men who have used abuse and their families can assist RAP workers to engage men and their partners without minimizing or rationalizing behaviours. Effective responses to IPV at the early resettlement phase requires accountability from men and support for the needs of the women and children. It recognizes the impact of a number of social forces related to culture and cultural differences on communities, families, and individuals. These forces include the realities of sexism, racism, and heterosexism, as well as experiences with immigration, colonization, and capitalism.

The manipulation of religion to control their partners may be prevalent in this population of men. Many refugee women will want to be faithful to their religion. RAP workers may witness a belief that she cannot defy God, even if she is in an abusive relationship. It is important to understand that many refugee women who are experiencing abuse are struggling with the isolation that results from being in a new country and at the same time, might be disconnected from their extended families, resulting



in further isolation. In some cases, these women have come from experiences not having their concerns or safety adequately addressed by police. Seeking shelter from strangers in a new country might seem to be a worse outcome or experience than enduring abuse in familiar surroundings for some refugee woman experiencing IPV.

## Legal Considerations

(What we need is) “More information and education for men about VAW and consequences in the Canadian context.” RAP worker

RAP workers need to develop a concrete understanding of how intimate partner violence is addressed in Canadian law. While it is not important for workers to become legal experts, it is important that settlement services embrace and reflect a position of no tolerance for domestic violence. In Canada, it is not permissible to use coercive acts, threats, physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, spiritual, or financial abuse against a partner. Certain behaviours are subject to legal consequences.

At a minimum, RAP workers should be informed of the behaviours that are considered criminal offences in IPV cases. This includes such behaviours as stalking, harassment, threats, property damage, assault, and kidnapping or forcible confinement. The Criminal Code also contains a number of special provisions that aim to address safety and service needs of survivors. RAP workers will sometimes be required to explain what behaviours can result in charges in Canada to both refugee men and women.

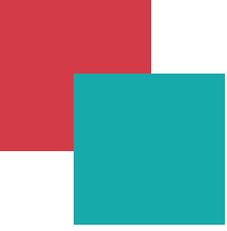
While exposing children to domestic violence does not constitute an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada, provincial and territorial child welfare legislation consider exposure of a child to domestic violence as a form of maltreatment. As such, provincial and territorial child protection systems have the responsibility of investigating possible cases of child exposure to partner violence, providing necessary services. If the children’s ongoing safety cannot be ensured, they may be removed from the violent household (Statistics Canada: Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2010). Therefore, RAP workers have an obligation to report incidents of domestic violence whereby a child under 16 years of age has been present. The client who is experiencing IPV may be apprehensive about police involvement given the potential to involve child protection services, who may be contacted by police.

## Creating the Space for Communication

When it comes to speaking with men who are either suspected of or are confirmed to have used abuse in their intimate relationships, it is important to attend to two very important elements: creating a setting that elicits communication while at the same time, not offering a space for rationalization and minimization. It is a careful balance. Many service providers will approach these interactions with men in one of three ways:

1. Anger and dismissal
2. Sympathy and alignment
3. Assessment and response

The goal is to create a setting where information can be attained and the needs of the woman (and her family) can be effectively addressed. If RAP workers approach each contact seeking to obtain a clear picture of what is happening in a particular partner relationship and respond to any risks identified, then the outcome for that woman can be considerably enhanced. The primary sources for assessing the circumstances will be the woman as well as her partner. Depending on the situation, the worker’s ability to understand the dynamics will be directly impacted by the way in which they create



an atmosphere that encourages dialogue and possible disclosure. It is in these conversations that risk can be further determined and a fully responsive service delivery process can be implemented.

Here are some guidelines for establishing a climate to speak about suspected or disclosed abuse:

1. Be prepared
2. Discuss confidentiality and limits to confidentiality
3. Acknowledge the presenting challenges in talking about the concerns
4. Make attempts to establish key rules for the conversation
5. Wherever possible, reference the concerning behaviour itself
6. Avoid confrontation which can increase risk and impede communication
7. Do not breach the confidentiality of his partner and do not share information that she has disclosed
8. Avoid rationalizing or justifying his behaviour however attempt to understand his perception of contributing factors
9. Use open-ended questions
10. Seek a common goal to end violence and ensure safety
11. Recognize any escalation in the discussion
12. Collaborate on options for service referrals where appropriate
13. Be clear about the limits to one's role and responsibilities as a RAP worker

## Safety is the Priority

### Assessing Safety – Worker

Review:

1. What do you already know (about him, the family, the woman, etc.)?
2. How does he present currently? Previously?
3. Who can you consult with to plan for this interaction?
4. Who is available for debriefing following the discussion?
5. What are the goals of the conversation?
6. What existing policies or procedures are in place?
7. What are your pre-existing biases/beliefs pertaining to IPV and relationships?
8. How will I continue to assess my safety throughout the interaction?
9. What are the warning signs indicating that the situation is increasing in safety risks?
10. Would having a male/female worker reduce the potential for escalation?
11. Am I prepared to conduct this assessment?
12. What resources/support systems do you have available to you?
13. What strategies/techniques do you use for self-care?

## Assessing Safety – Woman

Review:

1. Is he experiencing significant settlement distress?
2. Does he also abuse alcohol/drugs?
3. Is she very isolated with limited contact or communication opportunities?
4. Does he blame her for their challenges or issues?
5. Does he keep all of her legal documents?
6. Does he monitor many if not most of her activities?
7. Has she talked about separating from him?
8. Has he threatened to commit suicide?
9. Does she exhibit fear or appear to be intimidated by him?

**Risk Assessment Resources:**

[neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca](http://neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca)

[rapworkers.com/resources](http://rapworkers.com/resources)

## Assessing Safety - Children

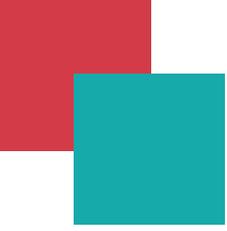
Review:

1. How do the children present (if relevant)?
2. Where are the children during any incidents?
3. How are the children impacted by the abusive behaviour?
4. Does the partner involve the children in the abusive interactions?
5. Have the children ever been harmed by the partner?
6. Has he ever threatened to take away the children?
7. Have child protection services ever been involved with the family?
8. Does the family know under what circumstances child protection services would become involved?

## Dealing with Denial and the Stages of Change

The degree to which refugee men who use abuse acknowledge or deny their abusive behavior will be a key individual difference that is relevant to how they are likely respond to intervention attempts. RAP workers will likely find men that do not see themselves as having a problem with violence. Even when they acknowledge that they have used abuse, they might frame it in terms of a normal response to lived situations and/or their partner's provoking behavior.

The Duluth Power and Control Wheel, which forms the educational basis for numerous intimate partner violence prevention and intervention programs, labels minimization, denial, and blaming as forms of abuse, along with other behaviors noted previously. Countering refugee men's denial and minimization and encouraging them to take personal responsibility for their abusive actions are important objectives that could exceed the scope of preliminary settlement interactions. This is often a long-term therapeutic process.



Research suggests that different types of intervention are appropriate for individuals at different stages of change. The transtheoretical model, developed for understanding the change process in substance abusers (another group characterized by denial), may be equally applicable to IPV perpetrators. It could serve as a guide for RAP workers to comprehend that the success of their attempts to address the issue are often affected by the specific stage that the partner might be in.

## Precontemplation Stage

**Characteristics:** Denial, no problem recognition, does not see any consequences to behaviour.

Initially, individuals in a stage of precontemplation may either deny the behavior, minimize it, or attribute its cause to someone else. If seen in treatment, it is likely due to pressure from others (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992).

How to engage these precontemplators in treatment remains a challenge. Daniels and Murphy (1997) noted that interventions for men in precontemplation need to focus on the goals of increasing awareness of the negative aspects of the problem, acknowledging the problem and accurately evaluating oneself.

**Questions:** Is there anything that you would like to improve in your family? Are others impacted by your comments or actions?

## Contemplation

**Characteristics:** Admits to issues but some minimization and rationalization exists. There might be some problem recognition and exploring intention to change but no commitment to take action.

**Question:** You stated that you have put her down and see that it has resulted in her feeling sad and distant from you. Would you like for this to continue or can we talk about resources that will help you to change this?

## Action

**Characteristics:** Admits to behaviour, recognizes their choice in the behaviour rather than attributing it to a loss of control. They acknowledge it is wrong and the impact on their partner, and begin to develop new thought and belief processes, as well as equality based, respectful patterns of behaviour. There is acceptance of consequences of his behaviour and openness to referrals, action plans, etc.

**Question:** Talking about and admitting to the abuse is difficult for many individuals. You recognize that it is not supporting a positive environment and is hurting your partner. I can refer you to a program that will help you to make the changes that you say you want. Can I share that information with you? Can we also talk about safety for your partner until you can access that service?

## Additional Questions:

We need to talk. Do you have time for us to meet?

Do you mind if we spend a few minutes talking about you and how things are going in your family/ resettlement?

Has there been a time when you tried to change your behaviour?

Are there people in your life who would support you to change?

Would things be better for your children if your behaviour was different?

What do you know about the risks and impact of your behaviour on your partner and/or children?

Does your partner seem happy?

How are you feeling??

Do you notice that your children are affected?

In what ways have you used control or abuse in your relationship?

What are you prepared to do now/next?

Are you interested in learning more about...?

I get the sense that you are not ready to make changes. We can discuss this at another time if you change your mind. Is there someone who you would feel more comfortable speaking with?

What might happen if things don't change?

## Community Mobilization, Resources, Referrals

The project asked what sector and service providers can do in response to intimate partner violence within refugee families. One RAP worker suggested that “Having female and male champions of VAW resistance representing and advocating for a VAW free community.”

Community partnerships, referral networks, and collaboration ensures the best possible client-focused service delivery. A community response that rejects intimate partner violence by challenging views that support power imbalance is an objective that each organization can begin to establish in their ongoing practices.

For treatment, some research indicates that a group like The Partner Assault Response (PAR) program is often the best place to break through the denial and rationalizations that keep the abuse going. In Ontario, the PAR programs are generally accessible through court or probation referrals. There are some programs that will offer voluntary/self-referrals. Breaking the silence, taking responsibility, and being challenged by others is critical for the refugee men to create alternative ways of perceiving their behaviour. Refugee Assistance Program workers can discuss this with partners who are suspected of or have admitted to using abuse in their relationships using questions that reveal readiness and an openness for referrals to these programs.

## Resources for Men:

Victim Services: To talk with an information and referral counsellor, call the Victim Support Line at 1-888-579-2888 or visit the directory online for a list of PAR service locations:

<http://services.findhelp.ca/ovss/>

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sfv-avf/sources/fem/fem-dir-trtmt-male/on-eng.php>

## Final Thoughts

Speaking to refugee men regarding their suspected or reported use of abuse is not a simple undertaking by any means. It is a complex process requiring thoughtful evaluation of various factors – the primary consideration being safety of the workers and the family involved. RAP organizations are vital facilitators with valuable, far-reaching goals to support successful settlement transitions. This framework has been offered as an aid in these conversations. Refugee clients will likely attend for services as a family unit, and as such, will require a fully responsive, inclusive approach to adequately and efficiently address the scope of their needs.

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