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# Helping Your Community



Promoting

Healthy Families - Healthy Communities

This booklet is to help individuals educate community members and bring awareness to the general public on the issue of family violence.

When working towards solutions on family violence, it is key to understand the issue.

There are steps individuals can take that can help prevent family violence. There are also activities that happen in communities that can be supported and attended that help prevent family violence.

## Education And Awareness

When helping Aboriginal communities to address the issue of family violence, education and awareness is important. When working towards solutions to the issue, it is key to understand more about the issue. It is also helpful to understand the history of Aboriginal people and where violence stems from.

Violence is not something that Aboriginals promote in the communities. It is not an acceptable behaviour. It has been an issue in the communities prior to and following European contact. The difficulties that communities face when dealing with family violence has been an issue for years. It is evident that family violence has been harmful to Aboriginal people.

### Education

Definition from Webster's Dictionary

- the action or process of educating or being educated
- a field of study dealing with methods of teaching and learning

### Awareness

Definition from Webster's Dictionary

- having perception or knowledge

Aboriginal communities are 'family oriented' and seek to maintain and support family systems. We want to be able keep the families together and support them during hardships.

### A Process Of Helping Our Communities:

- ▶ **Education And Awareness** - educating community members and bringing awareness to the general public (we do not know who we may be reaching out to or helping)
- ▶ **Prevention** - coordinating healthy community events (supports members who are seeking healthy living)
- ▶ **Intervention** - assisting those who want to make healthy changes in their lives, ensuring safety of all family members
- ▶ **Referral And Support** - finding appropriate services and providing ongoing support

## How I Can Help

There are steps individuals can take that can help prevent family violence. There are also activities that happen in communities that can be supported and attended that help prevent family violence.

Steps I am willing to take to prevent family violence are:

- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_

Activities I am willing to participate in that help prevent family violence are:

- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_

Future activities that I can become involved in that help prevent family violence are:

- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_
- ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample Violence Free Community Declaration**

Please note that the following is only a sample on which community members can elaborate on and alter to meet their own community views and needs.

**- Sample Violence Free Community Declaration -**

Whereas, the community of \_\_\_\_\_ First Nation does recognize the harmful effects of family violence and that it is an issue in the community; and

Whereas, family violence is a cycle that affects all members of the community; including women, men, children, Elders, and people with disabilities and it will take the whole community to work together to stop the cycle of violence; and

Whereas, family violence affects an individuals physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual parts of their very beings; and

Whereas, it is recognized that healing must start within the communities, from individuals, families, to the community as a whole, and that there is a need to support victims of abuse with trust and respect; and

Whereas, the leadership and the people of \_\_\_\_\_ First Nation do declare our commitment:

To work together to address the issue of family violence and it's negative impacts on the community and to incorporate our cultures and values into community activities, programs, and events and to teach our children these same values and belief systems; and

To actively support all initiatives and activities that promote healthy families in order to achieve a healthier Nation; and

That the \_\_\_\_\_ First Nation is a caring community and will support efforts that promote health and wellness in the community; and

That the \_\_\_\_\_ First Nation will work towards having a violence free community, where violence will not be tolerated and every measure will be taken to protect each community member.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Tips For Creating Awareness:**

- recognize the need to create awareness
- know your values and beliefs
- be sincere about helping (help because we want to, not because we have to)
- be sensitive to the issue (very 'touchy' subject)
- promote respect, trust, love, honesty, equality
- create a balance in learning (for every negative there should be a positive)
- integrate a variety of learning styles (visual, hands-on learning)
- be consistent with message (be assertive, not aggressive)
- stay positive, take a holistic approach
- be consistent with support
- be a positive role model (walk the walk)
- be knowledgeable about the subject (understand the issue and it's effects)
- network and discuss possible solutions with other workers (in community and other surrounding communities)
- seek help, advice, and support from others (community leaders, Elders, other community workers)
- be creative -use different ways to create awareness (posters, newsletters, radio shows, television messages, etc)
- encourage and support people who are making positive changes in their lives
- engage in and coordinate community events that promote healing and wellness

Education and awareness is a starting point towards healing communities. When we can begin to openly talk about and discuss ways in which we can work together and heal from the 'damage' family violence causes, then we can work together to mend families and promote healthy living.

Family violence will not 'go away' simply by ignoring that it exists. Rates of family violence will not likely decrease unless there is a strategic approach to addressing the issue.

"There needs to be team work in the community in order to implement family violence awareness effectively."

NAN Member 2006

### Prevention Activities

Family violence is a serious issue that affects all communities. It is too serious of an issue to not deal with together, collectively, as a group. It may be ideal to have a combined approach that involves all members of a community, from individuals, families, workers, leaders, youth, and Elders.

It is known that there is a lack of programming in northern Aboriginal communities that deal specifically with family violence and the prevention of family violence. Although there are gaps in services to northern communities, this is not to say that there is no quality work being done to prevent family violence.

Family violence is an issue that needs to be dealt with at the 'grass roots' level, at the community level. We can find ways to incorporate healing and prevention into community activities. An activity that promotes health and wellness is an activity that prevents family violence.

The following is a list of community activities that are being done throughout Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory.

These types of activities are examples of prevention activities:

- Community Feasts
- Celebrating Children (Graduation Ceremonies)
- Church Jamborees/Traditional Ceremonies
- Square Dancing/Jigging
- Pow-wows
- Radio Talk Shows (Sharing Information)
- T.V. Shows (Cartoon Shows, Screen Messages Promoting Healthy Living)
- Various Retreats (Camping, Fishing)
- Traditional Hunting Festivals (Sharing the Game with Community Members)
- Elders Bannock and Tea

Family violence has been identified time and again as a critical issue facing Aboriginal people. There is a need to strengthen and support individuals and families, to keep families intact, to keep them together. Healing is required for all members of a community, not just victims, not just abusers.

Communication among all First Nation members is crucial when addressing such a significant issue. It is not an issue that can be tackled by one earnest individual, it needs to become a group effort. Teamwork and collaboration is a requirement if reducing family violence in Aboriginal communities is going to be effective. Also, a high level of commitment must accompany such efforts.

Family violence is not part of the values and culture of Aboriginal people. It weakens individuals, families, communities, and Nations. Family violence exists. It matters. It can be reduced.

A collective approach to preventing family violence in a community may be to develop a **Violence Free Community Declaration**. It can be a starting point towards formulating a commitment to addressing the issue of family violence.

- **Resources And Training** - gather resources from local programs and also organizations outside of the community or on the internet. The more we know about family violence prevention, the more capable we are to start making a difference. Learning is a life long process and we want to take part in any training, workshops, or information sessions available in the community. We can also start hosting sessions of our own by utilizing community resource people.
- **Reporting And Safety** - acknowledging the importance of keeping women and children safe in the communities. It is important to know that we must protect our children from harm, even if it means reporting abuse to authorities. We want to provide healthy communities for our children to grow up in. Healthy children means that children can live free from any harm.
- **Working Together** - taking a collective, holistic approach towards dealing with the issue. It will take community networking, cooperation, and group efforts to decrease the rates of family violence. A thriving community will have members who can work together, support and respect one another.

With each community being unique and diverse in their own way, community needs of any kind will differ slightly from the needs of a neighbouring community.

There clearly is a need to work collectively to address the issue of family violence, an issue that has plagued our communities for generations. There needs to be an effective strategy when searching for solutions to the issue.

There is a need for involvement of all key stakeholders in a community, which also means including all members of a community. There is a need for a long term holistic approach to reducing family violence and healing needs to begin from within each community. Although there are gaps in services to northern communities, it does not mean that the issue can go on unnoticed and unspoken.

- Youth and Elders Gatherings
- Annual Community Gatherings (Homecomings)
- Memorial Sports Events (Baseball, Hockey, Volleyball, etc)
- Fundraising Activities (Bake Sale/Rummage Sale)
- Workshops or Meetings (All Members Welcome to Attend)
- First Nation Pageants
- Health Fair/Career Fairs
- Youth Activities (Junior Chief and Council, Youth Council, Youth Patrol, etc)
- Canoe Trips, Survival Skills
- Community Concerts Featuring Local Talent (Christmas Concerts, Music Concert, Karaoke, etc.)
- Community Kitchen (Cooking Skills, Food Preparation, Budgeting, Nutrition)
- Community Gardens (Grow Basic Vegetables and Share with Families)
- Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings (Ala-teen, Narcotics Anonymous)
- Support Groups (Women's Group, Men's Group, Youth Group, Elder's Group, Parent Support Group)
- Arts and Crafts Night (Beading, Mocassin Making)
- Movie Night
- Parent Respite
- School Visits and Presentations (Have Community Workers Present Various Information)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Duty To Report**

The duty to report applies to anyone, the general public or community workers, who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child may be in need of protection.

The need of protection can be from physical harm, emotional harm, neglect or abandonment, sexual harm or exploitation.

When an employee or worker suspects a child may be in need of protection, they are obligated to report to the local child welfare agency, local police services, or any social services workers.

Professionals are accountable for reporting any type of child abuse. Professionals who fail to report abuse can be charged, and if convicted, can be fined. It is important for all community workers to know that they are responsible for reporting any type of child abuse.

Reporting must be done even if it involves confidentiality. Reporting is not difficult and the person reporting is protected from any kind of legal action if the report is not made out of malice or spite.

Any effort to support and assist parents who may be at risk of abusing are encouraged. It is important to reach out to troubled families and attempt to prevent family violence before it happens.

#### **Duty To Report:**

- it doesn't matter if you believe someone else is going to report the situation, you can still report it
- reporting abuse can save a child's life
- always act in the best interests of a child
- making a decision to report should be based on child behaviours or other indicators
- the legal duty to report normally overrides any confidentiality rule
- reporting abuse ensures safety and well being of children
- do not put yourself at danger by trying to contact or confront the abuser
- it is important to keep children safe and free from harm
- ***for more information contact your local child welfare agency or police service***

#### **Safety Planning**

In a 1989 study by the Ontario Native Women's Association reported that eight out of ten Aboriginal women were abused, and said that there are "growing documentation that Aboriginal female adults, adolescents and children are experiencing abuser, battering and/or sexual assault to a staggering degree." (Laroque, 1994, p.72).

Source: The Family Dynamic - A Canadian Perspective 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Margaret Ward, p.312.

When an individual is seeking services, we may sometimes need to look outside the community for appropriate help and assistance. However, we also need to look at how we can offer continual support (in community) after services have been accessed.

When helping community members seek treatment or other services outside the community, it is key to follow up and let the person know that you are still available to them. It may be just to talk and listen to experiences, or to make 'after care' plans with them.

There is an on-going need for continual positive relationships with one another to ensure that the healing continues. Healing is a slow process of recovery. It can take years to learn how to cope positively.

**One person's healing affects another...that person can inspire other family members...that family can help other families...these families can inspire whole communities...**

#### **Violence Free Community Declaration**

Steps a community can take to help address the issue of family violence:

- **Individual Responsibility** - we are all responsible for our own actions and behaviours, we want to take responsibility for what we do and realize that we are accountable for our actions.
- **Promote Respect And Equality** - support equality to ensure that men, women, children, Elders, youth, and people with disabilities are given equal treatment in all aspects of community life. We will acknowledge and respect that every person has a right and the ability to make his or her decisions.
- **Education And Awareness** - public awareness and education are key to ensuring that the community is aware of how family violence negatively affects all members and that there is help available. We also want to promote healthy living and give members opportunities to learn more about healing and creating a healthy balance in life.

## How To Make A Referral

Making referrals to other organizations or agencies may be a practice that can be done on behalf of people who may find themselves in situations. Each Aboriginal community has programs and services available to its band members. There are a number of service providers right in each community, people who can help and guide others towards leading a healthier lifestyle.

When seeking treatment services, it is best to have permission (most times it is required) from the person who will be receiving the services. If the person who is to receive the services is not willing to cooperate or consent, the attempts to find help for them may not be successful.

Remember that we cannot change anyone. It is up to each person to choose to change their lives. We can only support, encourage, and trust that they will make healthy decisions to better their lives.

### Tips When Making Referrals:

- offer encouragement and support (be available as a support)
- be knowledgeable about what is available (know what services are in the community)
- be sure the referral is appropriate
- involve person who will be receiving services (participation is key)
- gather important information (health card numbers, status card numbers, etc)
- research and gather further information on outside organizations and services (be prepared to answer questions from person receiving services)
- try to establish and involve support from community members when referring to another agency or organization (other workers, leadership, Elders, etc)
- follow up with referral (to ensure the process is complete)
- advocate and assist with the referral process (may need to vocalize and represent the needs of the person requiring services, ie. translation, special needs, etc)

There are three basic approaches to preventing family violence.

### Tertiary Prevention

- treatment or other interventions to keep abuse from occurring (shelters, safe houses, skills training, parenting classes, long-term counselling)
- treatment for both victim and abuser

### Secondary Prevention

- working with groups of people most likely at risk of becoming abused (women, children)
- aimed at preventing abuse from occurring (community activities, skills training)

### Primary Prevention

- goal is to keep abuse from occurring at all
- aim is to create awareness and education at local community level (skills training, workshops, support programs, sharing/healing circles, etc)

Keeping our communities safe is key to healing and moving towards healthy families. Traditionally, the role of the community was to keep women and children safe from harm. Today, however, there are situations that women and their children are facing that results in them being unsafe.

Safety planning with women who may be at risk can be considered a secondary prevention measure. It is working with and supporting women who are at risk of becoming abused.

Safety planning in remote, isolated communities proves to be a challenge, as there common difficulties faced.

- air travel to shelters (if there is a need) is not always available, this also means that a woman leaves the community (with or without children) and most times with no personal belongings or property
- leaving the community to go to a shelter is a last resort for Aboriginal women (cultural differences, language barriers, different values and belief systems)

- hard for woman to ask for help in a small community, everybody knows everybody, and service providers may be related to the abuser
- safe homes (if available) lack anonymity, there are difficulties with confidentiality in small communities
- lack of long term, supportive services in community

**Safety Planning Tips:**

- involve women in all decision-making and planning stages
- be sensitive and supportive
- encourage women to talk to someone they trust
- talk about the importance of safety planning
- help woman make an exit plan or plan on where to go in an emergency (practice plan)
- help woman to identify a 'safe' place in the community in case of an emergency (temporary place to go until it feels safe to return home)
- help women to teach children how to be safe (use of words to signal children to leave the home)
- if there is a phone in the home, women can plan on who to call in case of an emergency (CHR, family, friend, police officer, nurse, teacher, other community workers, etc)
- children can also be taught how to seek help (use of a phone, going to a 'safe' place in the home, going to a 'safe' place in the community, etc)
- try to keep all important documents in one place (bank cards, health cards, status cards, birth certificates, etc)
- when possible, try to prepare a 'safe' bundle (extra clothes, documents, medicines, special toys) and keep in a safe place
- encourage women to seek help, guidance and advice from trusted community members

**My Safety Plan**

*If I feel unsafe and need help, I will:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I will find someone to talk to that I can trust. This person is:*

\_\_\_\_\_

*I can use a 'code' word to signal my children to find their identified 'safe place.'*

*This word will be:* \_\_\_\_\_

*In my community, I can contact:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I can teach my children to:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*If there was an emergency, where I would need to leave my home, I can prepare a 'safe bundle', in it I would have:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Keeping ourselves safe is important. We have the right to be able to live free from any type of abuse, so do our children. At times, we may find ourselves in situations that are not safe and there may be a moment of confusion, where we may not know what to do.

If we have a safety plan in place for ourselves, it may help us make healthy decisions when in a difficult situation. It may be helpful to involve our children and practice our plan, so that everybody remains safe when needed. Safety planning can be done with all members of a community.