



# SPOT THE SIGNS – BEFORE SOMEONE DIES

Domestic homicides are the most predictable and preventable of all murders. The problem is that most of us do not know what to look for or what questions to ask to figure out whether someone who is in an abusive relationship might be at risk of being killed. If you answer “yes” to 7 or more of the following questions there is the potential of serious risk for escalating or lethal violence and it is time to take appropriate steps to intervene before it is too late to help. In an emergency always call police. To find abuse hotline or shelter listings in your area, in Canada call 211 and in the U.S. call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (1-800-799-SAFE) or go to the website at [www.ndvh.org](http://www.ndvh.org). For a global list of abuse hotlines, shelters, and women’s organizations in over 80 languages go to [www.hotpeachpages.net](http://www.hotpeachpages.net)

## RELATIONSHIP HISTORY

Current Status of the Relationship

*Note: Separation is the most common risk factor present in a domestic homicide (81%). While leaving may be the best response to a violent relationship it is in leaving without adequate safety planning that the majority of women are killed.* 

- Is there a past, current or pending separation in the relationship?
- Is or was the relationship common-law?
- If separated does the abused woman have a new partner in her life?

Obsession, Jealousy, Control, Coercion

*Note: Experts say that when an abuser exhibits these behaviors, the violence often escalates after the abused woman leaves the relationship. This is the third most common risk factor (62%)* 

- Has the abusive partner displayed jealous behaviors or actions that indicate an intense preoccupation with his partner such as following her, repeatedly phoning her, spying on her, controlling her daily activities or finances, isolating her from friends or family?
- Has the abusive partner limited her mobility, such as locking her in a room, not allowing her to use the telephone, refusing to allow her to leave the residence

Relative Social Powerlessness

*Note: Abused women and their children who receive help from the larger community (friends, neighbors, family members, co-workers) are more likely to safely leave an abusive relationship.*

- Are additional challenges present for the abused woman (i.e. disability, immigrant or Aboriginal background, addiction, poverty, pregnancy, lack of transportation, literacy issues, mental illness, elderly etc.)?
- Are cultural factors present (i.e. family pressures/shame, religious beliefs, unwillingness to report, language barriers, isolation etc.)?
- Has the abusive partner interfered with or made threats about immigration status such as threats to revoke sponsorship, interfering with ability to work, or access English classes, or withholding passport or identity documents?

Children Exposed



*Note: Statistically, half the men who batter their partners also abuse their children. Men who have witnessed parental violence as children are 3 times more likely to become abusers.*

- Does either partner have children and are any of them under 19 years of age and living in the home? Are any of the children stepchildren of the abusive partner?
- Are there any arguments or threats over custody, contact, primary care or control of any of the children, including any formal legal proceedings?

## PERCEPTION OF RISK

Perception of Personal Safety

*Note: A victim’s intuition of danger is present in 43% of homicides. A woman’s intuition is a substantially more accurate predictor of future violence than any other warning sign.* 

- Does the abused woman believe her abusive partner will disobey terms of protective orders particularly no contact orders?

Perception of Future Violence

- Does the abused woman fear further violence if the abuser is arrested? Released from custody after arrest? Does the abuser have ready access to her and know where to find her?

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## ABUSER HISTORY

Violence History

*Note: Men who routinely intimidate, threaten or assault other people will sooner or later turn his abuse on his partner. One of the most common research findings is that people with a history of violence are much more likely to engage in future violence.*

- Does the abusive partner have a history of any actual or attempted violence, threats or intimidation on any person outside the family who has not been in an intimate relationship with him? (i.e.. friends, acquaintances, co-workers or strangers)

Previous Domestic Violence History

*Note: A history of Domestic Violence is the second most common risk factor found to be present in Domestic Homicides. Research studies indicate that men who are severely verbally abusive are very likely to become physically violent against their partners. (79%)* 

- Does the abusive partner have a history of stalking, harassment, assaults, threats, sexual assaults, property damage or other abusive behaviors against his partner or a previous intimate partner?
- Is there escalation in the frequency/severity of violence or abuse towards the abused partner, family members, a pet or another person? (physical, psychological, emotional, sexual etc.)
- Is there any history of threats or actual violence or abusive behavior against children, pets, other family members, friends, co-workers, or other persons such as a new intimate partner?
- Has the abusive partner ever forcibly confined his partner or taken her hostage?
- Has the abuser ever strangled, or bitten his partner? Assaulted her while she was pregnant?
- Does the abusive partner minimize or deny any previous spousal assault history?



Restraining or Protective Orders

*Note: The question of whether to get a restraining order in the first place is very complex because some abusers will respond to one as to a red flag waved in his face. If possible you should speak to an Advocate for abused women before deciding whether to seek an order.*

- Has the abusive partner ever violated a Court Order?
- Is the abusive partner presently bound by any Court Orders?

Alcohol/Drugs

*Note: Present in 42% of Domestic Homicides.* 

- Does the abusive partner have a history of drug or alcohol abuse?

Employment Instability

*Note: Present in 39% of Domestic Homicides.* 

- Is the abusive partner unemployed or experiencing financial problems?

Mental Illness

*Note: Depression is the fourth most common risk factor (58%)* 

- Is the abusive partner depressed or does he have a history of depression in the opinion of professionals (physicians, counselors etc.) or non-professionals (abused partner, friends, family, co-workers etc.)
- Does the abuser have a history of other mental illnesses (e.g. bipolar, paranoia, schizophrenia)?
- Has the abuser threatened or attempted suicide? (If YES, when and how?)

## ACCESS TO WEAPONS/FIREARMS

Weapons/  
Firearms  
(Used or  
Threatened?)

*Note: present in 40% of death review cases.* 

- Has the abusive partner used or threatened to use a firearm or weapon (i.e. gun, knife, crossbow) or other object intended to be used as a weapon (bat, vehicle, household object etc.) against his partner, a family member, children or an animal?

Access to Weapons  
/Firearms

- Does the abuser own or have access to weapons/firearms? (i.e. a friend, family member, through work, or recreational sports etc.)