

## Intimate partner violence in the time of coronavirus



The coronavirus is currently giving us a hard time in Quebec and pretty much everywhere in the world. This is a time of worries and upheavals for everyone. Unfortunately, the current situation accentuates difficulties for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) and for their children.

### 1 Loss of safe spaces

For victims of IPV, going to work, to school, spending time shopping for groceries or at the gym is very important. Outside activities become safe spaces that allow them to catch their breath and get in touch with a reality where they don't have to walk on eggshells and constantly be on alert. Physical distance and being able to meet benevolent and sympathetic people also allows them to receive validation and a positive view of themselves, which contrasts with their partners' attitude. These breaks in their reality provide a mental "shield" that helps victims to keep on going despite the situation of violence. It helps build up resilience. The ongoing confinement reduces (or eliminates entirely) opportunities to access safe spaces, for victims of IPV and their children.

### 2 From staying home to forcible confinement

Our governments ask us to stay at home as much as possible to prevent the spread of covid-19. Unfortunately, abusers may use this as a "reason" to coerce their victims even more, by forcing them to stay inside the house (through threats or guilt) and thus keeping them from the few opportunities still available, such as going for a walk, grocery shopping or just going out in the yard. The confinement recommended by authorities can then become a justification for real forcible (and sometimes criminal) confinement for victims of IPV.

### 3 Adding stress to trauma

Victims of IPV (current victims but also those who have been in the past) are exposed to micro-trauma on a daily basis and to greater trauma on an episodic basis. Many of them (and their children) are already suffering from post-traumatic stress, with all that that entails. It will therefore be all the more difficult for them to cope with the stress related to the pandemic, which may result in increased difficulties : anxiety, panic attacks, irritability, restlessness, insomnia, pervasive memories, depression, etc.

### 4 Escalation of violence... when IPV is present

The current situation creates stress for everyone. But for the majority of us, this stress will not become a pretext for violence. A respectful person will simply become a respectful... stressed person. On the other hand, in relationships where a dynamic of IPV was already present or in the process of being installed, violent partners may exert more violence. In this escalation, there may be new forms of violence, increased intensity (it can become more "striking") or it may be used more frequently.

**SOS VIOLENCE CONJUGALE IS AVAILABLE 24/7 ACROSS QUEBEC, AND PROVIDES ACCESS TO ALL THE APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) AND ANYONE WHO IS CONCERNED ABOUT A SITUATION OF IPV.**

Translation made possible by

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*\* Although most victims of intimate partner violence are female, it can also affect some men and members of the GLBTQ and non-binary community.*

## In the time of coronavirus, how can I help ?



### 1 Creating a sense of community and connection all around us

IPV is very common and you come across several victims during a walk or while shopping. Do not underestimate the power of a simple smile or a few nice words exchanged at the grocery store, pharmacy or on a street corner. It's time to create new kinds of connections with the people around us... always staying 2 meters apart of course!

### 2 Installing a safety net

Regular contact with those who are known to be victims of IPV prevents them from being completely isolated in their situation. Of course, it is important to be aware that the abuser may be close by. Exchanges have to be kept on "light" topics unless the person is alone. The same is true for text messages or e-mails, which may be intercepted by the abuser. If you are able to speak with the victim safely, it may be a good idea to agree on a code that could be conveyed easily if the victim needs you to notify emergency services. Chose a code that seems "innocent", such as talking about a sudden urge for sweets "I would give anything for ice cream right now...", about a shared memory "do you remember when we went to Quebec city?" or about someone in particular "I miss grandma so much today".

### 3 Share information about the availability of resources

Community resources specializing in the support of victims of intimate partner violence (SOS violence conjugale and our colleagues in shelters throughout Quebec and other external resources) are currently working hard to meet the needs of victims and their families. **We are available 24 hours a day, every day.** Knowing that there is help, that people are concerned about them and that they can call on us gives victims of IPV a dose of hope and power. Share our publications, make your concern visible, and you will have done a lot.

### 4 Support your local IPV resources

Resources are currently in a race against the clock to meet the needs of victims and children already housed in shelters (and in confinement), as well as those of victims who may need support and shelter in the short term. Keep a watch out for calls for help from these resources: fundraising, volunteering, material donations, etc. Every little bit can make a huge difference.

### 5 Showing support with chalk and markers

Nothing is as powerful as solidarity. Share your support and our helpline on sidewalks and streets through cities, towns and suburbs. Don't have any chalk on hand? Use your creativity to write or draw messages of support. We would be honored to receive photos of your work at [sos@sosviolenceconjugale.ca](mailto:sos@sosviolenceconjugale.ca). We will use these images to show solidarity for victims through our social networks.

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