



*1. Open Palm*



*2. Tuck Thumb*



*3. Trap Thumb*

# THE SIGNAL FOR HELP RESPONDER'S ACTION GUIDE

**You can be that judgement-free  
friend, family member, and  
coworker we all need in our lives.**



CANADIAN  
WOMEN'S  
FOUNDATION

FONDATION  
CANADIENNE  
DES FEMMES

# This guide gives you basic information on how to support someone dealing with gender-based violence.

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# What is the Signal for Help?



1. Open Palm



2. Tuck Thumb



3. Trap Thumb

The Signal for Help is a simple one-handed gesture you can use to silently show you need help and want someone to check in with you in a safe way. It might be useful in a video call. It is a tool that can help some people, some of the time. Every situation is different.

- ▶ ***This video shows an example of how the Signal for Help could be used.***



# What Do I Do if I See Somebody Use the Signal for Help?

Reach out to them safely to find out what they need. They may ask you to listen and be there for them. They may ask for help finding services. They may want you to call someone to help them. Let the person using the Signal take the lead.

**The Signal for Help signifies “reach out to me safely.”**

**The person using it may want you to call an emergency service, but do not assume that is what they want or need in the moment. Reach out to them and let them take the lead.**

**If you see someone using the Signal for Help in public or out of a window or door, calling 911 or emergency services is an appropriate response.**



# How Can I Reach Out Safely?

1

Call them personally and start by asking them if they are alone.

**Examples:**

***“Is this a good time to talk?”***

***“Is anyone home?”***

***“Should I call back later?”***

Be ready to respond if you think they might not be safe to talk right then. Example: “Someone is trying to get through to me. I need to call you back.”



# How Can I Reach Out Safely?

2

Ask questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no”.

**Examples:**

***“Would you like me to call a shelter or service on your behalf?”***

***“Should I look for services that might help you and call you back?”***

***“Would you like me to call 911?”***



# How Can I Reach Out Safely?

3

Send a text, WhatsApp message, or email message, and ask general questions

*Examples:*

*“How are you doing?”*

*“Get in touch when you can, I would love to catch up.”*

People in violent homes and relationships may be closely monitored. The person abusing them may watch where they go, who they call or text, what they do on social media, and more. These options can help you find out what’s wrong in a safer way.



[\*Learn more about the Signal for Help.\*](#)



# How Can I Support Someone Facing Abuse?

Chances are that you know someone living with abuse. Gender-based violence can be experienced differently by different people, and a person may not seem like they are being abused to you. They may not use the Signal for Help to communicate, but they still need to know you will help them feel cared for, supported, and unashamed if they decide to tell you what they are going through.



## **Remember that abuse is common.**

Many people experience it, and many people perpetrate it. But abuse is not inevitable. People do it to other people, and they can stop. We all have to play a part in ending it.



## **Be proactive.**

Find ways to demonstrate your compassion toward people going through abuse. Let them know that if they are going through anything difficult, you will be there to support them.



## **Learn about relevant resources and services.**

You can start with the community-based services on page 13-14.





# If someone tells you that they are experiencing abuse, here's how you can support:

- **Focus on the person being hurt.**

Your job is to support them. Make sure you are not putting your anger, shock, sadness, or fear first in the conversation.

- **Everyone copes with abuse differently.**

They may do things differently than you. That is okay. Be there to support them as they explore what works for them.

- **Listen and let them lead.**

Instead of telling them what you would do or what they should do, ask them how you can best support them.

- **Be judgement-free.**

Instead of saying “What did you do?”, “How did you make them mad?”, “Why don’t you leave?” or “You chose this relationship,” say:

***“It’s not your fault.”***

***“I’m here for you.”***

***“How are you doing right now?”***

- **Be patient and open-minded.**

Abusive relationships are complicated, scary, confusing, and traumatic. Figuring things out takes time. You may need to have more conversations with this person. Don’t push. There is no one right answer, no quick fix, and everyone deals with these things differently.



**People don't talk about gender-based violence very often and don't always know how to respond to it.**

**They might “blame the victim” and make the person who was hurt feel judged. We can all learn how to respond in better, more helpful ways.**

**We all have a role to play in ending abuse everywhere.**

**We can practice being caring, patient, and non-judgmental.**



# What is gender-based violence?

It is the types of abuse that women, girls, and Two Spirit, trans and non-binary people are at highest risk of experiencing. It can take physical and emotional forms, such as: name-calling, hitting, pushing, blocking, stalking/criminal harassment, rape, sexual assault, control, and manipulation. Many forms of this abuse are against the law.

It can happen between people in romantic relationships. It can happen in families, at work, and between friends and acquaintances and strangers. It often occurs in private places between people who know each other.

Anybody can be abused, no matter their background, identity, or circumstance. But women, girls, and gender-diverse people are at high risk of gender-based violence. Some are at even higher risks, due to the additional discrimination and barriers they face. This includes women with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women, trans and non-binary people, and women who are homeless or underhoused. People facing abuse may not have access to services that meet their needs (e.g. people in rural or remote areas).

Everybody deserves to feel safe. Everyone should feel loved and cared for. Violence and abuse are never acceptable.



***Learn more about  
gender-based violence.***



**Leaving a violent relationship is not always possible or safe.**

**If someone is being hurt and wants to leave, there may be reasons they can't or it may take them a long time to do it.**

**Leaving is not the right path for everyone. If a person facing abuse stays in an abusive situation, you can still play a supportive role for them.**



# Important Services to Know

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local emergency number. Many services are open all the time (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) and can provide help in many different languages.

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## Canada-wide:

- 211: call to find any service in your area
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-6868 | Text 686868
- [ShelterSafe.ca](http://ShelterSafe.ca): online map that connects you to your local shelter or transition house for help or information
- Trans Lifeline: 877-330-6366

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## Alberta:

- Family Violence Info Line: 780-310-1818

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## British Columbia and Yukon:

- VictimLink BC: 1-800-563-0808 | TTY 604-875-0885 | Text 1-800-563-0808

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## Manitoba:

- Family Violence Help Line: 1-877-977-0007 | TTY 1-888-987-2829

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## New Brunswick:

- Government of New Brunswick - Women's Equality Branch: [www.gnb.ca/supportservices](http://www.gnb.ca/supportservices)

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## Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Domestic Violence Help Line: 1-888-709-7090

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## Nova Scotia:

- Domestic Violence Line: 1-855-225-0220

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## Northwest Territories:

- YWCA: 1-866-223-7775
- (867) 873-8257 in Yellowknife

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## Nunavut:

- Baffin Regional Agvvik Society: 867-979-4500



# Important Services to Know

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## Ontario:

- Anishnaabe Kwewag Gamig  
Northern Ontario First Nations  
Crisis Line: 1-800-388-5171
- Assaulted Women's Helpline:  
1-866-863-0511 | TTY 1-866-863-7868  
Text #SAFE (#7233) on your Bell,  
Rogers, or Telus mobile phone
- Fem'aide (Francophone):  
1-877-336-2433 | TTY 1-866-860-7082
- Seniors Safety Line: 1-866-299-1011

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## Prince Edward Island:

- PEI Family Violence Prevention  
Services: 1-800-240-9894

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## Quebec:

- SOS violence conjugale:  
1-800-363-9010

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## Saskatchewan:

- 24-Hour Crisis and Abuse Line:  
1-800-214-7083
- Abused Women's Crisis Line:  
1-888-338-0880
- North East Crisis Line:  
1-800-611-6349 or 1-800-668-6868

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## Websites:

- [Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse](#)
- [Draw The Line: Engaging Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence](#)
- [Gender-Based Violence Knowledge Centre](#)
- [National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence](#)
- [Neighbours, Friends and Families](#)



# Frequently Asked Questions

## How did the Signal for Help start?

It was launched by the Canadian Women’s Foundation and our partners in April 2020 in response to an increased risk of gender-based violence and increased use of video calls in the COVID-19 pandemic. The Signal is designed as a tool to address the violence that can happen in intimate partner and family relationships.

## Does the Signal for Help mean “call the authorities right away”?

No. It signifies “reach out to me safely.” The person using the Signal may want you to call authorities, but do not assume that is what they want or need. Let them take the lead.

## Does the Signal stand for something? What if I see something like it being used and I’m not sure what it means?

The Signal for Help is not meant to represent anything in any sign language. If you see someone using a gesture that looks like the Signal for Help and you are not certain what it means, consider the context in which they are using it. When it is safe to contact them, ask them to clarify if they need your help.

## What if an abuser learns about the Signal for Help?

An abuser might learn about the Signal. And people in abusive situations are also often closely monitored and may not feel safe to use it. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for everyone in every situation. The Signal for Help is a tool some people might use, some of the time.

## What if someone can’t use the Signal for Help?

Other resources and services may help them. If you suspect someone you know is in danger and cannot use the Signal, you can still safely check-in using the tips above.



# Continue Your Journey: Become a Signal for Help Responder

Go to [signalresponder.ca](https://signalresponder.ca) to join  
our community of active learners

You will get useful tips and information.

You'll get access to training to build  
your knowledge, and practice and test  
your skills. You'll learn more ways to take  
action and to become a more supportive  
friend, family member, and coworker.





**The Canadian Women's Foundation** is Canada's public foundation for gender justice. We support women, girls, and gender-diverse people to move out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership



**canadianwomen.org**

**Facebook:**

Canadian Women's Foundation

**Twitter:**

@cdnwomenfdn

**LinkedIn:**

The Canadian Women's Foundation

**Instagram:**

@canadianwomensfoundation

**Podcast:**

canadianwomen.org/podcast

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