

Gaslighting

A harmful form of psychological manipulation, gaslighting is a common tool used to gain power and control in a relationship. Gaslighting includes being fed constant misinformation and is used to create self-doubt and uncertainty in the victim, leading them to question their own realities, memories and even their sanity.

Gaslighting has been particularly problematic during the pandemic, as heightened anxieties and fears can exacerbate the desire to gain control over a partner. Social isolation allows abusers to more easily employ gaslighting techniques, as the victim may rely solely on the abuser for feedback and sources of information. Anxieties related to COVID-19 can also make it significantly harder to leave the abusive relationship and leave the security of home.

If you suspect that your partner is gaslighting you, it is important not to second guess yourself. Try to recognize the patterns and realize that gaslighting is a form of power and control. Developing a support network of friends and family, even if that is virtual support, who can confirm your reality and sense of what is true will mitigate self-doubt and help increase self-esteem.

2019-20 Impacts

- **175** women & children sheltered
- **1,934** Crisis Line calls
- **1,128** Stopping the Violence women's counselling sessions
- **1,760** children & youth outreach connections
- **2,316** women supported through the justice system
- **920** Older Women's counselling sessions
- **1,273** child & caregivers sessions
- **2,830** volunteer hours

Our Mission

Victoria Women's Transition House Society (VWTH) collaborates, advocates and educates to address and prevent intimate partner violence and abuse of women and children through supportive shelter, housing, counselling and other community-based services.

How to Reach Us

Crisis and Information Line
250.385.6611

Community Office

Suite 100 3060 Cedar Hill Road
Victoria, BC V8T 3J5

☎ 250.592.2927

✉ info@vwth.bc.ca

🌐 transitionhouse.net

Charitable No. 10817 3501 RR0001

Victoria Women's Transition House is a registered charity and donations are gratefully appreciated.

Give online at **transitionhouse.net** or call **250.592.2927**, Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm.

We need your help now more than ever!
Thank you.

Stopping the Violence Program – Women's Counselling

The Victoria Women's Transition House Stopping the Violence counsellors are busier than ever, providing support to women who have left an abusive relationship or who are currently living with an abusive partner. Many women are single parents who are facing new financial strains and struggling with isolation while raising children. While many of us are also struggling during COVID-19, those impacted by intimate partner violence and abuse can have heightened stress and anxieties. Survivors need to find ways to move forward, an integral part of healing from abuse.

Right now, one of the biggest challenges for clients with an abusive partner, is to address legal problems related to parenting arrangements. With access to the courts limited due to COVID-19, it is difficult to obtain court orders related to the safety of children, including protection orders. It is so important to have specialized professional and trauma-informed

counsellors to assist with safety planning and offer compassionate support. Talking with a counsellor can help women to determine their needs and find ways to move forward.

If you are experiencing abuse or If you need more information on the supports available, you can call 250.592.2927 or reach out to our **24 Hour Crisis & Information Line at 250.385.6611**.



Interview with VWTH Counsellor, Jessica*

Could you please tell us a little about the Stopping the Violence Program?

Stopping the Violence (STV) offers individual or small group counselling for women who have experienced intimate partner violence.

How long do you typically work with an individual woman?

We offer focused short term counselling and the time frame will vary depending on the need. Some women only require a few sessions and others may be with us for longer. Women may attend a group as well as individual sessions and all sessions are free of charge. We encourage women to seek out other specialized resources in the community in addition to what we offer. Often women have complex issues that involves support from several organizations.

How do Transition House counsellors help and support clients?

We believe that women are the experts in their own lives and therefore, they determine their needs. My goal is to support women towards greater self-awareness and to provide teaching tools to increase safety. This includes their emotional, mental, physical and spiritual safety.

As part of the program, we help to complete individualized safety plans for women and their children. These plans include how to stay safe in the home and the community while living with the

ongoing risk of abuse. For example, safety plans can cover issues such as securing the physical home, managing correspondence regarding co-parenting, or responding to encountering an abusive ex-partner in the community.

What are some new, emerging challenges facing STV counsellors?

Homelessness and risk of homelessness are huge challenges facing our clients, especially for those seeking to leave an abusive relationship. It is incredibly hard to find affordable housing in our region, and it becomes even more difficult when children are involved. As well, we are seeing increasingly more complex cases involving mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression and PTSD. There is a lack of available complimentary support services in the community, so many vulnerable women need high levels of assistance.

What do you like most about the work that you do?

I like connecting one-to-one with women, being able to listen to their unique stories and experiences, and supporting them to a more positive place where they have more choices. It's important to provide safe places for healing and tools for women to continue healing and witnessing a woman's journey through healing and recovery is inspirational.

**Name has been changed for privacy*



I just wanted to tell you I am grateful for all you do - changed my life, saved me, helped me...I felt I mattered. Thank you for your kindness.
~ VWTH client

Why Does She Stay?

In our work, we sometimes encounter folks who ask, "Why does she stay in an abusive relationship?" The answer is complex. But by understanding the many barriers that a woman faces when she considers leaving an abusive partner, we can begin to support and empower women to make the best decisions for themselves and their children, while holding abusers solely accountable for the abusive behaviour.

- **Danger and Fear:** An abuser's verbal threats and actions can increase over time, and he can become more violent if the victim tries to leave. A victim's fear is very real – there is a huge rise in the likelihood of violence and homicide during and after separation. She lives in a world of everyday, constant terror.
- **Isolation:** A perpetrator works to weaken a woman's connections to family and friends, isolating her and making it extremely difficult for a victim to seek support. An abuser will often try to reduce a woman's contact with the outside world, preventing her from recognizing that his behaviour is abusive and wrong. Isolation leads women to become extremely financially and emotionally dependent on their controlling partner.
- **Shame or embarrassment:** Perpetrators can be seen as well respected or liked individuals in their communities because they know how to be charming and calculating. This prevents people



from recognizing the abuse and isolates the woman further. The perpetrator will minimize, deny or blame the abuse on the victim. Victims may be ashamed, so they will make excuses to themselves and others, to cover up the abuse.

- **Trauma and low self-confidence:** Imagine being told every day that you are worthless and the impact that this has on your self-esteem. Victims have limited freedom to make decisions, they are often traumatized, regularly told 'you couldn't make it on your own, you need me'. They believe they have no choice but to stay.
- **Practical Reasons:** Abusers often control every aspect of their victim's life making it difficult to have a job or financial independence. By controlling access to finances, a woman is unable to support herself or her children. She may fear becoming homeless, having her children taken away or, even being deported, if she has an insecure immigration status.

Victoria Women's Transition House has a 24-Hour Crisis and Information Line that offers confidential, non-judgemental service, support, information and resources. Staff can walk a woman through a safety plan and determine if space is available in our Emergency Shelter. We are here to help. **250.385.6611**.

Women depicted are models.