The Health of Any Nation Begins in The Homes of its People!

Family Violence Resource Guide for Gurdwaras

SIKH FAMILY CENTER

866-SFC-SEWA(732-7392)

Contents

01. Letter to the Gurdwara Committee	Pg. 2
02. The Key to Gurdwara Commitment	Pg. 3
03. Two Guiding Principles for a Gurdwara Response	Pg. 4
04. Family Safety Resource Card for Your Gurdwara: Customize & Share	Pg. 6
05. Additional Ideas: Immediate Actions and Institutional Actions	Pg. 7
06. Facts About Family Violence: Myth vs. Reality	Pg. 8

Definition of Family Violence:

Family Violence is any action—physical, mental, financial, emotional, spiritual—taken by one person to place fear in and control another person who is more vulnerable. Science shows people in violent homes, including children, suffer lasting traumatic impacts on their brains. Family Violence may also be referred to as Domestic Violence.

01.

A Letter to the Gurdwara Committee

Waheguruji ka Khalsa, Waheguruji ki Fateh!

Our hearts break when we hear in the news about another dangerous case of family violence in the Sikh community--the community of Guru Nanak Sahib (eradicator of all discriminations) and the community of Guru Gobind Singh (eradicator of all hierarchies).

In its ultimate form, family violence kills. Every day, 3 women are murdered by their partners in the U.S. Heinous murders of women and children, as well as cases of murder-suicides occur in the Sikh community as well.

When investigated, it often turns out women who tried to seek help, didn't receive necessary support.

Our gurdwaras try to inspire sangats to be GurSikhs. But when people hear such stories, or experience such violence themselves, they become angry about the lack of support, sad about the tragedy, and even distanced from the community and gurdwara.

Put simply: **families need your help to protect their safety and their lives.** We know gurdwaras provide inspiration and support. We also know that gurdwaras cannot be expected to do everything. Still, the danger of family violence is ever-present. Gurdwaras must respond in a deliberate, pre-planned, and consistent manner.

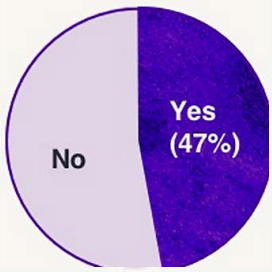
This guide provides some information, ideas, and resources within the community that you can share with your sangat and individuals seeking support (including men, women, children and elders). For additional resources, you can contact Sikh Family Center, the Sikh American organization focused on gender-based violence. **Remember: you have help, you are not alone.**

Have you ever directly been the target of family/domestic violence?

Female

Male

Has anyone close to you ever experienced family/domestic violence?



Statistics from Sikh Family Center National Needs Assessment Survey, 2018

Various gurdwara sevadaars were interviewed March - Sept. 2020 to prepare this Guide

02.

The Key to Gurdwara Commitment

Gurdwaras can commit to taking small steps that are firmer, safer, and more consistent.

The impact of violence in even one relationship ripples through many families—by marriage or birth—and can have devastating effects on the Sikh kaum. Violence often becomes inter-generational, as hurt children may hurt others when they become adults, continuing the cycle over generations. Recognize the far-reaching impact your work can have!

Victims of violence are vulnerable. They must never be taken advantage of or placed in even more danger. To limit liability and prevent any one gurdwara sevadaar from acting inappropriately, **the entire gurdwara administration should agree on a standard protocol to use when responding to a sangat member seeking help.** This protocol should remain the same from one gurdwara committee to the next.

People often ask individual raagis or granthiis for help. But, these sevadaars work for the gurdwara administration and often feel constrained or confused about what they can do or say. **We need top-down commitment by the committee/gurdwara administration** to share some basic principles and reliable resources with each and every sevadaar and employee.

03.

Two Guiding Principles for a Gurdwara Response

Gurdwaras should take action with the following TWO Guiding Principles in mind. Make sure everyone at the gurdwara knows and commits to these principles.

1. **Do no harm**

2. **Do not turn anyone away empty-handed**
   Any person who discloses violence must be given some information/ resources/options, so that they may speak with a family violence expert soon.

Please note: This guide is largely focused on responding to those victimized by violence. The needs of the victim-survivor must come first, and at times these needs may be connected to the change and healing of the person who has caused the violence. If someone who has acted violently towards family members approaches the gurdwara and is looking for resources or help, please have them contact Sikh Family Center--they will try their best to provide trusted referrals and reliable resources.

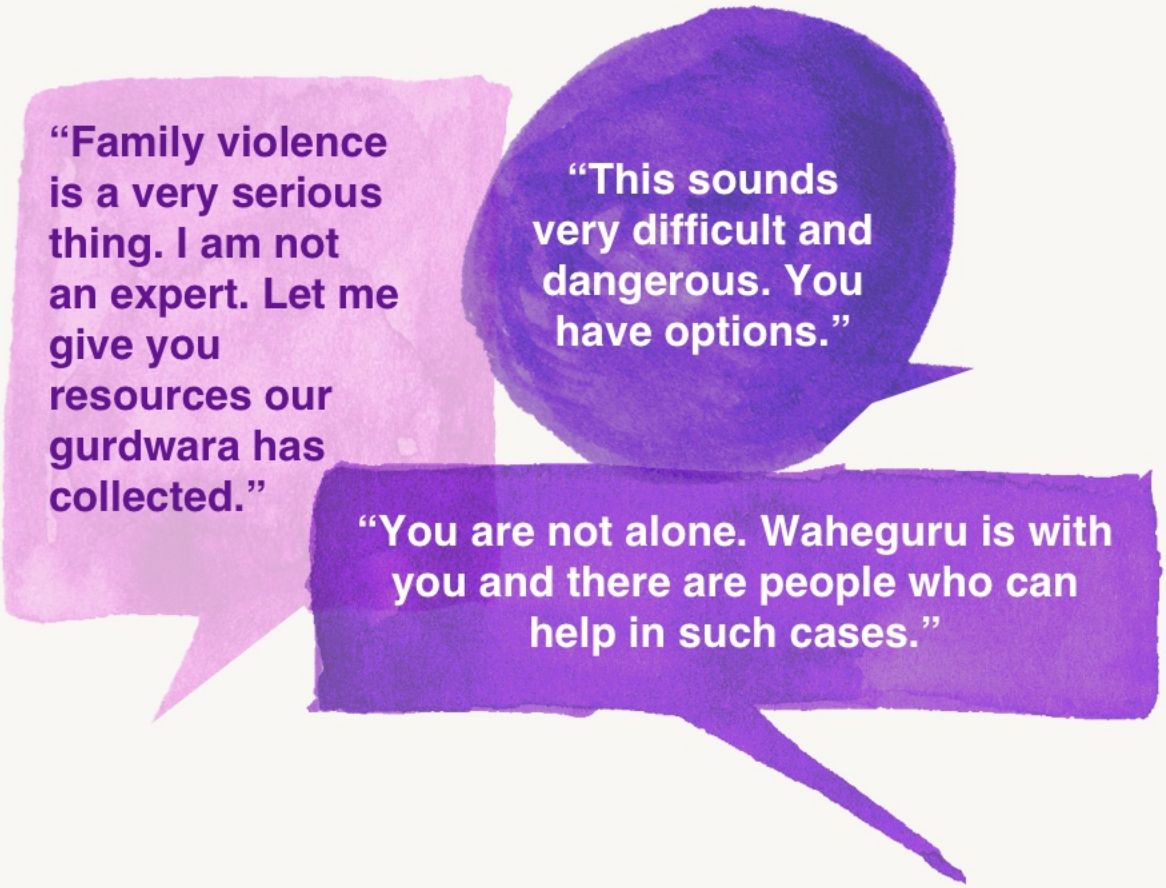
Those willing to take responsibility for their actions and wanting to change should have opportunities to receive services (including, if applicable, for past traumas or current diseases like alcoholism).

However, someone's violence against others should never be "excused." While being open to supporting calls for help from anyone, remain aware that many people use the promise of change to coerce victims into staying in dangerous situations. False promises should not be an excuse for any past or future harm.

Guiding Principle #1: Do No Harm

- ✕ Never tell someone you have "No idea" what to do.
- ✕ Never tell someone you don't believe them—even if you actually don't.
- ✕ Never tell other people what a person shared, without **first** getting the person's permission.
- ✕ Never tell someone you will solve their problems or that you will stop the violence.
- ✕ Never tell someone it's their fault that the abuse is occurring.

What to say instead:



04.

Family Safety Resource Card

Customize and Share!

Guiding Principle #2: Do Not Turn Anyone Away Empty-Handed

Create and share your Gurdwara's Family Safety Resource Card today.

Family Safety Resource Card

Provided by: _____

Free and Private Phone Lines	Sikh Family Center Helpline: 866-SFC-SEWA (732-7392) National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Local Family Violence Agency: _____

_____

Local Women's Shelter: _____

_____

Local Legal Aid that does Family Law: _____

_____

Local Sangat Member Liaison with SFC: _____

_____

Complete and share copies of this card (contact ***Sikh Family Center*** for more copies).

Share this resource card in-person and via text/WhatsApp with all Gurdwara employees, visiting jathaas, and sevadaars.

05.

Additional Ideas

Immediate actions you can take:

- Share videos about family violence on your gurdwara social media today.
- Share posters and images to educate sangat about safety.
- Start early! Arrange a workshop for your high school & college students.
- Ask for a training/workshop for your committee/sevadaars/granthis.

** For any of the above, contact the Sikh Family Center.*

Videos on family violence are available on Sikh Family Center's Youtube channel, in Punjabi and English.

Further commitments your committee can make to increase sangat safety:

- Include in your written Gurdwara constitution a commitment to help victim-survivors.
- Make a public commitment to your sangat to share all resources about family safety, including your "Family Safety Resource Card" and contacts with any and all future committees and sevadaars.

Evaluate and share your experience:

- Discuss internally how you are responding to cases of family violence.
- If you are not hearing about any cases, ask why not?
  - Surveys of the Sikh community show that **1 in 4 Sikh women** report experiencing family violence.
- In preparing this Resource Guide, various gurdwara sevadaars across the country were interviewed by Sikh Family Center. Contribute to this discussion!

06.

Myth vs. Reality

Facts About Family Violence

Know the myths vs. the reality about family violence in our communities.

What People Say	Verified Facts About Family Violence
"It takes both hands to clap!"	One member of the relationship is not responsible for the violent and controlling actions of the other.
"All couples fight! We can sit the couple down and they can 'compromise' and solve issues."	Mediation can indeed help couples who are arguing due to other reasons. But in cases of family violence, fear is used to dominate and control a person, and mediation can put that person in even more danger. *Note: Family violence can turn **lethal** very quickly. For example, strangulation (any pressure to someone's neck), can kill within minutes. The presence of a gun in the house also increases the danger by 500%, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.*
"Family violence occurs only in new immigrants!"	Many people who were born in the U.S. or have lived in the U.S. for years have used violence or have been victims of family violence.
"Uneducated people do such things!"	Family violence is carried out by doctors, lawyers, gurdwara committee members, business owners—this violence is not cured by money!
"The U.S. is not like Punjab, if she really wanted to leave, she could!"	On average, across cultures, a woman will leave an abusive relationship **7 times** before she leaves for good. There are many emotional and practical reasons someone is unable to leave—not to mention the fear! Research shows **the most dangerous time** for a victim is when they are trying to leave someone abusive.
"Victim has told conflicting stories so she must be lying!"	Traumatized victims respond in various ways, sometimes telling one part of the story, and later recalling another part of the story.

What People Say vs. Verified Facts About Family Violence

"Some women just provoke their partners!"	No one wants to be abused. In fact, some victims may appear very aggressive in public as a defense mechanism to protect themselves.
"As long as he doesn't hit her, it's ok!"	Abuse is not always physical. It also includes humiliating/name-calling, controlling finances, stalking, etc. Non-physical abuse can be just as harmful as physical abuse and can cause, for e.g., depression, suicidal thoughts, or inability to parent effectively.
"People who are abusive just need to better connect with Sikhi and the Guru!"	Amritdharis, non-amritdharis, gurdwara-going Sikhs, non-gurdwara-going Sikhs—all report cases of family violence. Abuse is never justified, and all people seeking resources should be listened to and offered support.
"Women are causing problems today with increased demands of independence."	Since 1469, every Sikh has a Guru-given right to independence and freedom. Unhealthy ideas about gender roles (and what women can or cannot do) cause more violence. Violence also reinforces unhealthy gender roles. We want our daughters and sons to work both outside and inside the home, and to be safe in their relationships.
"He just needs to stop drinking!"	Not all people who use or abuse alcohol are violent to others. Alcohol might be used as an excuse for violence, but it does not cause violence. Violence is a choice to create fear and control another.
"It's a mental health problem."	Domestic violence is not a mental illness. Not all people with a mental illness engage in violence, which is a choice to create fear and control.
"They look like a happy couple, in photos and in public. I've never seen him mis-behave with her!"	Even if you regularly see the couple, remember it only takes an abusive person seconds to make a gesture towards the victim that can scare or control them. People using violence seldom show signs of abuse in public. In fact, they may come across as very friendly or charming, quote gurbani, do kirtan, etc.
"Girls just don't want to live with in-laws!"	Families are evolving and both generations need to consider how to create healthy homes: forcing or scaring girls is not the way! Shamefully, many in-laws participate in family violence.

What People Say vs. Verified Facts About Family Violence

"The children need both parents and he's a good father!"	Even if the person does not directly hurt the children, science shows children in violent homes experience significant changes to their brains, beginning in the womb. The sound of violence alone can have a negative impact on normal brain development. Kids are very perceptive! Children who witness abuse also have increased risk of using violence in their relationship, and entering an abusive relationship themselves.
"Women who leave the marital home are only thinking of themselves. If they take the children, they are destroying the whole family."	Without safety, no relationship—no matter its legal or spiritual significance and status—can be healthy. Leaving is a very big choice for most people, and it may be the only safe way to protect themselves and their children. Distance might also be the most important step for victims to take to begin healing.
"He's just stressed!"	Violence is never an appropriate way to relieve stress. Besides, if while stressed he does not abuse his neighbor, his friends, or his boss, how can we excuse him for abusing his wife or children?
"He said he would stop!"	Changing and turning away from using abusive behavior is not impossible. But it is only possible with an honest commitment to change. Therapy and public commitments to change have shown to help at times. But sadly, almost all people who abuse their partners do promise to change at some point or another, and often use this promise as a trick or manipulation.
"It's impossible to help in such private matters!"	Family violence is not a private matter: it has lasting effects for generations and across the kaum. It may seem difficult to know what to do if someone comes to you for help, but don't let that stop you from providing support. Listen to them. Don't place blame. Offer resources. Sometimes you have to support the same person many times, because they may keep returning to the same unhealthy or abusive relationship.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੀ ਸਭ ਊਪਰਿ ਮਇਆ ॥

The divine-conscious being shows kindness to all.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤੇ ਕਛੁ ਬੁਰਾ ਨ ਭਇਆ ॥

No evil comes from the divine-conscious being.

SIKH FAMILY CENTER

ਸਿੱਖ ਫੈਮਿਲੀ ਸੈਂਟਰ

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contact@sikhfamilycenter.org

Sikh Family Center promotes community health and well-being with a special focus on gender justice. We provide trauma-centered interventions for victim-survivors of violence while working to change the social and cultural conditions that allow gendered violence to occur in the first place. Our training, outreach, and advocacy are grounded in cultural tradition, grassroots power, and intergenerational healing.

We thank the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence for their solidarity & support toward the creation of this Guide.

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