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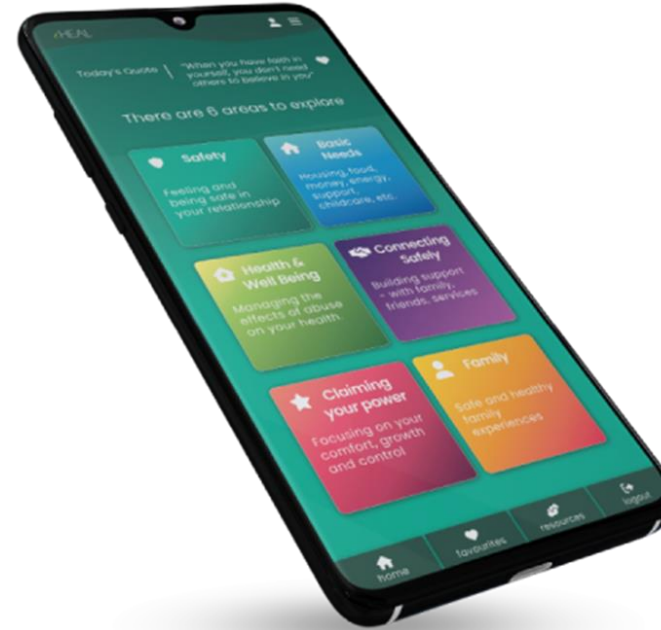
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Digital Support in Intimate Partner Violence Care: Exploring the iHEAL App

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Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



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Acknowledgement: This presentation draws on research and evaluation conducted over the past 25 years with women who have experienced IPV funded by:



CIHR IRSC



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada

Acknowledging the diversity of lands we live on, and the First Peoples who have stewarded those lands, and our collective obligation to mitigate the ongoing colonial violence against those people and lands.



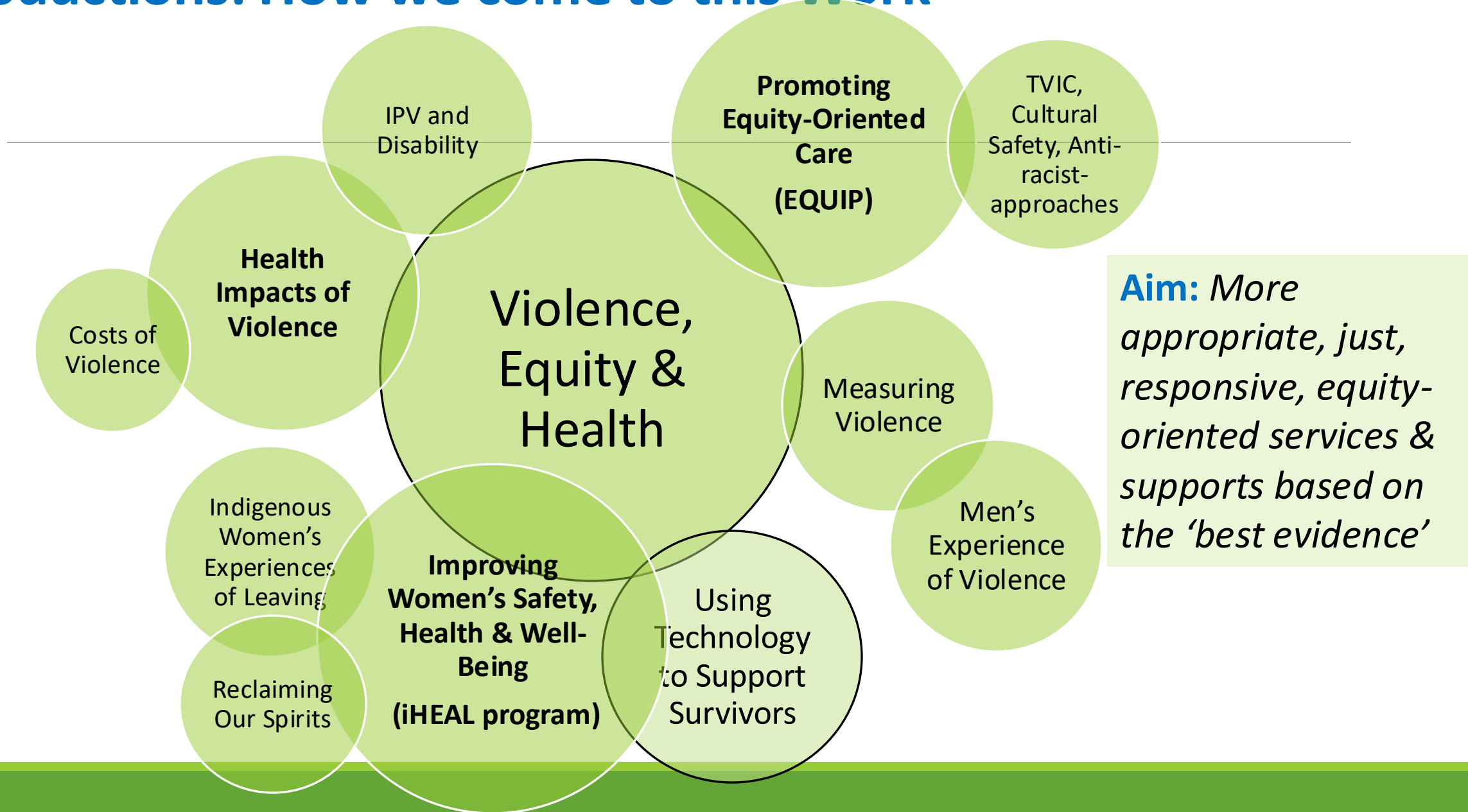
Learning Objectives

1. Describe the iHeal app and its role in supporting individuals experiencing IPV through trauma- and violence-informed care
2. Identify evidence-base and features of the iHeal app that promote safety, healing, and health for women navigating IPV.
3. Recognize practical strategies for nurses and community health providers to integrate the iHeal app into clinical practice to enhance client support, agency, and outcomes.



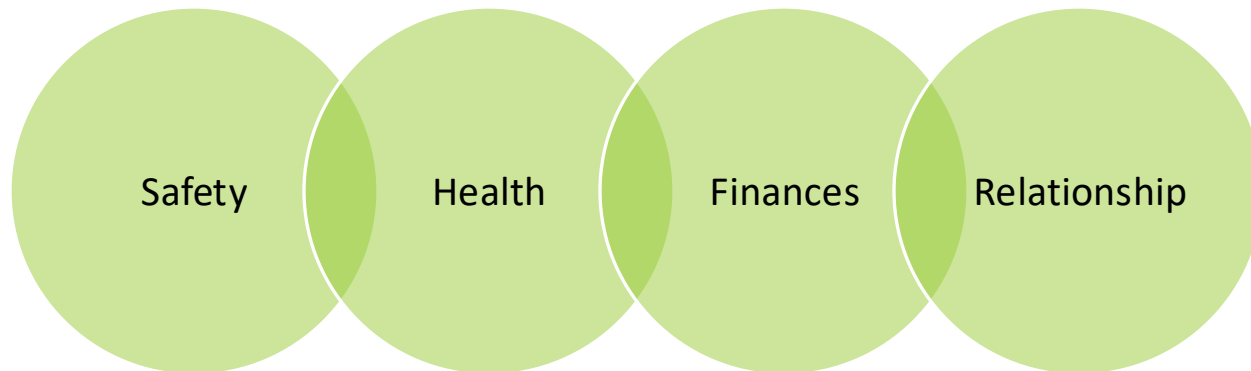
When you think about women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), what's one word that comes to mind about the kind of support they need most?

Introductions: How we come to this Work



IPV in Canada: A Public Health Epidemic

More than 40% of Canadian women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime (Cotter, 2021)



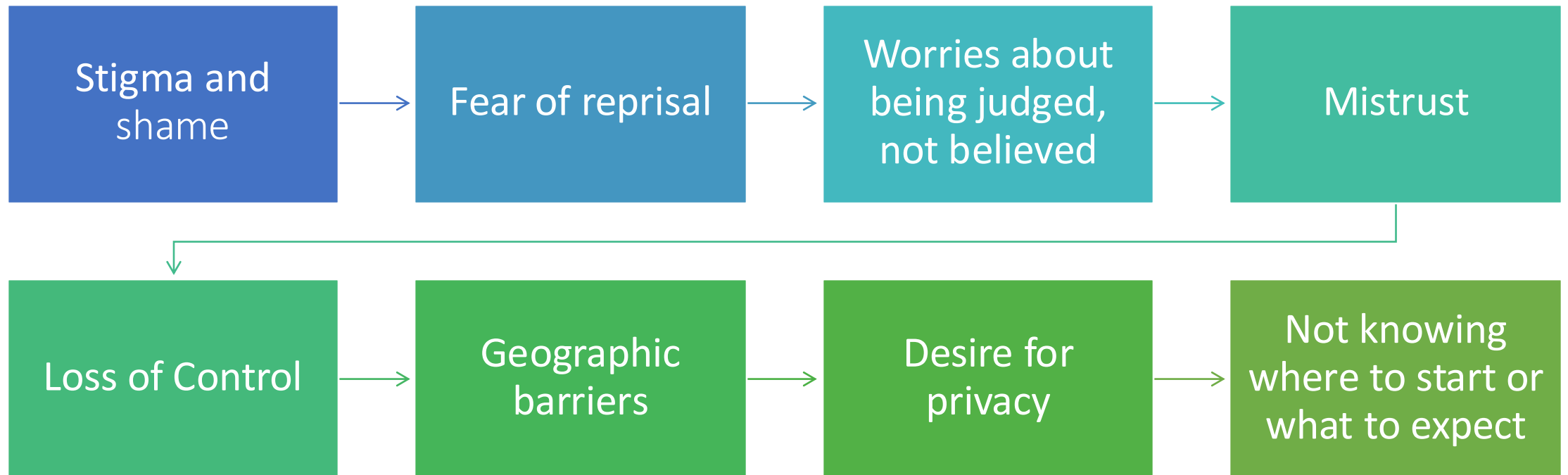
Significant impacts that can persist



From your practice...

**What barriers to support do women
experiencing IPV face?**

Barriers to Support for Women Experiencing IPV



1 in 5 Women who have experienced IPV access violence services

Can technology help address gaps in support for women who have experienced IPV?



***Well-Designed Apps
have benefit for
women who have
experienced IPV***

Emezue, Chase, Udmuangpia, Bloom, T. L. (2022); Miklitz et al (2023)

Canadian Context



Benefits of the personalized app for 4 groups of women:

- better *mental health*
- increased *confidence* in safety planning
- stronger sense of *control* over their lives
- *less coercion* from their abusive partners

Women's Impressions:

- Safe and Private
- Good fit with Needs

95% recommended to other women



In Women's Words

... a big *eye opener* and made me have to think about what is most important. It was occasionally upsetting ...but helpful.

Amazing to get an outside view of the risks and benefits in my own personal life and get tips on *how to build myself*.....
LOVED IT!

....like somebody knew which questions to ask..... somebody had experience... [I felt] comfortable. It was *friendly*...It wasn't judgmental.

Because the tool was focused on *safety*, not on convincing me to leave my partner, it helped me feel *empowered*



Introducing the iHEAL App:

A health and safety resource for women experiencing IPV



2016-2020
Research
Version



2020-2021
1st Public App



Dec 2023
“Made in Canada”
Broad Consultation
Inspired by iHEAL
program

Reach Nov 2025: 14,000 Users, every province and territory
Top 100 Educational Apps in Canada

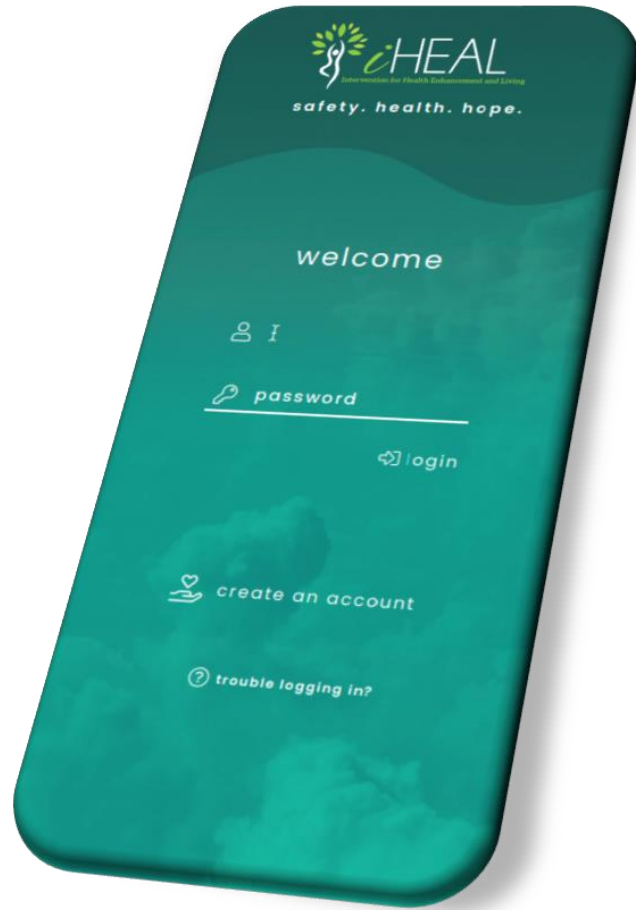
How many of you have ever wished you had *more resources* at your fingertips to support women experiencing IPV?



Introducing the iHEAL App



iHEAL App Design: A Knowledge Mobilization Approach

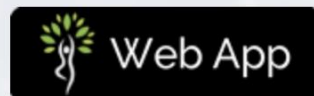


- Inclusive without stereotyping
- Prioritize women's safety and privacy
- Woman-led: Choice and control
- Hopeful and encouraging
- Practical: information, tips, resources
- For women at any point in journey
- Complement existing services in Canada



Finding support for a safe and healthy path forward

Backed by years of research and testing, the free, private and secure iHEAL app helps Canadian women who have experienced abuse from a current or past partner to find personalized ways to stay safe and be well.



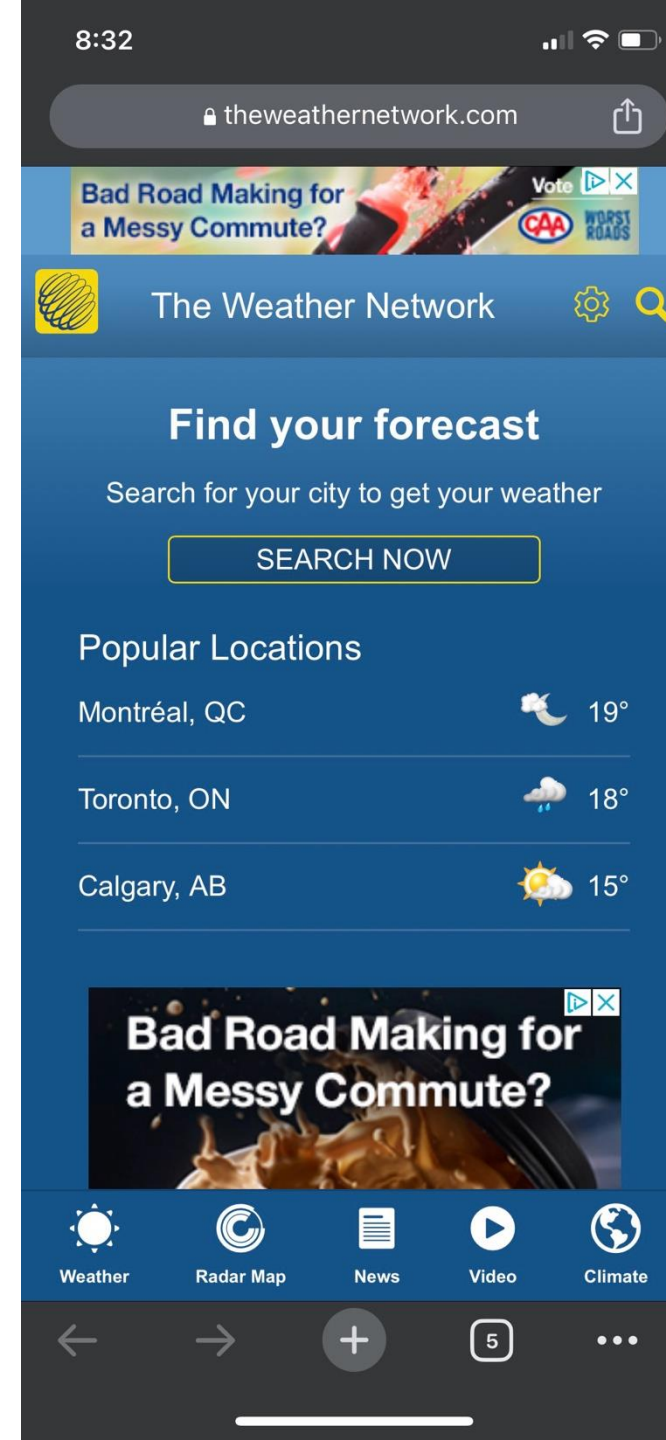
Please check
each box below
to proceed.

- ☒ Please note that this app is not for emergencies. If you need urgent help, please call 911.
- ☒ If someone forces you to unlock the app, please enter: 1234 as the password. It will open a safe weather page.
- ☒ Please remember your user name and password. This is not stored in the app. There is no way to retrieve it if you forget it.

Start

Safety and Privacy:

- Username and password known only to user
- No Personal identifiers collected or stored (anonymous)
- Hosted on a secure Canadian server
- 'Safe Use' information (website)
- Accessible Privacy Policy
- Prominent Safe Exit
- Safe exit and 'fake' password go to weather page





Home Page:

Organized into 6 'pillars' that align with iHEAL components

- Today's quote
- Women choose where to start (but we put safety first)
- Easy navigation to the main menu using 'home' or back buttons
- Each pillar organized in the same way





Safety



Everyone deserves to feel safe in their relationships, but abuse robs women of feelings of safety.

All types of abuse – physical, sexual, emotional, financial or spiritual – are harmful. All types of abuse can happen to women while in a relationship and after that relationship has ended. You *can't* control your (ex)partner's actions but there are things you *can* do to protect your safety. Being aware of your safety is the first step.

🕒 1–2 mins

How's your safety?

Start

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Safety



Danger Assessment (Male Partner)

Activity



Danger Assessment (Female Partner)

Activity



Power and Control

Activity



Safety Actions

Activity



home



saved



resources



exit



Basic Needs



What are the essentials in your life? We all have basic needs but what is most important is different for each of us. It can be challenging to get and build these basics – whether safe housing, childcare, a stable income, access to health care, a network of support, a bit of relaxation or private time, or energy to get on with life!

🕒 1–2 mins

How are you doing with your basic needs?

Start

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Basic Needs



Increase control over your finances

Info



Healthcare is a Basic Need

Info



Resting body and mind

Info



Relationships

Info



Help with Children

Info



home



saved



resources



exit



Health and Well-Being



Women can develop a range of health problems because of abuse. In many ways health problems can make daily life harder.

Working towards being as healthy as possible is important, but it can also be hard.

🕒 1–2 mins

How is your health?

Start

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Health and Well-Being



Accessing Health Care

Info



Stress and Your Health

Info



Assess Your Health

Activity



Mental Health

Info



Sleep and Fatigue

Info



home

Chronic Pain



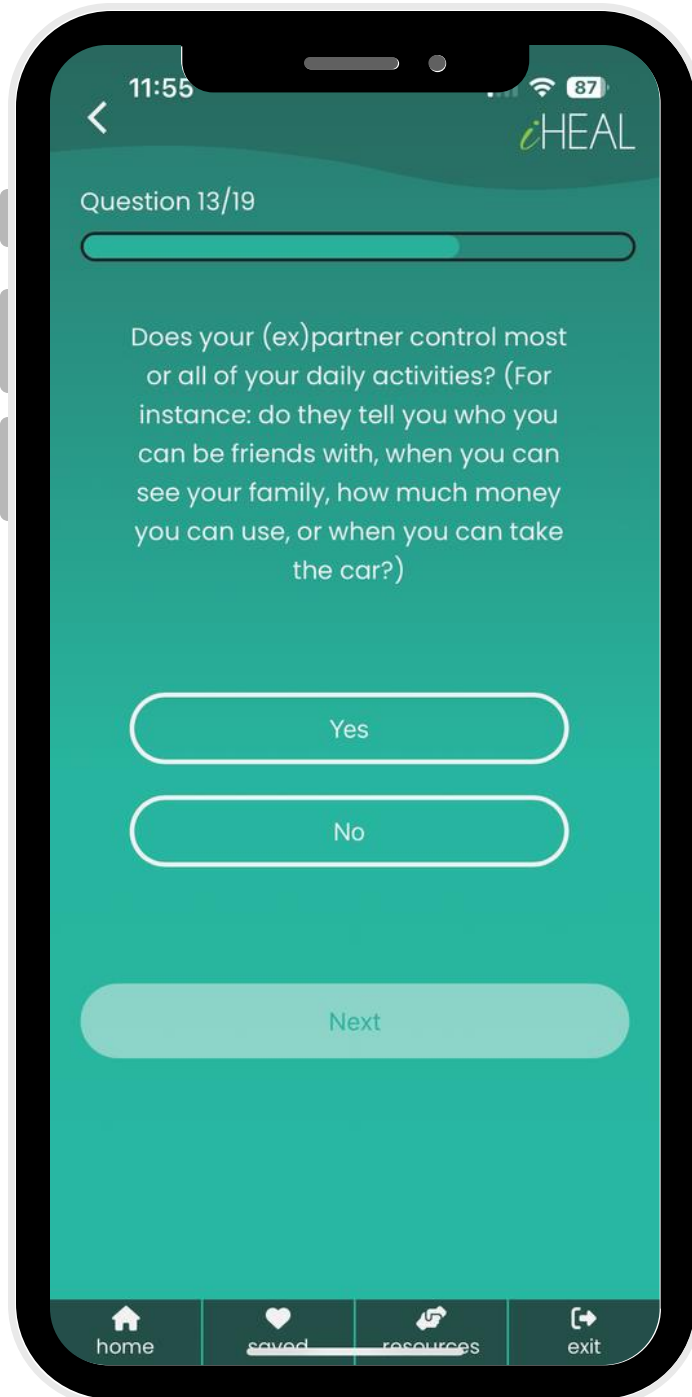
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resources



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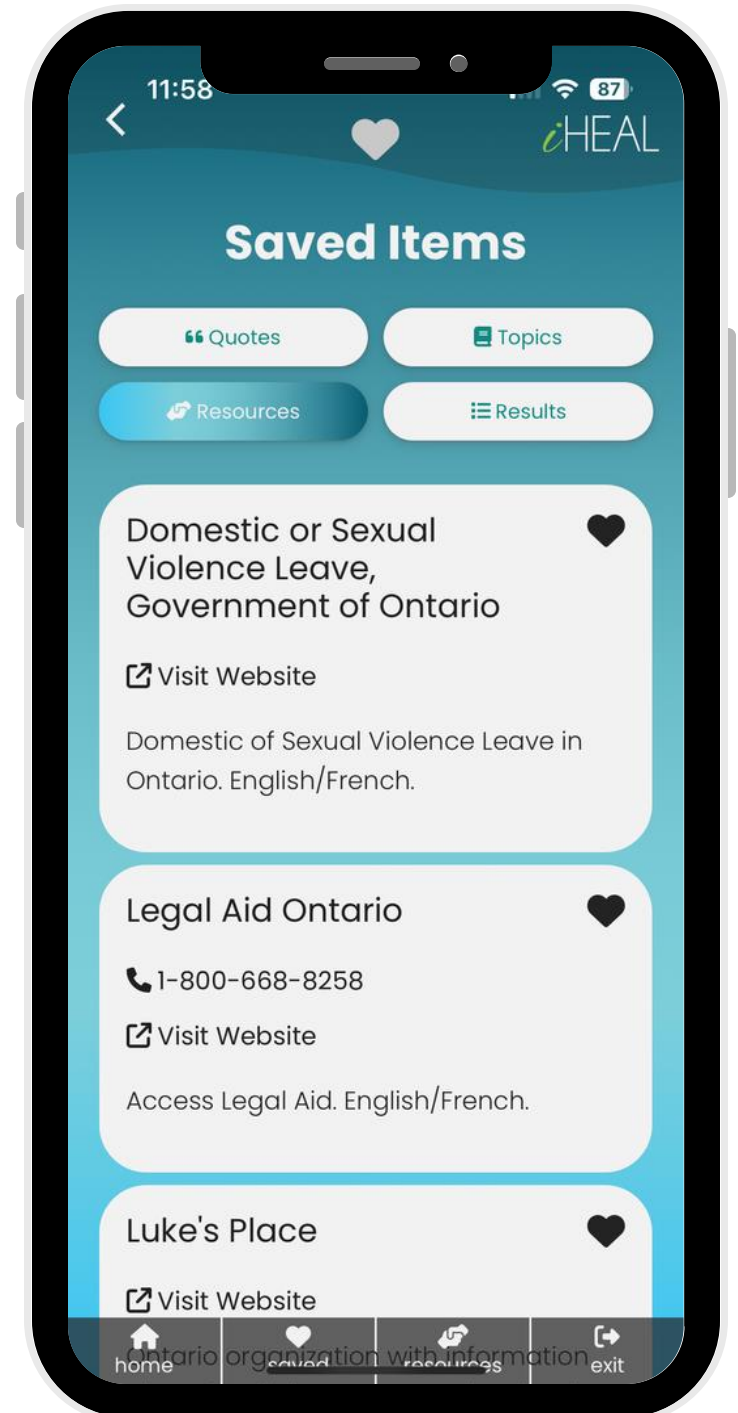


Topics include *interactive activities* used to tailor messages:

- Danger Assessment
- Safety Actions Checklist
- Symptom Checklist
- Healthy Partner Relationships
- Shaping your Family

Access to Resources

- Specific Resources shown in 'Topics'
- Search from Resources Tab
- National resources prioritized
- Province/Territory tailored to user
- Links embedded
- Brief Description
- Can be saved for later use



Example 1: Women Using the App

Janina has 2 school aged children and is living in second stage housing.

She left her abusive partner 9 months ago. He continues to stalk and harass her.

She is regaining her energy and is determined to stay separated but sometimes feels overwhelmed.

She worries about her kids --- how to support and protect them.





What might interest Janina?

- helping her children
- taking care of herself
- dealing with stalking



Family



Abuse and violence can change your family in important ways. Family is important to everyone regardless of whether or not they are parenting or have family members active in their lives. Women with children often worry about how their children will be affected by abuse and may struggle to protect and support them.

Regardless of your past, you can focus on creating safer and healthier family experiences. You can create a new experience of family – however you define it.

1-2 mins

What is your experience of family?

[Start](#)

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about family


[Putting the Past in its Place](#)

Info


[Shaping Your Family](#)

Activity


[Healthy Family Relationships](#)

Info


[Caring for Children](#)

Info


[Separation and Divorce](#)


resources

Info



exit



Caring for Children

Women are often blamed for children's exposure to violence. This is misplaced blame. Abusive partners are responsible for their abusive and harmful behaviour. Women are often resourceful, trying to keep their children safe.



Helping Children with their Reactions to Abuse

- Reactions from children depend on how they understand and deal with violence and abuse. For example, children might help out more or act out in anger. Their reactions depend on many things such as their developmental stage and abilities, relationship with your (ex)partner, their own experiences and what they know of the abuse.
- Children might worry about spending time with their other parent. They may be concerned about both parents and feel conflicted.
- Violence services can help you and your children understand feelings, safety issues during contacts and develop ways to manage risks. Some offer age-specific programs and counselling for children or youth, or they may recommend other resources. Your health care provider could give referrals as well.
- Books, movies and web-based resources can help your child(ren) understand and talk about their experiences.
- Help lines can give children a comfortable place to talk or webchat.



Family safety and protecting children



Getting Support while you Care for Children

- Women often feel worried they'll be judged by the services that are meant to support them. Violence services can help you get help from "the systems" you may encounter such as Police, Social Assistance, Family Court, Child Protection etc. in ways that are also safer for children.
- Some workers may ask what your child(ren) have seen or heard, how children are doing and any problems.
- Child Protection services are concerned with how to keep



home



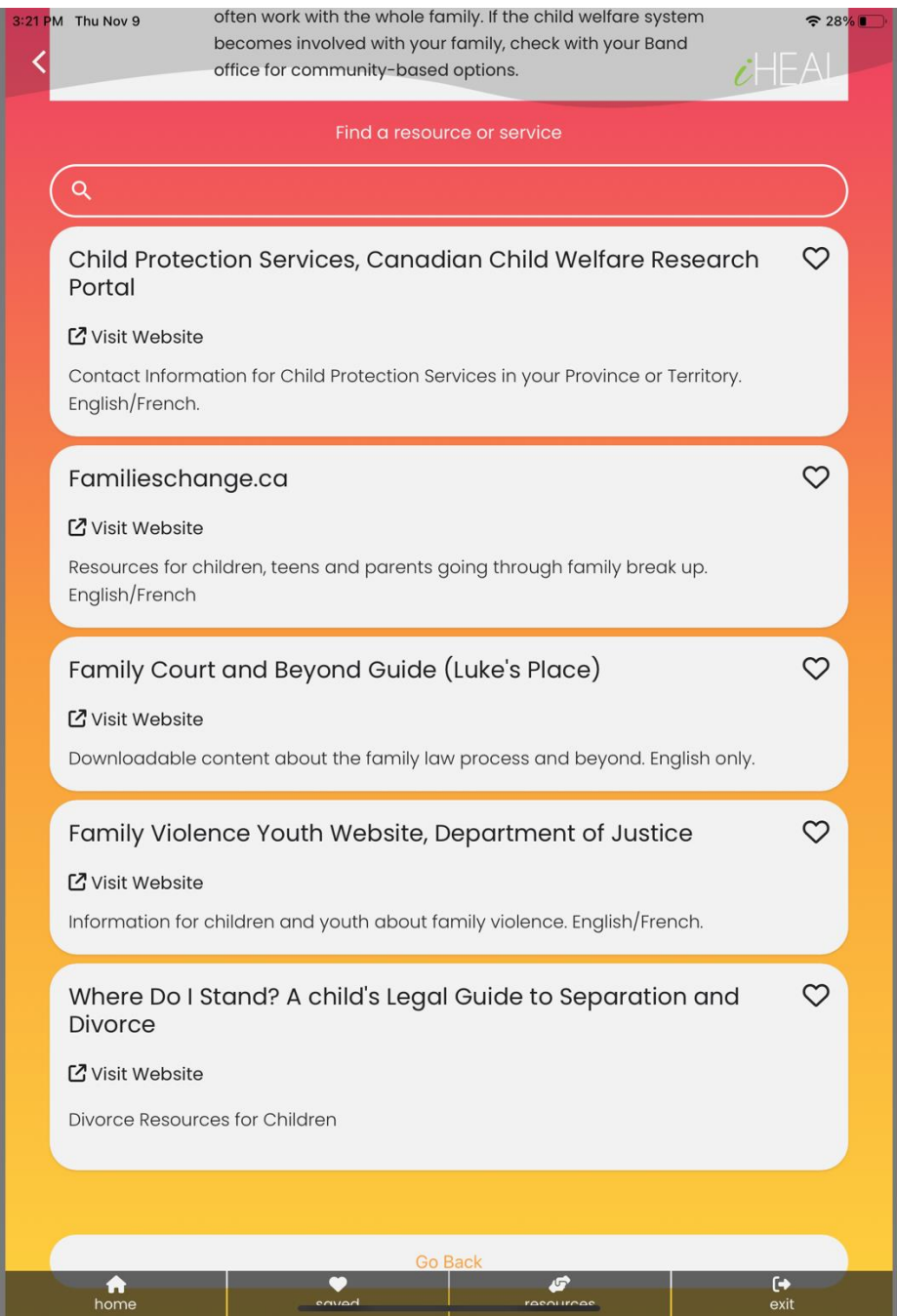
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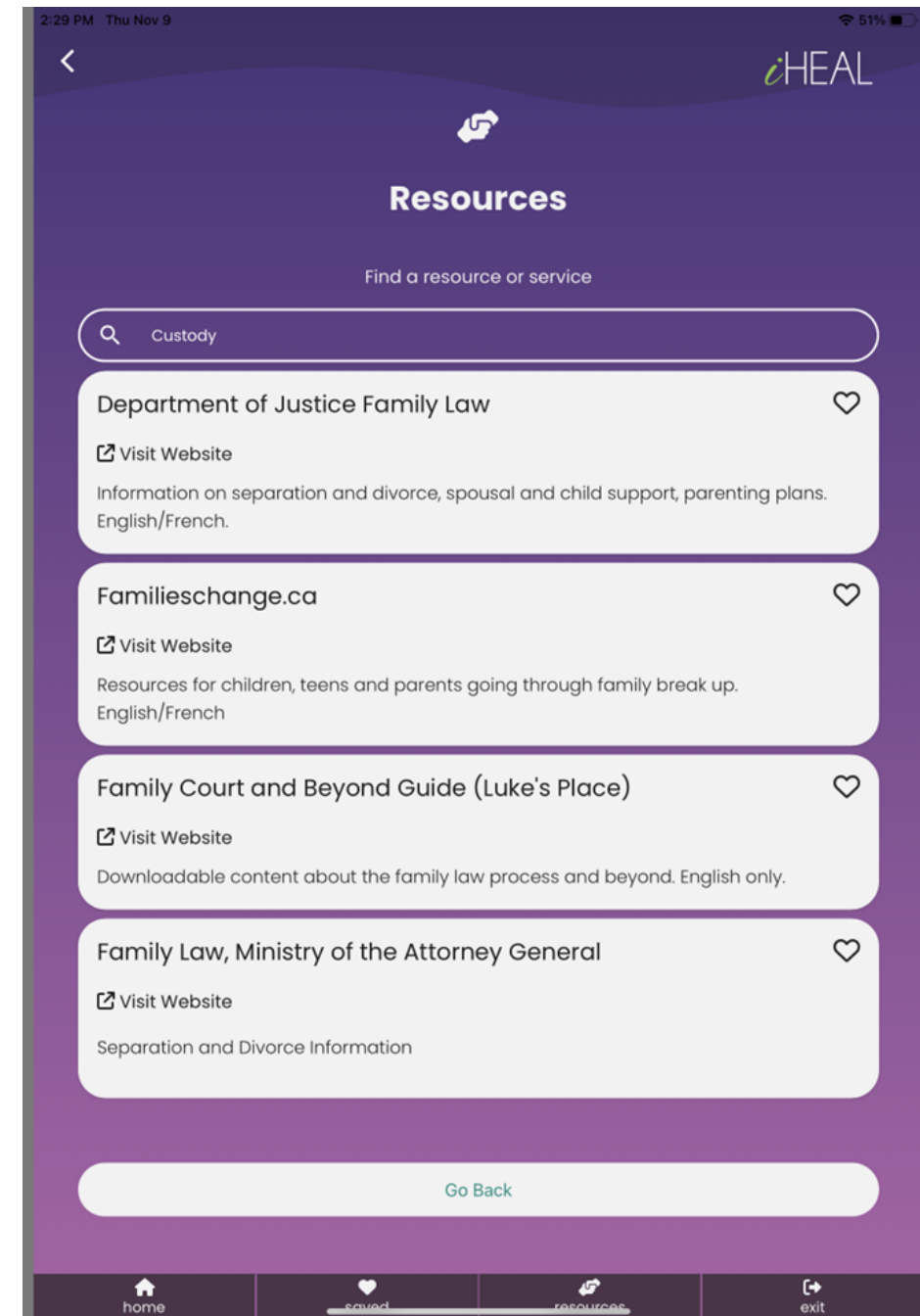
resources



exit



Resources: Caring for Children





Claiming your Power



Taking care of yourself is part of healing from abuse and planning for your future. Finding comfort is a way to bring moments of meaning and joy to life, even when life is hard. Investing in yourself helps to reduce stress, increase sleep quality, improve energy and increase your sense of control. It may be difficult to put yourself first, but you are important!

⌚ 1-2 mins

How are you doing?

Start

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Claiming your Power



Caring for Yourself

Info



Managing & Reducing Stress

Info



Moving Your Body

Info



Grounding Activities



Info



exit

Support for Women's Well-Being

MANAGING STRESS

MOVING YOUR BODY

GROUNDING ACTIVITIES.....

Managing & Reducing Stress

Making decisions about an abusive relationship can be extremely stressful. It's completely normal to experience strong physical and emotional reactions. There are many ways that our bodies and brains let us know about stress. Paying attention to these signs can help you to recognize and manage your stress.

- > Pay attention to your BODY. Is it giving you warning signs?
- > Pay attention to your EMOTIONS. Are they giving you warning signs?
- > Pay attention to your MIND. Is it giving you warning signs?
- > Pay attention to your BEHAVIOR. Is it giving you warning signs?

Do you experience any of these signs of stress? Your body may be letting you know that you need to take care of yourself. There are many ways to manage and reduce stress. You may want to explore:

- Moving your body
- Grounding activities



Grounding Activities

Grounding activities are short, simple activities that focus your attention and can distract you from intense emotions (such as a panic attack). They help you to *be present* and stay *connected* to the world around you. Grounding helps to:

- manage your stress responses
- take control over your emotions
- increase feelings of safety
- help develop skills for healing.

Watch this video for examples of grounding activities.



Ready to try a mindful moment?





Tips for Dealing with Stalking

Stalking (Criminal Harassment) is against the law in Canada. Stalking is a repeated behavior that can include:

- Watching you or tracking where you go.
- Threatening you, your children, family, pets or friends (in person, on the phone, email or text messages).
- Frequent unwanted calls, hang ups, text messages or emails.
- Vandalizing your property.
- Installing audio or video surveillance in your home, car, computer or phone
- Other unwanted or harassing contact that make you afraid.

These acts are not a sign of love; they are about power and control.

Stalking often occurs when a woman leaves her abusive partner but can also happen while living with a partner. It's important to take any threat seriously, but particularly if your (ex)partner is jealous and controlling or you are at high risk of harm. Complete the 'DANGER ASSESSMENT' activity to learn more your personal risk.

Some ideas for dealing with stalking



Reach out for help



Keep good records



Be alert and prepared



Keep your distance

Stalking: Information Tips Resources

Some ideas for dealing with stalking



Reach out for help

- Call the police. Explain that your partner has been abusive and that you are afraid. They will assess the situation and help you understand your legal options.
- Contact a violence helpline or service. They can help you think about your options and connect you to services if you wish.
- Apply for an Order of Protection. You can do this without help from the police. Learn more in the PROTECTION ORDERS topic.
- Ask trusted friends, co-workers or family members to help watch for signs of stalking.
- Install a safety app on your phone to alert a trusted person that you need help.



Keep good records

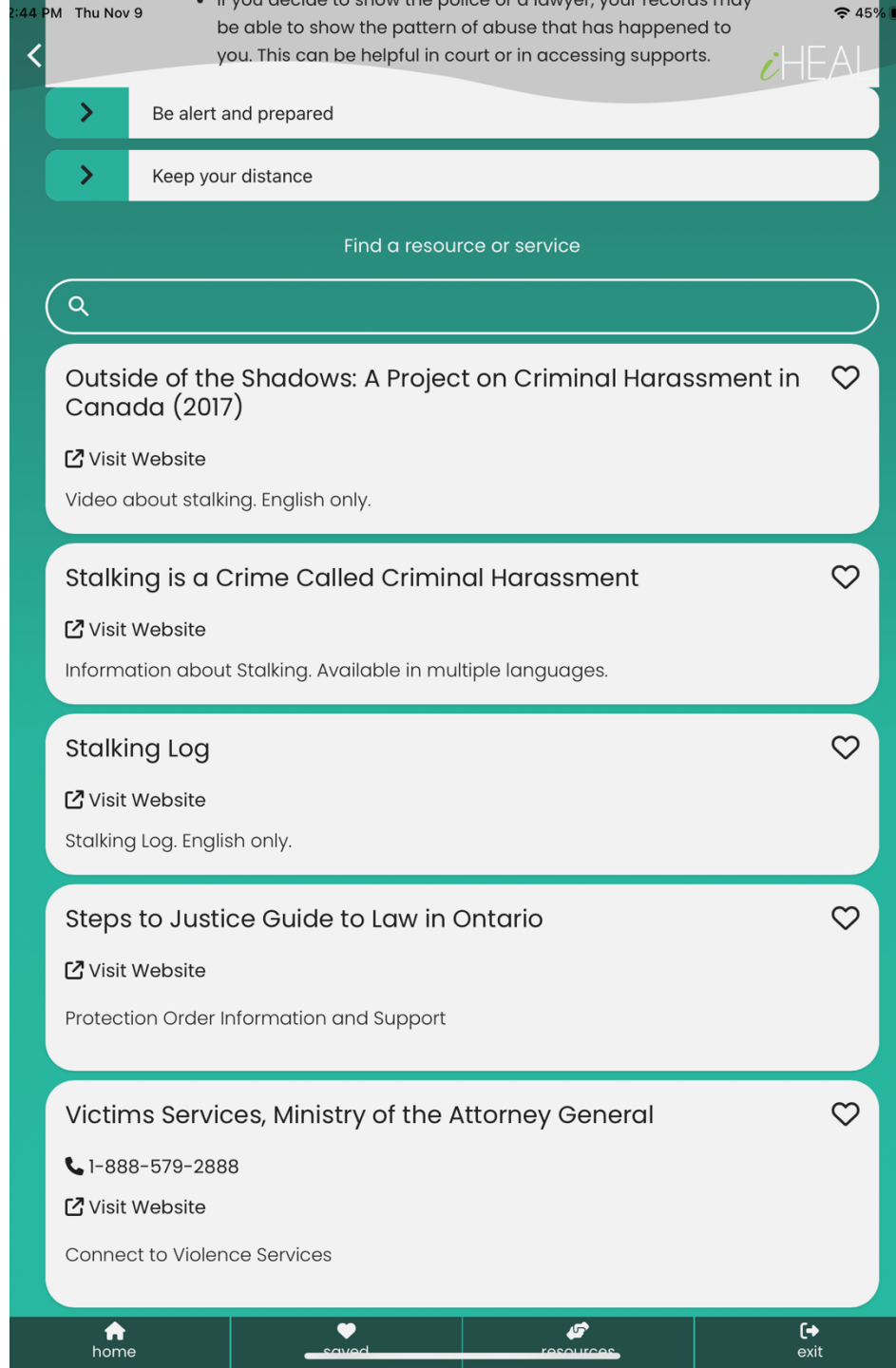
- Keep detailed notes about the stalking. Dates, times, places, actions and threats are easier to explain and remember when written down. Keep this information in one place (e.g., in a small booklet, on a calendar, on your phone or computer). Choose a place that is private and that your partner cannot access or destroy.
- Keep all recorded telephone messages, texts, e-mails, gifts, letters or notes that have been sent by your partner. Consider making a back up copy of the original (e.g., a screen shot, picture, or file saved on a computer).
- Keep track of calls made for help (to police or other services).
- If you decide to show the police or a lawyer, your records may be able to show the pattern of abuse that has happened to you. This can be helpful in court or in accessing supports.



Be alert and prepared



Keep your distance





Saved Items

Quotes

Topics

Resources



Tips for Dealing with Stalking

Info



Grounding Activities

Info



How and When to Share Your Story

Info



Saved Items

Quotes

Topics

Resources

Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave, Government of Ontario

[Visit Website](#)

Domestic of Sexual Violence Leave in Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario

[1-800-668-8258](#)[Visit Website](#)

Access Legal Aid

Applying for a Peace Bond

[Visit Website](#)

Government information about applying for a Peace Bond. English/French.

Luke's Place

[Visit Website](#)

Ontario organization with information about family law process when leaving abuse. English only.

[Go Back](#)

Example 2: Family Members or Friends

Taylor has noticed that their 20-year-old sister is not herself. Previously active and full of life, she seems down most of the time and complains of pain. She turns down invitations to events and gatherings.

She hasn't said it directly, but they wonder if this has anything to do with her new partner.

Something isn't quite right but they aren't sure how to help.



2:42 PM Thu Nov 9

< iHEAL

Question 1/5

How often do you feel afraid of your partner or ex-partner?

Never or seldom

Some of the time

Most of the time

Next

4:22 PM Thu Nov 9 45%

< iHEAL

Question 3/5

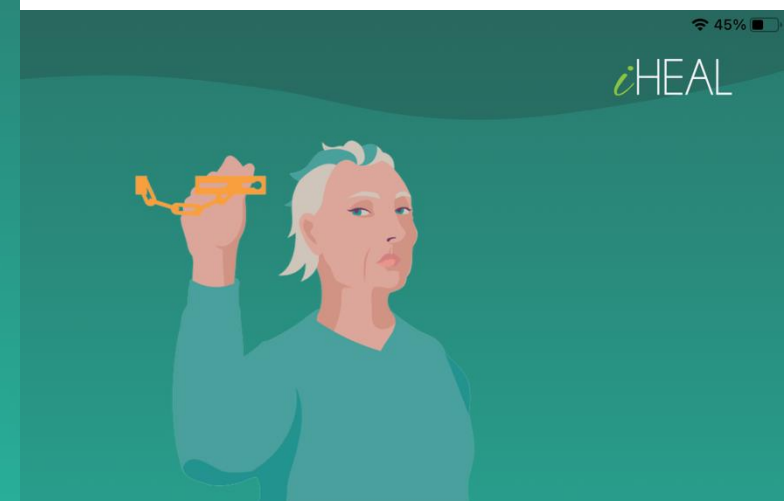
How often do you try to avoid making your (ex)partner angry?

Never or seldom

Some of the time

Most of the time

Next



Feeling unsafe in some parts of your relationship seems to be a regular part of your life. Everyone deserves to feel safe. Complete the *Danger Assessment* to learn more about your specific risks. Explore the topics to learn about safety actions that you can take and resources that could be helpful.

Finish

Redo Activity



Emotional/Psychological Violence

How many of these apply to your situation?

- Criticizing your looks, ability, sexual activity or sexuality?
- Making racist, ableist, homophobic and/or sexist comments
- Calling you names
- Humiliating you in front of others
- Playing mind games, making you think you are crazy



It's important to recognize power and control in your relationship.

Living with a partner who is emotionally abusive and controlling can wear you down and make you question your worth. The effects on your health and well-being can be just as strong as physical or sexual abuse.

But this type of abuse is often harder to identify – and other people may not 'see' it as abuse. This can make it harder to deal with. Learn more about options for dealing with the abuse of power and control in your relationship in the Safety topics below.

Finish



Health and Well-Being



Women can develop a range of health problems because of abuse. In many ways health problems can make daily life harder.

Working towards being as healthy as possible is important, but it can also be hard.

⌚ 1-2 mins

How is your health?

Start

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Health and Well-Being



Accessing Health Care

Info



Stress and Your Health

Info



Assess Your Health

Activity



Mental Health

Info



Sleep and Fatigue

Info



home

Chronic Pain



saved



resources



exit





Question 1/4

Health problems that are VERY COMMON for women who have experienced abuse. Which of these problems interfere with your day-to-day life?

(select all that apply)

Feeling worried/uptight

Feeling sad/depressed

Tired/always feeling tired

Difficulty sleeping

Back pain

Headaches

Difficulty concentrating

None



The health issues you identified are:

Difficulty sleeping

Back pain

Headaches

Difficulty concentrating

Swollen/painful joints

Poor appetite

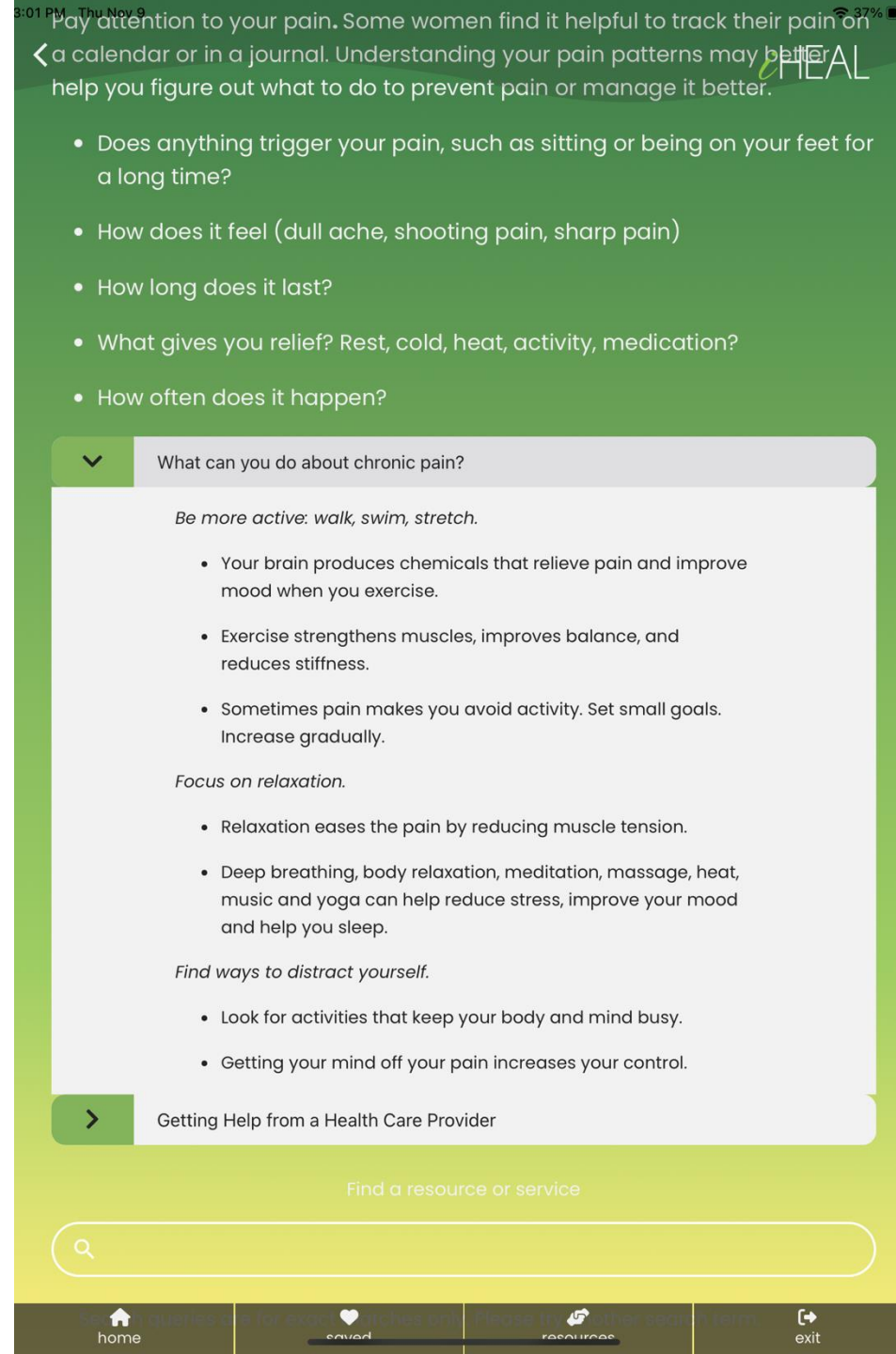
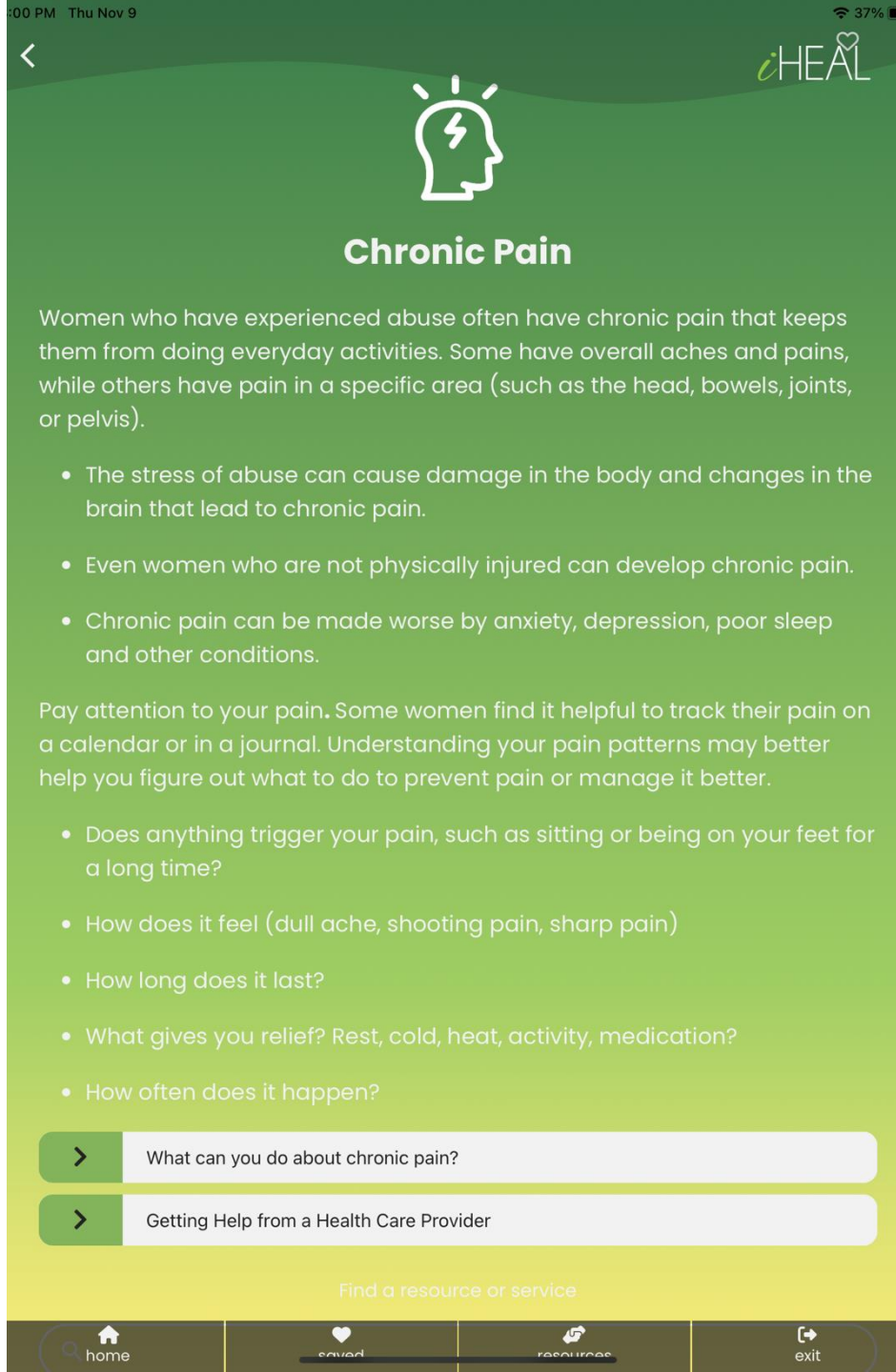
Panic attacks

The health issues you are living with are real and very common for women who have lived with abuse. Health issues can make it difficult to manage your daily life. As long as you are experiencing abuse, and even after abuse has stopped, your health can be affected.

Identifying the health problems that are most concerning to you can help you think about way of limiting the impacts of these problems on your life - on your own or with support from a health professionals or others. Check out the topics in this section or in **Claiming Your Power** (for self care). Building your confidence in addressing and managing symptoms is possible and can have a positive impact on your life.

Finish

Redo Activity



Example 3: Service Providers

Joanne is a public health nurse in a HBHC program. She has been working with Kate since the birth of her 6-month-old baby. She has been helping her manage postpartum anxiety. Kate is also experiencing chronic gastrointestinal (GI) upset.

Kate confides that she has a lot of stress - she hates her job but is afraid to talk to her wife Alana who is 'going through a lot' and has 'anger issues'. Alana complains that Kate doesn't do enough in the relationship – she doesn't want to upset her more.

When asked if Alana has ever threatened her or harmed her, she pauses ... and then says 'yes', but that she didn't mean to do it.





Everyone deserves to feel safe in their relationships, but abuse robs women of feelings of safety.

All types of abuse – physical, sexual, emotional, financial or spiritual – are harmful. All types of abuse can happen to women while in a relationship and after that relationship has ended. You *can't* control your (ex)partner's actions but there are things you *can* do to protect your safety. Being aware of your safety is the first step.

⌚ 1-2 mins

How's your safety?

[Start](#)

Topics

Choose a topic to explore more about Safety


[Danger Assessment \(Male Partner\)](#)

Activity


[Danger Assessment \(Female Partner\)](#)

Activity


[Power and Control](#)

Activity


[Safety Actions](#)

Activity


[Emergency Help](#)

Info


[Violence against women services](#)

Info


[Phone and Online Safety](#)

Info



home



saved



resources



exit

Sexual Assault Help



Danger Assessment (Female Partner)

Some things are known to increase women's risk of being killed by their abusive partners. This activity can help you judge your level of danger now from your partner or ex-partner. Use this version if your partner is a woman. If your partner is a man, go to the Danger Assessment (Male Partner).

Answer these questions to learn more about your current risk. If a question doesn't apply, or you don't know the answer, please answer 'no'. Your score will be displayed at that end.

This activity can be upsetting. You may want to take a break or talk to someone you trust.

[Next](#)


home



saved

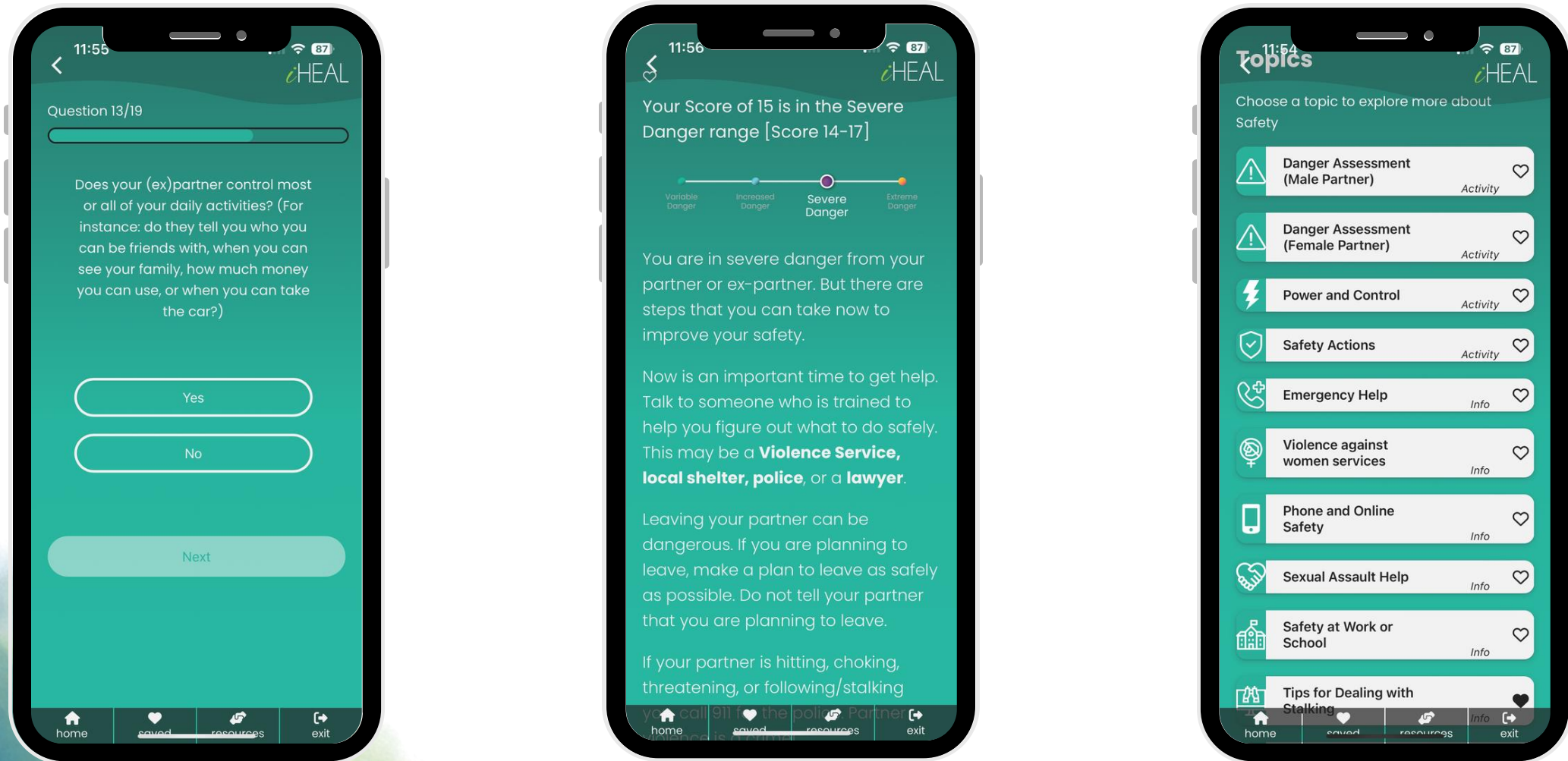


resources



exit

Supports Personalized Risk Assessment and Safety Planning



Integrates the Danger Assessment© with Customized Results,
Safety Topics and Resources

Question 3/3

Safety everyday, including after separating. Which of these things would you like to try (or try again)?

(select all that apply)

Change locks or improve home security

Remove objects (knives, tools, axes, guns) that could be used weapons

Protect yourself from your (ex)partner when using your phone or online

Make a plan for keeping yourself safe at work or school

Teach children about safety at home, school, and in community

Get legal advice about parenting orders and child support

Plan for safe contact between children and (ex) partner

Ask a doctor, nurse or counsellor for help and support

Talk to someone you trust from your spiritual or faith community

Access help for newcomers through settlement or Violence Services

Access Indigenous supports (an Elder, friendship center, band office)

Access services specific to people identifying with the queer community



The Safety Actions you would like to try are listed here:

Install a free smart phone safety app to reach a safe contact

Talk to a violence service about your escape plan

Keep a record of violent incidents in a safe, private place

Record abuse or threats from your partner in a safe place

Get legal information about your options and rights

Make a plan for keeping yourself safe at work or school

Access services specific to people identifying with the queer community

You can't control your (ex)partner's actions but thinking about your safety and planning ahead is helpful. Trust yourself – what is right for other women might not be right for you.

Check out the topics in this section to learn more about the some of the Safety actions that interest you.

Finish

Redo Activity



Violence against women services

Violence against women (VAW) or domestic violence (DV) services can help you figure out what to do when you experience abuse. They provide confidential information, safety planning and counselling in different ways – *phone, chat, by video, in person*.

There may be more than one violence service where you live. Community programs, shelters/transition houses and crisis lines work together to help women who have experienced abuse – usually at no cost to you.

Their staff have specialized knowledge about abuse and can help you connect with other services that may be helpful – whether you are planning to leave your partner or not.

You don't have to stay at a shelter to get help. Most shelters provide telephone support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Staff are trained to support women and children in an emergency, and to help them be safer over time.

Regardless of how you connect, you can expect staff at most Violence

- Working with you to apply for or find housing.
- Helping you apply for a Protection Order or access legal advice, including related to the safety of children.
- Helping you prepare for and attend court or linking you to someone who can provide this support.
- Helping children to safely get to and from school.



Things to consider about staying at a Shelter/Transition House



How can I find Violence Services in my area?

- Use the links below to find a Violence Services in your area or search **Canada 211** for your community [topic: abuse assault]
- Many services have websites that provide information about their programs.
- Some areas offer specific services for Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native women, Francophone, newcomer or other groups of women. Many provide supports in different languages.
- Call the Violence Service to talk to them about your situation and the type of help you need. They will talk to you about how they can help and help you decide what to do next.

Service Providers:

Use the iHEAL app in many ways....

- ✓ help women assess their risk (Danger Assessment) and make a plan for safety
- ✓ Help women consider how violence is affecting their health, well-being, and relationships -- identify options for their concerns using the many topics in the app
- ✓ explore resources and services that could be helpful to women
- ✓ provide an immediate response to women who have identified that they are experiencing violence, including those who are waitlisted for services
- ✓ provide a resource for women to use on their own when programs/services end
- ✓ find credible information about issues that fall outside their expertise
- ✓ and much more ...

Using the iHEAL app in Service Settings



No flags for violence
All Settings



Offer to ALL women

“If you know anyone who is in an unhealthy or unsafe relationship, please share this with them...”

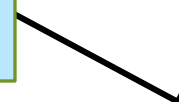
Post or Share Information
(stickers, videos)

Flags for violence



Episodic Contact

(e.g. police, Emergency Dept, mental health crisis service)



Ongoing contact

(e.g. VAW service, public health, primary care, counselling)

“I am concerned about your [safety, wellbeing, health] in your relationship. This app can help you think about your relationship

“This app can help you think about your relationship. I could walk through some of it with you if you would like”

Safety Planning



<https://ihealapp.ca/>



Do you feel *SAFE* in your partner relationship?



To learn more, go to **iHEALapp.ca**



If you are a woman who has experienced abuse, the iHEAL app can provide personalized information to help you be safer and healthier.

PRIVATE. SECURE. FREE.

iHEAL App Promotional Resources (EN, FR)

Do you feel *SAFE* in your partner relationship?

The iHEAL app can help you find ways to be safer and healthier that work for you.

More information:
iHEALapp.ca

Private, secure, free support for women



Videos (intros, walk throughs, etc)

With Thanks

We gratefully acknowledge the many people who contributed to this work, sharing their energy, insights, and expertise towards change

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