

**Make It Your Business
when you hear abusive language**

SETTING: A restaurant

[We're at the entry to a cafe, where a BYSTANDER (MARIE) arrives to be seated by a MANAGER (AMANDA) who is also the hostess. The NARRATOR is having a coffee and reading a book.]

AMANDA: [to the BYSTANDER] **Hello, welcome. Do you have a reservation?**

MARIE: **Yes, in the name of Marie Gallant. I'm expecting two others, but I'm really early.**

AMANDA: **Terrific, have a table ready for you. Right this way.**

[AMANDA guides BYSTANDER MARIE to a table next door to a couple, a well-heeled WOMAN (SHELLEY) and a ritzy-looking MAN (DANIEL), who are already seated. A SERVER (MARSHALL) approaches DANIEL and SHELLEY and gives them drinks, serving DANIEL what looks like a beer and refilling SHELLEY's water as he asks if they are ready to order.]

MARSHALL: **So, are you ready to order?**

[DANIEL smiles wryly at MARSHALL and holds his menu purposefully, while SHELLEY looks pouty and cross. She is fiddling with her smartphone and looking away from DANIEL.]

DANIEL: [to MARSHALL, crossly] **Just another minute, please.**

[MARSHALL leaves the scene. DANIEL lowers the menu speaks quietly but meanly.] **Put that phone down, you ugly bitch. And look at me when I'm talking to you. I'm paying for this meal. You can at least look grateful.**

SHELLEY: [Looking at DANIEL as she pulls her hands away and places them in her lap, and then looking away again.] **I'm not that hungry.**

DANIEL: [Holding her phone from the table.] **Texting your sister, I suppose. Deciding what to eat? You're too stupid to even decide what to eat. If you were any stupider, I'd have to remind you when to breathe.** [He puts SHELLEY's phone in his breast pocket.]

[MARSHALL is obviously overhearing this disconcerting conversation. He approaches the table again, pretending not to have heard, trying to be

cheery but looking frightened instead, talking a little bit too breezily, with a forced manner.]

MARSHALL: **Uh, ready to order now?**

DANIEL: [With an air of normalcy as he looks away from SHELLEY and towards MARSHALL, shaking off the meanness.] **We'll both have the special.**

SHELLEY: [interrupting, seeking MARSHALL's attention] **Oh, just, uh...**

DANIEL: [DANIEL repeats himself loudly, drowning out her attempted interruption. He passes the menu curtly to MARSHALL.] **Yes, two specials. Bring her some water, and I'll have another one of these.** [He gestures to his glass. SHELLEY looks down at her lap, dejected and defeated.]

NARRATOR: **Intimate partner violence is a common form of family violence. It can include emotional and verbal abuse, sexual abuse, or physical abuse. This abuse or violence often happens in private, away from witnesses. But there may be public signs of one partner using power and control to dominate the other. Words, body language, and controlling behaviour can all be signs of abuse.**

Showing a sense of entitlement to someone's attention, putting down someone's gender, restricting how a person uses their phone, trying to isolate them from family and friends, belittling them, calling them names—these could all be signs of abuse or violence.

If you were a server like Marshall overhearing abusive language, what could you do to address the abuse and keep yourself and the people around you safe? Here's one option.

[Back to scene where it was interrupted.]

MARSHALL: [pouring water for SHELLEY, with his back to DANIEL, says,] **More water?** [When the woman looks up and MARSHALL catches her eye, MARSHALL mouths the words "Are you okay?" SHELLEY nods and reaches to hold the glass of water with one hand and to make a "stop/halt" gesture with the other hand.]

SHELLEY: **Oh, that's enough water. Thanks.** [The response gives her an excuse to catch MARSHALL's attention and put the emphasis on the "Thanks" meaningfully.] **I'm okay.**

[MARSHALL nods back and carries on. He seeks out AMANDA, out of earshot of the table.]

NARRATOR: If you think someone is a target of abuse or violence, making eye contact and checking if they're okay may reduce their sense of isolation. It can remind them there is help and support outside their relationship. Asking "Are you okay?" gives them back some control of the situation.

AMANDA: What's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost.

MARSHALL: The man at table five just said terrible things to the woman he's with. She says she's okay, but I don't think that she is. I don't know what to do. Do we have a brochure or something about family violence prevention services? Could I just slip it into her purse when she's not looking?

AMANDA: [Listening intently, thinking for a minute, then thinking out loud.] No. I don't think we have a brochure. But Marshall, I don't think it's a good idea to put anything into her purse. What if he found it later? Or what if he read it over her shoulder? What if it made the situation worse? We want to get her resources in a way that makes her feel safe.

MARSHALL: [Concerned and disconcerted.] There must be something more I could do.

AMANDA: Well, there are posters in the washroom with facts about family violence and numbers she can call. Keep refilling her water glass, and check in as best you can.

NARRATOR: There are times when the actions available to you will not seem like enough. But bigger actions could increase the danger for the victim instead of making things better. The woman at the restaurant seems to be at risk of further violence. When she leaves, she will still be at risk. But she can leave at risk knowing someone has noticed her and tried to help—or she can leave at risk and feel unnoticed, hopeless, and alone.

Here's another example of what you could do as a witness, this time getting some backup and going for help.

[MARSHALL finishes taking the order and walks away from the couple, seeking out AMANDA to talk to.]

MARSHALL: **The man at table five just said some really terrible things to the woman he's with. I heard him call her "stupid" and "ugly" and a "bitch"**
[MARSHALL blushes and looks uncomfortable even repeating the words].
It was awful. I felt so uncomfortable. To me, that sounded like abuse.

[AMANDA listens carefully and looks concerned.]

AMANDA: **Thank you for telling me right away. This is a family business, and we can't accept that kind of language here.**
What do you think we should do? [AMANDA is thinking out loud and doesn't really leave time for an answer.] **Man, we're really going to have to talk about what to do in these kinds of situation. ...** [She is sounding more decisive now – talking to Marshall more directly.] **We'll both talk to Family Violence Prevention Services after this is all sorted out and learn more about what we can do.** [Coming back to herself, she says, with confidence and purpose]
I'll talk to the man at table five right now – please keep an eye on me, and if he reacts badly or the situation starts to get out of hand, be ready to call 911.

AMANDA: [Approaching the couple's table with open body language. AMANDA speaks clearly but firmly.] **Excuse me, sir, we've had complaints from nearby tables that you've been using abusive language. That's not welcome in our restaurant.**

DANIEL: [Turning red and fuming.] **Cancel our order. We're leaving.** [He gestures to SHELLEY.] **C'mon, Shel. Tell them we're not coming back.**

[SHELLEY shrugs and mouths an apology, **Sorry**, looking pained and embarrassed as she picks up her jacket and follows behind DANIEL. He reaches to take her hand, and she bats it away, Melania-style. She leaves with her head down.]

[MARSHALL comes to AMANDA's side by the table, ready to clear away glasses.]

MARSHALL: **Do you think she's safe? Do you think she'll be okay?**

AMANDA: [Shaking her head, brow furrowed.] **I don't know.**

MARSHALL: **Do you think we did enough to make a difference?**

AMANDA: [Introspectively again.] **For her sake, I hope so. But I'm not sure we'll ever know.** [More clearly and assertively again.] **At least we drew a line and said what we won't tolerate in our workplace.**

NARRATOR: **Turning a blind eye to abusive and demeaning words may be turning a blind eye to violence or the power imbalances in society that give rise to violence. Remember, if a situation escalates or if you think someone is in danger—or if you are in danger—call 911.**

The server and manager were not the only people who overheard abusive language. If you were a passerby who heard the demeaning and controlling language, what could you do to address the abuse and keep yourself and the people around you safe? Let's ask the person who was sitting nearby.

[Turning to the BYSTANDER MARIE]

Excuse me, I know you heard what happened at the next table. What's your take?

MARIE: **What that man was saying to the woman he was with, well, I wouldn't say such mean things to my dog. I was disgusted. I went to the cash to tell them what had happened. I left *my* name and number – in case they need a formal witness. I wish it was illegal to say such abusive things – I would have called the police in a heartbeat. That poor woman! I'm so glad the manager spoke to the man and made him leave. Something had to be done. But I will definitely be coming back to this restaurant, if that's how they treat jerks like that guy.**

NARRATOR: [Speaking directly to the camera.] **A small action might be all it takes to help in a situation of family violence. Recognize signs of violence and abuse. Consider what you can safely do. Reach out for help from community services like Family Violence Prevention Services. *Make it your business* to prevent family violence.**