

The Word That Keeps People From Asking for Help — and How to Change It This Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Speaker and advocate Heather Abbott calls for language reform in domestic-violence communication so more people recognize the help is meant for them.

DIGBY, NS, CANADA, October 15, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As Domestic Violence Awareness Month continues, speaker and advocate Heather Abbott, BBA, CPA, is calling attention to a hidden barrier that keeps countless people from reaching out for help — the word “abused.”

Abbott explains that while agencies and public campaigns use the word to signal who they serve, for many people living in controlling or unsafe relationships, it’s a label that has taken on a strong negative stigma. It feels shaming, inaccurate, and impossible to accept. “The word itself made me shrink from help that could have saved me.”



Heather Abbott - Speaker and Advocate for Prosperity & Healthy Relationships

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Heather C Abbott

For Abbott, she never knew help was meant for her. In 2015, her first husband took his own life in front of her after 25 years of emotional control and manipulation. “Even then,” she recalls, “as I ran for help, I stopped and looked back because part of me thought he might have faked it. That’s how deep the denial and confusion go when you’ve been conditioned for decades — and yet I still couldn’t accept the word ‘abused’ for another four

months.”

Abbott’s message is simple but urgent: speak to experiences, not labels.

Instead of asking “Are you being abused?”, she urges agencies to describe what people might actually feel — for example: confusion, fear, shame, or feeling controlled by a partner’s temper.

“If the people you are offering help to can’t tell you’re speaking to them, then you can’t help them,” Abbott says.

“The stigma around that one word keeps people silent,” she continues. “If we shift the language, more people will recognize themselves and reach out before it’s too late.”

Abbott also stresses that confidentiality and compassion are critical.

“When I opened up slightly to a psychiatrist, he told me I was abused and had to leave the marriage,” Abbott recalls. “The abruptness of it was like a slap to the face, and I never reached out again. Gentleness and confidentiality save lives.”

Her call to action this October:

- Use experience-based language instead of labels.
- Guarantee confidentiality in all help-seeking interactions.
- Integrate relationship education early — teach students how to recognize healthy and unhealthy behaviors.
- Train helpers and professionals to respond with patience and compassion.

Abbott believes this simple language shift could allow thousands more people to identify their situation and find help safely.

“We can’t erase the stigma attached to ‘abused,’” she says. “But we can stop using it in outreach. That’s how we start saving lives.”

Abbott is available for interviews throughout Domestic Violence Awareness Month and beyond. More information, including media photos, downloadable bios, and Heather’s video story, is available at www.bookheather.ca/media.

About Heather Abbott

Heather Abbott, BBA, CPA, is a speaker, author, and advocate for prosperity and healthy relationships. Blending professional insight with lived experience, she helps individuals and organizations foster wellbeing through understanding, clarity, and compassion.

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If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available. In Canada, call or text 988 (Suicide Crisis Helpline). In the U.S., dial or text 988.

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