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CRIMINAL LAW

A 2018 Alberta Guide to the Law

Assault



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GENERAL

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ASSAULT

Assault is a criminal offence defined in section 265 of the Criminal Code

WHAT IS ASSAULT?

Situation 1



You intentionally apply force to another person without their consent.

Situation 2



Through your physical actions, you try to, or threaten to, apply force to another person.

Situation 3



You confront, block, or beg from another person while openly carrying a weapon, or an imitation weapon.

Assault can include kicking someone, spitting on someone, panhandling with your knife visible, threatening you will stab someone, seriously injuring someone who agrees to fight you, and more.

TYPES OF ASSAULT

- Simple assault
- Assault with a weapon
- Assault causing bodily harm
- Aggravated assault
- Assaulting a peace officer
- Sexual assault

WHAT IS CONSENT?



Another person freely gives you permission to touch them, having full knowledge of all the associated risks.



Even if another person says you can touch them, it is NOT valid consent IF:

1. You hurt, or say you will hurt, them or someone else if they don't consent.
2. You lie to them about what you will do or who you are.
3. You are in a position of authority over them.
4. You intentionally seriously injure them.

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WHAT IS ASSAULT?

Definition of Assault in the *Criminal Code*:

The definition of assault can be found in section 265 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

An assault can happen whenever someone touches another person and that person does not want to be touched. An assault can be anything from a punch in the face to touching someone on the shoulder, as long as the contact happened without the consent (permission) of the person being touched. The important thing is not the amount of force used, but whether the touching was consented to and whether it was intended.



An assault can also happen when someone threatens or attempts to apply force to another person and causes that person to feel a reasonable fear of harm. There does not need to be any touching for this type of assault to occur. For example, if someone is pointing their finger in another person's face and that person feels that they are going to be assaulted, an assault may have happened.

Assault also occurs when a person who is carrying or wearing a visible weapon (or an imitation of a weapon), stops another person, harasses them or asks them for something. Section 2 of the *Criminal Code* defines a “weapon” as anything a person uses or means to use to cause someone fear, to harm or to kill. This includes any guns, knives or other object which could be used or seen as a weapon.

Intention

A person must intend, or mean, to touch or threaten to touch someone else for an assault to happen. When someone accidentally touches someone else, this is not an assault. For example, if someone is waving their finger at someone else, but does not intend to touch or threaten them, then they have not committed an assault.



WHAT IS CONSENT?

For an assault to occur, there needs to be an absence of consent. If consent is found, then no assault has occurred. Consent is an important part in many activities that involve touching.



For example, in a hockey game, the players have consented to the regular touching that occurs between them during a game. So, if a hockey player injures someone, the player has not likely committed an assault because the injured player agreed to play the game knowing it involved some danger of being hurt or injured. The injuries must be those that are expected in any hockey game, however; if they are more serious, then it might be assault since a hockey player does not consent to anything outside of the normal rules and risks of the game.

**** NOTE:** Consent becomes invalid when adults intentionally apply force to each other and cause non-trivial bodily harm (e.g. as a result of a fist fight or brawl) or if weapons are used. ******

Has there been consent?

Whether there is consent depends on the facts of the situation. In a trial, the Crown (the prosecution) must prove that the person who was assaulted did not consent to being touched. Consent can be either express or implied. Express consent means the person who was touched actually said that they could be touched. Implied consent means the person who was touched showed, by their actions, that the touching was okay. It may be implied that the touching was consensual if a reasonable person in the same situation would assume that consent had been given. However, for consent to be implied, the facts must support the accused's belief that they had consent. Implied consent is NOT a valid defence in cases of sexual assault.

Self-Induced Intoxication

If a person is in a state of self-induced intoxication and assaults someone, they will not escape criminal liability just because they were intoxicated when it happened. As a matter of public policy, people are not generally allowed to use drunkenness as a defence to an assault.



When is consent NOT given?

A person has not given consent to being touched if they merely went along with what someone was doing because they were threatened or scared. Just because someone has not said "no" does not mean they have consented.

A person has NOT given consent in the following situations:

1. If the accused has hurt, or threatens to hurt, the person or someone else (this third person can be someone the person being assaulted does or does not know.)
2. If the accused lies to the person they touch, and touches them in a different way than what the person agreed to.
3. If the accused lies to a person about who they really are so they can get that person's consent.
4. If the accused uses a position of authority to coerce someone into consenting. Examples of relationships of authority are those between teachers and students, doctors and patients and

lawyers and clients.

5. When injuries caused by the assault are non-trivial (result in bodily harm).
6. When a weapon is used.

In these situations, no consent will be found no matter what the accused believed to be true.

SELF-DEFENCE

Self-defence is a defence to a charge of assault and it is defined in the *Criminal Code*. Self-defence allows people to use force *only when necessary* to defend themselves or another person. The action taken in self-defence must have been reasonable in the circumstances.



One factor a court will look at when determining if the action taken in self-defence was reasonable is the nature and proportionality of the person's response. If someone is threatening to punch a second person, that second person can use as much force as is reasonably necessary to stop it. Punching or holding the person might be reasonable. Shooting the person would likely not be reasonable. Extra or unnecessary punches would also not likely be justified.

SUMMARY & INDICTABLE CONVICTIONS

If a person is charged with assault, a prosecutor may choose to proceed with it as a summary or indictable charge depending on the circumstances of the case. A summary charge would generally be considered less serious than an indictable one.

If a prosecutor decides to proceed summarily and the person is found guilty of assault, the maximum penalty is \$5000 and/or 6 months in prison. A Provincial Court judge sitting alone will hear your case if it is a summary matter. You may be able to have someone appear on your behalf if you are charged with a summary conviction.

If a prosecutor decides to proceed with indictment, you must appear in court. Indictable offences begin in Provincial Court, but if the charge proceeds to trial you have the right to have your trial heard by a Provincial Court judge OR by a Queen's Bench justice with or without a jury. The maximum penalty for indictable assault is 5 years in jail.

TYPES OF ASSAULT

Assault Simpliciter

Assault Simpliciter is the basic form of assault, specifically touching without consent, where no bodily harm is caused, no weapon is used, and the touching is not of a sexual nature.



Aggravated Assault

Aggravated assault is an assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim. An assault becomes “aggravated” when the harm caused goes beyond something minor and becomes more serious. Everyone who commits an aggravated assault is guilty of an indictable offence and could face up to 14 years in prison.

Assault with a Weapon or Causing Bodily Harm



If in committing an assault the person carries, uses, or threatens to use, a weapon or something that could be thought of as a weapon, or if they cause bodily harm to their victim, they are guilty of assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm. Assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm could be either a summary or indictable offence. A summary conviction could be punished by up to 18 months imprisonment. Indictment could mean up to ten years imprisonment.

Sexual Assault



Sexual assault consists of unwanted touching that is of a sexual nature. Sexual assault can be a summary conviction offence punishable by up to 18 months (or between 6-24 months if the victim is under 16) or an indictable offence and can be punished by up to 10 years imprisonment (or between 1-14 years if the victim is younger than 16).

Sexual assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm is an indictable offence punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment depending on the weapon used (or up to life if the victim is younger than 16).

Aggravated Sexual Assault is when assault is both aggravated and sexual. Aggravated sexual assault is indictable and punishable by 4 years to life imprisonment.

The age of consent in Canada for sexual activity is 16 years. Therefore, persons under the age of 16 cannot consent to sexual acts. Consent must be express for it to be a valid defence to sexual assault charges.

Unlawfully Causing Bodily Harm

Anyone who unlawfully causes bodily harm can be punishable by a summary conviction with imprisonment up to 18 months, or by an indictable offence up to 10 years. Assaulting a public transit operator and torture are both within this definition.

Assaulting a Police Officer

There are special charges for assaulting a peace officer punishable by summary or by indictment and imprisonment up to 14 years depending on the type of assault.

LEGAL OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE VICTIM

Pressing Charges



If someone is assaulted and it is reported to the police, the police will investigate to find out what happened before they lay charges. A victim will be asked to give the police a statement explaining what happened to them. Usually, the police will lay a charge if they believe there is enough evidence.

If the police do not lay a charge and the victim wants to continue the matter, they can contact the Provincial Court House and make an appointment with a Justice of the Peace to swear a “private information”. If the Justice of the Peace finds there is enough evidence to lay a charge, a charge will be laid, and a Court date set and the person accused of assault will get an Appearance Notice.

Peace Bonds



A peace bond is a protection order made by a court. It is used in situations where a person has caused another to fear for their own safety or the safety of their spouse, common-law partner, child or property. A peace bond requires the individual to keep the peace, be of good behaviour and follow other conditions for the period of time the Court believes is necessary to ensure the victim’s safety. The most common condition is that the accused stay away from the victim and not have any contact with them.

To get a peace bond, a person should:

1. Report the incident to the police and explain why they feel afraid.
2. Get the file number from the police and then make an appointment with the judge, Justice of the Peace, or magistrate at the Provincial Court House.

A peace bond is free of charge and does not require a lawyer. It is up to the judge or the police to decide if the process for a peace bond should be started. If the judge decides to begin the process then the complainant will have to swear an “Information” and, eventually, appear in Court to explain to a judge why a peace bond should be issued. Once it is issued, if the person with the peace bond breaks the conditions, then they can be arrested and charged with a criminal offence.

Emergency Protection Order and Restraining Order

An Emergency Protection Order (EPO) and a Restraining Order (RO) are court orders for a person who assaulted someone else, or who may assault someone else, to stay away. The difference between an EPO and a RO is that an EPO requires that there is an immediate need for protection for the applicant(s) from a family member. Often, the police can assist with obtaining an EPO, but an individual can apply on their own as well. In some cases, a lawyer may be needed to apply for a RO. You may also complete a Statement of Claim requesting a RO on your own. People who need assistance and cannot afford a lawyer can contact The Legal Aid Society of Alberta or the Protection and Restraining Order Project (PROP).

An EPO must be reviewed within 9 working days of being granted by a Court of Queen's Bench Justice. If it is not reviewed, it may expire. At the time of the review, the person requesting the EPO can file an affidavit as to why they need protection. The person the EPO is against may be able to argue against the EPO. If the review is successful, the EPO will become a Queen's Bench Protection Order, which is similar to an EPO but the immediate need for protection is less.

A RO typically lasts for 3 months but it can be renewed at the Court of Queen's Bench and can even be made permanent. It is up to the person asking for the RO to complain to police if the person subject to the order violates it – the police can then arrest that person and bring them before the Court to be dealt with.



The main differences between a Peace Bond and an EPO or a RO are the amount of time it takes to get one and what happens to the person who breaks it. An EPO or a RO may be ordered quickly and, if broken, the person can be found in “contempt”, which means they do not get a criminal record, but they can be fined or jailed. If a peace bond is broken, it is a criminal offence which results in both a sentence like a fine or jail, and a criminal record.

WHO CAN I CALL FOR MORE HELP OR INFORMATION?



Legal Resources

Legal Aid Society of Alberta Suite 300, Revillon Building 10320 - 102 Avenue; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 1-866-845-3425
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Provides legal advice, assistance, and representations to those who qualify for their services at a reduced rate.

Student Legal Services – Criminal Law Project #203, 9924 – 106 Street; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 780-425-3356
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Law student caseworkers from the University of Alberta can provide legal information and referrals, as well as act as agent in Provincial Court for certain criminal matters if you meet our income guidelines.

Lawyer Referral Service	Ph: 1-800-661-1095
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This service provides the contact information for up to three lawyers that may be able to assist you with your legal matter. When you phone, explain the nature of your legal matter to the operator. You will then be provided with the contact information of lawyers who may be able to assist you. When you contact the lawyers, be sure to tell them that you received their contact from Lawyer Referral Service. You will be able to speak to them for free for 30-minutes and they can provide you some summary legal advice. This 30-minutes is not intended to be a time for a lawyer to provide you with free work.

Emergency Protection Order Program	Ph: 780-422-9222
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A program operated through Legal Aid Alberta. Lawyers (free of charge, & with no eligibility requirements) to help obtain protection orders that can prevent a family member from contacting you.

Other Resources

Edmonton John Howard Society #401 - 10010 – 105 Street; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 780-428-7590 Web: https://johnhoward.org/
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Workers can help understand the consequences of crime, available sentences, and the court process. Can also help with housing and employment.

Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton #900, 10242 – 105 Street; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 780-421-1175 Web: http://www.efryedmonton.ab.ca/
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This service is specifically for women and girls. Court workers explain court procedure and terminology, provide legal referrals, and offer practical assistance and support to those appearing in court.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta 14904 – 121A Avenue NW; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 780-423-2141 Email: info@ncsa.ca
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Court workers provide information on the nature of the criminal charge, rights, and court procedure. Can also help with the necessary court documents, legal aid applications and providing written submissions when speaking to sentence.

Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton #205 - 14964 121A Avenue; Edmonton, AB	24 Hour Support Ph: 780-423-4102 Office Ph: 780-423-4102 Email: info@sace.ca
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Provides specialized, trauma-informed services at no fee. This includes: counselling, court support, and public education.

Inner City Victim Services - Bissell Centre Bissell Centre Downtown West 10530 96 Street; Edmonton, AB	Ph: 780-232-7840 or 780-994-3295 Email: rsipes@bissellcentre.org ; or ehample@bissellcentre.org
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Victim Support Services offers one-on-one case management for victims of crime, including help with court, preparing documentation, accessing financial benefits, as well as emotional support.