



Supporting a Loved One Experiencing Abuse

***1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime
These women are our sisters, daughters, friends, co-workers, or neighbors***

Many victims of domestic violence suffer silently each day, feeling alone and afraid. As a close family member or friend, you may feel like a helpless bystander watching your loved one endure these feelings, but there are actions you can take.

Domestic violence is about power and control; therefore, victims are in the most danger when ending and/or escaping abusive relationships. For victims of domestic violence, attempting to leave or reach out to anyone for help could trigger the abuser to use life-threatening violence, thus increasing their safety risks. As someone who wants to help, it is important to handle this situation with care. Addressing the violence in a relationship requires not only courage but a tremendous amount of support and resources.

Below are general guidelines that you can use when supporting a friend or family member who is experiencing abuse.

Avoid Confrontations

If you suspect that someone you love is experiencing abuse, do not try to confront them about the situation. Instead, offer support without judgment or criticism—try to keep some resources on hand such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline number (800-799-SAFE) or a brochure from a domestic violence program in your community. There are many reasons that individuals experiencing abuse do not reach out to family and friends. Do not assume that just because you now are aware of the abuse, that your loved one is ready to talk about it. Respect her¹ privacy and her decision not to share her experiences with everyone.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

is a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviors that a person uses against a current or former intimate partner.

It might include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual violence
- Emotional abuse
- Economic abuse
- Intimidation
- Property damage

Listen

A better way to understand how to support a person experiencing abuse is to listen. Allow her to share her feelings and offer positive feedback. Victims of violence are experts in their personal experiences, and recognizing this fact is the most important step. Don't try to make any decisions for the victim or survivor. Trying to make decisions for her implies that she is not capable of making good choices, and in an attempt to help, you're actually deterring her from further confiding in you or seeking your support.

¹ In recognition of national statistics, feminine pronouns are used in this publication when referring to victims of domestic violence and masculine pronouns are used when referring to perpetrators of domestic violence. Recognizing that domestic violence primarily impacts women does not suggest that abusive relationships are limited to only heterosexual relationships. It is important to recognize that sometimes the perpetrator might be female while the victim is male. It is also important to acknowledge that domestic violence happens in same sex relationships.

Avoid Judgments Or Criticisms

It is critical that you respect the decisions survivors of violence make about their safety, even when you don't agree. Criticisms are never helpful when someone has turned to you for support. When a survivor trusts you enough to confide in you, this is not the time for an "I told you so" lecture or repeating your judgments of the abuser. Criticizing will only create distance between you and the victim, so it is important to share your concerns in a nonjudgmental and proactive manner, which will help to protect her safety.

Ask How You Can Be Helpful

Do not assume that the decisions you would make for yourself are going to be safe or helpful for your loved one who is experiencing abuse. Ask what you can do to support her and to help her in protecting her safety. Any support and encouragement you can offer will make a difference.

Educate Yourself & Learn More About Community Resources

If you are unsure of what to say or how to be helpful, call the domestic violence hotline in your community or the National Domestic Violence Hotline to talk through strategies and options. Researching support options available to victims is also very helpful. Knowing about community resources, obtaining additional information about abuse, and sharing that information will help her expand her support network to include specially-trained domestic violence advocates in the community.

Encourage Her To Talk With An Advocate

Advocates at domestic violence shelters/agencies can enhance a survivor's safety plan by offering additional resources and sharing new information. Your local domestic violence shelter does more than offer a secure resting place. There are thousands of domestic violence programs across the country that offer many services that can help survivors navigate the legal system, access community resources, relocate, or get support for their children.

Have Patience

Remember to have patience with anyone experiencing abuse. The process of leaving takes time, resources and support. Victims often try to leave several times before they are able to make a final break. Remember that even though someone does not make the same choices you would make, that does not mean that their choices are bad. There is no one step that will make the situation better—leaving does not guarantee that the violence will end. It is also important to be aware of your own limitations and develop personal boundaries. If you witness a violent episode, call 911 immediately.

Remember that no one can address domestic violence alone; your efforts will make a difference! To learn more contact your local domestic violence shelter or the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-799-SAFE

SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MIGHT BE ABUSED

- Person has noticeable bruising and lacerations that may be explained away by clumsiness.
- During conversation the person may make statements about her life that may indicate isolation, intimidation, threats, emotional abuse or controlling behaviors are occurring in her relationship.
- Partner is destroying property or abusing pets.
- Partner reads or monitors emails and phone calls including passwords, codes, or PIN numbers.
- Partner insults, humiliates, or calls the victim inappropriate names.
- Partner is preventing victim from keeping a job or from attending school.
- Partner controls the finances and makes the victim ask for money or withholds money altogether.

***Note: There are behaviors and attitudes that *may* indicate an abusive relationship. The presence of any one of these behaviors or attitudes does not always mean there is abuse present in the relationship.**