

Helping Abused Victims: A Guide for Friends, Family, Classmates, & Co-workers

*This material addresses violence in heterosexual relationships, but violence occurs in lesbian, bisexual, transgender, & gay relationships, too.

Approximately 2 million women are abused by husbands, boyfriends, or intimate partners each year. Chances are, someone you know — a friend, family member, classmate, roommate, co-worker, or neighbor — is a victim of domestic violence. All intimate relationships have problems, and sometimes it's difficult for others to decide when it's appropriate to intervene. Perhaps you feel your friend's problem will work itself out. Not so. The violence won't end until action is taken to stop it. There are many things you can do to prepare yourself to offer supportive and empowering assistance. Support victims in protecting themselves by **validating their experiences, providing support, and providing information about resources/options**. Learn about domestic violence – talk to a domestic violence advocate, read books, or visit websites to learn more about domestic violence.

Leaving an abusive situation is difficult for many reasons; don't expect your friend or loved one to leave immediately. She may even return to the abuser – note that survivors leave their abusers an average of 7-11 times before ending the relationship permanently. It's important for you to **support her through the entire process**, though you may be frustrated, worried, and want her to get out of the situation right now. Remember that she knows what is best for her; she has been living in this situation and must determine the risk. It is often most dangerous for a woman when she attempts to leave or has left the abuser. She must plan for her safety carefully, & it may take a great deal of time & several attempts for her to actually leave. Support her in making her own decisions.

Victims need friends who are willing to listen. **A good listener is nonjudgmental**. The goal is not to get them to leave their abusers or to "fix" the situation or the relationship for them, but to provide support and information. Let go of any expectations you have that there is a "quick fix" to domestic violence or to the obstacles an abused person faces. Understand that not doing anything may very well be the safest thing a victim can do at any given time. Challenge and change any false attitudes and beliefs that you may have about persons who are abused. Women who are abused aren't abused because there is something wrong with them. Rather, they are women who get trapped in relationships by their partners' use of violence and control.

What You Can Do to Help a Victim

<i>BELIEVE HER.</i>	... and let her know that you do. If you know her partner, remember that abusers most often act different in public than they do in private. Take domestic violence seriously – it can involve threats, pushing, punching, slapping, choking, sexual assault, assault with weapons or verbal abuse.
<i>LISTEN TO WHAT SHE TELLS YOU.</i> <i>LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT.</i>	Initiate a conversation in private and when you have enough time to talk at length. Tell your friend you care about her and you really want to listen. Ask about her situation, then give her plenty of time to talk. Ask questions to make sure you understand what she is saying. Avoid making judgments. Don't force the issue, but allow her to confide in you at her own pace. Let her know that you are concerned about her safety, that she doesn't deserve to be treated this way, and that abuse is never acceptable. Support her in making choices for herself, even if her choice is to stay in the relationship. Never blame her for what's happening or underestimate her fear of potential danger. Focus on supporting her right to make her own decisions.
<i>VALIDATE HER FEELINGS.</i>	It is common for women to have conflicting feelings - love and fear, guilt and anger, hope and sadness. Let her know that her feelings are normal.
<i>AVOID VICTIM-BLAMING.</i>	Tell her that the abuse is not her fault. Tell her that the abuse is her partner's problem and his responsibility, but don't "bad-mouth" him.
<i>SHOW CONCERN.</i> <i>PROVIDE HER WITH VALIDATING MESSAGES.</i>	If you are concerned about her safety, tell her you are concerned without judgment by simply saying, "Your situation sounds dangerous and I'm concerned about your safety." Say "I'm worried about you" rather than "Why don't you leave" or "I wouldn't put up with that." Listen to her and provide her with validating messages: "You don't deserve to be abused. There is no excuse for domestic violence. You deserve better." "I am concerned. This is harmful to you. I'm glad you told me." "This is complicated. Sometimes it takes time to figure this out. I will support your choices." "You are not alone in figuring this out. There may be some options. I will support your choices." "I am here for you and will support you, no matter what." "I care. I want to know about domestic violence so we can work together to keep you safe and healthy".
<i>REMIND HER OF HER STRENGTHS.</i> <i>BUILD ON HER STRENGTHS.</i>	Abused persons live with emotional abuse as well as physical abuse. She probably is told continually by her abuser that she is bad – she may believe she can't do anything right and there is something wrong with her. Give her emotional support to believe she is a good & worthy person. By helping her recognize her skills, abilities & strengths, you will help her see her other options. Point out the strength she has shown by surviving her current situation. Based on what she tells you (& on what you have seen), point out the ways in which she has developed skills to cope, solve problems, and shown courage & determination. Even if skills she has tried have not been successful completely, help her to build on these strengths.
<i>OFFER HELP.</i>	Offer specific forms of help & information. If she asks you to do something you're willing & able to do, do it (if you can't or don't want to, say so & help her find other ways to have that need met). Look for other ways you can help.

What You Can Do to Help a Victim

<i>BE A PARTNER IN HER SAFETY PLANNING EFFORTS.</i>	The key to safety planning is taking a problem, looking at all of the available options, evaluating the risks and benefits of different options, and figuring out ways to reduce the risks. Offer ideas/alternatives, resources, & information. Encourage her to develop a safety plan to protect herself (and her children). Help her think through the steps she should take if her partner becomes abusive again. Help her contact a local program for abused persons (see information below about SAFE and Interact). They can help her examine her options and find a safe place. Assure her that these programs will keep information about her confidential. Take caution – an abused woman frequently faces the most danger when she tries to flee and you could face threats and/or harm from her abuser. You can read about Safety Planning on various websites, such as http://www.womenslaw.org/simple.php?sitemap_id=3 .																		
<i>SUPPORT & RESPECT HER DECISIONS.</i>	Remember there are risks with every decision an abused person makes. If you really want to be helpful, be patient & respect her decisions, even if you don't agree with them. Keep in touch with your friend; the abuser may isolate her. By letting her know you care and are available to her, you provide her with a connection to the world and options for safety.																		
<i>GUIDE HER TO RESOURCES.</i>	Talk to your local domestic violence program about how you can help your friend in a safe way. Guide her to these services/programs – they offer safety, advocacy, support, legal information, etc.																		
<i>COMMUNITY RESOURCES:</i>	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 40%;">National Domestic Violence Hotline</td> <td style="width: 30%;">1-800-799-SAFE (7233)</td> <td style="width: 30%;">http://www.thehotline.org/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline</td> <td>1-866-331-9474</td> <td>http://www.loveisrespect.org/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SAFE of Harnett County</td> <td>(910) 893-SAFE (7233)</td> <td>http://www.safeofhc.org/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Interact of Wake County</td> <td>(919) 828-7740</td> <td>1-866-291-0855 toll-free http://www.interactofwake.org/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Harbor, Inc.</td> <td>Crisis Line (919) 631-5478</td> <td>Office (919) 938-3566 http://www.harborshelter.org/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Daymark Recovery Services</td> <td colspan="2">(800) 256-2452; Hopeline (919) 231-4525; Crisis Line (919) 934-6161</td> </tr> </table>	National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)	http://www.thehotline.org/	National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline	1-866-331-9474	http://www.loveisrespect.org/	SAFE of Harnett County	(910) 893-SAFE (7233)	http://www.safeofhc.org/	Interact of Wake County	(919) 828-7740	1-866-291-0855 toll-free http://www.interactofwake.org/	Harbor, Inc.	Crisis Line (919) 631-5478	Office (919) 938-3566 http://www.harborshelter.org/	Daymark Recovery Services	(800) 256-2452; Hopeline (919) 231-4525; Crisis Line (919) 934-6161	
National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)	http://www.thehotline.org/																	
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline	1-866-331-9474	http://www.loveisrespect.org/																	
SAFE of Harnett County	(910) 893-SAFE (7233)	http://www.safeofhc.org/																	
Interact of Wake County	(919) 828-7740	1-866-291-0855 toll-free http://www.interactofwake.org/																	
Harbor, Inc.	Crisis Line (919) 631-5478	Office (919) 938-3566 http://www.harborshelter.org/																	
Daymark Recovery Services	(800) 256-2452; Hopeline (919) 231-4525; Crisis Line (919) 934-6161																		
<i>ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES:</i>	Campus Safety (x1375) OR x1911 for emergency situations; Campus Minister (x1547); Counseling Services (x5709); Student Health Services (x1560); Vice Pres. for Student Life (x1540).																		

Is Someone You Know Being Abused? Look for the signs.

Injuries & Excuses: In some cases, bruises & injuries may occur frequently and be in obvious places. When this happens, the intent of the abuser is to keep the victim isolated & trapped at home. When black eyes & other bruising is a result of domestic violence, the person being battered may be forced to call in sick to work, or face the embarrassment & excuses of how the injuries occurred. When there are frequent injuries seen by others, the victim may talk about being clumsy, or have elaborate stories of how the injuries occurred. In other cases, bruises & other outward injuries may be inflicted in places where the injuries won't show (this also is a tactic used by an abuser to keep a victim from reaching out or from having the violence exposed).

Absences from Work or School: When severe beatings or other trauma related to violence occurs, the victim may take time off from their normal schedule. If you see this happening, or the person is frequently late, this could be a sign of relationship violence.

Low Self-Esteem: Some victims have low self-esteem, while others have a great deal of confidence and esteem in other areas of their life (at school, as an athlete, with hobbies, etc.) but not within their relationship. Within the relationship, a sense of powerlessness may exist. A victim may believe they could not make it on their own or they are somehow better off with the abuser as part of their life.

Personality Changes: People may notice that a very outgoing person, for instance, becomes quiet and shy around their partner over time. This happens because the one being battered "walks on egg shells" when in the presence of the one who is abusive. Accusations (of flirting, talking too loudly, or telling the wrong story to someone) have taught the abused person that it is easier to act a certain way around the abuser than to experience additional accusations in the future.

Fear of Conflict: As a result of being abused, victims may generalize the experience of powerlessness to other relationships. Conflicts can create a lot of anxiety (including conflicts with co-workers, friends, roommates, classmates, relatives, & neighbors). For many, it's easier to give in to whatever someone else wants than to challenge it. Asserting needs/desires begins to feel like a battle, & not worth the risks of losing.

Self-blame: In an emotionally abusive relationship, abusers often excel at constantly "reminding" the victim they are to blame for whatever has been happening. Once internalized, this can poison one's ability to see through an abuser's lies. A person who very often takes all of the blame for things that go wrong may be experiencing emotional abuse.

Isolation & Control: Adults who are abused physically often are isolated; their partners tend to control their lives to a great extent. This isolation is intended to make the abuser the center of the victim's universe, as well as to purposefully limit the victim's access to others who might attempt to help her/him escape. (Examples: victim has limited access to the telephone; frequently makes excuses as to why they can't see you or they insist their partner has to come along; doesn't seem to be able to make decisions about spending \$; isn't allowed to drive/work/enroll in certain classes).

*Adapted from http://www.womenslaw.org/simple.php?sitemap_id=120;

*Adapted from "Helping the Battered Woman, A Guide for Family and Friends," National Woman Abuse Prevention Project, 1989.