

How to help someone who you think might be a victim of domestic abuse

HOMES FIRST

If you suspect that someone may be in an abusive relationship, you can try to find a safe space and time to talk to them and let them know that you are there for help and support.

Don't leave it to someone else to start the conversation – in a fifth of cases of domestic abuse last year, nobody else knew what was going on.

As one victim explained:

"No one asked, so I just didn't tell."

Make sure you won't be overheard or interrupted and that you are both in a safe place before you start the conversation.

Do not confront the abuser.

Do not do anything that may endanger you, the victim or their children.

Approach the subject with obvious kindness and concern.

Avoid using the labels of 'domestic abuse' or 'domestic violence' as many people don't want to identify with these.

Always start the conversation face-to-face

If you try and have it over the phone or social media their partner may find the messages and retaliate against them or you.

To start the conversation, try asking the person how things are in their relationship, or mention things you have noticed in their behaviour or the behaviour of the abuser.

Examples of what to say:

"We haven't seen much of you recently, is everything ok?"

"I've noticed you seem a bit down, has anyone upset you?"

"Wow, they text you a lot – do they do that all the time?"

"I'm worried about you – I saw the way they looked at you and you seemed scared."

Confiding in a friend

Evidence shows that victims are much more likely to confide in a friend or someone close to them, than to the police or professional services.

If the person starts to talk about the abuse, try to listen with an open mind and a supportive attitude – even if you don't agree with what they say.

It can be difficult not to offer opinions about the relationship or the abuser, to criticise or to blame, but this is unhelpful because it can make the person clam up and make them less likely to talk to you later.

Don't pass judgement.

Saying things like "Really?!"

"That seems so unlike him"

or

"It sounds like you are both as bad as each other". is not helpful.

Listen with an open mind

If the person does not disclose the abuse, respect their wishes but let them know you are always there for help and support.

And, be careful not to offer advice – leave that to the experts. Never tell them to leave the relationship immediately, as this can be highly risky and there may be many reasons why they are unable to leave.

For example:

fear for themselves and their children,
lack of money or risk of homelessness.

The victim is the expert in their own situation.

Important things to get across:

Let them know that help is out there – make sure they know where to find the contact details of relevant support services and helplines who can help them with safety planning

Let them know that you believe them

Let them know that you want to help

Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault

Thank them for their bravery – it takes a lot of courage to open up about something like this

If they want to find out about what might happen to the perpetrator, and what options are available to them and the authorities, Victim Support has a simple, clear guide on this [web page](#). (link??)

You don't need to have all the answers.

Just by listening you will be helping the person to admit what is happening, and this will break the silence around the situation.

Ask them what they want to do, or have happen next, so that they feel in control of the situation.

Ending a relationship with an abusive partner or adult family member is an extremely difficult and risky decision to make and the victim may take some time to decide to do this – and to work out how to do it safely.

Practical support

People who have been in an abusive relationship often say how helpful it was to get practical support from the people they know.

Here are some general tips that you can share with them, especially if they are still in the relationship and considering leaving:

Once they've opened up to you...

Encourage them to pack an emergency bag and to hide this in a safe place, possibly away from their home, in case they need to leave their house quickly. This might contain important documents such as passports and birth certificates, spare keys to their home or car, money, medications, some clothes and a few of the children's toys.

Help them to work out a plan for leaving including who they can call, where they might go, and how they can get there.

If they have left the relationship, the person may need to change their contact details and think carefully about who they share them with, because some of the people they know will also know the abuser and may not keep this information secret.

Consider a code word

Agree a code word with the person so they can signal to you if they are in danger or distressed and need you to access urgent help on their behalf.

Here are some examples of practical support that you may be able to offer:

Being with them when they contact support organisations or helplines

Offering to go with them to appointments

Helping them to move to a safe place
Letting them stay at your home for a short time

Looking after their children so that the person has time to think, plan and receive support.