

Women's Aid - Domestic Violence Support Advice

The chances are high that you may know a sister, mum, colleague, cousin or friend who is experiencing abuse behind closed doors.

Unless you are trying to help someone who has been very open about her experiences it may be difficult for you to acknowledge the problem directly.

However, there are some basic steps that you can take to assist and give support to a friend, family member, colleague, neighbour or anyone you know who confides in you that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

How you can help

- Listen to her, try to understand and take care not to blame her. Tell her that she is not alone and that there are many women like her in the same situation.
- Acknowledge that it takes strength to trust someone enough to talk to them about experiencing abuse. Give her time to talk, but don't push her to go into too much detail if she doesn't want to.
- Acknowledge that she is in a frightening and very difficult situation.
- Tell her that no one deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what her abuser has told her. Nothing she can do or say can justify the abuser's behaviour.

- Support her as a friend. Encourage her to express her feelings, whatever they are. Allow her to make her own decisions.
- Don't tell her to leave the relationship if she is not ready to do this. This is her decision.
- Ask if she has suffered physical harm. If so, offer to go with her to a hospital or to see her GP.
- Help her to report the assault to the police if she chooses to do so.
- Be ready to provide information on organisations that offer help to abused women and their children. Explore the available options with her. Tell her about the National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge) on 0808 2000 247, and how to access this website.
- Go with her to visit a solicitor if she is ready to take this step.
- Plan safe strategies for leaving an abusive relationship.
- Let her create her own boundaries of what she thinks is safe and what is not safe; don't urge her to follow any strategies that she expresses doubt about.
- Offer your friend the use of your address and/or telephone number to leave information and messages, and tell her you will look after an emergency bag for her, if she wants this.

- Look after yourself while you are supporting someone through such a difficult and emotional time. Ensure that you do not put yourself into a dangerous situation; for example, do not offer to talk to the abuser about your friend or let yourself be seen by the abuser as a threat to their relationship.

If you're worried about someone you know, you can contact the Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline:

0808 2000 247

(run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge)