



How to Respond to a Friend or Family Member Who is Experiencing Domestic Violence

Don't be afraid to let her/him know that you are concerned for her/his safety. Help your friend or family member recognize the abuse. This might mean sitting down with resources that identify abusive relationships and asking the person to examine the relationship for warning signs and indicators. Tell her/him that you see what is going on and that you want to help. Reinforce that what is happening is not “normal” and that they deserve a healthy, non-violent relationship.

Acknowledge that she/he is in a very difficult and scary situation. Let your friend or family member know that she/he has done nothing to provoke abuse and someone who is a victim of abuse is a victim of crime. It is not her/his fault. Reassure her/him that this happens to a lot of people and that there is help and support out there.

Be supportive. Listen to your friend or family member. Remember that it may be difficult to talk about the abuse. Make sure you let the person know that you are available to help whenever she/he may need it. Be someone who will listen and believe what you are hearing.

Be non-judgmental. Respect your friend or family member's decisions. There are many reasons why victims stay in abusive relationships. She/he may leave and return to the relationship many times. Do not criticize those decisions or try to guilt someone into making a decision that you think is best. She or he will need your support even more during those times.

Encourage her/him to participate in activities outside of the relationship with friends and family. Continue to reach out with invitations, visits, and phone calls. Often an abuser will attempt to isolate someone from circles of support. Be patient and diligent with attempts to stay connected.

If she/he ends the relationship, continue to be supportive. Even though the relationship was abusive, your friend or family member may still feel sad and lonely once it is over. Often people in abusive relationships experience good times with the person when he/she is not being abusive. When a relationship ends, your friend or family member may need time to mourn the loss of the relationship. Understanding the complexity of the situation will show that you are compassionate. This is a time to really show your support.

Help her/him to develop a safety plan. Ending a relationship that has been violent is a scary time. Violence tends to escalate in severity when someone decides to leave. Getting out of a relationship safely takes preparation. You can help by offering to store personal items, cash, extra car keys, copies of important documents, and other essentials for someone who is preparing to break off a violent relationship. Create a code word that your friend or family member can use to indicate that you need to call police. Offer to keep children or pets. Ask what you can provide to make the process easier.