

Helpful Suggestions for Friends and Family Members of People Experiencing Domestic Violence

- *If you have suspicions*, ask your friend or relative how their relationship is going. Ask what happens when there are disagreements. Ask specific questions like, “Has he/she ever pushed or shoved you?”
- *Do not give ultimatums or orders*. One characteristic of an abusive relationship is that the batterer limits the victim’s ability to make choices. Don’t condone his/her behavior by also making choices for her/him.
- *Be realistic about consequences*. Domestic violence has real and dangerous physical and emotional effects on all people living in the household, especially the children. Do not be afraid to remind the victim of this, or to make a call to Child Protective Services if a child in the home has been hurt in an altercation between the parents. Calls can be made anonymously.
- *Do not downgrade the abuser*. One of the ways that many abusers isolate their victims from help is to tell him/her that their friends and family don’t like him/her and want to break up their relationship. Angry criticisms of an abuser may convince a victim that he/she is right. Remember that no matter how much you dislike him/her, the victim also sees his/her best qualities and often loves him/her despite the abuse. She/he will often defend him when someone criticizes him/her and may be reluctant to confide in you if she/he needs help in the future.
- *Encourage the victim’s self-esteem*. Most physically abusive relationships are also very emotionally abusive. Many victims stay because they do not realize that they deserve better or are capable of making it on their own. Remind the victim often of her/his strengths and of how valuable she/he is to you.
- *Set an example* for getting help by contacting a local shelter or mental health professional to educate yourself about domestic violence and to give yourself a support system to vent your frustrations.
- *Encourage the victim to develop a safety plan*. This may include hiding extra keys, clothes, money, and important papers in a safe place. When developing a safety plan, make sure to give the victim information about and a phone number to the local shelter.
- *Trust the victim’s knowledge of violent cycles*. Most victims are very used to the violent patterns in their relationship and know when they are safest. Respect her/his choices about when she/he can take certain steps.
- *Be prepared to be frustrated*. Know that the victim is doing something everyday to improve her/his situation. Victims try many things to stop the violence. These may range from talking with the abuser, or trying to be a better wife/husband, to calling the

police and a counselor. Even though she/he may not be making the choices that you would, recognize that she/he is trying.

- *Be patient.* Often a victim tries several times to leave before she/he makes a final break. Sometimes this process takes years. Make personal boundaries for yourself so that you can be supportive, but not overwhelmed by a victim's needs.
- *Encourage the victim to start a journal.* This may help the victim realize the severity and frequency of the abuse, as well as serve as a helpful source of information later.
- *If you witness or hear a violent episode.* DO NOT try to intervene physically, this may result in injuries to other people. Call 911 immediately. When the police arrive cooperate, ask to fill out a statement and be prepared to testify. Often the victim cannot because she/he fears retaliation.