

Supporting a person who is being Abused



A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES, NEIGHBOURS, FRIENDS AND WORKMATES

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour carried out by a family member or other significant relationship (eg. de-facto partner or parent-child relationship) that is threatening or harmful to other members of the family or relationship. It involves the use of power and control by one person over another or others, and results in fear, distress and often isolation.

There are many forms of domestic violence including physical (hitting, pushing), psychological (belittling, humiliation), financial (controlling your money), social (preventing you from seeing friends and family), and spiritual (preventing you from keeping your religious obligations or expressing your spiritual identity).

All violence is unacceptable.

WHAT DO I LOOK OUT FOR?

There are behaviours and signs that are common to people who are experiencing domestic violence. The person may:

- Seem afraid of a partner or always very anxious to please.
- Stop seeing friends or family, or cuts phone conversations short when the partner is in the room.
- Appear anxious, depressed, to have lost confidence, tired or teary for no obvious reason.
- Receive rude or nasty reactions from a partner.
- Have injuries or time in hospital that raises your suspicion and concern.
- Keep justifying their movements or expenses.

A person's safety is of paramount importance. Instill faith in them that you will keep confidence.

SUPPORTING A FRIEND, FAMILY MEMBER, NEIGHBOUR OR WORKMATE WHO IS EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Your support can make a difference. Approach your friend, family member, neighbour or workmate in a sensitive way, letting them know your concerns. Tell them you're worried about them, then explain why. For example: I'm worried about you because I've noticed you seem unhappy lately.

Don't be surprised or offended if they seem defensive or reject your support. They might be scared of worrying you if they tell you about the abuse. They may not be ready or may feel ashamed and afraid of talking about it.

A GUIDE TO ENGAGING:

ASK by gentle questioning such as:

- I'm wondering if everything is okay at home
Are you okay?
- I have noticed those bruises, did someone do that to you?
- I've noticed you seem frightened by your partner, is everything OK?

LISTEN without judging and focus on what you can do to support them without telling them what to do. Listen to what they are saying and give them time to tell their story. Tell them that you **BELIEVE** what they are saying and that you want to help.

RESPECT their right to make their own decisions. Take their fears and the abuse **SERIOUSLY**.

ACKNOWLEDGE that talking about violence and abuse takes courage. Tell them you think they have been **BRAVE** in talking about the abuse, and in being able to keep going despite the abuse.

HELP them to explore their options. You can help by finding out about services and how to use them. Assistance with finding and accessing services can be a good place to start if they want to pursue this.

Don't push the person into talking if they are uncomfortable but let them know that you're there if they need to talk. Be patient and keep an ear out for anything that indicates they are ready to talk about the abuse.

WHAT CAN I DO IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER?

If you believe that the victim and any children have been, or are about to be, harmed, call the police on 000 immediately.

QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK AND THINGS YOU COULD SAY

These are just some ideas. It is important that you only say what you believe and use your own words.

- The way your partner treats you is wrong.
- What can I do to help you?
- How do you think his/her behaviour has affected you? I'm worried about what he/she could do to you or the children.
- 'What do you think you should do?'
- What are you afraid of if you end the relationship?
- What are you afraid of if you stay?
- Would you like me to support you while you call a specialist support service?

SERVICES THAT CAN HELP SOMEONE WHO IS A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

POLICE – Call '000' and ask for the Police for immediate assistance

1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732

A national sexual assault, domestic violence counselling and advice service.
24 hours, 7 days a week.

FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

For an interpreter, ring 13 14 50

FOR THE NATIONAL RELAY SERVICE

ring 1800 555 677

WHAT NOT TO DO

When talking to someone who is being abused, some things may not help, or may stop a person from wanting to confide in you fully. Here are some of the things that victims of abuse have shared did not help.

- Do not attempt to mediate the situation on behalf of the victim. This may place them at higher risk.
- Do not blame them for the abuse or ask questions like 'what did you do to make this happen?' or 'why do you put up with it?' These questions suggest that it is somehow their fault.
- Do not keep trying to work out the 'reasons' for the abuse. Concentrate on supporting the person who is being abused.
- Do not be critical if they say they still love their partner, or if they leave but return to the relationship. Most people just want the abuse to stop. Leaving an abusive partner takes time, and is not the only option. Your support is really important.
- Do not criticise their partner. Criticise the abusive behaviour and let them know that no-one has the right to abuse them. For example, say 'your partner shouldn't treat you like that'. Personal criticism of a partner is only likely to make them want to defend them.
- Do not give advice or tell them what you would do. This will only reduce their confidence to make their own decision. Listen to them and give them information, not advice.
- Do not pressure them to leave or try to make decisions on their behalf. Focus on listening and supporting them to make their own decisions. They know their own situation best.

