

How to Help a Friend or Family Member

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Are you concerned that someone you care about is experiencing abuse? Maybe you've noticed some warning signs, including:

- Their partner puts them down in front of other people
- They are constantly worried about making their partner angry
- They make excuses for their partner's behavior
- Their partner is extremely jealous or possessive
- They have unexplained marks or injuries
- They've stopped spending time with friends and family
- They are depressed or anxious, or you notice changes in their personality

If someone you love is being abused, it can be so difficult to know what to do. Your instinct may be to "save" them from the relationship, but it's not that easy. After all, there are many reasons why people stay in abusive relationships, and leaving can be a very dangerous time for a victim. Abuse is about power and control, so one of the most important ways you can help a person in an abusive relationship is to consider how you might empower them to make their own decisions. Additionally, you can offer support in various ways.

Acknowledge that they are in a very difficult and scary situation, be supportive and listen

Let them know that the abuse is not their fault. Reassure them that they are not alone and that there is help and support out there. It may be difficult for them to talk about the abuse. Let them know that you are available to help whenever they may need it. What they need most is someone who will believe and listen.

Be non-judgmental

Respect your friend or family member's decisions. There are many reasons why victims stay in abusive relationships. They may leave and return to the relationship many times. Do not criticize their decisions or try to guilt them. They will need your support even more during those times.

If they end that relationship, continue to be supportive of them

Even though the relationship was abusive, your friend or family member may still feel sad and lonely once it is over. They will need time to mourn the loss of the relationship and will especially need your support at that time.

Encourage them to participate in activities outside of the relationship with friends and family

Support is critical and the more they feel supported by people who care for them, the easier it will be for them to take the steps necessary to get and stay safe away from their abusive partner. Remember that you can call the hotline to find local support groups and information on staying safe.

Help them develop a safety plan

Check out our information on creating a safety plan for wherever they are in their relationship — whether they're choosing to stay, preparing to leave, or have already left.

Encourage them to talk to people who can provide help and guidance

Find a local domestic violence agency that provides counseling or support groups. Call us at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) to get a referral to one of these programs near you. Offer to go with them. If they have to go to the police, court or lawyer's office, offer to go along for moral support.

Remember that you cannot 'rescue' them

Although it is difficult to see someone you care about get hurt, ultimately they are the one who has to make the decisions about what they want to do. It's important for you to support them no matter what they decide, and help them find a way to safety and peace.