

Talking to People who are Victims/Survivors of Abuse

The following pointers can help you initiate conversations with people experiencing abuse.

- **Start the conversation.** Choose the right time and place.
- **Do not label terms.** Do not label terms like domestic violence, victim, and survivor unless the person uses those words. This can be overwhelming.
- **Let go of expectations of a quick fix.** Not doing anything may sometimes be the safest thing the survivor can do.
- **Believe victims.** It may be hard to believe that the abuser is acting in this way. Abusers often act differently in public than in private.
- **Listen to their story.** Listen without judging or giving advice. Be compassionate. Be aware of the impacts of trauma and oppression on victims and survivors.
- **Avoid victim-blaming.** Tell them that the abuse is not their fault.
- **Take it seriously.** If you are concerned about their safety, tell them without judgment.
- **Offer help.** Refer them to a service provider who can offer medical attention, counselling, emotional support, safety planning, housing, etc. Offer help and information like childcare, driving to appointments, helping with pets, etc.
- **Have a codeword or signal.** This can help the victim indicate when immediate help is needed.
- **Give them control.** Support their decision on who to tell, what steps to take, and what types of support they need.
- **Support and respect their decisions.** There are risks with every decision made by a victim. There is no one way an individual must act or react to abuse. Be patient and respect their decisions, even if you do not agree with them. Keep the channels of communication open. Tell them you are there for them regardless of their decision.



Conversation Starters to talk to someone experiencing abuse

- I'm worried about your safety. Is it okay if we talk about it?
- I noticed that sometimes your partner does this [insert concerning tactic]. Does that happen a lot? How does that make you feel?
- I'm so happy you told me about [insert disclosure of abuse]. How can I help you? What do you need?
- I noticed that you've been [insert survivor's behaviour like "getting hurt a lot lately, not going out as much, etc.]. Is everything okay? If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here.
- I know this can be hard to talk about. I promise I believe you and won't judge any of your choices or experiences. I care about you and just want you to be safe.
- I recently read/watched/heard [insert book, article, movie about domestic violence]. Have you seen it? What do you think?