

Supporting Someone in an Abusive Relationship

It may be hard to know what to do if you think your friend, family member or co-worker is in an abusive relationship. You may want to keep the following tips in mind, taking care not to insert yourself into a potentially dangerous or violent situation.

Be available to offer support, but don't give advice or try to force a course of action

- Let them know that you're there to support them. Offer to connect them with additional help when/if they're ready.
- Help them develop a safety plan if they ask.
- Make sure to consider your own safety needs when offering assistance. Do not put yourself at risk.

Listen without judging

- People in abusive relationships may already have negative feelings about themselves. They may feel shame and embarrassment about their situation. Try not to pass judgment.
- Don't push them to make a change that they're not ready to make. Remember there can be many reasons a person believes they need to stay in an abusive relationship.
- They may not be ready to share what is happening or take a particular course of action. Let them know you are a source of support.

Help with "reality checks"

- Make sure the person knows that the abuse is not okay. No one "deserves" abusive treatment.
- Let them know that the abuse is not their fault.
- Remind them that physical or emotional abuse in a relationship is not acceptable. Many people in abusive situations don't know what a healthy relationship looks like.

Warning signs of an abusive relationship

- Downplaying visible signs of physical injury
- Using excuses that don't make sense to explain injuries (for example, using the excuse "I fell down the stairs" to explain a black eye)
- Fearfulness when a partner's name is mentioned
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Blaming themselves for their partner's behavior
- Receiving harassing phone calls, e-mails, or texts
- Becoming upset when receiving phone calls at work
- Having a partner who makes all the decisions
- Having a partner who only allows them to talk to certain people.

Warning signs in remote workplaces

- Stops using video in meetings
- Expresses anxiety over family members watching or listening to what they say or do during calls
- Wears more makeup than usual
- Stops participating when they otherwise would
- Sudden change in home circumstances
- Unresponsiveness that is out of the norm
- Changes in behavior, communication style, demeanor

Connect them with local resources

- Provide information about domestic violence resources and safety planning. Often people in abusive relationships are unable to safely research this on their own.
- Know that you may not be able to help the person in an abusive relationship. What they choose to do is outside of your control. Providing a listening ear and being a friend is help and support.

Respect confidentiality

- If your friend, family member or co-worker chooses not to tell anyone except you, respect their privacy. It could be a matter of safety as well as confidentiality.
- If you have concerns that keeping the situation private may endanger the person or others (in or outside of the workplace), contact one of the resources listed here, your supervisor, or your Human Resources department for help.

Domestic violence resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Phone: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

TDD: 1-800-787-3224

Text: START to 88788

Live chat: thehotline.org

Offers crisis intervention, information about sources of help and referrals for shelters, programs, social service agencies, legal programs and other helpful organizations.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

ncadv.org

Get information on developing a safety plan. Find national crises organizations and local resources listed by state.

Domestic Shelter Locator

domesticshelters.org

This online search tool can be used to find help for domestic violence in your zip code and your language.

Love is Respect

loveisrespect.org

Offers information, support and advocacy to young people ages 13-26 and their concerned friends, family members, and support group.

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