

Keeping Swindon **Safe**



Swindon Domestic Violence Forum

Friends and Family Leaflet

If someone you know is experiencing domestic violence...

Note: To both reflect the overwhelming majority and for ease of reading, this document refers to victims/survivors of domestic violence as female, and perpetrators as male. However, this is not meant to imply that domestic violence does not occur in same-sex relationships, or by women to men.

If you think a friend or family member is experiencing domestic violence, there are some things you can do to help.

Below are some suggestions about how to do this effectively, based on what abused women have told us they have found helpful.

People often feel awkward about ‘taking sides’ and try to keep out of a situation, believing it’s not really any of their business. Friends and family may think that they are being ‘neutral’, but the abuser usually takes this as evidence that his behaviour is ‘acceptable’. In addition, an abused woman can believe the ‘not taking sides’ of those closest to her as blame for the situation.

Raise the Issue

Don't wait for your abused friend to tell you about her situation. Bring the subject up yourself when her abusive partner isn't around. Let her know that you are concerned about her and want to help. Try not to criticise her partner or the relationship. Instead, focus on the abuse and her safety. You don't have to know all the answers. The importance of helping your friend break the silence and end the isolation should never be underestimated. Listen to what she says and let her show you how you can be supportive.

Giving Support

You need to support your abused friend in whatever decision she is currently making about her relationship, while being clear that the abuse is wrong. It's ok to be truthful or give your opinion, but bear in mind that your friend needs to be supported rather than judged. Maintain contact with her, helping her think about all the options on offer.

Supporting a friend in this way is not easy. You don't want to see her get hurt, but may have to watch her carry on with her partner when you think she should leave him or have him arrested. As her friend, make sure you offer her something the abuser doesn't. For example, if he tells her what to do all the time, it's no use you doing the same.

Supporting your friend may prove frustrating: she may not take the course of action that you think she should. You may find yourself wondering why she stays or how she puts up with it. It is important, however, to remember three important things:

- You are not the person who has to live with the consequences of her decisions. She is. Therefore, it isn't surprising that she makes decisions in her best interests (as she sees them), rather than doing what you may want her to do.
- Leaving is an extremely difficult decision to make, involving both emotional and practical choices. Most women are trying to make these choices despite the abuser begging them to stay and promising to change.
- Often, leaving a violent partner is not the end of the violence. In the UK, two women are killed every week by a partner or ex-partner. Of these, most were in the process of attempting to leave a violent relationship, or had recently left one.

If you try to offer to help a friend, remember that you are putting yourself in a dangerous situation. Whatever else you do, be sure to keep yourself safe.

What to say

The following messages will help your friend if you can get them across when talking about her situation:

- **Domestic violence is totally unacceptable.** Every woman has the right to live her life free of violence, abuse, intimidation and fear.
- **Domestic violence is very common.** One woman in four experiences domestic violence at some point in her life.
- **Domestic violence is very dangerous.** Each week in the UK, two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner.
- **Domestic violence is not just about individual men abusing individual women.** It is about society's perception of domestic violence and the acceptance that violence and abuse of women is OK.
- **Domestic violence is about power and control.** Abusive, violent and sexually abusive behaviour is wide-ranging and subtle in what it tries to achieve.

- **Domestic violence is intentional behaviour.** It is about scaring a woman into doing something that she doesn't want to do, or scaring her out of doing something that she does want to.
- **The abuser is 100% responsible for his abuse.** Alcohol, culture, or unemployment are not excuses. His abuse is his problem and his responsibility.
- **It is not your fault.** No woman deserves to be abused, regardless of what she says or does.
- **A man can change if he wants to.** His behaviour is within his control and he can choose to stop.
- **You cannot change him.** He himself is the only person who can stop his violence.
- **You don't have to put up with it.** A woman has the right to safety and respect, to put herself and her children first and to focus on her needs.
- **You can increase your safety.** If the man is intent on being violent, she will not be able to stop him. However, there are things she can do to increase her safety. Contact the national domestic violence helpline or visit www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/domestic_violence/index.shtml for some ideas.

Above all be patient. Your friend may need to talk about her situation many times. She may try to improve things or give her partner several 'last' chances. Remember that women often leave and return several times. If this happens, remember that each time she will gain a little more understanding, and given enough ongoing support – may eventually decide to make the final break.

Building your friend's self-esteem can help. Remind her of her good points, challenge her if she puts herself down or blames herself, praise her for every step she takes, and let her know she has your support.

Practical Help

On a practical level you could:

- Agree a code word or action that your friend can use to signal that she is in danger and cannot get help herself.
- Offer to keep copies of important documents and other items for her. That way, if she has to leave in a hurry, she doesn't have to waste time collecting important belongings.
- Together or on your own, find out information about local services and help. Offer any practical help you can and feel safe to give, such as the use of your telephone or address for information or messages, keeping a spare set of keys/overnight bags/important documents for emergencies.

Finally, get some support for yourself. You have to be strong if you're going to be able to help her. Most domestic violence services are happy to help with any

worries you may have or provide suggestions as to other things you can do. Most importantly, don't give up on her. You might be her only lifeline.

DO...

- **Approach her** about the abuse in a sensitive way, for example by saying, 'I'm worried about you because...'
- **Believe** what she tells you: it will have taken a lot for her to talk to you and trust you.
- **Take the abuse seriously.** Abuse can be physical and emotional, and can destroy someone's self-confidence. Her boyfriend or partner could be placing her in real physical danger.
- **Focus on her safety.** Talk to her about it and how she could protect herself.
- **Help her recognise the abuse** and understand how it may be affecting her.
- **Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault** and that no one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do.
- **Listen to her** and help her to think about her relationship, whether she wants to break up or stay.
- **Suggest she talks to someone independent,** for example a counsellor but only when she is ready to do this.

Encourage and help her to develop a safety plan. Agree with her concerns for her safety as well as that of her children. Offer your help making a list of actions, should the abuser become violent again. Suggest that she has an 'escape bag' somewhere which could include an extra set of car keys, ID documents, birth certificates, insurance cards, in case she needs them.

Encourage her to break the isolation. One of the best ways for an abuser to continue the abuse is to stop the victim from seeing family, friends or co-workers. Help your friend find an agency that can give advice, information and support.

Encourage her to take threats seriously. Express your concerns for her safety and always take threats made by the abuser seriously. An abused woman is in the most danger when she has decided to leave. When she decides she needs to leave, the time must be right and safe for her.

Do not judge: Your friend may have had to find other ways to cope with the violence and abuse, that you don't agree with, eg alcohol. She may need support in finding ways to overcome this.

Continue to support once she has left. Your friend may think she has made the wrong choices; she may still love the abuser. Remember there could have been some good times in the relationship.

Remember: if you feel overwhelmed or frightened yourself, get help.

Don't...

- **Blame her or ask judgmental questions**, such as, 'what did you do to make him treat you like that?' or 'why don't you just break up with him?'
- **Focus on why he is abusing her.** Concentrate on supporting her and discussing what she can do to protect herself.
- **Be impatient or critical of her.** If she is confused about what to do, or if she says that she still loves him. It's difficult for anyone to break up a relationship, and especially hard if they are being abused.

Don't maintain a friendship with both the victim and the abuser. This part is hard for a lot of people, but the truth is that if you try to support both parties, you're not going to be much help to either. She needs to be able to talk to someone who believes her, who will not pressure her to 'see it from the other person's point of view', and who would never encourage her to get back together with the abuser.

Suggestions of questions to ask?

- What can I do to help?
- How has his abusive behaviour made you feel?
- How is it affecting you?
- How have you been coping with the abuse?
- What can you do to make yourself safer?
- What are you afraid of if you leave?
- What are you afraid of if you stay?
- Do you know when an incident is going to happen? Is there a pattern?
- What are your worst fears for yourself/your children?
- Are there things you do to try and protect yourself/your children? (This is a good chance to help her see how much she may already be doing to stay safe.)
- Who else is around to help you cope? (Support networks of friends and family, access to money, and so on.) Can these be increased?
- Can I help you find out information about what choices you may have?
- Would you like me to go with you to find out some information?

Men against domestic violence

Men can play a particularly important role in helping to stop domestic violence. As well as being part of dealing with the violence, men are the majority of the

judges, police officers, and doctors who work with families in crisis. Some are the neighbours, friends, and family members who support victims by reaching out and lending a hand.

Domestic violence is everyone's concern, and there are many opportunities for men to be involved in making communities safer. They are more likely to hear other men saying that violence towards your partner is OK. Making a clear statement that violence in a relationship is unacceptable is important. In addition, fathers have enormous influence over the development of their children.

Men can make a difference by:

- **Being role models.** Men are in a good position to talk to male abusers of domestic violence, letting them know that their behaviour is not acceptable, that they need help, and that help is available.
- **Speaking out against domestic violence.** This can have an enormous effect in helping to change views and opinions that support and allow the continuation of abuse.
- **Being a role model to a child** who lacks a positive male figure in his life.

If after reading this leaflet you need further information, please contact:

In an emergency always dial 999

National Numbers

**National Domestic Violence
Helpline**

0808 2000 247

www.womensaid.org.uk
www.refuge.org.uk

MALE
(for male victims)

0808 801 0327

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

Broken Rainbow
(for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual & Trans)

0845 604460

www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

The Honour Network
(National Forced Marriage & Honour Based Violence Helpline)

0800 599 9247

www.karmanirvana.org.uk

Childline
Or

0800 1111

NSPCC
(for Children & Young People)

0808 800 5000

www.thehideout.org.uk

Elder Abuse Helpline
(for Older People)

0808 808 8141

www.elderabuse.org.uk

RESPECT
(Support and advice for perpetrators)

0845 122 8609

www.respect.uk.net

Local Contact Numbers

In an emergency always dial 999

**Swindon 24 hour helpline
(Swindon Women's Refuge) 01793 536447**

**Wiltshire Police
(ask for the Domestic Abuse Unit) 0845 408 7000**

Victim Support, Wiltshire 01380 738888

Sexual Assault Referral Centre 0808 168 0024

**Swindon Borough Council
Swindon Housing Needs Team 01793 464498
Children & Families (Social Services) 01793 466903
Adult Services 0800 085 6666**

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