

SUPPORTING A FRIEND OR RELATIVE



There is no simple way to 'spot' whether a person is experiencing domestic violence, but a pattern of abuse could include:

- Absence from work or school or social events
- Fear of their partner, references to their partner's anger
- Personality changes - (e.g. an outgoing woman becomes withdrawn)
- Repeated unexplained injuries

People often feel awkward about 'taking sides' and try to keep out of it, saying 'it's not really any of my business'.

Friends and family may think that they are being 'neutral' or they may not even know what to do to help. But ignoring it doesn't help.

THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO.

- If you think a friend or loved one is being abused, try telling her that you're concerned, say why you're worried and ask if she wants to talk to you about it. Let her know you want to help. You don't have to know all the answers. The important thing is to break the isolation.

- Always prioritise safety - yours and theirs. The abuser won't appreciate you getting involved so be careful about what you do and where and when you do it. Be careful not to intervene personally and ring the police if she is in immediate danger.

- Support your friend in whatever decision she's currently making about her relationship, whilst being clear that the abuse is wrong. Remember, what you are trying to do is be supportive, not to make her feel judged. It's not always easy for women to just leave.

- Stay in contact with her over time and help her to explore what choices are on offer. Try to focus on her safety rather than the abuser or the relationship. Let her guide you in how best to support her.

- Reassure her that the abuse is not her fault and that you are there for her. Remind her of her strengths, 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.



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PRACTICAL TIPS

Agree a code word or action that if she says to you or you see, you know she's in danger and cannot access help herself.

Find out information about her rights and the services available – for example, contact specialist support agencies such as Refuge and Women's Aid who can provide practical and emotional support.

Get some support 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 actions you might take.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, DON'T GIVE UP ON HER. YOU MIGHT BE HER ONLY LIFELINE.

• DON'T LET FINANCIAL CONCERNS KEEP HER TRAPPED:

She doesn't need to be afraid to go into a busy bank - banks can now offer to discuss personal and sensitive financial matters in private.

She doesn't need to find her passports or driving licence before she escapes the house – banks will accept non-traditional forms of identification such as a letter from the manager of a Refuge.

The important thing is to escape to safety, everything else can be sorted after that.

• FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/
domesticviolence](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/domesticviolence)

<http://tinyurl.com/5opyps>

• PHONE LINES:

The 24 hour Freephone National Domestic Violence helpline: 0808 2000 247 run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge

Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline: 028 9033 1818

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 027 1234

Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 80 10 800

Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327

The Dyn Wales/Dyn Cymru Helpline: 0808 801 0321

The Honour Network (for forced marriage and 'honour' based crime): 0800 5999 247

Broken Rainbow (for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender victims): 08452 60 44 60

National Centre for Domestic Violence (civil legal help): 0800 970 2070

The Forced Marriage Unit Helpline: 0207 008 0151

HOW TO BE A LIFELINE FOR A FRIEND EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

