DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHATTERS LIVES

DON’T LET SOMEONE YOU KNOW FALL TO PIECES

If you know someone who is experiencing Domestic Violence...
Below are some suggestions about how to do this effectively, based on what formerly abused women have said they 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 easily interpret the ‘neutrality’ 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 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 they are currently making about their 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 or relative needs to be supported rather than
judged. Maintain contact with her/him, helping them explore all the options on offer.

Supporting a friend in this way is a huge challenge. You don’t want to see them get hurt, but may have to watch them carry on with her / his partner when you think they should leave them or have them arrested. As their friend, make sure you offer them something the abuser doesn’t. For example, if the abuser tells them what to do all the time, it’s no use you doing the same.

Supporting your friend or relative may prove frustrating: they may not take the course of action that you favour. You may find yourself wondering why they stay or how they put up with it. It is important, however, to remember three critical things:

♣ You are not the person who has to live with the consequences of any decision. They are. Therefore, it isn’t surprising that she/he makes decisions in her/his best interests (as she/he sees them), rather than doing what you may want them to do.

♣ Leaving is an extremely difficult decision to make, involving both emotional and practical considerations. Moreover, most victims are in the position of attempting to make this decision within the context of an abuser who begs them to stay and promises to change.

♣ Often leaving a violent partner only signifies the end of the relationship - not the end of the violence. Two women are killed every week by a current or former male 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 help to 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 all help your friend if you can get them across when talking about her situation.

- **Domestic abuse is totally unacceptable.** Every person has the right to live their life free of violence, abuse, intimidation and fear.

- **Domestic abuse is very common.** One woman in four experience domestic violence at some point in her life and one man in six.

- **Domestic abuse is very dangerous.** Each week in the UK, two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner.

- **Domestic abuse is about power and control.** Abusive, violent and sexually abusive behaviour is wide-ranging and subtle in what it tries to achieve.

- **Domestic abuse is intentional and instrumental behaviour.** It is about scaring a person into doing something that they don’t want to do, or scaring them out of doing something they don’t want to do.

- **The abuser is 100 per cent responsible for his abuse.** Alcohol, culture or unemployment are not excuses. The abuse is their problem and their responsibility.

- **It is not your fault.** Nobody deserves to be abused, regardless of what they say or do.

- **An abuser can change if they want to.** Their behaviour is within their control and they can choose to stop.

- **You cannot change them.** They themselves are the only person who can stop the violence and abuse.

- **You don’t have to put up with it.** Everyone has the right to safety and respect, to put themselves and their children first and to focus on their own needs.
You can increase your safety. If the abuser is intent on being violent, you will not be able to stop them. However, there are things you can do to increase your safety.

Above all, be patient. Your friend may need to talk about their situation numerous times. They may try to improve things or give their partner several ‘last’ chances. Remember that victims often leave and return several times. If this happens, remember that each time they will gain a little more clarity, and may - given enough ongoing support - eventually make the break final.

Helping to build your friend’s self-esteem can have great benefits. Remind them of their good points, challenge them if they puts themselves down or blames them self, praise them for every step they take, and let them know they have your support.

Contact the National Domestic Violence Help-line or visit [http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/domestic_violence/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/domestic_violence/index.shtml) for some ideas.

Practical help

On a practical level you could:

- Agree a code word or action that your friend can use to signal that they are in danger and cannot access help herself.

- Offer to keep copies of important documents and other items for them. That way, if they have to leave in a hurry, they don’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 are able (and feel comfortable) to give, such as the use of your telephone or address for information or messages, keeping spare sets 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 them. Most domestic abuse 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 them. You might be their only lifeline.

Do…

♥ **Approach them** about the abuse in a sensitive way, for example by saying, ‘I’m worried about you because…’

♥ **Believe** what they tell you: it will have taken a lot for them to talk to you and trust you

♥ **Take the abuse seriously.** Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally, and is very destructive to someone’s self-confidence. Their partner could be placing them in real physical danger.

♥ **Focus on safety:** talk to them about it and how they could protect themselves.

♥ **Help them to recognise the abuse** and understand how it may be affecting them. Recognise and support their strength and courage.

♥ **Help them to understand that the abuse is not their fault** and that no-one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do.

♥ **Listen to them** and help them to think about their relationship, whether they want to break up or stay, and how they can protect themselves from any more abuse.

♥ **Offer help to protect them but only if you are not putting your own safety at risk.** For example, you could offer to be around when the abuser is there, give them lifts home or take phone messages from the abuser.
Encourage them to talk to a counsellor, or talk to a counsellor yourself about what you could do to support her.

Encourage and help them to develop a safety plan. Agree with their concerns for their safety as well as that of the children. Offer your assistance in developing a plan that may even include you. Help them look ahead to a plan of action should the abuser become violent again. Suggest that they have an ‘escape bag’ somewhere which could include an extra set of car keys, ID documents, birth certificates, insurance cards, in case they need them.

Encourage him / her to break the isolation. One of the most effective ‘tools’ for abusers is the victim’s isolation from family, friends, co-workers or any type of support system. Help your friend find an agency offering counselling and support groups. Help them see how isolated she is.

Encourage her / him to take threats seriously. Express your concern for their safety and never minimise threats made by the abuser. Remember, however, that an a victim is in the most danger when they have decided to leave. Respect their judgement as to the right time to leave. Leaving such a situation is a process; the time must be right and safe.

Evaluate how she / he copes. Faced with violence and abuse, many victims develop ways of coping that are themselves destructive. Your friend will need support in re-evaluating these negative coping mechanisms, and considering how to adopt more constructive ways of coping. The last thing they will need is another reason to be hard on themselves, so real encouragement will be required.

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

Don’t…

- Blame the victim or ask judgemental questions such as, ‘What did you do to make them treat you like that?’ or ‘Why don’t you just break up with him / her?’

- Focus on trying to work out the abuser’s reasons for the abuse. Concentrate on supporting them and discussing what they can do to protect themselves.
• **Be impatient or critical of her / him** if they are confused about what to do, or if they say that they still loves him / her. 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. Your friend needs to be able to talk to someone who believes them, who will not pressure them to ‘see it from the other person’s point of view’, and who would never encourage them to get back together with the abuser. Placing yourself in the position of investigator or mediator is not going to help the situation.

**Questions you might ask**

- What can I do to help?
- How has his / her 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’s your worst-case scenario for yourself/your children?
- What are your worst fears for yourself/your children?
- What do you already do to protect yourself/your children? (A good chance to help them see how much they are already doing to stay safe)
Which of the things you do to protect yourself/your children work in practice, and which don’t?

What personal strengths do you have that help you to deal with this situation? (Explore how can these be increased, e.g. by raising her self-esteem, self-belief and ability to trust their gut instincts.)

What external resources are there to help you cope (support networks of friends and family, access to money, access to alternative accommodation and so on)? How can these be increased?

Can I help you find out about what other choices might be available?

Which options would be most realistic for you? What do you see yourself as actually being able to do? (Focus on those.)

**Specialist Organisations**

**Police:** 0161 856 5050 (main switchboard 24 hour)
Website: www.gmp.police.uk
In an emergency call 999
Non emergency 101

**Dias:** 01942 495230
Email: diasdvc@aol.com

**WAVE:** 01942 262290
Email: info@wavedvcentre.com
Website: www.wavedvcentre.com

**Victim Support & Witness Service:** 01942 489929
Email: info@victimsupport-wigan.co.uk
Website: www.victimsupport.org.uk

**Men’s Advice Line:** 0808 801 0327
Email: info@mensadvicecentre.org.uk
Website: www.mensadvicecentre.org.uk

**Broken Rainbow:** 0300 999 5428 (LGBT Helpline)
Email: help@brokenrainbow.org.uk
Website: www.brokenrainbow.org.uk