How To Help a Woman Who is Being Abused

Objectives

This Fearless Act Kit will help you:

- Know the definition of intimate partner violence
- Recognize the laws and programs that can help an abuse victim — and reach out to them
- Take steps toward safety from an abusive relationship
- Support someone (a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, a relative) who you think might be experiencing domestic violence

If you are being abused, or know someone who is, you are not alone: According to the Justice Department, at least 25 percent of U.S. women are battered by husbands, boyfriends, or other intimate partners at some point in their lives. Violence doesn't discriminate on the basis of age, race, economic class, or sexual orientation. And domestic violence is a crime in every state.

Women who want to leave abusive relationships face real fears for their safety, and often for the safety of their children. They risk financial hardship, encounter many new practical challenges, and often lack family and community support to help them. They must also undo the emotional ties that bind them to their abusers.

But leaving isn't impossible: At least 60 percent of abused women do it. These steps can help.

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Step 1: Examine Your Own Relationship

Does your partner put you down? Use intimidation or threats? Track your movements or act excessively jealous? Coerce sex? Shove, slap, or hit you?

Abuse is not just physical violence; it can be emotional or mental injury, too. Get help figuring out if your relationship is healthy: Check the National Domestic Violence Web site, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Web site, or call the National Domestic Violence hotline, at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

You have a right to live without fear or violence. Abuse is not your fault.

If you're passionate enough about the issue, chances are you'll motivate others, too.

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Step 2: Reach Out to Others Who May Be Abused

Many times, people don't reach out to someone who is being abused because they are afraid they won't say the "right thing" or they believe the myth that partner violence is a private matter.

Wrong! Violence affects everyone. That's why supportive acts to help a friend, relative, neighbor or coworker often are the best response. Don't pretend you are a professional if you are not or butt thoughtlessly into other people's business, but do learn to see when help is needed or when a law has been broken. Even a little bit of support and concern may save a life.

• If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, let her know you care. Ask questions about her situation. Give her time to talk. Gently ask again a few days later. Don't rush into providing solutions.
• Listen without judging. Your friend, sister, co-worker or neighbor may believe her abuser's negative messages about her. She may feel ashamed, inadequate or afraid you will judge her.
• Let her know that it's not her fault. Tell her that there's never an excuse for violence in a relationship.
• If she stays in the relationship, continue to be her friend while expressing concern for her safety. Remember, leaving an abusive relationship takes time.

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Step 3: Get Support

Break the silence. If you need help, turn to friends, family, women's and community groups, religious institutions, counseling centers, and domestic violence programs. Tell people you trust what is happening and talk about how they can help.

If you're helping a friend, encourage her to contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1 (800) 799-SAFE (7233), or 1 (800) 787-3224 (TTY), or a local domestic violence program. Encourage her to document the abuse. If she is planning to leave, remind her to take important papers. Remind her that domestic violence is a serious crime and that she can seek help from police and courts.

Step 4: Make a Safety Plan

Abuse victims can build themselves safer lives:

- Think about where you can go if violence begins. Avoid the kitchen (too many weapons) and rooms with no exits. An ideal room has a lock on the door, a window, and a telephone. Keep car keys or money for transportation ready.
- Ask neighbors to call police if they hear violence or if you give a prearranged signal.
- Weigh your legal options. If you report abuse to the police, criminal charges may be filed against the abuser. Another option is a civil order (often called a restraining or protection order) that directs the abuser to stay away from you. These orders also can evict a violent person from a shared home, grant child support or custody, and keep an abuser from having weapons. If you need to get a divorce (especially if custody and visitation are at issue), ask the local domestic violence program for the names of experienced lawyers.
- Document the abuse: Take photos of any injuries (a doctor or clinic can do this); keep a written log of incidents including names of witnesses; file a report with police. Keep the records in a safe place.
- Prepare to leave: Put some money in a secret place. Memorize hotline numbers. Plan a place to go. Assemble a bag with identification, money (checkbooks, credit cards), keys, medicine and important papers such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, immigration papers, and medical cards for you and your children. Keep the bag somewhere safe, like with a trusted friend.
- Give your children's school or day care the
names of those who have permission to pick them up.
• Teach your children how to get to safety, call 911, and not get in the middle of violence.
• Ask co-workers, supervisors, receptionists, and security staff at your workplace to help screen your calls and limit the abuser’s access to you. Give them copies of a recent picture of the abuser.

Step 5: Build a New Life

After a battered woman leaves her abuser, there’s still lots of work to do to recover. Here are some tips for the battered woman, whether it is you or your friend.

• If contact with the abuser is necessary, have it in a public place.
• If continuing to live in the same the house or apartment, change the locks and the telephone number, and vary routes to work or school.
• If there is a protection order against the abuser, make copies to keep: - At work - At the children’s school - With the battered woman - And with several friends and family members of the battered woman.
• Continue to seek out resources (books, support groups, etc.) that build strength. Get counseling to help overcome the effects of abuse.
• Take back your power: Take a self-defense class.

Next Steps and Resources

• Get referrals to shelters and programs across the United States -- or a safety plan that you can personalize, from the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 787-3224 (TTY)
• Get free "take action" kits, to help stop domestic violence, from the Family Violence Prevention Fund: 1-800-END-ABUSE.
• Get a free booklet, Every Home a Safe Home," including a quiz to identify abuse, models for equality-based relationships, and a safety plan, from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.
• See what you can do to protect your neighborhood against domestic violence
• Feel smarter? Check your domestic violence IQ on Thriveonline.
• Learn about the Silent Witness program, seeking to end domestic murders.
• Gain insight from Thriveonline’s relationship expert, Delilah.
• And see how strength in numbers can build a
powerful organization in a few short years. 
- More resources, from Moms Online.
- Read a Doghouse column to see how men’s ideas about relationships can be shaped — the wrong way.
- Connect to just about any organization — including many local groups — working on domestic violence.