

How to help someone who is living with Domestic Violence

1. Believe them. Be patient.

Becoming aware of domestic violence, either through observation or disclosure evokes a wide variety of responses. To help the person, you must believe their story and be patient. Too often we judge what we hear or have seen, presume we know what's best, and jump into rescue mode. While we intend to help, we can in fact do harm. Believing their story and asking how you can help are the starting points for a journey that will unfold over time.

Many people who are abused believe they are to blame or that there is something wrong with them. They will often go to great lengths to justify their abusive partner's behavior. Recognize that this is normal behavior; in fact, as counterintuitive as it may seem, it is a safety mechanism. This can be very frustrating when you see their situation differently.

Be patient and do not issue ultimatums. Remember, forcing them to act can put them in very real danger.



2. Tell them that they do NOT deserve the abuse.

They may feel isolated, trapped, confused, ashamed, sad or angry. They may feel like nothing they do is ever enough. Their abuser has blamed them for all of the conflict and abuse in the relationship. Tell them that they are not to blame and that you think they are a good person. Point out their strengths and capabilities and offer examples.

3. Get informed.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone and it takes many forms. It is complicated occurs on a continuum that may involve one or multiple tactics.

- A victim may or may not be physically abused, but the threat of violence is often present.
- They may be verbally assaulted and emotionally abused; financially controlled; sexually assaulted; or have their children's or pet's safety used against them.
- They may be coerced into activities that foster dependency on their abuser like cutting off relationships with friends and loved ones, having a baby, using substances or quitting their job.
- The common thread for most victims is that they fear their partner, many describe their life as "walking around on egg shells" or that they are "afraid of pushing their partner's buttons".

It's also important to know that domestic violence is not motivated by anger, but by power and control.

There are many excellent online and community resources you can reference to learn more. (Since information is constantly being updated, use search terms: domestic violence information, domestic violence resources, power & control wheel, to find the latest updates.)



4. Just listen.

Let them do most of the talking.

When you live with an abusive partner, the priorities in your life are dictated by your partner. Your needs are at best discounted and more often ignored; and you become conditioned to make choices that appease your partner. Many victims describe being voiceless and hopeless. Having an ally who listens to them, cares about what they say, treats them with respect and encourages them to express their own ideas, helps them to grow in confidence; an essential step toward independence. Remember, it is not your job to rescue them, but to empower them.

5. Take care of yourself too.

The journey through domestic violence is challenging for all involved. As a helper, it can be rewarding and incredibly frustrating.

First, and most important, remember to "put on your oxygen mask first" and maintain healthy boundaries. Next, be clear and transparent about what you can and cannot do. And finally, be mindful of your own safety. Domestic violence perpetrators are unpredictable and while their violence is typically isolated to their victims, they may lash out.

6. Ways to help.

Confidentiality & safety first

Ask what they need and how you can help.

Be discreet.

Check in privately (in person)

Do not use text or email as they may be monitored.

Knowledge is power

Bookmark articles on your phone or computer to share with them the next time you meet.

Keep your own journal

Document things you witness or hear with dates & details. This could help them in court.

Help them create a safety plan

- **Identify people they know and how they can help, then make a plan to ask:**

Friends, family, employer, physician or children's school, others.

- **Keep copies of important documents**

Social security cards, birth certificates, drivers license, passports, insurance info, bank account numbers, cash, order of protection, custody agreement, other.

- **Think about their financial needs**

Suggest they open a credit card in their name only, or open a checking account in different bank.

- **Give them a break!**

Offer them something fun to do. The moments free from chaos will help them to relax, see that they matter to you, and help to restore balance.

Connect them to resources (see back)

Encourage them to contact local resources -- there is no cost or obligation. Let them call from your phone or research them from your computer.

Resources

RESOLVE

Breaking the cycle of domestic violence

Counselors available Monday-Thursday

9AM – 5PM

585.425.1580

www.resolve-roc.org



Additional Resources

Willow Domestic Violence Center

24/7 Hotline

585.232.7353

NYS Domestic Violence Hotline

800.942.6906

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