



How to Help a Friend in an Abusive Relationship

Teen Voice

Point out the Different Types of Abuse.

Help your friend recognize that abuse is more than getting hit or slapped. Abuse can be emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual. Abuse gets worse over time and won't stop on its own.

Express Your Concerns.

Tell your friend you are glad she confided in you. You can never say the following things too much: I'm worried about you; It's not your fault; I'm glad you told me about what you're going through; you deserve better; or I'm here for you.

Be Accepting.

Try to understand that there are both good and bad times in your friend's relationship. Don't become upset if she is not ready to break off the relationship and keeps returning to the abusive partner. Let her know you are there for her and will support her in whatever decision she makes.

Support Your Friend's Strengths.

Point out your friend's strengths. Remember, abusive partners often put down, make fun of or ridicule their partner. Encourage your friend to take time for herself and spend time with people who support her.

Reach Out to Someone Older for Help.

Encourage your friend to find someone to talk to about the abuse, such a domestic violence counselor, school counselor, teacher, clergy member or relative. Offer to go with your friend or to make the first call for them.

Work on a Safety Plan.

Help your friend think of ways to increase her safety. The physical abuse may increase if your friend takes steps to end the relationship because the abuser may feel he is losing control. Talk to your friend about what she thinks the abuser might do.

Be There. Listen. Stay There.

Keep supporting your friend. Avoid blaming her and make sure she knows you are standing beside her. If your friend is ready to end the relationship, continue to be supportive and try to get her involved in activities. It takes time to get over any relationship- even one that is violent.

If your friend is the abuser:

- Tell your friend that it is never acceptable to hurt someone, physically, emotionally, or sexually.
- Give examples of kinds of controlling and abusive behaviors that you observed.
- Don't let the conversation turn to a discussion of her faults. No matter what she's done, she doesn't deserve to be hurt, intimidated, or abused.
- Tell the person that he has to take responsibility for his behavior. Abuse is a choice and he can make the choice to change. Acknowledge that change is difficult, but that you will support him.
- Tell him that hurting his partner is a crime and that you want to see him get help before he gets involved with the authorities.
- If you witness an incident of dating violence, call 911 or the local police.



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This handout is gender specific because that is the reality of dating violence. According to the Department of Justice, 85% of dating and domestic violence survivors are women (2000). Safe House provides services to all survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault regardless of gender or sexual orientation.