

Family Violence: Recognizing & Helping



I am concerned about someone I know

- 1) Look at the list of abusive behaviours in “Family Violence: Building a Definition”. Have you observed these behaviours over a time? If so, it may be an abusive relationship.
- 2) Consider if there have been changes in the person’s behaviour.
 - Has the person stopped coming to events they used to attend regularly?
 - Are they withdrawing from friends and family?
 - Do you notice changes in their personality? (For example, do they often seem sad or angry when they used to be cheerful? Do they seem tired when they used to have energy?)
 - Has there been a change in their medical needs or a change in their behaviour?
 - Do they have any bruises or other physical injuries that do not match up with the story they tell you about how they got them?
- 3) The following are all clues that they might be dealing with abuse. These are changes in behaviour that you may have noticed in someone you know.
 - Signs of injury like bruises, sores, and broken bones that are not explained or not clearly explained
 - Depression, withdrawal
 - Anxiety, fear
 - Not willing to make even simple decisions without her partner
 - Limited access to money
 - Very little time spent with friends and family outside the relationship
 - Drug or alcohol abuse to blot out the pain

Know that it is your business. Preventing abuse is everybody’s business in a safe and caring community.

Know that there is something you can do. An act of support and positive encouragement can make a big difference to someone who is being abused. You can contact one of several community or government resources for advice or ideas on how best to help. Information listed at the end of this document will give you a starting point.

Know that it isn’t hopeless to get involved. People who are abused tend to develop low self-esteem and lose their self-confidence. It may take time for them to find their way out of the relationship. They must overcome their fears, plan for their safety, and take steps toward independence. Your positive support and encouragement can help. Bear in mind that victims are often diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This affects their ability to make decisions and take action.

Finding the right words

Use caution and assess the situation. For example, if you are approaching the person at work, be aware that this is their professional environment. You must be aware of the relationship you have with the person and recognize that they may not be ready to discuss this.

There is no perfect way to bring up the subject of abuse. Telling them you care about their safety and the safety of the children can be a powerful way to start. Make family violence material available to them.

Because people who use abusive behaviours employ isolation as a tactic to control, the person suffering abuse may think no one knows what they are going through. Letting a victim know your concerns may be a welcome surprise.

Ask permission to share what you know about abuse, and be sure to let them know you will help in any safe way you can.



Because this is someone you know and care about, just let them know that you care and the door may be open to begin talking about the abuse.

If someone tells you they are in an abusive relationship

1. Let them know you believe them. Listen to what they are saying.
2. Tell them they don't deserve to be hurt. Tell them the abuse is not their fault. They do not deserve to be abused. Nobody does.
3. Privately express your concern and ask, "How can I help?" Encourage them to talk to someone who can help them identify the risks and develop safety plans.
4. Honour their feelings and experiences. They may need to talk about the good stuff as well as the bad stuff in their relationship.
5. Find out what they want to do and support that. They may be confused—abuse will do that to a person. They may decide something and then change their mind. That is okay.
6. Accept that they may want to stay in the relationship or try again to make it work. Don't criticize. Just remind them that you are there, no matter what they decide.
7. Be prepared for many different feelings or reactions. The person may feel guilty or embarrassed for telling you—or even angry that you know. Don't take any reactions personally. Keep reminding them that you are there for them, that you accept them exactly as they are, and that you will back them in their choices.

What not to do

1. Do not make judgments or give advice. You don't know what the individual's experience is like. You don't know what is right for them, even if you have been in a similar situation. Listen and accept them no matter what.
2. Do not criticize their partner. Abusive partners may not be bad all the time. If you criticize the person's partner, they may feel forced to defend them or feel that you think they are stupid for being involved with them.
3. Do not ask unnecessary questions. A person who feels uncomfortable discussing the abuse may shut down if you ask them questions. To them, any question may feel like prying. Open the door for them to talk and just listen.
4. Do not over-react. If you express shock or horror, they may stop talking.
5. Do not confront their partner. Confronting them about the abuse could make a bad situation worse.

Child Abuse & Non-reporting

The failure to recognize child abuse, and in some cases the failure to acknowledge its reality, leads to non-reporting. Another factor is that people often don't want to get involved. The nature of the problem, its secrecy and shame, the legal sanctions which it can entail, and the young age and relative dependency of its victims all serve to reduce voluntary reporting.

Children generally want to talk about their abuse so it can be stopped, but they are often afraid that they will not be believed or protected, or are fearful of the possible consequences of disclosure.

U.S. research by Morris and associates discovered that the more a physician accepted the use of physical discipline, the less likely they were to report physical abuse cases; however, disapproval of physical disciplinary methods did not automatically lead the physician to consider the act abusive and worthy of report. The overall threshold of discipline severity seemed high among physicians in the study, but the data also suggested that younger physicians tended to have a lower threshold.