

What can I do to help someone who is being abused?

If you know someone is experiencing domestic abuse/violence, there are things you can do to help.

Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline
0808 808 2241

**SHEFFIELD DOMESTIC ABUSE
CO-ORDINATION TEAM**



Family, friends and neighbours often believe they should stay 'neutral' in a domestic abuse situation but sometimes the abused person can see this as an indication that people believe they are to blame for the abuse. The abuser can see it as evidence that their actions are acceptable.

Here are some pointers on how you can help someone who is being abused:

- Don't wait for the abused person to speak out about their situation, or wait to witness the abuse first hand; bring the subject up yourself when the abusive partner isn't around
- Approach them about the abuse in a sensitive way, for example by saying, "I'm worried about you (and the children where applicable) because..."
- Let them know you are concerned about them and want to help
- Show them you believe what they are telling you
- Take the abuse seriously and don't try to find an explanation for the abuser's behaviour. Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally, and is very destructive to someone's self-confidence
- The importance of helping to break the silence and end the isolation should never be underestimated. Listen to what they say and let them show you how you can be supportive
- Try not to criticise their partner or the relationship, instead, focus on the abuse and their safety (and the safety of any children)

- You need to support the abused person in whatever decision they are currently making about their relationship, while being clear that the abuse is wrong (and will be having an impact on their children, if they have them).
- DO NOT approach the abuser as this may increase the risk of abuse.

How can I help if they won't recognise their abusive relationship?

Supporting someone is a challenge especially if they do not recognise that they are in an abusive relationship. You don't want to see them get hurt, but may have to watch them carry on with their partner when you think they should leave them. However, it is important to remember three vital things:

- You are not the person who has to live with the consequences of any decision. They make decisions that they feel are in their best interests.
- Leaving is an extremely difficult decision to make, involving both emotional and practical considerations. Most abused people are in the position of making this decision when the abuser is promising to change and begging them to stay.
- Often, leaving a violent partner only signifies the end of the relationship - not the end of the violence.

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

On a practical level you could:

- Agree a code word or action that they can use to signal that they are in danger and cannot access help.
- Together or on your own, find out information about local services and help.

See www.sheffielddact.org.uk for details of services in Sheffield or ring the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 808 2241

- Encourage them to talk to a support agency, or talk to them about what you can do to support them
- Encourage and help 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 by looking ahead to a plan of action should the abuser become violent again. Suggest preparing an escape bag somewhere which could include an extra set of car keys, ID documents, birth certificates, insurance cards, in case they are needed.
- Help them think through how their children might cope in an emergency, what to advise them to do

Remember

- **DO NOT** ask the abused person judgmental questions that suggest blame such as, “what did you do to make them treat you like that?” or “why don’t you just break up with him/her?”
- **DO NOT** focus on trying to work out the abuser’s reasons for the abuse. Concentrate on supporting the abused person and discussing what he/she can do to protect themselves.

- **DO NOT** be impatient or critical of him/her, if they are confused about what to do, or if they say that they still love their partner. It's difficult for anyone to break up a relationship, and especially hard if they are being abused.

Suggestions of questions to 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 stay or leave?
- 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?
- 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?

**Most importantly, don't give up on them.
You might be their only lifeline.**

What if I am really worried that someone will get hurt?

If you are concerned that someone you know may be at risk of serious harm, don't be a bystander. Domestic or sexual abuse can lead to serious injury or death. The risk could be to children as well as adults.

Phone 999 if you are worried about a neighbour or friend **and you think they are at risk of immediate harm** (i.e. you think a crime is happening at that moment that requires an immediate Police response).

Phone 101 if you want to report concerns to the Police but you do not think they need immediate help (i.e. to report a crime that has happened and the risk has passed or to gain advice).

Or you can call **Crimestoppers** and give information anonymously at **0800 555 111** or at www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Or you can call the **Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline** on **0808 808 2241** to talk to someone about your concerns and get advice as to the way forward.

Employers – what can you do?

Domestic abuse/violence affects the productivity of employees. It increases stress, employee absenteeism and turnover. Sometimes it results in workplace violence that threatens the safety of all employees.

Therefore, developing a workplace response makes good business sense because it reduces abuse-related costs and enhances employee well-being and productivity.

People suffering domestic abuse can feel embarrassed and ashamed. This can inhibit them from speaking to their employers when it is affecting their work performance.

Organisations can help and support by:

- Listening to their employee in a non-judgemental way
- Have a work place policy and procedure on domestic abuse/violence
- Display domestic abuse/violence literature in relevant places
- Ensure that they are kept safe in the work place from the abuser
- Be understanding when they need time off work due to injuries or appointments
- Ask them what you can do to help
- Train relevant personnel on domestic abuse. Identify ways to risk assess and manage.



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