

Guide to supporting people who are being abused



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

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

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:

- Approach them about the abuse in a sensitive way, for example by saying, "I'm worried about you 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 know how you can be supportive
- Try not to criticise their partner or the relationship, instead, focus on the abuse and their safety
- 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

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 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:

- Advise of local services that they may want to access and support with a referral i.e. Outreach Service, Drug & Alcohol services, Legal Services.
- Offer to refer them for extra security for their home.
- Encourage and help to develop a safety plan (see below). Agree with their concerns for their safety as well as that of the children. 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.

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?

Domestic or sexual abuse can lead to serious injury or death. The risk could be to children as well as adults.

- **Complete a DASH Risk Assessment** – This will determine what risk level the person is at. If the risk level is high refer to IDVAS and MARAC (you don’t need their consent to do this).
- Advise them to **Phone 999** if they need immediate help.
- **Advise to Phone 101** if they want to report concerns to the police.

PLANNING FOR YOUR SAFETY

Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline – **0808 808 2241**

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – **0808 2000 247**

Police: Emergency – **999** Non-emergency – **101**

WHEN STILL IN A RELATIONSHIP:

- ✓ If the abuse is cyclical or ongoing, there will be another incident. Plan in advance how you will respond next time, including crisis situations.
- ✓ Keep any important / emergency phone numbers handy (police, DA service, GP, social worker, schools, etc.)
- ✓ Call 999 in an emergency. Keep your mobile on you and fully charged.
- ✓ Do you know where the nearest payphone is?
- ✓ Are there neighbours you could go to in an emergency? Ask them to call the police if they hear you in trouble
- ✓ Rehearse an escape plan that enables you and the children can get away as quickly as possible
- ✓ Pack an emergency bag and store this somewhere safe (e.g. a neighbour's or friend's house, in your car)
- ✓ Keep some money on you - including change for the phone and bus fares
- ✓ If your abuser is about to attack you, try to avoid high risk areas of the home like the kitchen, garage or bathroom (access to weapons etc.)

LEAVING A RELATIONSHIP:

There may come a time when the only option is to leave. If you decide to leave, plan carefully as this can be a particularly dangerous time.

- ✓ Plan to leave at a time when your abuser will not be around. Take everything you need with you, including important documents. You may not be able to return later
- ✓ Take children with you as it may be hard to get them back later. If they are at school, make sure the teachers know about the situation, and who will be collecting your children
- ✓ If possible set aside some money each week in a separate bank account
- ✓ You can apply for Domestic Abuse re-housing priority through the council
- ✓ Many solicitors can offer you a free half-hour of initial advice and legal aid can be available for things like Injunctions
- ✓ Don't be overwhelmed. Get help to plan leaving from a Support Worker

WHAT TO PACK:

- ✓ Forms of ID: birth certificates, passports, visas & work permits
- ✓ Money, bankbooks, cheque book, credit / debit cards
- ✓ Keys for house, car & place of work. (get an extra set cut)
- ✓ Details for any benefits you claim
- ✓ Driving licence & car registration
- ✓ Prescribed medication
- ✓ Copies of documents relating to your mortgage or tenancy
- ✓ Address book, diary, photographs, jewellery, small sentimental items
- ✓ Clothing, toiletries & toys for you and children
- ✓ Documents relating to abuse (police reports, injunctions etc.)

AFTER YOU HAVE LEFT:

- ✓ Avoid places that you went together and mutual acquaintances
- ✓ Alter your routines / routes to places as much as you can
- ✓ Try to change appointments your abuser may know about
- ✓ Tell the children's school, nursery or child-minder what has happened, and make sure they do not let anyone else pick up the children. Talk to a solicitor about a Prohibited Steps order to protect your children
- ✓ Tell your employer if you think your partner will contact you at work
- ✓ Make sure your mobile phone cannot be tracked
- ✓ Change your phone number / block abuser's number
- ✓ If you need to contact your abuser (or anyone who he knows), withhold your telephone number or use a second mobile only for this purpose
- ✓ Talk to your children about keeping your new address / location secret
- ✓ Ensure your electoral registration is anonymous
- ✓ If you stay or return to your home, then you may need an occupation order or injunction. Many solicitors offer a free half-hour of advice and sometimes legal aid available for protection against domestic abuse
- ✓ Call the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline or attend Sheffield Council (Howden House) if you need emergency housing or a refuge
- ✓ Change door locks and secure windows
- ✓ Install smoke alarms and get a fire safety check from the fire brigade
- ✓ Install an outside security light (back and front)
- ✓ Inform neighbours & ask them to tell you if they see your abuser
- ✓ Use an answering machine to screen calls
- ✓ Keep a detailed diary of all abuse & incident numbers
- ✓ Report all incidents of abuse & unwanted contact to the police