

What to do & say if someone tells you they are being abused?

If someone confides in you that they are living in an abusive relationship, it's natural to feel shocked, even if you suspected they were in an unhealthy relationship.

So what do you say and what do you do if someone you know tells you they are experiencing domestic violence? Here's our guide.



Step 1

After telling the person you are genuinely sorry to hear they are being abused, ask these important questions in any order that feels right:

1. Are you safe at the moment?
2. Do you need me to call the police or an ambulance?
3. Would you like me to come and get you?
4. Would you like to chat? I can come to you or we can meet somewhere quiet.
5. How can I help you?
6. Is there anyone you would like me to contact? OR Would it be ok if I contacted XYZ because I think they could help you/us work through this.



Step 2

Reassure the person that's confided in you.

It takes lots of courage to tell someone you are living in an abusive relationship. So again, tell them you are very sorry they are being abused. Then reassure them by saying things like:

- None of this is your fault.
- You deserve better (and please refer to our [Conversations of Hope, Video 3 - Do I stay or do I go?](#))
- I'm here for you. Let's talk about what you want to do next or who you could go to for expert help.
- Are you ready to leave the relationship or do we need to work together to create an escape plan for you? (Please see our [Escape Guide](#) for help. It can be downloaded without revealing any contact details.)
- Would you like to contact a counsellor or domestic violence support service for expert advice?

Don't forget to thank them for trusting you with this personal information.



Step 3

Always give them control of what happens next.

When you live in an abusive relationship, your abuser takes away your power to control your own life. That's why it's important to ensure you always give people experiencing domestic violence the power to make their own decisions – regardless of whether you agree with them or not.

It can be hard because if you care about the victim, all you want to do is solve their problems and keep them safe. But if you take over their life, even with the best of intentions, you are also taking away their ability to make decisions and determine their own future – just like their abuser.

There are some things you should never say or do

It takes courage to reach out for help and telling others about the abuse may place the person in danger. With that in mind, never say or do the following:

- ✗ **Never** say things like, “I told you so” or “I knew they were no good”. Being right isn't important. Your priority should be helping the person who has confided in you.
- ✗ **Never** tell them what to do unless they ask you for your opinion.
- ✗ **Never** contact the abuser to tell them you know about the abuse. This will usually escalate the danger for the person who has reached out to you.
- ✗ **Never** lose your patience if the person remains in the abusive relationship. Of course they should leave as soon as they can but it needs to be their choice.

Final words

- While it may be frustrating, the worst thing you can do is turn your back on anyone in an abusive relationship. It only increases their abuser's power and isolates the victim further. So always keep conversations open by saying you are there if they need you.
- If you hear or see abuse occurring and you feel it's safe to do so, try to neutralise the situation by interrupting the abuser and asking a random question like:
 - Can I borrow ...
 - Do you know the directions to ...
 - Have you seen my lost pet ...
- These sound like bazaar questions to ask while abuse is happening but that's the point. These types of questions can completely derail the abuser. If you don't think it's safe to intervene, call the police.
- If you see or overhear abuse, note down:
 - What you saw or heard
 - When it happened (date & time)

This can be used as evidence should the victim of domestic violence choose to go to the police.

For more advice

Please look around the Escape to Better Foundation [Resources Page](#) or contact your local domestic violence support services. If you found this guide useful, please support us by [Donating here](#). We are a privately funded, registered charity helping people plan and implement a sustainable escape **before** they are in crisis.

DISCLAIMER: This advice is provided in good faith and as a guide only. We recommend you seek professional advice, tailored to your specific situation. Your local domestic violence support services or trained and qualified counsellors are often great resources for assistance.

In addition, your employer or your abusive partner's employer may offer an Employee Assistance Program (often called EAP). They provide free and highly confidential outsourced counselling services so you don't need to worry that your manager will learn about your situation or your abuser will discover your plans.

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