

Suggestions for Friends and Family Members of People Experiencing Domestic Violence

As friends and family members, it can be difficult to know what to do when someone you care about is experiencing domestic violence. Here's a list of some guidelines to assist you in addressing the violence with the friend or family member and helping them seek the help that is available. Although we will use the term victim/survivor and batterer throughout this handout, please be aware that she may not see herself as a victim/survivor or view her partner as a batterer.

- **Ask questions.** If you suspect domestic violence is occurring, ask how the relationship is going. Ask about disagreements and tension that you observe in the relationship. You can ask specific questions like, "Has he ever pushed or shoved you?" or "Has he ever called you or your children names?"
- **Be aware of the effects of domestic violence.** Domestic violence has serious and dangerous physical and emotional effects on everyone living in the household, including the children. Educate yourself on the effects of domestic violence so that you can share them with the victim/survivor in a non-judgmental way that lets her know that you are concerned. Information can be a powerful tool in helping her recognize and mobilize herself against future violence.
- **Trust her knowledge.** Victim/survivors are the "experts" on their relationships and are typically aware of the patterns of violence that occur in the relationship and the batterer's behavior, so trust her to gauge when she is safest. Respect her choices about when she can or cannot take certain steps.
- **Give her positive feedback.** Physically abusive relationships are also emotionally abusive, and all types of abuse lower the victim/survivor's self esteem. Some victims stay in the relationship because they believe that they are to blame for the abuse or do not see the possibility of a nonviolent relationship. She may also have fears of making it on her own. Remind her of her strengths and abilities and her importance to you.
- **Recognize her efforts.** Realize that the victim/survivor is doing something every day to try to improve her situation. Victim/survivors try many things to stop the violence in their lives. These may include talking with the abuser, calling the police, or contacting a mental health professional or clergy member. Recognize that although you might like to see her make different choices, she is trying to improve her situation. Change often occurs in small steps that eventually lead to large gains.
- **Do not criticize the batterer.** Saying critical things about the batterer also implies criticism of the victim/survivor as she may have chosen the batterer as her partner. Also, one of the ways that many abusers isolate their victims is by telling her that her friends and family don't like him and want to break up the relationship. Criticisms of the abuser may convince her that he is telling the truth about this. Keep in mind that she may also see his positive qualities and continue to love him, despite the abuse. Criticizing the abuser can cause distance in your relationship making her less likely to come to you for support.
- **Don't make choices for her.** One aspect of abusive relationships is that the

batterer limits the victim's ability to make choices. Try not to repeat this behavior by giving her ultimatums or orders. Issuing ultimatums or orders may lessen her ability to confide in you and get your support.

- **Learn about community resources.** You may want to help yourself by contacting a local shelter or domestic violence program to educate yourself about domestic violence and learn more about community resources. Expand your own support system so that you can share your feelings and frustrations with others.
- **Be patient and know your limits.** A victim/survivor may try to leave several times before she makes a final break, and this process can take years. While it can be difficult to maintain your patience with her, remember that leaving is a process that takes time. Develop personal boundaries for yourself so that you can be supportive, but not overwhelmed by a victim/survivor's needs. Make sure to take time for yourself to engage in self-care and get support.
- **Encourage her to start a log or journal.** This may help the victim/survivor to realize the frequency, severity, and duration of the abuse she has experienced and can be a helpful source of information later. You may also want to keep a log that can include information about the violent events or others who saw or heard the event, pictures, and information about injuries to the victim or property.
- **Encourage the victim/survivor to develop a safety plan.** Safety plans can help the victim/survivor to make important plans and decisions about her safety. Safety plans may include the "what" and "how" a victim/survivor will respond if violence is imminent. Safety planning is an ongoing process that changes and evolves as she makes difficult decisions about the relationship. Contact your local shelter to learn more specific information about safety planning. Local shelter numbers can be accessed by calling ODVN at 800-934-9840.
- **Call the police.** If you witness or hear a violent episode, **DO NOT** try to intervene physically as this may result in injuries to you or others. Call 911 immediately. When the police arrive, cooperate, ask to fill out a statement, and prepare yourself to testify in court. Often the victim/survivor cannot cooperate with the police or follow through to take necessary legal steps due to her fear of the abuser.