

10 Ways to Help a Friend or Family Member Who is Being Abused

Helping someone who is being abused isn't always easy.

- 1. Take a Deep Breath.** Before you say anything to your friend/family member, take time to think about your relationship with the person and what this person means to you. The type of relationship that you share will affect your approach. Monitor your own emotions: You're in the best position to help someone else when you're open-minded and patient.
- 2. Don't be afraid to tell them you are concerned for their safety.** Help them recognize the abuse. Tell them you see what is going on and you want to help. Help them see that what is happening is not "normal" and that they deserve a healthy, non-violent relationship.
- 3. Acknowledge that they are in a very difficult and scary situation.** Encourage them with strength and courage. Let them know that it is not their fault that they are being abused – the abuser, not the victim, is responsible for the abuse. Let them know they are not alone.
- 4. Be supportive.** Listen to them. Remember, it may be difficult for them to talk about the abuse. Let them know you can help out whenever they need it. What they need most is someone who will listen to them and believe them, and who can help them sort out their options.
- 5. Be non-judgmental.** Respect their decisions. There are complex reasons why victims stay in abusive relationships. They may break up with and go back to the abuser many times. Don't criticize them for doing that. They will need your support even more at those times. Don't make them feel bad for their choices – even if you think the choices are wrong.
- 6. Encourage them to do things with you and other friends and family and to take part in other activities outside of their relationship.**
- 7. If they break up with the abuser, continue to be supportive of them after the break-up.** Though the relationship was abusive, they will probably feel sad and lonely when it is over. They may be tempted to get back together with the abuser, and will especially need your support at that time.
- 8. Help them develop a safety plan.** Safety Planning helps victims think ahead about how to protect themselves. A safety plan is developed before a dangerous situation arises rather than at the last minute. A safety plan identifies dangers to avoid and resources for help.
- 9. Encourage them to talk to people who can give help and guidance.** Offer to go with them to find a counselor or support group, or to talk to their family, friends or teachers. If they are going to the police, to court, or to see a lawyer, offer to go along, but make sure to let them do the talking.
- 10. Remember you cannot "rescue" them.** Although it's difficult to see someone you care about get hurt, ultimately the victim must make the final decision. You should be there to support them and help them find their own way to escape the abuse and make themselves safe.