

What to Say When You Think Someone is Being Abused

If you suspect a friend or family member is in an abusive relationship, talking with them about it can be hard. The most important thing you can do is to let them know that they have support and options to leave the relationship.

It's important to remember that you can't "rescue" your friend from an abusive relationship. Although it is hard to see someone you care about get hurt, ultimately the person being hurt needs to be the one who decides to do something about it. It's important to support and help her find a way to safety.

Here are some easy ways to help start the conversation:

Offer support without judgment or criticism.

There are many reasons why a victim may stay in abusive relationships. And, many reasons why she* may leave and return to the relationship many times. Let her know it's not her fault and that she's not alone. Respect her decisions, even when you don't agree. Do not criticize or guilt her—she needs you to be helpful, not hurtful.

- "It's not your fault he treats you that way."
- "I know this is difficult to discuss, but please know you can talk to me about anything."
- "You are not alone. I care about you and am here for you, no matter what."
- "You are not responsible for his behavior."
- "No matter what you did, you do not deserve this."

Don't be afraid to tell her that you're concerned for her safety.

Help your friend or family member recognize the abuse while acknowledging that she is in a very difficult and dangerous situation.

- "I see what is going on with you and _____ and I want to help."
- "You don't deserve to be treated that way. Good husbands and partners don't say or do those kinds of things."
- "The way he treats you is wrong. Men should never hit or threaten the women they love."
- "I'm worried about your safety and am afraid he'll really hurt you next time."
- "Promise me that if you need to talk, you'll come to me."

Avoid confrontations.

There are many reasons why individuals experiencing abuse don't reach out to family and friends. It's important to recognize if she is ready to talk about her experiences while offering support.

- "I'm here to help and am always available, even if you don't want to talk about it."

- “Remember, you’re not alone – I am here for you when you’re ready to talk about it.”

Ask how you can be helpful.

Don’t try to make any decisions for your friend because it implies that you think she’s incapable of making good choices for herself and it may deter her from confiding in you in the future. Instead, focus on offering support and encouragement.

- “I want to help. What can I do to support you?”
- “How can I help protect your safety?”

Encourage her to get help.

Suggest ways she can get additional support. Help her look into available resources. RAVE has specially-trained advocates to help her out of the situation.

- “Here is the number to our local domestic violence agency. They can help provide shelter, counseling or support groups.”
 - “They also offer services to help you understand the legal system, access community resources, relocate or get support for your children.”
- “Let’s develop a safety plan.”
- “If you need to go to the police [or court or a lawyer], I can go with you to offer support.”