

Understand Abuse

You may be trying to decide if your friend or family member is in an abusive relationship. Although every situation is different, this pamphlet will help you recognize signs that might indicate your friend is in an abusive relationship. It will also give you suggestions on how you can help.

Abuse is never the victim's fault. Abuse is a pattern of physically and emotionally violent and coercive (intimidating) behaviors that one person uses to exercise power and control over another. Abusers may use verbal insults, emotional abuse, financial control, threats and/or sexual and physical violence as a way to dominate their partners and get their way.

Here are some examples of abuse:

- **Verbal:** Name calling, threats to hurt or kill or put-downs
- **Emotional:** Isolation from others, ridicule, criticism, blame, abuse of pets, accusations of affairs, making account for time, criticism of friends and family or challenging authority with children
- **Financial or Resource:** Controlling money or bank accounts, withholding child support, destroying property, taking keys or purse, running up debts or ruining credit
- **Sexual:** Constant sexual demands, forcing unwanted sexual acts, forcing family members to see pornographic materials or wanting sex after abuse
- **Physical:** Pushing, kicking, biting, locking in or out of house, slapping, choking, throwing or hitting with objects, threatening to use or using a knife or gun

For more information about safety planning, community resources or domestic violence programs and services in your area contact:

To find your nearest domestic violence program:

Ohio Domestic Violence Network:

- 800-934-9840 (TTY/V) or 614-781-9651 (TTY/V)
- www.odvn.org

For information about free legal assistance:

Ohio Legal Services:

- 866-lawohio (866-529-6446)
- www.ohiolegalservices.org



The comprehensive resource on domestic violence

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) is a statewide coalition of domestic violence programs, supportive agencies and concerned individuals working together to stop domestic violence through education, information and training for those who are affected by domestic violence, and by promoting social and systems change.

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HELPING A VICTIM
OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A Guide for Family and Friends



Recognize the Signs of Abuse

Her husband or boyfriend acts very controlling and puts her down in front of other people.

Her partner violently loses his temper, striking or breaking objects.

He acts extremely jealous of others who pay attention to her, especially men.

She becomes quiet when he is around and seems afraid of making him angry.

She stops seeing her friends and family members, becoming more and more isolated.

She often has unexplained injuries or the explanations she offers do not quite add up. (Sometimes you will not see any bruises, as abusers target their blows to areas that can be covered with clothing.)

She casually mentions his violent behavior but says it is “not a big deal.”

She often cancels plans at the last minute.

Her partner controls her finances, her behavior and even who she socializes with.

Her child acts out, is frequently upset or is very quiet and withdrawn.

Trust your desire to help.

Domestic violence almost never stops on its own.

What You Can Do

When someone you care about is a victim of abuse, it is hard for friends and family members to know what to do. Here are some ideas you can use to help your friend talk about the abuse and get the help that is available. Remember your friend may not see herself as a victim or her partner as an abuser. Try to avoid those words when talking to her.

- **Ask specific questions.** Ask “Has he ever pushed or shoved you?” or “Has he ever called you or your children names?”
- **Learn the effects of domestic violence.** Share them with the victim in a non-judgmental way that lets her know you are concerned.
- **Do not criticize the abuser.** Criticizing her partner can cause distance in your relationship, making her less likely to come to you for support.
- **Listen without judging.** Tell your friend that you care and are willing to listen. If she is willing to talk, listen carefully and talk in a safe place. Believe her!
- **Trust her knowledge.** Victims are the “experts” on their relationships and know the patterns of violence in the abuser’s behavior, so trust your friend to judge when she is safest.
- **Give her positive feedback.** All types of abuse lower the victim’s self-esteem. Remind your friend of her strengths and abilities and her importance to you.
- **Do not make choices for her.** Abusers often limit the victim’s ability to make choices. Try not to repeat this behavior by giving her ultimatums and orders.
- **Learn about community resources.** Contact a local domestic violence program to educate yourself about domestic violence and learn more about community resources.
- **Encourage her to start a log or journal.** This should include details about the frequency, severity and duration of the abuse she has experienced.
- **Encourage her to develop a safety plan.** Contact your local domestic violence shelter to learn more information about safety planning.
- **Call the police.** Contact police immediately if you witness or hear a violent episode. DO NOT try to intervene.

Understand Why She Stays

There are many reasons a woman decides to return to or stay in an abusive relationship. In many cases, the victim fears for her life. She may want the violence to end, not the relationship. She may want her children to grow up with both parents. She may be so damaged by the abuse that she thinks the situation is her fault, or that she can not make it on her own. Whatever the reason for her decision, here is how you can help:

- Help her find resources, provide emotional support and build her self-esteem.
- Encourage her to speak with an advocate to develop a safety plan for herself and her children.
- Encourage her to keep a log, including evidence of threats sent in letters, email, or left on voicemail or answering machines. Suggest that she keep the log in a safe place.
- Suggest that she tell her doctor or nurse about the violence and ask to have the abuse recorded in her medical records with photographs of injuries, or offer to take photos yourself. Suggest that she store the photos in a safe place, along with a written description of what happened. These records will be helpful for her if she decides to take legal action.

***Be patient and know your limits.** A victim may try to leave several times before she makes a final break, which may take years. Establish boundaries so that you can be supportive, but not overwhelmed by the victim’s needs.*

How to Help When She Leaves

If she decides to leave her relationship, she may need money, help finding a place to live, a place to store her belongings or transportation to a battered women’s program. Decide if you feel comfortable helping her in these ways.

The most important thing you can do is help her develop a safety strategy in advance, which includes setting aside money and important documents in a safe place and making a plan to escape from the violence. Contact a local domestic violence program to learn more about safety planning.