

# Supporting a person who is being abused?

A guide for families, neighbours, friends and workmates

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Domestic and family violence – both terms are commonly used - is a **pattern of abusive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship that over time puts one person in a position of power over another, and causes fear.**

There are many forms of family violence including physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Family violence can occur in many different kinds of intimate relationships. For example, from one partner towards another or from an adolescent towards a parent. There are other types of violence that can occur in families and relationships. These types of violence are harmful to individuals and to family and community harmony.

**All violence is unacceptable.**

## WHAT DO I LOOK OUT FOR?

There are behaviours and signs that are common to people who are experiencing family violence. People experiencing family violence may:

- Seem afraid of her partner or always very anxious to please them.
- Stop seeing her friends or family, or cuts phone conversations short when her partner is in the room.
- Appear anxious, depressed, has lost her confidence, tired or teary for no obvious reason.
- Their partner seems rude or nasty to them.
- Have injuries or time in hospital that raises your suspicion and concern.
- Keep justifying their movements or expenses.

***The woman's safety is of paramount importance. Instil faith in her that you will keep her confidence.***

## SUPPORTING A FRIEND, FAMILY MEMBER, NEIGHBOUR OR WORKMATE WHO IS EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE.

**Your support can make a difference.** Approach your friend, family member, neighbour or workmate in a sensitive way, letting her know your concerns. Tell her you're worried about her, then explain why. For example: *I'm worried about you because I've noticed you seem unhappy lately.*

### A GUIDE TO ENGAGING:

**ASK** by gentle questioning such as:

- *Is everything okay at home?*
- *Are you okay?*
- *I noticed those bruises, did someone do that to you?*

**LISTEN** without judging and focus on what you can do to support her without telling her what to do. Listen to what she is saying and give her time to tell her story. Tell her that you **BELIEVE** what she is saying and that you want to help.

**RESPECT** her right to make her own decisions.

Take her fears and the abuse **SERIOUSLY.**

**ACKNOWLEDGE** that talking about violence and abuse takes courage. Tell her you think she has been **BRAVE** in talking about the abuse, and in being able to keep going despite the abuse.

**HELP** her to explore her options. You can help by finding out about services and how to use them. Assistance with finding and accessing services can be a good place to start if they want to pursue this



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Don't be surprised or offended if she seems defensive or rejects your support. She might be scared of worrying you if she tells you about the abuse. She may not be ready, or may feel ashamed and afraid of talking about it.

Don't push the person into talking if they are uncomfortable, but let them know that you're there if they need to talk. Be patient, and keep an ear out for anything that indicates they are ready to talk about the abuse.

## WHAT CAN I DO IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER?

If you believe that the victim and any children have been, or are about to be, harmed, call the **police** on **000** immediately.

## QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK AND THINGS YOU COULD SAY

These are just some ideas. It is important that you only say what you believe, and use your own words.

- *The way he treats you is wrong.*
- *What can I do to help you?*
- *How do you think his/her behaviour has affected you?*
- *I'm worried about what he/she could do to you or the children.*
- *'What do you think you should do?*
- *What are you afraid of if you end the relationship?*
- *What are you afraid of if you stay?*
- *Would you like me to support you while you call a specialist support service?*

## WHAT NOT TO DO

When talking to someone who is being abused, some things may not help, or may stop her from wanting to confide in you fully. Here are some of the things victims of abuse say did **not** help.

- **Do not attempt to mediate the situation on behalf of the victim. This may place her at higher risk.**
- **Do not blame her for the abuse** or ask questions like 'what did you do for him to do that?' or 'why do you put up with it?' These questions suggest that it is somehow her fault.

- **Do not keep trying to work out the 'reasons' for the abuse.** Concentrate on supporting the person who is being abused.
- **Do not be critical** if she says she still loves her partner, or if she leaves but returns to the relationship. Women just want the abuse to stop. Leaving an abusive partner takes time, and is not the only option. Your support is really important.
- **Do not criticise her partner.** Criticise the abusive behaviour and let her know that no-one has the right to abuse her. For example, say 'your partner shouldn't treat you like that'. Personal criticism of her partner is only likely to make her want to defend them.
- **Do not give advice** or tell her what you would do. This will only reduce her confidence to make her own decisions. Listen to her and give her information, not advice.
- **Do not pressure her to leave** or try to make decisions on her behalf. Focus on listening and supporting her to make her own decisions. She knows her own situation best.

*Our goal must be a society where all people are safe in their home, families and close relationships; where violence and abuse are not acceptable; and where all relationships respect the equality and dignity of each person. This is part of the Gospel vision of love and respect.*

*Bishops of Victoria, October 2016*

## SERVICES THAT CAN HELP SOMEONE WHO IS A VICTIM OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

**POLICE** – Call '000' and ask for the Police for immediate assistance

**SAFE STEPS** – 1800 015 188 – A state-wide 24 hour, 7 day a week crisis support service for women and their children

**1800 RESPECT** – 1800 737 732 – A national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling and advice service. 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Content adapted from the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au) Prepared by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Women's Research Advocacy and Policy Centre (August 2016).

Download Domestic Violence Resource Centre's *Is someone you know being abused in a relationship – A guide for families, friends & neighbours. Your support can make a difference* <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-publications/booklets/someone-you-know-being-abused-relationship> This resource is available for download in 13 different languages.