



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

SUPPORTING FRIENDS WHO MAY BE IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Are you concerned that a friend is in an abusive relationship? It can be hard to know what to do. Starting an honest conversation might be uncomfortable for both of you. But it could also be the helping hand your friend needs.

SAFETY FIRST.

Always consider safety - if there is immediate danger call 911 or the [Military Police](#).

Anywhere your friend lives - next door, across the city, in a remote area, in another province or outside of Canada - you can always contact the police for help.

If you are concerned that children are involved, contact [Child Welfare Services](#) or the police.

Your friend might be unhappy or angry with you for doing this but children's emotional and physical safety are always a priority.

You can reach out to [Family Information Line](#) (1-800-866-4546) at any point to confidentially discuss the situation and seek advice. Free, Anonymous, Bilingual Available 24/7.



BE ALERT FOR WARNING SIGNS.

Remember that people in an abusive relationship may not be physically harmed.

Is your friend...?

- overly anxious to please their partner
- fearful or defensive of their partner
- submissive or nervous in their partner's presence
- depressed or anxious
- restricted from seeing family or friends
- limited from accessing money or a car
- showing physical injuries, wearing clothing/accessories to hide them, or creating stories to explain the injuries

Is your friend's partner...?

- overly jealous
- insulting or embarrassing your friend publicly
- teasing or yelling at them
- being physically aggressive or intimidating

CONSIDER YOUR FRIEND'S FEELINGS.

Your friend may:

- Feel overwhelmed by fear. It can be a fear of violence, the unknown, their own safety and the safety of children or pets.
- Believe that they are at fault and that by changing their own behavior the abuse will stop.
- Experience a conflict of emotions. They may love their partner, but hate the violence. They may hope that their partner's "good side" will reappear.
- Leave but then return to the relationship (even more than once).
- Feel dependent upon their partner in an emotional and/or financial way.
- Experience feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment.
- Feel resigned and hopeless and find it hard to make decisions about their future.
- Be unsure if the abusive behaviour is normal, or may try to downplay the abuse.

SUPPORT YOUR FRIEND.

- **Look for a private moment** and never talk about abuse in front of their partner or others. Do not text or leave voicemail messages. Their partner could be monitoring their conversations. Meet in-person or call them but always be aware of cues. If their partner comes home or enters the room, your friend may quickly change the conversation topic.
- If your friend reveals an abusive incident or behavior, **listen to them and believe what they tell you.**
- **Be there for them, regardless of what they decide to do.** This might make your friend feel more comfortable to open up. If they deny that anything is wrong, do not push. Communicate that you will be there for them if they want to talk.
- **Do not give advice or tell them what you would do.** This will only reduce their confidence to make their own decisions.
- **Reassure them that the abuse or violence is not their fault.** Say, "You are not to blame," or "What's happening is not your fault." Avoid asking questions like "Why do you put up with it?" or "How can you still be in love with them?"

- **Focus any criticism on the abusive behaviour and not on their partner.** Criticism of the partner will likely make your friend want to defend them.
- **Help them create a safety plan,** whether they are choosing to stay, preparing to leave, or have already left. If they do not live near you, seek out local services that could be available to them.
- **Help build their self-confidence.** Acknowledge their strengths and that they are coping well with challenging and stressful situation. Encourage them to develop and maintain a social network.
- **Be patient.** It can take a long time to recognize that they're in an abusive relationship. It can be even longer before they are willing or able to decide what to do.
- **Thank them for sharing with you.** It's a difficult topic to openly talk about.
- **Keep everything confidential.**
- **Take care of yourself.** Consider your own emotional boundaries and accept the limits in your ability to help. Recognize the possible consequences of becoming involved, such as being at risk from the abusive partner.
- **Encourage your friend to reach out to other friends or family members, as well as services.** Offer to go with them or check in. You can also reach out to these services.

FOR MILITARY MEMBERS:

Chaplain Services

Health Services

[Sexual Misconduct Response Centre](#) (SMRC – 1-844-750-1648).

SUPPORT SERVICES THAT MAY BE WITHIN THE MILITARY COMMUNITY:

[Family Information Line](#): 1-800-866-4546

[Military Family Resource Centre](#), including the local social worker, [Canadian](#)

[Forces Member Assistance Program](#) (CFMAP):1-800-268-7708).

SUPPORT SERVICES OUTSIDE OF THE MILITARY COMMUNITY:

Local women's organizations

Shelters

Sexual Assault Centres

