

# Do You Know Someone Who is Being Abused?

## A Guide for Family and Friends



### How Do I Know?

Domestic violence is **not** “an isolated incident,” “a lovers’ quarrel” or “a private family matter.” It is a **pattern** of coercive and assaultive behaviors that one person in an intimate relationship uses against another. Every relationship has ups and downs, but domestic violence includes **repeated** behaviors with the aim of coercion and control. People who use violence try to control aspects of a partner’s life through fear, threats, manipulation, and other tactics. *Sometimes—but not always—people use physical and/or sexual violence as a way to dominate an intimate partner.*

### Someone May Be Using Violence Against Their Partner If They:

- Talk badly about their partner in front of the children, interfere with their parenting, or threaten to take the children if they leave
- Control their partner’s finances, behavior, and social life
- Become violent quickly, striking, or breaking objects
- Act jealous of others who pay attention to their partner
- Minimize or deny behaviors, or blame their partner for the abuse

### Someone May Be Experiencing Violence in Their Relationship If They:

- Stop seeing friends and family members, or become more isolated
- Often cancel plans at the last minute
- Are quiet when their partner is around and seem afraid to make their partner angry
- Casually mention the violent behavior, but say it’s “not a big deal”
- Have unexplained injuries or offer explanations that do not quite make sense

### Examples of Abuse Include:

#### Verbal

- Belittling
- Insulting
- Name-calling
- Threatening to hurt or kill
- Yelling

#### Emotional

- Accusing
- Blaming
- Criticizing friends and family
- Intimidating
- Isolating

#### Sexual

- Pressuring or forcing sexual acts
- Wanting sex after abuse

#### Physical

- Choking/strangling
- Hurting or killing pets
- Kicking
- Punching
- Pushing/shoving
- Slapping

#### Financial

- Controlling or withholding money
- Not allowing someone to seek medical care or counseling
- Not providing adequate support for children
- Running up debt or destroying credit

### Domestic Violence is a Traumatic Experience

Trauma can be caused by someone who hurts, abuses, sexually assaults, or commits a crime against another person. Exposure to domestic violence is especially traumatic because it’s caused by someone who is supposed to love and care for them. Trauma affects the brain and body, and can make people feel like they are losing their mind or going crazy.

#### People Who Have Experienced Trauma Often Feel:

- Agitated, jumpy and/or anxious
- Sad and/or depressed
- Less trusting of others
- Numb and/or disconnected

*These symptoms often resolve after a person is safe and healing.*

#### People Who Have Experienced Trauma Often:

- Blame themselves
- Relive traumatic events

#### People Who Have Experienced Trauma May Have Trouble:

- Remembering the sequence of abusive events
- Thinking clearly or solving problems

Trauma has an impact on both the **brain** and **body**.



### Why Do They Stay?

Seeing your friend or loved one mistreated can make you feel very frustrated, not only at the person who is violent, but also at the loved one for not leaving. There are many reasons that a person decides to return to or stay in an abusive relationship. People often:

- Fear for their lives and are terrified that their partner will become more violent if they leave. In fact, the most dangerous time for a person is when they try to leave.
- Have limited financial resources to break away and believe they cannot make it on their own.
- Believe the situation is their fault.
- Fear that their partner will get custody of the children.

A person experiencing violence may want the violence to end, but not the relationship. People who abuse are not violent all the time. They often can come across charming and romantic in between episodes of violence.

### Children Living in a Violent Home

You may notice that children act out, are frequently upset, or are very quiet and withdrawn. People who use violence often undermine their partner’s parenting, as well as the relationship between their partner and children.

No one **DESERVES** to be hurt.

**Believe your friend or loved one when they tell you they are experiencing violence.**

### **What Can I Do?**

Most importantly, encourage your friend or loved one to develop a safety plan with a domestic violence advocate. Contact a local domestic violence agency, or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** to speak with an advocate. Safety planning is a free service, and calls are confidential.

#### **Do...**

- Ask specific questions about the abuse
- Listen without judging
- Tell them they are not alone and help is available
- Trust your loved one's knowledge
- Highlight their strengths and courage
- Learn about and offer community resources
- Provide information on domestic violence
- Contact police immediately **ONLY** if you witness or hear a violent episode. **DO NOT** try to intervene.

#### **Don't...**

- Criticize their partner
- Make choices for them
- Sound angry or upset
- Suggest couples counseling, it can be dangerous
- Use terms such as "victim" and "abuser"

### **When the Person Experiencing Violence Feels Ready to Leave**

If a person experiencing violence decides to leave, they may need money, helping finding a place to live, somewhere to store their belongings, or transportation to a shelter. Decide if you feel comfortable helping in these ways. A person may leave and return to their partner multiple times before leaving for good. It is important to respect their judgment and timeline for leaving. Try to think of each time as them moving closer to freedom.

### **If the Person Experiencing Violence Does Not Want to Leave**

You can help by providing emotional support to build their self-esteem. Let the person experiencing violence know:

*“ I'm sorry this has happened to you. ”*

*“ You don't deserve that. ”*

*“ You are an amazing person. ”*

When you focus on their specific strengths and abilities, your encouraging words begin to diffuse their partner's hurtful and degrading comments, enabling them to feel stronger.

### **Encourage a Person Experiencing Violence to:**

- Speak with an advocate and develop a safety plan that includes their children.
- Keep a timeline or journal in a safe place that details the frequency, severity, and duration of the abuse, including evidence of threats sent in emails, letters, texts, or on voicemails.
- Tell a doctor or nurse about the violence, and ask to have the abuse documented in their medical records with photos of injuries, or take photos yourself. Ask them to store the photos in a safe place, along with a written description of what happened. The records may be helpful if the victim decides to take legal action.

### **Remember!**

It takes patience to support a person experiencing domestic violence. Don't forget to reach out for support for yourself. The domestic violence hotline is there for you, too.

**Trust Your Instinct To Help!**



**www.odvn.org • 800-934-9840**

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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To find your local domestic violence program, visit our website, [www.odvn.org](http://www.odvn.org) or call ODVN at 1-800-934-9840 for more information.