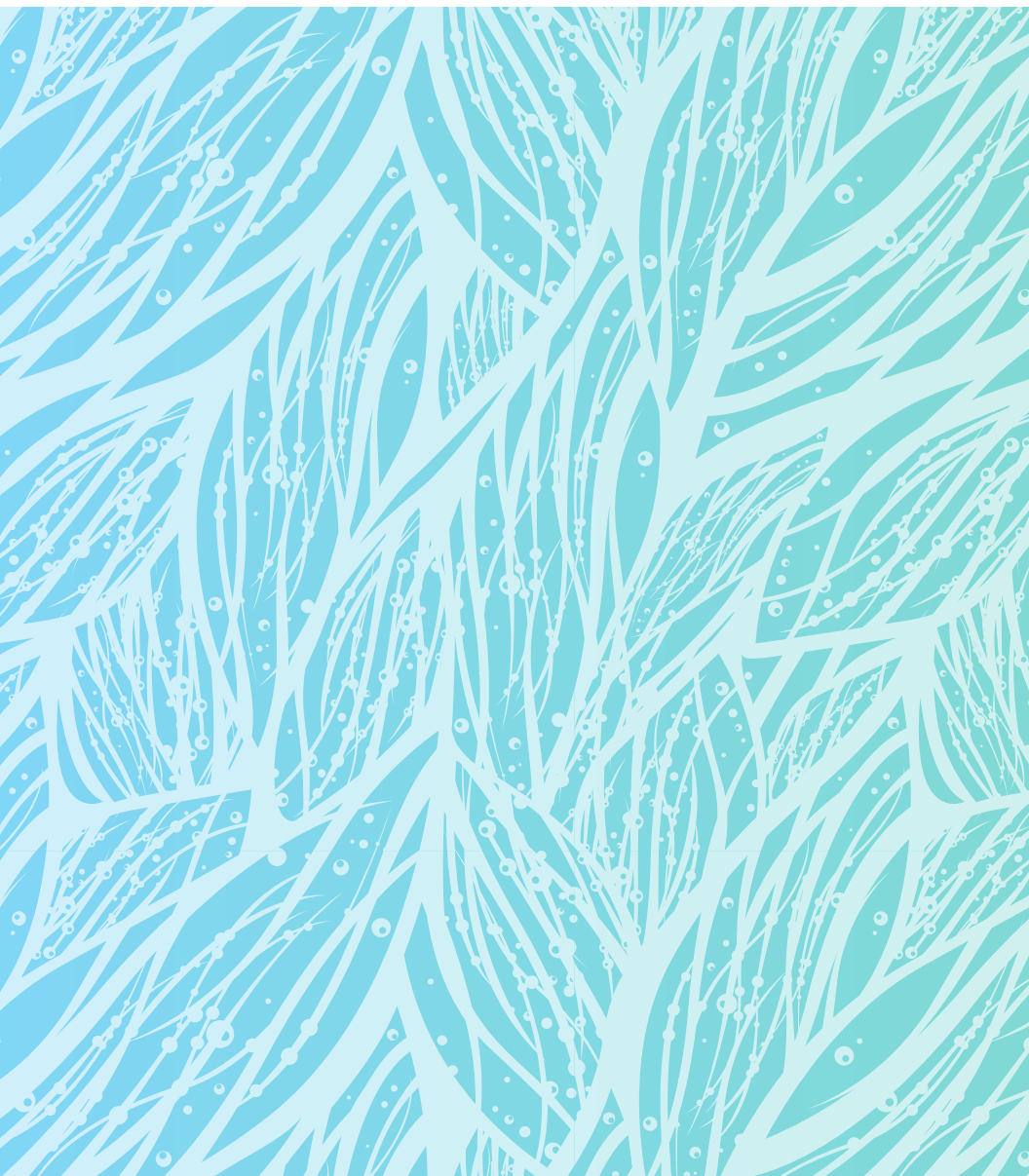


# Neighbours, Families, Friends, and Co-workers



The following section provides information and suggestions for friends, family, neighbours, and co-workers of people who have experienced abuse. This section will sometimes refer to women as those who have experienced abuse. This is because women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. However, many of the points below may be equally valid about anyone you know who has experienced abuse.

There are steps you can take if you suspect someone you know is abusing their partner, or suspect someone you know is being abused. See *“Understanding Abuse”*, starting on page 1, to learn about different forms of abuse.



*Remember: it is against the law for children to be exposed to abuse. If you know of a child who you think may need protection because they are experiencing or seeing abuse, it is your duty to report this to Child Protection Services.*

# Deal with your thoughts and fears



Sometimes the abusive person feels ashamed about their abusive behaviour. You need to approach them with the assumption that they would prefer to have a relationship without abuse.

Sometimes both partners are ashamed about the abuse. This can lead them to minimize the seriousness of the abuse, or even deny that it is happening.

Sometimes the abusive person is confused about who is responsible for their choice to abuse. Sometimes they want to stop their abusive behaviour, but think that it is the abused partner's responsibility to stop it. Sometimes they say things like, "If she disrespects me, then I will disrespect her", "She made me do it", or "She drove me to it".

Sometimes women who have experienced abuse are also confused about who is responsible. They may blame themselves for their partner's abusive behaviour. It is not the abused partner's fault. There is no excuse for abuse. If one partner is being disrespectful or abusive, it does not give the other partner the right to abuse or be disrespectful toward them.

Often people who abuse are not abusive all the time. They can also be respectful and caring to their partners, family, and friends. People often think a person who is like this could never be abusive. It can be confusing to friends and family to learn that a person they know as loving and caring has been abusive towards their partner.

Friends and family may think the abuse can't be serious if she stays with her partner. Read pages 62–64 to understand why women stay with a person who abuses, and how difficult it can be for women to make changes. Many women love their partners and they simply want the abuse to stop. It may be helpful to read pages 118–124 about how to be a good support person.

## Prepare yourself before you offer support

Learning about abuse against women and the supports available by reading this book is a good place to start. It is important to be supportive, but it is also very important to get the professional assistance needed. It can be helpful to talk to a counselor who works with these issues, especially for long-term support. Contact a transition house (women's shelter) in your area to talk to someone about how you can help. You do not have to share your identity.

## RESOURCES

**Neighbours, Friends and Families** is a public education awareness program with a toll-free information line to help people learn about the signs of abuse and what can be done to prevent further abuse.

Call 1-855-225-0220, or visit [neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca](http://neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca) for information about this program.

## Let her know you are there for her

Asking someone if they are being abused can be very uncomfortable but often it takes no more than asking "Do you need to talk?" or saying "I've been worried about you".

Never tell your friend or family member what she should do. She has to make that choice for herself. You can make suggestions and ask her what she thinks. If you are unsure what this person wants from you, ask.

Know that you are not responsible for her choices. What she does is her choice. Telling her to leave does not help. Don't take the credit or the blame for her decisions.

## Be a good listener

Being a good listener can be emotionally demanding. Details about abuse are often painful. You have to be balanced and stable yourself, and able to handle your friend or relative's stories and emotional turmoil. Your job is to be there for her, to just listen. By listening, you can help her work through what is happening and the impact it is having on her and her children. You can affirm that the abuse is not her fault.

Patience is essential when supporting a woman who is being abused. Making changes is a process, not a single act: often it takes months, or even years. Your friend or relative may talk for a very long time before she acts to change or leave her relationship.

## Help her make a safety plan if she wants one

Your friend or family member may need to plan an escape route, know where she would go in an emergency, and how she would get there.

*See pages 30–33 for information on safety planning.*

Encourage her to call police if she is being threatened or hurt. Officers are trained to handle abuse cases and have procedures they must follow. Some departments have Victim Support Units.

*See pages 34–44 of this book to find out what will happen if she or a neighbour calls the police.*

## **Let her know help is available**

Let your friend or family member know that she can get help and support from a counselor, and that there are programs that can help her partner stop the abusive behavior. The Directory in this book has lists of support agencies and programs.

## **Go with her to appointments**

Your support will mean a great deal, even if it is simply accompanying your friend or relative to appointments.

Talking to doctors, police, and lawyers can be a scary experience. So can attending Court. Offer to go with her as a support person.

## **If she wants to leave, help her find a safe place to go**

Think carefully before you offer your home. Having a woman and her children live with you can be extremely stressful.

Help your friend or relative connect with counselors at a local shelter to discuss her options before you make any decisions.

## **Be aware of her needs**

Your friend or relative may have specific needs. She may have experienced racism or felt excluded and isolated in the past when thinking about getting help. This may make her reluctant to turn to particular organizations or people for support.

Read pages 16-28 to see if any of the information applies to your friend or family member. You may be able to help her find support from someone who understands her special needs.

# Do's and don'ts when offering support

You can help your friend or family member and her partner learn about what supports are available to them. You can listen and support both of them. You can give them information about abuse and what is considered criminal behavior.

At the same time, you cannot make decisions for them. You cannot assume you know better than they do what is best for them. You may think you know what is best for your friend or family member, her partner, and the children. However, it is up to your friend or family member to decide for themselves what they want to do.

**Don't blame your friend or family member for her partner's choice to abuse.** Even if she has made poor choices in the relationship, she is not responsible for her partner's choices.

**You can encourage your friend or family to take responsibility for her own choices, but not her partner's choices.** Many women say that their friends or relatives offered practical support that helped them, but being blamed for their partners' choices made them feel worse.

**Don't say, "I told you so." Resist the urge to say, "I knew this would happen."** No one wants to hear that, and it isn't helpful.

**Don't make judgmental statements.** Many women say that they didn't tell someone about the abuse because they heard statements such as, "I think some women like being controlled by a strong man," or, "No man would ever get away with abusing me!"

**Do take care of yourself.** Be aware that your friend or relative's abuse may trigger memories of your own. If this happens, you should consider helping her find support from someone else.

**Do find a support person for yourself.** Find someone you can talk to about your own feelings, but be careful not to betray your friend or relative's confidences.

Sometimes the abusive person will feel threatened by your conversations with the person experiencing the abuse. In these situations, it can be helpful to reach out to the abusive partner to find out how they might be supported as well. Often a woman will know whether or not it is safe to reach out to support her abusive partner. Many women want this person to have support even if they are no longer together in a relationship.

*Call the police if you are being threatened in any way.*





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