

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS BEING ABUSED

If someone confides in you they are involved in an abusive relationship they have trusted you with information that is very personal, and they may feel very ashamed about their situation. Try to be sensitive to this, and remember that it took great strength and courage for the victim to share this information. It can be difficult to know what to say and do in this situation, so here are some tips:

- ❖ **Ask for help!** Domestic abuse is a sensitive and difficult situation. Hearing of someone's abuse can be overwhelming and scary. It is okay to not have all the answers. Even if you don't feel comfortable talking to someone about their abuse, you can always refer them to a crisis line or an outreach center such as Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse. By caring about the victim and supporting them, you have already helped by showing them that they are valuable and deserve to be treated with respect.
- ❖ **Be concerned for their safety!** It is okay to tell them you are concerned for their well-being. Offering phone numbers to crisis lines or a safe place to stay will let them know that there are resources available even if they don't choose to leave the abuser at this particular time.
- ❖ **Believe them!** When a victim comes to you, believe that they are telling the truth! Never discredit or deny a victim's story or allegations. This may be the first time the victim is telling someone about the abuse. Your reaction can impact their decision to share it with others.
- ❖ **Do not tell them what to do!** Telling a victim of domestic abuse what to do in their personal situation will only perpetuate their feeling of incapability. Each victim of abuse will have their own personal response and process in dealing with the abuse. Victims of abuse have already had so much power taken away, it is important you give them power back by encouraging them to make their own decisions.
- ❖ **Don't confront the abuser!** Though you may feel very angry hearing about the abuse, confronting the abuser will probably put the victim in greater danger. Be careful to keep what the victim tells you confidential, so that the information will not get back to the abuser. Don't send e-mails or leave phone messages that indicate you know anything about the abuse.
- ❖ **Respect their choices!** Ultimately it is up to each individual to make choices about their lives. The victim is the expert on their life, and as such, is the best person to decide what is safest at any point. Try to help them decide what they want to do, and support them in their choice (whether or not you agree with it).
- ❖ **Tell them it is not their fault!** Many victims believe in some way they are at fault or responsible for what is happening to them. Domestic abuse is never the victim's fault. Try to avoid making statements or asking questions that might contribute to blaming the victim, such as, "what did you do that made your partner so mad," or "if it were me, I would have left by now."

