



WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS EXPERIENCED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

It can be very frightening when you suspect a friend or loved one is involved in an abusive relationship, and you may feel powerless to help. The best thing you can do is to support your loved one and empower them to make the best decisions for themselves and guide them to resources when appropriate.

HOW TO IDENTIFY INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Intimate Partner Violence (also known as domestic violence, dating violence or relationship abuse) is typically thought of as physical violence, but includes much more. IPV is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship (thehotline.org), and can consist of physical abuse, psychological and verbal abuse, sexual abuse, digital abuse and stalking. Signs of abuse can look different in every relationship, but you may have noticed, these possible warning signs:

- Their partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- They have bruises or injuries they aren't able to explain.
- Their partner puts them down in front of others.
- They are constantly worried about making their partner upset or angry.
- They withdraw from things they love or people they love in order to spend time with their partner.
- They make excuses for their partner's behavior or take blame for it.

There are many reasons why people stay in an abusive relationship. It is important to know that leaving an abusive relationship can be incredibly dangerous. Abuse is about power and control. Regaining that power and control over their life is key to a person's healing process.

SUPPORTING SOMEONE AT ALL STAGES

There are three stages in supporting a loved one if they have experienced Intimate Partner Violence: while they are in the relationship, when they are leaving the relationship, and after they have left. It is important to understand that a person has different needs in each of these stages.

When your friend or loved one is still in the relationship:

If you are supporting someone who is still in an abusive relationship, it is important to know that the person might struggle to recognize or acknowledge the abusive behaviors because they have become normalized. This person might have strong feelings for their abusive partner, including a desire to return to a time when things were 'better'. Even when being manipulated, feelings of love build over time, which makes it even harder for someone to recognize the abuse or feel like they can leave. During this time, it is especially important for a person in an abusive relationship to know there are other people in their lives that want to support them

and care for them. They may not want to talk about what's going on or might only want to talk about when things are good in the relationship. They might not be ready to define what is going on as intimate partner violence or abuse. These reactions are common and normal for someone who has experienced harm. Talk about the behaviors and not the person. Don't be afraid to let them know that you're concerned about their safety.

When your friend or loved one is leaving the relationship:

When someone is leaving a relationship or if they chose to report what is occurring, understand that this could be the most dangerous time for someone experiencing abuse. Support and guide your loved one in finding resources in order for them to develop safety plans and know what options they have. Even if a person chooses to leave a relationship, it is very common and normal for someone to get back together with an abusive partner. It might be frustrating as someone who cares, but it is important to always support that person and let them know you are there.

Once your friend or loved one has left the relationship:

When a person leaves a relationship, be prepared for them to grieve the relationship. They might have many conflicting emotions, like anger or fear due to the violence, but sadness and loneliness for the end of a relationship. It could be difficult for them to even bring up a conversation about what they're feeling. It is also very common and normal for a person to get back together and break up with the abusive partner multiple times before ultimately leaving the relationship.

HOW MIGHT A PERSON FEEL?

It is natural for someone who has experienced harm to feel a tremendous loss of power and control over all aspects of their lives during or after an abusive relationship. Keep in mind that **no two people have the same emotional reaction or behaviors.**

Common Feelings:

- Shock, Numbness
- Denial
- Anger at abuser or at themselves
- Loss of control, even questioning "am I crazy?"
- Humiliation, violation, betrayal
- Feeling dirty, damaged
- Sadness, Loss, Depression – in extreme cases, suicidal
- Fear of retribution if they report it or tell anyone
- Fear for safety, Anxiety, Nightmares
- Guilt, Shame, Self-Blame
- Fear of being blamed by others
- Confusion
- Questioning their own judgment

Possible Behavioral Changes:

- Changes in eating patterns
- Changes in sleeping patterns – difficulty sleeping, sleeping all the time, nightmares
- Withdrawing from friends or activities, engaging with people
- Changes in how they engage in dating/relationships
- Excessive substance use
- Excessive exercise
- Self-injury, cutting
- Signs of depression, suicidal risk factors
- Taking out anger on others, strong/exaggerated response

When someone has experienced IPV, it is common for memories to come back at any time. They may feel the same fear they did during the relationship. They could experience nightmares, flashbacks or experience triggers. **Triggers** are when someone comes in

contact with stimuli that was present during a trauma or reminds the person of it, which causes a neuro-biological trauma response to kick in. This might cause this person to avoid situations, people, or things that remind them of the relationship or person.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

If someone opens up about their experience to you, it is critical that you demonstrate that you **believe them**. Remind them that healing takes time.

- Listen. Be patient. Communicate without judgment.
- Allow your friend or loved one to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. Telling their story and experience can be re-traumatizing and triggering. Don't pry for details, and believe what they do say.
- Allow them to make choices for themselves. Support them if they want to report or not, if they are ready to leave or not, etc.
- Encourage them to get support, preferably with an Advocate. An advocate can explain all options, help consider pros & cons of each option, provide support, accompany them to resources or help make appointments, and referrals for them.
- Let their healing happen on their timeline. Avoid putting pressure on them to engage in activities they aren't ready to do yet. It may take weeks, months, years for the person to integrate this trauma into their life experience.
- Encourage them to create a self-care plan to focus on their emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.
- Don't give out any personal information about your loved one. If anyone contacts you about their contact information or location, check with them before you share it. You never know if it is the abusive partner.

Consider using these phrases:

- **"I'm sorry this happened."** Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life. Phrases like "This must be really tough for you," and, "I'm so glad you are sharing this with me," help to communicate empathy.
- **"It's not your fault."** Remind your loved one, that the abusive partner chose to do this to them and they are not responsible for another person's actions.
- **"I believe you."** The best thing you can do is to believe what they are telling you.
- **"You are not alone."** Remind your loved one that you are there for them are other people in their life who care.
- **"This doesn't change how I think of you."** Some people are concerned that sharing what happened will change the way other people see them, especially a partner. Reassure your friend or loved one that their experience doesn't change the way you think or feel about them.
- **"I'm honored that you trust me enough to share this with me."** Let them talk about their experience if they come to you.
- **"It took a lot of strength & courage for you to... [seek help, report, tell me, etc.]"**
- **"You deserve to be in a safe, healthy, equitable, respectful relationship."** Remind them of what they deserve if they choose to be in a relationship.

It is a crucial piece of someone's recovery that you let them decide whether or not to pursue resources. Accept of their decisions. However, if you are significantly concerned for their immediate safety, it is ok to share your concerns.

Avoid victim-blaming questions that imply that they could have done things differently like “why didn’t you leave?” or “what did you do to cause them to get angry?”

If you ask questions, stick with open-ended questions that allow them to control their own narrative. Also, asking too many questions may make someone feel that you are skeptical or blaming them.

Be cautious about how you share your own strong emotions – especially anger. You don’t want to worry your friend or loved one that you might confront the abusive partner. That could also potentially escalate the situation. You also don’t want them to feel they must be your caretaker if you are having a strong emotional response.

Avoid saying things like: “It’s ok” or “It’s going to be ok.” The truth is that they are not “ok” right now and saying that might make them feel like you are not able to understand what they are feeling or going through.

Respect someone's need for privacy and never share what they have told you. Violations of privacy are trust violations, which could make them feel violated all over again. Sharing information could also be a safety risk for someone experiencing IPV.

Keep in mind that you are not a counselor and you cannot take on responsibility for a loved one’s wellbeing. You can be a support, but maintain reasonable boundaries. It’s important that you refer them to helping professionals (like campus professional and volunteer advocates) and not allow them to excessively lean on you in place of seeking professional assistance.

WHAT I MIGHT FEEL & WHAT TO DO

When you suspect someone you care about is in an abusive relationship or they tell you they have experienced abuse, it can be a lot to handle. A supportive reaction can make all the difference, but that doesn’t mean it comes easy and might be overwhelming. If you have experienced harm yourself, this may activate some of your own feelings of victimization.

- Assess your own safety – Abusive partners can often threaten family and friends. It is important to assess and understand your own safety risks while supporting your loved one.
- Engage in self-care. Use healthy coping mechanisms that you have used in dealing with other crises.
- You may want to talk to an advocate, counselor or attend some form of support group for friends & loved ones.
- Educate yourself about intimate partner violence by:
 - attending relevant events – Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October) programming, an S.O.S. or other related program
 - read books or watch movies
 - visit local and national websites that discuss IPV (listed below)

RESOURCES:

[Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry & Controlling Men](#) by Lundy Bancroft

It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence by Meg Kennedy Dugan and Roger R. Hock

Trauma and Recovery, by Judith Herman, M.D.

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are by Brenè Brown

CAMPUS, LOCAL & NATIONAL RESOURCES:

Sexual Offense Support (S.O.S.) – 24 Hour Advocacy: **302-831-1001, press 1 for SOS**

Provides crisis intervention/advocacy for those who have experienced sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, sexual harassment & stalking, and for those assisting them. Clinician will take a first name & phone number and the advocate will call back within 10 minutes.

www.udel.edu/sos



Student Wellness & Health Promotion – During business hours: **302-831-3457**

Professional advocacy to assist people who have experienced sexual misconduct. (Angela Seguin, M.Ed., CA, DVS and Zainab Shah, B.A., CA, DVS). www.udel.edu/studentwellness

Center for Counseling & Student Development – During business hours: **302-831-2141** Individual and group counseling, as well as psychiatry services. www.udel.edu/counseling

UD Helpline 24/7/365 – 24 Hour Helpline for psychological and emotional issues: **302-831-1001**, press 1 for SOS, press 2 for immediate counseling assistance

UD LiveSafe App – Download the UD LiveSafe app on your phone for fast access to these resources.



UD kNOw More – UD's sexual misconduct policy and resources. www.udel.edu/knowmore



Delaware Domestic Violence Hotline:

Child Inc. New Castle County: 302-762-6110

People's Place Kent & Sussex County: 302-422-8058 or 302-745-9874 (Spanish)

YWCA's Sexual Assault Response Center – 24/7 rape crisis for New Castle County: **1-800-773-8570**

<http://www.ywcade.org/sarc>

Psychological Mobile Crisis Unit – will go to the person in distress during psychological crises and provide care, transport to inpatient treatment if needed: **1-800-652-2929**

National Domestic Violence Hotline – **1-800-799-7233** and online chat: <http://www.thehotline.org/>

National Dating Violence Hotline (teens) – **1-866-331-9474** & online chat: <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>

National Sexual Assault Hotline through the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network: **800.656.HOPE (4673)** or via online chat at <http://online.rainn.org>.