

Module Five | Lesson Two | A

How to Help:

When a Friend or Family Member is Being Abused

Watching a friend or family member go through an abusive relationship can be scary. It may seem difficult to figure out how to help them. Even if your friend is experiencing the serious effects of dating abuse, they may have a very different point of view than you. While only the person experiencing the abuse can make the choice to end a relationship, a caring friend can still provide essential support to help a friend stay safe. Here are some pointers.

Only do what you can. Wanting to be there for someone you care for is important, but first realizing your limitations is essential. It's critical to listen openly, provide support, and ask questions, but ultimately, your friend or family member must make decisions for themselves regarding their relationship. You can't save them, nor does it help to insist they abide by your wishes. Doing so may push them away, and they may stop confiding in you as a result. You can be most supportive by being there for them, even if their situation does not change. However, this can be exhausting and frustrating, so if you need to step away for a bit, or establish boundaries, it is okay to do so. You have to take care of yourself to be able to take care of them.

Share your worry with them. If this is the first attempt at talking about the abuse with your friend or family member, make sure you are talking at a time that is safe for your friend. Make sure they aren't stressed about who might hear you or see you talking. Give your friend concrete examples about times you were worried for them, and share examples based on these [warning signs](#). Remember, the abuser isn't always abusive, and there can be periods of time when your friend feels love and happiness.

Establish trust and prove to be trustworthy. Let them know you are there to help them, and understand that what they are going through may be difficult and confusing. Assure them that you will not share what they reveal to you with others unless you get their permission to do so. Stand by this, and do not break their confidence. However, with that said, if they are in serious danger or threaten to harm themselves, you may need to involve others and seek additional help.

Listen more than you speak. Your friend or family member may feel overwhelmed when you first start talking about these issues. It is important to not bombard them with questions, but instead, ask open, helping questions, rather than ones that imply judgement. Let your friend or family member decide how much to share. It may take more than one conversation with you for them to share what is truly going on in their life, and it may take a while for them to trust that they can safely talk to you.

Focus on your friend: It can be easy to want to attack the actions of the abuser, but that may not be helpful. Your friend likely cares for the abuser and just wants the abuse to stop. Point out the abusive or unhealthy behaviors without attacking their partner. If your friend decides to stay with their partner, don't criticize their decision, but rather let them know that, no matter what, you will always be there for them.

TAKE A STAND FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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Create a safety plan. Whether or not your friend leaves their abusive partner, creating a safety plan with them may help them feel more empowered. A safety plan is basically a plan for them to stay safe for when things get bad with their partner. It allows a person to have power when they feel powerless otherwise. It is also important to keep in mind that your friend is most vulnerable upon leaving the abuser, and in many abusive relationships, the abuse tends to escalate when they try to end the relationship.

[Loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org) has great resources for safety planning, including a downloadable safety plan:

<http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Teen-Safety-Plan.pdf>.

Extend an invitation. Abuse often manifests itself through isolation. Because of this, when a person is considering leaving an abusive partner, it is important for them to know that they have relationships outside of their abusive one. Invite them to safe activities and events with other friends and family and include them in regular life.

Continue to offer support. Whether or not your friend decides to end their relationship with their abuser, they need support. If they decide to stay with them, they may worry about what you think of them and whether you will be disappointed. Assure them that this is not the case and that you will be there whenever they need you. It may take a long time for them to leave, or rather, end the relationship with their abuser and the abuser will try to make it hard for your friend or family member to do so.

Provide connections to resources. Work to connect your friend to resources that can help them through this period of life. Ask your teacher for support groups in your area or explore the resources below. Sometimes the best assistance is to say, “I believe you,” or “I am here for you,” or “It’s not your fault.” Refrain from judgement and be supportive.

You can always call the National Teen Dating Hotline, [Loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org), at (866) 331-9474 or text “loveis” to 22522 (message and data rates apply). Trained, experienced advocates are available 24/7/365. You do not have to be the one experiencing abuse or in crisis to receive help and more information.

The following additional resources may also help:

LoveIsRespect - www.loveisrespect.org

The National Domestic Violence Hotline - www.ndvh.org

Break the Cycle - www.breakthecycle.org