

How You Can Help a Friend or Relative in an Abusive Relationship

1. Believe her. Take seriously what she tells you. Listen carefully to her story. Do not judge her. Respond to her feelings.
2. Be concerned about her injuries – does she need or has she received medical attention? If so, encourage her to go to the emergency room.
3. Be concerned about her safety or need for a safe place. Be sure that a safe place is available to her, whether in a home or at a domestic violence shelter; let her know how to contact such a place in your community. You can refer her to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). 1-800-787-3224 (TDD).
4. Suggest that her husband needs treatment. He needs to take responsibility for his behavior and for the changes he needs to make. Has she thought about calling the police and pressing charges? Physical abuse and/or threats are a crime, and a record may be helpful in the long run to hold him accountable for his behavior.
5. Refer her to a support group. Abigail Ministries at 1-440-281-7136 has Christian based support groups for women in abusive relationships. The domestic violence shelters also have support groups available in various locations.
6. Support the legitimacy of her getting away from the situation where she is in danger, but do not push her to leave or criticize her for not having left sooner. The danger level intensifies when she leaves the relationship.
7. Recognize that she may feel she has failed as a wife, but she does not cause the abuse. Nobody deserves to be hit. Just because the couple has conflict (normal), that does not mean there is justification for the verbal or physical abuse (not normal).
8. Realize that if she stays in the relationship and her husband does not get help, the abuse will happen again and will get worse. Explain the cycle of violence. Domestic violence increases in frequency and severity over time.
9. Recognize that she may be very ambivalent. She probably loves her husband and it is quite possible that when he is not abusive he can be very loving toward her.
10. Be aware that an abusive husband may have greatly damaged her self-esteem and confidence in her ability to take care of herself and her children. Don't reinforce her low self-esteem by taking over and making decisions for her. Choices about her life are hers, not yours. Let her make her own decisions. Help her to see she has choices.
11. Tell her that abuse is a sin and that God does not expect her to submit to the sin of abuse. God wants her and her children to be safe.
12. Help her to realize that God will not abandon her regardless of her decisions. God will be her source of strength, comfort, courage and love whatever decisions she makes.
13. Above all, let her know that you are there to help and listen and that you will support her even if she decides to leave.