

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

You might think that something as simple as talking to a friend about abuse couldn't possibly make a difference, but it really does.

If you think a friend or loved one is being abused, talk to her about it. Listen to her. Let her know you care. You don't have to be an expert. You just need to be a friend. Just knowing that someone cares enough to ask about the abuse can break through the wall of isolation that can exist around victims of relationship abuse.

What if She Decides to Remain in the Relationship?

Sometimes it can be frustrating when a friend returns to a batterer or stays in an abusive relationship. It is important to understand that there are many reasons for these decisions.

Just like ending any relationship is a process, leaving an abusive relationship takes time.

In many cases, the victim fears for her life. She may also want her children to grow up with both parents, and feel guilty, believing that the abuse is her fault. Sometimes a victim's self-esteem is so damaged by the abuse that she thinks she can't make it on her own. Or she may just want the violence to end, not the relationship. Whatever the reason for her decision to stay in the relationship, there are many ways you can help.

- **Listen, without judging.** Often a battered woman believes her abuser's negative messages about her. She may feel responsible, ashamed, inadequate and afraid she will be judged by you. Telling the victim what to do can be just as controlling as the abuser, and often leaving is more dangerous than staying.
- **Tell her the abuse is not her fault.** Explain that violence in a relationship is never acceptable. There's no excuse for it – not alcohol or drugs, financial pressure, depression, jealousy or any behavior of hers.
- **Be honest and supportive.** Tell her you are afraid for her and her children. Tell her you want to help, but don't pressure your friend to leave. Avoid language like “You need to...” “You should...” “Why don't you...” “You have to...”
- **Make sure she knows she is not alone.** If and when she wants help, it is available. Let her know that domestic violence tends to get worse and become more frequent with time and that it rarely goes away on its own.
- **Explain that relationship abuse is a crime,** and that she can seek protection from the police or courts.
- **Suggest that she develop a safety plan in case of emergency.**
- **Think about ways you might feel comfortable helping her.** If she decides to leave her relationship, she may need money, assistance finding a place to live, a place to store her belongings or a ride to a battered women's shelter.
- **Get advice.** If you want to talk with someone yourself, to get advice about a particular situation, contact DVS at 582-9841.