

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 them about it. Listen to them. Let them 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 They Decide 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 their life. They may also want the children to grow up with both parents, and feel guilty, believing that the abuse is their fault. Sometimes a victim's self-esteem is so damaged by the abuse that they think they can't make it on their own. Or they may just want the violence to end, not the relationship.

Whatever the reason for their decision to stay in the relationship, there are many ways you can help.

- **Listen, without judging.** Often a victim believes their abuser's negative messages about themselves. They may feel responsible, ashamed, inadequate and afraid they 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 them the abuse is not their 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 the victim.
- **Be honest and supportive.** Tell your friend you are afraid for them and their children. Tell your friend 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 your friend knows they are not alone.** If and when they wants help, it is available. Let them 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 they can seek protection from the police or courts.
- **Suggest that they develop a safety plan in case of emergency.**
- **Think about ways you might feel comfortable helping them.** If they decides to leave the relationship, they may need money, assistance finding a place to live, a place to store their belongings or a ride to a domestic violence shelter.
- **Get advice.** If you want to talk with someone yourself, to get advice about a particular situation, contact DVS at 582-9841.