

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE YOU THINK MAY BE EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Hume Region Integrated Family Violence Services work to enhance the capacity of organisations, service providers and the community. Its aim is to prevent violence against women and children and to work with men to ensure a violence free future.

People affected by family violence need support. Women experiencing violence more often talk to family and friends about the abuse than go to the police or a support agency.¹ If you think someone you care about is being hurt by their partner or a family member it can be upsetting and frightening. Asking that person if they are safe within their relationship and then responding in a caring, respectful and non-judgemental way can make a real difference. Talking to someone who cares can help a person living with violence to validate their experiences, build trust and to know that they are valued. Receiving support from someone often puts a person affected by violence in a position to make better decisions about their safety and their future.

*'A friend ... she listened, more importantly she believed me which was critical for me ... she talked about the issues and allowed me to vent and cry and not feel that I was offloading.'*²

*'My family and friends didn't think it was that bad because he only physically hit me once. But the putdowns and manipulation were so much worse, the way he controlled my life. I really wish my family could have understood how horrible it was.'*³

*'You don't have to fully understand to be of assistance. All you have to do is give your time and love without being judgemental.'*⁴



SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE THAT SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE:

- They are depressed, nervous or withdrawn
- Their partner criticises or humiliates them in front of other people
- They describe their partner as controlling or prone to anger.
- They talk about how their partner controls their money and other aspects of their life, such as contact with their family and friends
- They seem uncomfortable or anxious while their partner is around and may be eager to please them
- They could have bruises or injuries and may give unconvincing explanations about how they got them
- They have recently left the relationship and their ex-partner is continually calling, texting, following them or coming by their home or work uninvited.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I THINK SOMEONE I CARE ABOUT MAY BE EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE?

- **Ask the question**
'I have been really worried about you, do you feel safe within your relationship?' The person you think is experiencing violence may be defensive or refuse your support. Don't pressure them to talk to you, be patient. Let them know that you are there if they need you.⁶
- **Listen**
Respectfully listen to them talk about their experiences.
- **Communicate belief**
Let them know that you believe them and that you take what they have said seriously.
- **Validate their decision to talk about their situation**
'I'm really glad that you trusted me enough to talk to me about this.'
- **Help them recognise the abuse and name it**
'What you have just described to me is violence and that is against the law'.

- **Let them know you support them**
'What can I do to help you stay safe.' Let them know you support and respect their right to make their own decisions, regardless of whether they stay or leave the relationship.
- **Offer practical assistance**
Offer them a safe place to stay, mind the children or find out what support and assistance is available to them.

WHAT NOT TO DO...

- **Don't trivialise the violence**
Some people believe if a person isn't being physically abused then they are not experiencing violence. There are a range of behaviours that are abusive, many of which are non-physical. It is important to recognise that these behaviours can be just as harmful.
- **Don't blame them for the abuse**
No one ever has the right to use violence against another person. You may feel frustrated that the person experiencing violence doesn't 'help themselves' by separating from the abusive person. People stay in abusive relationships for a variety of reasons. They may believe they have no other alternative, they may still love the person or be staying for reasons relating to their children. The violent person may have threatened to harm them, their children or other family members.
- **Don't pressure them to leave**
Leaving a violent relationship is very difficult and does not necessarily mean that the violence will end. It is also unhelpful to tell the person affected by violence what you would do or what they should do. Focus on supporting them to make their own decisions, as they have the greatest understanding of their situation.⁷

If you are experiencing family violence or hurting the people you care about, help and support is available.

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service:
1800 015 188

Centre Against Sexual Assault:
1800 806 292

Kids Help Line:
1800 551 800

Women's Legal Service Victoria:
1800 133 302

Men's Referral Service:
1800 065 973

Centrelink Crisis Payment:
132 850

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service:
1800 105 303

WIRE:
1300 134 130

In the case of an emergency call
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INTEGRATED FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES
Women, men and children
Hume Region



For more information about these fact sheets go to www.familyviolenceservices.com.au

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) Personal Safety Survey, ABS Cat. No. 4906.0. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

2 WHGNE (2008) Raped by a partner: A research report, Women's Health Goulburn North East, Wangaratta.

3 DVIRC (1999) Is someone you know being abused in a relationship? A guide for families, friends & neighbours, Domestic

Violence & Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne.

4 Ibid