

How do I get involved?

You don't have to be a social worker, police officer or doctor to help victims of abuse. Every individual has the power to help stop domestic violence. Here are some ways you can get involved:

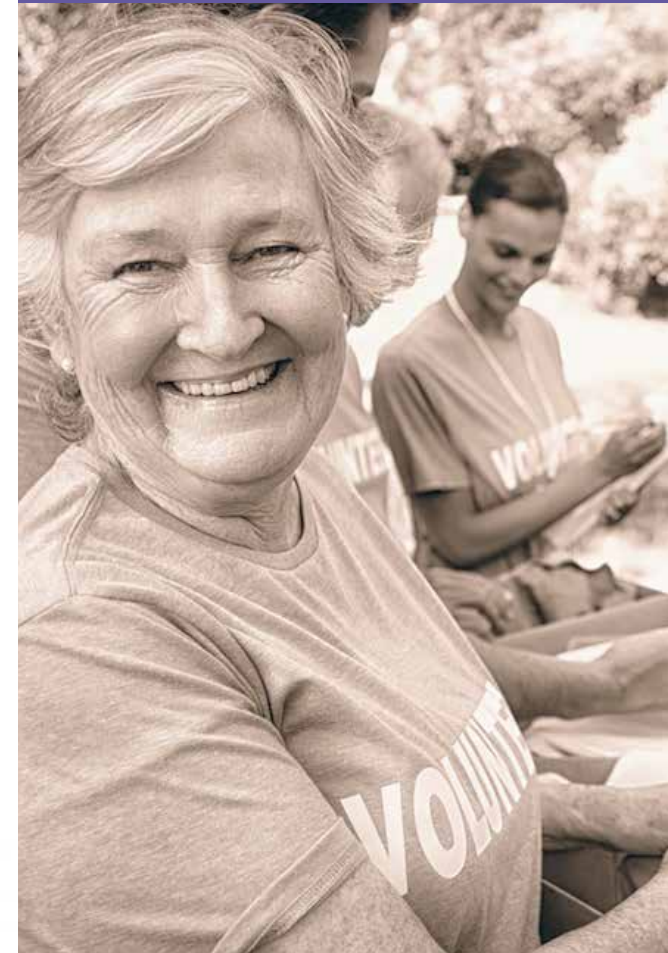
- If you know someone who may be abused, talk with her and let her know that help is available.
- Be alert for symptoms of domestic violence in your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers.
- Volunteer at a local domestic violence organization.
- Donate time, money, food, clothing, or household items to a domestic violence shelter.
- Take domestic violence seriously at all times, and demand that your friends do the same. If you hear a friend joke about violence against women, take a stand.
- Encourage leaders in the community to speak out against domestic violence. Religious and business leaders, teachers and politicians can all use their positions to let others know that domestic violence is wrong.

How do I recognize the signs of abuse?

- Does she often have bruises or injuries? Does she dismiss them or does the explanation she offers not make sense?
- Does she tend to cancel plans at the last minute, without saying why? Does she seem isolated and unable to socialize on her own?
- Does she seem afraid of making her husband or partner angry? Does she need his “permission” or must she follow his “rules”?
- What is her mood and appearance? Does she seem pale, tired all the time, frantic, nervous, meek or anxious?
- Is she overly jumpy or rattled by unexpected noises or sudden movements?
- What is the tone of her voice? Does her speech seem rushed or labored? Does she seem overly cautious about “saying the right thing”?
- Does she receive an inappropriate number of private phone calls?
- Does she give you the feeling that there’s something she wants to tell you, but she can’t quite do it?
- Has she ever described an abusive behavior, but then rushed to defend the abuser?



What Can I Do?



82% of Americans say they would do something to help reduce domestic violence if they knew what to do.

Many women who are victims of abuse live in fear, isolation, and shame. If the abuse has gone on long enough, women begin to believe the things they hear from their abusers. As a result, a woman's self esteem and confidence can be very low, and she may feel trapped and hopeless.

But there is hope. A concerned friend, relative, co-worker or neighbor can offer much-needed support and encouragement. But what to say, and how to say it?

To be truly helpful it is important to be a good listener first. Withhold your judgment of the woman's predicament and let her reveal what is happening in her own time, at her own discretion. Here is What You Can Do to help a victim of domestic violence.

What can I say to someone who is being abused?

- Ask direct questions about her situation, but do so gently. You might begin the conversation something like this: *"I'm concerned about your relationship with (partner). Are you being hurt in any way? Do you feel safe?"*
- Listen without judging. Don't rush into providing solutions. If she is not forthcoming, let the matter rest and ask again a few days later.
- Let her know you care and that it's not her fault. Even if you are an acquaintance or relative of the abuser, make it clear that you are not in alliance with him. *"Nobody deserves to be hit."*
- Explain that there is never an excuse for violence in a relationship—not alcohol or drugs, not financial pressures, not depression or jealousy—not anything.
- Keep in mind that any action a woman takes to remove herself from her situation may result in more abuse—either to her or her children, or both. Remember that she knows best what is the safest thing for her to do.
- If she remains in the relationship, continue to be her friend while firmly expressing your concern for her safety. Leaving an abusive relationship is a huge step and may not happen right away.

What A Victim Needs to Hear

*"I am concerned for your safety."
"I am afraid for the safety of your children."
"It will only get worse."
"I am here for you
when you want to talk or leave."
"You do not deserve to be abused."*

How can I help?

- Provide her with information on domestic violence. For immediate and confidential help, encourage her to call **Project DOVE** at **1-800-889-2000**, 24-hours a day.
- Offer her a place to stay, help with her children or spare cash. Women who live in abusive homes often have no access to money. The decision to leave often means the decision to become homeless.
- Offer her a place to store her getaway bag with clothing and other necessities. Help her make a safety plan. **Remember**, she is taking a serious risk. Let her set the pace.
- If she is planning to leave, remind her to take important papers, such as birth certificates, insurance documents, food stamps, driver's license or ID, checkbook, immunization records and social security cards for herself and her children.
- Urge her to tell her doctor or nurse about the abuse and ask them to document it in her medical records.
- Remind her that domestic violence is a serious crime and that she can seek protection from the police and courts.
- Most importantly, support her decisions. She knows what is best for herself. Never judge or try to solve her problems with quick fixes. What you say and do could make a difference between life or death.