

Tipsheet: Domestic Abuse—Helping a Friend

The First Step

- Taking the first step in talking to a friend may be the most difficult. Think about your relationship with your friend and use your personal judgment and compassion to find the best way to initiate the conversation. Look at the situation from the perspective of your friend. Where would be a safe place to talk? When would be a good time to have the discussion?
- Asking direct questions can begin a conversation that allows the victim to give specific answers. Questions such as "Have you ever been hurt by your partner?", "Are you afraid of your partner?" or "Is something happening at home?" give the victim permission to discuss the abuse.
- It is crucial that you listen to your friend very carefully. Do not react with judgment or shock. Your sensitivity will allow him or her to share more information.

The Next Step

- Once your friend has admitted to the abuse, try to be supportive without giving advice. Keep in mind that your friend may deny the extent of the abuse. It is important to state very clearly that the victim is never to blame for violence.
- Be clear with your friend that you are worried about their safety. Work with your friend to develop a safety plan in case things start to escalate. You also need to think about your own safety as you develop this plan. Are you willing to hide spare car keys or a suitcase or essentials in case she/he needs to leave quickly? Can you provide cab money to get to a shelter?
- Be patient. Remember that it takes time for victims to seek the help they need. When your friend is ready, there are a variety of resources available to victims of abuse in the Twin Cities area. Professional, trained advocates, support groups, legal advocates and safe housing are available to support and assist victims of domestic abuse.

How Can I Help?

- Find a time and place that is safe for your friend to talk about the situation.
- Plan what you will say and how you will say it.
- Anticipate how your friend may react. Denial, anger and tears are common reactions.
- Ask specific questions that imply your suspicions.
- Listen without judgment or shock.
- State clearly that your friend is not to blame for abusive behavior.
- Connect your friend with community resources and programs.
- Work with your friend to develop a safety plan in case things escalate. Think about your safety in the process.
- Be patient with the choices your friend is facing.
- Remember that you cannot "rescue" your friend from an abusive situation.

Source: Cornerstone Advocacy Services, 952-884-0376 www.cornerstonedv.com

Resources: [United Way 2-1-1](http://UnitedWay2-1-1.org)™ is a free and confidential, 24-hour information/referral line that can connect you to over 40,000 programs and resources in our community. Just dial 02-1-1 or 651-291-0211.