

# Help Someone You Know

## In an emergency

If you witness or are involved in an **emergency situation** where someone is being hurt or threatened with violence, **call the Police immediately on 111**. You might save someone from being injured or killed. In an emergency situation, you do not need permission from the person being hurt to ring Police.

## Otherwise if you know someone is being abused

If it is NOT an emergency situation, but you know someone is being abused by a partner, ex-partner or family member, the best thing to do is to build trust with that person, offer non-judgmental support and information about specialist domestic violence services like Shine's Helpline. Make sure they know that you won't share anything they tell you about their situation unless they want you to, or unless it is an emergency situation and they are being hurt – or are at risk of being hurt - at that moment.

Take their lead and find out what is important to them. They know their partner (or whoever is controlling/abusing them) better than anyone, and will already be trying and doing things (often restricting their own freedom) to keep themselves - and their children - safe. Think about how you can support their efforts or make more choices available to them.

## Safe communication - do no harm

If you're talking to someone who you know or suspect is being abused by a partner or family member, only talk to them about the abuse in a private setting, when there are no other family members around, and no verbal children who might inadvertently share what's being said.

If you're contacting them by phone, text or social media private messaging, be careful not to say or write anything that will raise the abusive person's suspicions or put them at further risk should the abusive person read it.

If you are sending a written message, keep your questions general about their welfare, do not ask specific questions about the abuse, e.g. 'How are you doing? Can we make a time to catch up on the phone?' If you're talking on the phone, you can suggest that if it's not safe for them to talk, they can say 'I think you have the wrong number' and hang up and you will call them again another time. If it is safe for them to talk, you can suggest a code word or phrase they can use if it becomes unsafe for them during that call or in the future.

## **If you suspect abuse but you're not sure**

If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse but you're not sure, give them encouragement and space to talk, and be direct about your concerns. **Start with general questions** like: How are things at home? How's it going with your partner?

If the answers are vague **then ask questions to clarify what they mean, and make your questions more specific**: That's terrible that you and your partner are not getting on well lately. What happens when you argue with him/her? What does he/she do when he's stressed or angry?

**If you're still not sure about what is happening, ask direct questions about whether they are afraid or being controlled, hurt or hit**: That's a nasty bruise. Did your partner hurt you? Are you ever afraid of him/her? Has he/she ever hurt you, pushed you, or been violent to you? Do you feel like you're being controlled by him/her? Do you feel like it's not okay to just be yourself? Is there anything that you feel like you have to give up to keep the peace at home or make your partner happy? Are there ways that your life and your choices is are being restricted?

Many people will not offer this information unless you ask directly; they may think you don't want to know, or be afraid you will not believe them or will judge them badly based on what they have seen or experienced before. **Asking direct questions may help them to feel like they can tell you what's really going on because you are showing that you are prepared to hear it, take it seriously, and not blame them for it.**

**Remember that words like 'victim' or 'abuse' may not describe how they see their situation**, so be specific in your questions by asking about being hurt or hit, being afraid or being controlled.

**If they don't want to answer your questions or tell you what's going on, that's okay** – you don't want them to feel like they're being interrogated. **Let them know you're there for them if and when they want to talk to you about what's happening to them, and continue to build trust.**

## **If the answer is yes - honour dignity and resistance**

**If that person discloses that they are being controlled, hurt, or abused in some way, ask questions to understand and acknowledge how they have responded to, or resisted, that abuse. Always treat them in a way that upholds their dignity.** No one wants or chooses to be abused. While people in these situations do not have the power to stop the other person's abusive behaviour, they will resist in a range of ways to preserve their dignity and sense of control over their own life. Their resistance may be what they are thinking and telling themselves in their mind, to help-seeking in many and often creative ways, to asserting their voice and autonomy, even when they may know the likely result is violence.

You can say things to validate their response like, "I'm not surprised that you've been feeling depressed - what your partner has done to you sounds terrible and very frightening and it sounds like you're responding in a way that refuses to accept how he/she treats you as normal. I think you've been brave to share with me what you're going through."

**You may not always understand or agree with the way they resist the abuse, but it is important to see it as a response, rather than viewing the behaviour as contributing to the abuse, or bringing it on themselves.** The only person responsible for abusive and controlling behaviour is the person who is using or perpetrating that behaviour.

**Acknowledge the trust they have in you to share their situation, and reassure them that you can be trusted:** "Thank you so much for telling me what's happening to you. I can imagine it was probably scary to tell me, but I want you to know that you can trust me. I won't share what you've told me with anyone unless you want me to or unless it is an emergency situation and you are being hurt or threatened at that moment."

## **State that violence and abuse is not OK**

It's important that you are clear and consistent with this message - it might be the first time that the person has heard it. People may blame themselves and feel they've done something to deserve the abuse. It's important they hear things like: "It's not your fault. There's no excuse for that sort of behaviour. You are entitled to be safe."

## **Check for current safety**

If the person's safety is at risk in the near future – e.g. their ex-partner is stalking them and has threatened violence - encourage and offer to support them to make contact with a specialist domestic abuse service like Shine's Helpline. But **if anyone is in immediate danger, call the Police on 111.** "Are you afraid he/she might kill you, or have you ever felt like that? How safe do you feel right now? Are you okay to go home? Do you know about Shine's Helpline? If it would help, I can support you with making this call?"

## **Offer support to meet the needs of children**

People experiencing abuse who have care of children often prioritise their children's wellbeing over their own and will have much more to weigh up in making the decision whether to stay or leave the relationship, including how likely it is that their partner will win a custody battle. They may worry that if this happens, they won't be able to protect their children when they're in the care of the partner. If they are considering leaving their partner, they are likely to need support to meet the needs of their children during and after leaving, so offer what you can. Read more below under 'Concern for the safety of a child.'

## **Offer contact with [Shine's free national Helpline \(0508-744-633\)](#), or another specialist domestic violence service**

"I'm concerned about you/your safety. There are some really excellent services that can help in these sorts of situation – do you want the number of Shine's confidential Helpline? It's free to call and answered every day of the week."

## **Offer a Safer Homes booklet**

You can download for free or order printed copies of this booklet to share from [here](#). The booklet was created to help people understand whether they are experiencing domestic abuse, as well as provide information about risk factors, impacts on adults and children, women's refuges, advocacy, safety programmes and other specialist services, protection orders, and other legal options and processes, and more.

## **Offer to stay in touch, or to talk about it another time**

There may be many reasons why someone is not ready to share their experience of domestic violence with you. Once you've asked some questions, they may consider discussing it later with you or someone else. Either way it's helpful for them to hear: "My door is always open. You might like to talk to me about it another time - that's OK."

## **Support, don't push. Give information, not advice.**

### **Remember: leaving is the most dangerous time and there's a lot to weigh up**

Someone experiencing abuse is most likely to be seriously injured or killed just before, during, and after leaving a violent partner. It can be very dangerous for someone experiencing domestic violence to disclose their situation if their abusive partner finds out or even suspects that something is going on. Keeping quiet and staying with an abusive partner may be a preferable option for many reasons, including safety.

Someone in this situation is likely to need a lot of planning and practical, financial and emotional support to be able to leave an abusive partner safely, especially if they are pregnant or have young children. Having children with an abusive partner means that there will always be a connection to that partner, and the abuse is likely to continue after leaving, through the children and possibly directly to the children without the protective parent around. So they will need to be very careful navigating the relationship whether they decide to stay or leave their partner.

Someone experiencing intimate partner violence, will have their freedom and choices limited by the abusive person's behaviour, and further limited if they are marginalised in

some way, for example by poverty, a mental health issue, disability, or their experience of trauma or of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Ask them about what they want, and how you can support them to have more choices available to them.

But also beware of judging the choices that they do make. Sometimes it can be hard to understand the decisions that people make who are experiencing domestic violence. Without fully knowing their situation and context as only they do, you may make judgments or assumptions that don't account for the full picture of their reality.

NZ research shows that people experiencing domestic violence feel best served and supported by specialist organisations like Shine, so make sure you give them Shine's Helpline number.

You cannot solve the problem for them, but with your support, and with good information and over time, they may regain safety and control over their life.

## **Concern for the safety of a child**

### **Physical/sexual abuse of a child**

If you know or suspect that a child is being physically or sexually abused, ring the Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) on 0508-326-459. This line is answered 24/7. You can ring anonymously to talk through a situation before deciding whether to make a formal report. As long as you are making a report in 'good faith', you will not get in trouble if you end up being mistaken. Many people think "what if I'm wrong?" and avoid calling if they aren't sure. But the other question to ask yourself is "what if I'm right?". However, even this can be scary for some people, so another place to start is to ring Shine's Helpline for advice.

### **Children exposed to domestic abuse**

Children are always impacted when they are exposed to family violence, with research showing that long-term impacts on health and wellbeing are similar to children who are physically abused. If you are concerned about a child in this situation, ring Shine's Helpline to talk through the situation and get advice on what action to take. Often these situations involve the children's mother being abused by their father, step-father or mother's boyfriend. If the mother is a safe and protective caregiver, the best way to help the children is usually to support their mum to be safe. Situations can be complicated and it's always a good idea to get some specialist advice before intervening or making a notification to Oranga Tamariki.

## Talking to someone who is using abusive behaviour

### Only share concerns that are safe to share

If you are going to talk to someone who is using violent or abusive behaviour, it is important to stress that your concern stems from personal observations, or from what someone told you who is NOT their partner (or whoever is the target of their abuse), as this is likely to increase that person's danger. It's best, if you can, to let the victimised partner know that you are willing to speak to the person abusing them and discuss with that person what would be useful and safe for you to say, as well as to give them warning so they are prepared. **Never do or say something that is going to put that person at greater risk.**

If the situation is a man abusing a female partner or ex-partner, other men who are close to him are the most likely to be able to influence him to change his behaviour. If you have trust or influence with someone using abusive behaviour, it is important to talk to them if it's safe to do so. Your main message should be that abuse and violence to a partner, ex-partner or family member is never OK, but it is OK to ask for help. It is also important to calmly and respectfully challenge and discourage any victim-blaming justifications that are used to excuse or minimise abusive behaviour.

### Specialist non-violence programmes

If you are encouraging someone to get help, it's important to suggest a specialist non-violence programme like [Shine's No Excuses programme](#) for men. In some locations, there are also non-violence programmes for women.

Since this is such specialised work, most counsellors will not have the skills to be able to do this work safely and effectively. You can ring Shine's Helpline for a referral to your local non-violence programme. Another helpline specifically for this audience is [0800 Hey Bro \(439 276\)](#) run by He Waka Tapu.

Suggesting an alcohol and drug programme may be helpful if the person also has an alcohol and/or drug problem, but changing their drinking/using behaviour is unlikely to stop their controlling behaviours even if it stops the worst of their violence, so it's important to also suggest a non-violence programme.