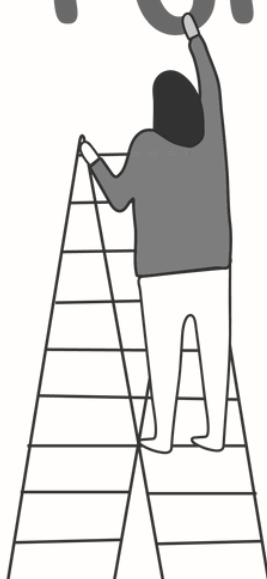


# FINDAWAY TO SUPPORT



A toolkit for those who are worried that their family member, friend, neighbour or colleague may be in an abusive relationship.

**Anonymous Phoneline: 0300 140 0061**



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# Introduction

Unfortunately, domestic abuse is more common than people often think. We know that there are over 2 million victims of domestic abuse every year in the UK, and that approximately 1 in 5 people will experience domestic abuse in their adult lifetime [1].

With that being said, you will almost certainly come into contact with someone in an abusive relationship in your lifetime. The good news is that there are lots of things that you can do to help.

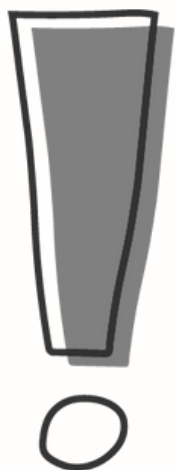
If you have concerns about someone you know, or someone comes to you for support; its only natural that your first thought will be "How can I help?"

Please take a look at some of our suggestions for helpful things you can do or say if someone you know is being controlled, scared, or hurt by their partner, ex-partner or family member.

If after reading this resource you feel like you need more information or advice, please do not hesitate to call us on 0300 140 0061.



# What is domestic abuse?



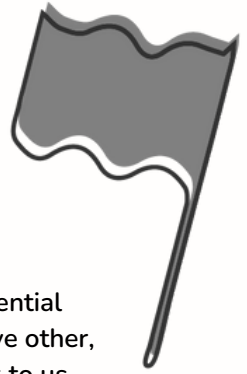
Domestic abuse happens between intimate partners or family members. It might not be easy to identify domestic abuse at first. While some relationships are clearly abusive from the outset, in other relationships, abuse often starts subtly and gets worse over time. Domestic abuse isn't a one off – it's usually a pattern of behaviour, and the abuser will try different things to gain control.

Domestic abuse is a gendered crime, which means that statistically more women are victims of domestic abuse and more men are perpetrators of domestic abuse. However, anybody can be a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Lots of people think domestic abuse means physical violence, but is it often so much more than that. Domestic abuse includes:

- Emotional abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Physical abuse
- Digital & online abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Economic abuse
- Coercive & controlling behaviour
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Stalking & harassment (see page 5)

# What are the Red Flags?

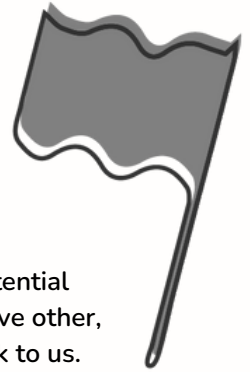


Remember: This is not an exhaustive list, there are many potential indicators of abuse. Some of these behaviours might also have other, perfectly reasonable explanations. If you are still unsure, talk to us.

## **The abuser might:**

- Purposefully disagree with things their partner says.
- Silence their partner during conversations.
- Tell jokes that hurt their partners feelings then complain that they are too sensitive.
- Make their partner feel as if their emotions don't matter.
- Make their partner apologise for things they didn't do.
- Make their partner feel selfish or stupid because of their actions.
- Put words in their partner's mouth or speak for them without their consent to undermine their self-esteem.
- Have sharp mood swings. One moment they seem distant, the next they are not available, and then they are loving.
- Deny things said or actions that took place, including previous abuse from a past relationship.
- Blame their partner for everything and not take any responsibility themselves.
- Say things like they can't live without their partner.
- Dislike a lot of their partner's friends and not want them to spend time with other people.
- Use other people (e.g. family members or friends) to spy on them and report back or to make their case for them.
- Push for commitment and declarations of love early-on in the relationship, so the relationship gets serious quickly.
- Be jealous of other people their partner sees, including family and friends, but also things they spend their time on like work and activities.

# What are the Red Flags?

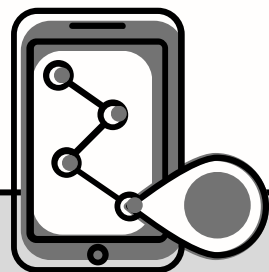


Remember: This is not an exhaustive list, there are many potential indicators of abuse. Some of these behaviours might also have other, perfectly reasonable explanations. If you are still unsure, talk to us.

## **The victim might:**

- Avoid doing things they know will make their partner angry.
- Feel the need to constantly check in and update their partner of their whereabouts.
- Change their appearance and/or behaviour.
- Seem confused as the abuser creates doubt in the victim's perception or memory.
- Defend their partner to their friends and family and make excuses for their behaviour.
- Question their sanity or behaviour.
- Ask their partner how they feel about everything or not be able to make a decision without their partner's approval.
- Seem defensive and feel you are judging them.
- Be around less and be less available for social events.
- Have location sharing on their phone and share their passwords with their partner.
- Say their partner is insecure, jealous, worried about (or has accused them of) cheating.
- Stop doing things they previously enjoyed, like hobbies, studying and even leaving their job.
- Hide things they've bought or seem anxious about their partner seeing what they've bought
- Blame themselves for their partner's behaviour.

# Is it stalking?



Unfortunately with abusive relationships, the abuse usually doesn't end when the relationship ends. Often, upon the relationship ending, stalking behaviours can either begin or escalate.

Stalking is a pattern of unwanted behaviour and attention. It can be difficult for people to recognise as often the individual behaviours can appear non-threatening or insignificant on their own.

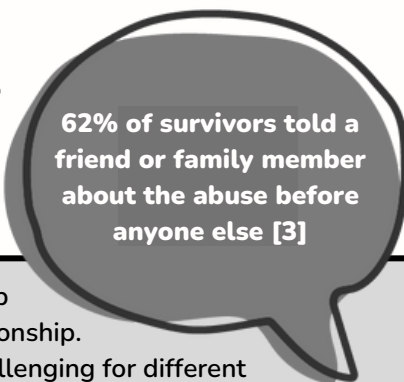
Stalkers are controlling, fixated, and obsessive. Stalkers are not only distressing—they can be dangerous. Stalking should be taken very seriously.

If someone you know is being stalked, be careful not to minimise the behaviour – instead ask yourself, is the behaviour **FOUR** (Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted and Repeated)? If the answer is yes, **this is stalking**.

You can find more information about stalking on our website or through specialists such as the Alice Ruggles Trust, Paladin & the Suzy Lamplugh Trust [2]. Below are just a few things that family members and friends can do to help victims of stalking in particular:

- Believe and validate victims - don't question victims or minimise what they tell you.
- Recognise the pattern of behaviour and acknowledge what the victim is going through - others might just focus on individual incidents.
- Avoid saying things like 'if you ignore them they will go away'.
- Support the victim and encourage them to seek help from specialist services.
- Help them to keep a log of incidents, including how it made them feel at the time.
- Do not share any information about the victim with the stalker - stalkers may try to use family and friends to contact or monitor the victim, they can become unconscious accomplices, or targets themselves (see page 18 for information on your safety and wellbeing).

# Should I 'get involved'?



62% of survivors told a friend or family member about the abuse before anyone else [3]

It can be really difficult to tell when a relationship is abusive, especially for others outside the relationship. Maybe the relationship is an unhappy one, or challenging for different reasons, or it's just a relationship that looks different from what we're used to ourselves. However, if something doesn't feel right, or you've noticed a potential sign of abuse, don't ignore your gut feeling.

Ignoring the signs could leave the person you're worried about feeling more alone. Taking notice is the first step to helping them.

## How can I help?

There are many reasons someone might be reluctant to speak out if they are being controlled, scared or hurt by their partner or family member. For example, they might blame themselves, they might be afraid to bring shame on their community or family, they might not recognise what is happening as abuse, or they might still love their abuser and want to protect them. Perhaps most importantly, they might be scared of their abuser and the consequences for them and their children.

These are just some of the things that might prevent the person you're worried about from sharing what's happening, it also might mean if you have concerns and try to talk to them about it, they might deflect your support and deny that anything is wrong.

If someone does share their experiences with you, how you respond can make a huge difference. Once someone has received a supportive response they are more likely to speak out again and might go on to get more support. **We want the first response to always be a supportive one.**



# What can I say?



## Be patient

Usually it takes people who experience domestic abuse several years to seek help. This means patience is key when expressing your concerns. Don't take it personally if they don't immediately confide in you. Instead, make sure they know you are always there if they do need you, and trust that when they can, they will speak up.

## Listen & believe

If someone tells you about abuse, or worrying behaviour they are experiencing, make sure you listen and validate their experience. Brushing it off or trying to reassure them that it's a one-off will make it harder for them to talk about it. Trust what they say and let them know that you believe them.

Simply giving someone space to talk, and listening to how they're feeling, can be really helpful in itself. If they're finding it difficult, let them know that you're there for when they are ready.

Try not to make assumptions. Your perspective might be useful to them, but try not to assume that you already know what has happened, or what will help. **They know their situation better than anyone.**

## Be calm

Even though it might be upsetting to hear that someone you care about is being treated that way and at risk of harm, try to stay calm. This will help the person you care about feel calmer too, and show them that they can talk to you openly without upsetting you.

# What can I say?



## **Acknowledge**

Acknowledge and believe how hard it must have been for them to share this with you. Show them you care and are concerned. Acknowledge that it takes strength to trust someone enough to talk to them about experiencing abuse.

Acknowledge that they are in a frightening and very difficult situation. Give them time to talk, but don't push them to go into too much detail if they don't want to.

## **Tell them it's not their fault**

Many abusers will make the person they abuse blame themselves and will use psychological abuse to weaken their judgement and self-esteem. Tell them that no one deserves to be treated that way, despite what their abuser has told them.

Nothing they can do or say can justify the abuser's behaviour. Reassure them that abuse can happen to anyone and the only person responsible is the abuser.

## **Don't judge them**

Don't ask why they haven't left or judge their choices. Instead, build their confidence and focus on their strengths. People in abusive relationships need support and understanding – not judgement.

There are many reasons why it's difficult for someone being abused to leave. Those reasons are all valid for them. Leaving is a process and they may make many attempts.

**Remember, the abuser alone is responsible for the abuse.**

# What can I say?



## **Remind them they're not alone**

Seeking help can feel lonely, and sometimes scary. The person you care about may have been deliberately isolated. Say you are there for them, and that there are solutions. Tell them that they are not alone and that there are many people in the same situation.

Let them know they have options and that there are support services available. Be ready to provide information on organisations that can offer support. Reassure them by letting them know that they are not alone, and that you will be there to help. Explore the available options with them.

## **Give them time**

It might take them several tries before they confide in you. Be patient. You might want to know more details, or want them to get help immediately. However, it's important to let them set the pace for seeking help. Support them at their own pace.

Let them make their own decisions. The person you're worried about is the expert in their own life and their choices need to be respected without judgement. They might not want additional support right now. Let the person you're worried about tell you what they want and need - don't try to solve the problem, rescue them or give advice.

It's important not to tell someone to leave an abusive relationship. This has to be their own decision. Many people will never leave the abuser, and whilst it might feel frustrating to see someone stay in an abusive relationship, supporting their decisions will help them trust you and keep you connected.

**Remember: Leaving an abusive relationship can be the most dangerous time for the victim - the decision to leave must be theirs, at their pace and done in a planned way.**

# What can I say?




## Be there

The abuser will try to isolate them, making it harder to reach out to someone or ask for help. Whether they leave or stay, be understanding and available. Even if they always say no, contact them to ask if they want to meet-up, invite them to social activities and ask how they are. Try and keep in touch with them, stay connected - it might seem like something small, but it can make a huge difference.

## Be safe

Finally, be safe - don't put yourself or the person you're worried about at risk. Try and talk face-to-face and in private if you can. Remember that their social media, phone, and emails might be monitored. Never confront the abuser or act as a go-between.



### Should I share my own experience?

If you have your own experiences of abuse it is up to you how open you choose to be about this.

If you do decide to share, consider how you would feel if you received a negative response.

The person you're worried about might compare their experience to yours and may seek to minimise their own abuse, find differences between your experiences, or may feel guilty at discussing their experiences with you.

If asked outright if you've experienced abuse, you could return the conversation to them, e.g. "Let's talk about you right now."

# Helpful Responses

## Starting a conversation

Often we are told about that we shouldn't say, therefore, we want to provide you with examples of things you could say to initiate a conversation, safely and sensitively. Remember: If they're not ready to talk - respect their decision and give them time. These are just a few examples:

**Wow, they text you a lot, do they do that all the time?**

**What do you think they would do if you left?**

**How do you feel when they do [X]?**

**How often do they 'kick off' like that?**

**You said they don't like it when you do [X] - what happens when you do things they don't like?**

**We haven't seen much of you lately, is everything ok?**

**I'm worried about you, I saw the way they looked at you and you seemed scared.**

## Responding Helpfully

A helpful response includes listening, going at their pace and thanking them for sharing with you.

Remember: We don't have to rescue or fix everything, and its OK not to know what to do next. However, it is important that we provide a helpful response so the person knows they can come to us again.

**I believe you**

**I'm not sure what to say, but I'm really glad you told me**

**What do you want to do? Is there anything I can help with?**

# Unhelpful Responses



The way in which we respond to our family members or friends in these circumstance is crucial. The more positive experience they have while speaking with you will increase the probability of them feeling supported and like they can come to you for help again. Unfortunately, despite our best intentions, sometimes we may respond unhelpfully and in a way that could leave the person we're worried about feeling misunderstood and isolated.

## Things to avoid saying:

- Using language such as "just leave" or "don't let him". Unfortunately victims often have very little power and control over their situation, therefore, they don't have a lot of choice.
- Suggesting they are to blame in any way for their abusers behaviours. Such as "what did you do to annoy them that much/make them do that?"
- Using any cultural or religious beliefs to influence their decisions.
- Using ultimatums such as "it's him or me" - there are many barriers to leaving which means this could lead to you becoming more isolated from the victim.
- Using your previous experience to try and school them on the "right" or "wrong" way to handle their situation, remember, every situation is different.
- Forcing them to disclose to you, or pressuring them to leave the relationship. Remember: leaving is the most dangerous time. Pressuring someone can push them away and could also be dangerous.
- Excusing the abuser's behaviour, for example, "you know what they're like when they've had a drink" and "she's like that with everyone"
- Minimising the situation in any way - such as "this sort of stuff happens all the time in marriages" - remember domestic abuse is never OK!

# What can I do to help?



There are lots of practical things you might be able to do to support someone, if that's what they want you to do. For example:

Look for information that might be helpful and be ready to provide information on organisations that offer specialist support. Offer to sit with them and explore the available options. You can find out who else can help on the last page.

If they are going to an appointment (e.g. with their doctor, solicitor or specialist support worker) help them to write down lists of questions that they want to ask, or points they want to make.

Go to appointments with them, if they want you to – even just being there in the waiting room can help someone feel reassured.

Ask if they have been physically hurt or if their health has been affected. If so, offer to go with them to a hospital or to see their GP.

Go with them to visit a solicitor if they are ready to take this step.

Help them to report an incident to the police if they choose to do so.

# What can I do to help?



Let them create their own boundaries of what they think is safe and what is not safe; don't urge them to follow any strategies that they express doubt about.

Help them to keep records of the abuse, keep a log of incidents, things they have told you, messages and photos of any injuries or damage to property. Make sure this is kept somewhere safe where the abuser cannot see it, and that the abuser can't see that messages, screenshots or photos have been sent to someone else.

Ask them if there are any practical tasks you could help with, for example:

- offering them a lift somewhere
- arranging childcare for them
- helping with a household task

**Remember: Look after yourself while you are supporting someone through such a difficult and emotional time. Don't put yourself into a dangerous situation, and be realistic about what you can and can't help with.**





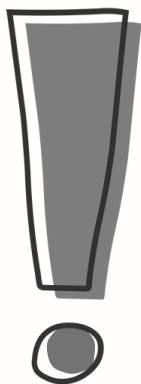
# What can't I do?



As much as we might want to, we can't 'rescue' the person we're worried about, but we can support them and be there for them.

Being close to someone who is in an abusive relationship is hard and upsetting. However, it's important to resist the urge to 'rescue' the victim, or 'confront' the abuser. Even with the best intentions doing either of those things can be unhelpful and could be dangerous.

It can be frightening and distressing to see someone you care about being abused, and you might feel powerless or desperate to help. However, trying to control the situation and push someone into a course of action could put them in more danger, and put yourself at risk as well.



It's important not to tell someone to leave an abusive relationship. This has to be their own decision. Many people will never leave the abuser, and whilst it might feel frustrating to see someone stay in an abusive relationship, supporting their decisions will help them trust you and keep you connected. It's important to remember that they are not 'choosing' to stay, the abuser is responsible for the abuse. The best thing you can do to support is let the person you are worried about make their own decisions about the relationship; they are the experts of their own experience.

**Remember: It is the abuser's actions that are preventing them from leaving.**

# What if they don't want my help?



If you feel that someone you care about is being hurt or controlled, but can't or won't reach out for help, and won't accept any help you offer, it's understandable to feel frustrated, upset and powerless.

However, it's important to accept that there are many reasons why it's difficult for someone being abused to leave or to reach out for help. Those reasons are all valid for them. Leaving is a process and they may make many attempts. Some people might never leave. Remember, the abuser alone is responsible for the abuse.

There are still things you can do to help in this situation, for example you can:

- Let them know that you will be there if they ever change their mind and that there will be no judgement from you. Keep the door open for when they are ready.
- Take a step back, look after your own mental health, reassure yourself that when they are ready you will be there.
- Focus on the things you can do rather than the frustration of them not moving at the pace you expect them too. Accept that you cannot control the situation and you might already be doing everything you can.
- Talk to us if you'd like to discuss your situation anonymously. We can talk to you about what is happening and offer practical support and information. Sometimes it might just be helpful to talk to someone else, especially if you are the only person the victim has told about the abuse. Call our phoneline or use the online webchat to speak to a trained advisor.

# Keeping Safe Together



Let the person you're worried about create their own boundaries of what they think is safe and what is not safe; don't urge them to follow any strategies that they express doubt about.

Look after yourself while you are supporting someone through such a difficult and emotional time. Don't put yourself into a dangerous situation, and be realistic about what you can and can't help with.



Consider creating a safety plan with the person you are worried about, at their discretion. For further advice and support of how to achieve this visit:  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**If it is an emergency or if you or someone else is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999**



# Your safety

- Make sure that you don't put yourself in a dangerous situation.
- Do not offer to talk to the abuser about the situation or their behaviour. You might feel you want to do this, but be mindful that doing so could be dangerous for yourself and could increase the risk to the person you're worried about.
- Try not to be seen as a threat to the abuser's relationship or control, this increases the risk of the person you're worried about being further isolated from you and could also put your own safety at risk.
- Avoid challenging or confronting the abuser. Remember that the person you're worried about might have their social media, phone, and emails might monitored.
- Consider arranging times when it is safe to contact or using code-words where appropriate.

# Your wellbeing

Supporting someone else can be challenging and upsetting. Making sure that you look after your own wellbeing can mean that you have the energy, time and distance to help someone else.

Set boundaries and be realistic about what you can do. Remember that small, simple things can help, and that just being there for them is really important. Healthy boundaries are good for our own wellbeing and they also help us support others better too.

Boundaries are also important because abusers will frequently try and push or ignore the boundaries others have set, and the person you're worried about might not feel they have the right to set boundaries in the first place.



# What if it's an emergency?

Breaking someone's trust could put them at additional risk and may mean that they are unlikely to trust other people in the future. However, there may be times when you feel someone needs help urgently, for example if you're worried:

- That someone is at immediate, serious risk of harm, such as death or serious injury and that it could happen soon.
- About the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.

**If anyone is in immediate danger contact the police on 999 as soon as possible.**

If you do have to tell someone else what is happening, let the person you are worried about retain as much control as possible, whilst keeping yourself safe. This could mean that you tell the person you are worried about what your concerns are and, if appropriate, contact the relevant services together.

If you or others feel in danger right now call 999 and ask for the police to help. You might feel worried about getting someone in trouble, but it's important to put your own safety first.

**If you are concerned about the welfare of a child or a vulnerable adult contact social services in your local area. Alternatively, you can call the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 if you are concerned about a child or visit [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) for further support.**

If you are worried about someone and unsure what to do, seek out advice.

# How can Findaway help?



Our phonenumber is an anonymous and confidential\* service for those aged 16 and over. It is open to anyone worried someone they know is at risk of domestic abuse. We provide practical information and support from trained advocates. Please note: this is not an emergency/crisis service.

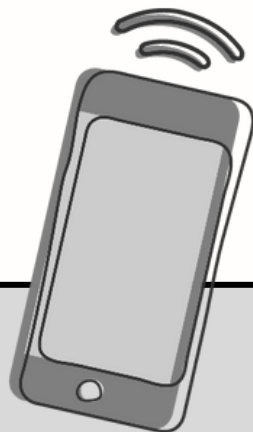
Talk to us - **0300 140 0061**

We provide free workshops to the community that explore domestic abuse and highlight how to recognise the red flags in someone's relationship. If you would like to attend, please visit our website to book your place.



We will also be developing peer-support groups for those who are actively supporting their loved one - if this is something you are interested in, please don't hesitate to contact us.

# How to get in touch



0300 140 0061



[www.wefindaway.org.uk](http://www.wefindaway.org.uk)




[hello@wefindaway.org.uk](mailto:hello@wefindaway.org.uk)



[@wefindaway.org.uk](https://www.instagram.com/wefindaway.org.uk)



[@wefindawaytosupport](https://www.facebook.com/wefindawaytosupport)



Who else  
can help?

There are lots of specialist domestic abuse support services who have useful information on their websites and offer support that the person you're worried about will be able to access, if that's what they want to do.

You can find your local specialist services using the Women's Aid Service Directory at:  
[www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-directory](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-directory)

**National Phonelines:**

24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline by Refuge: 0808 2000 247

Men's Advice Line - Helpline for male victims of domestic abuse: 0808 801 0327



Findaway is a project delivered by Wearside Women in Need, a registered charity.

Charity Number: 1181932

Our registered office is

4-6 Mary Street,

Sunderland,

SR1 3NH



This project is made possible by our funder Comic Relief.

Thank you to all of our steering group members, partner organisations and friends who have informed, inspired and contributed to the information in this toolkit, including Jewish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid and Women's Aid Federation England.



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