



**WORRIED
ABOUT A
FRIEND'S
RELATIONSHIP?**

A toolkit for
responding to abuse
as a bystander



This booklet has been written specifically for sexuality and gender diverse communities and is for anyone who:

- suspects or knows that someone they care about is in an abusive relationship
- knows someone who has, or may have, been sexually assaulted
- is worried that someone they know is using abusive behaviours or hurting the people they love

When you have seen or know about abuse and you are not the victim or the person who uses abuse, this is known as being a 'bystander'.

This bystander toolkit is designed to support you to intervene in a helpful way when you know or suspect that someone is in an abusive relationship and/or has been sexually assaulted.

This toolkit is divided into three sections: Recognise, Respond and Recover

RECOGNISE: Is designed to help you recognise signs of abuse and overcome hesitations that may be preventing you from intervening.

RESPOND: Has information about what you can do to appropriately and safely intervene or offer support.

RECOVER: Has tips to help you take care of yourself after you have supported someone you care about.

Throughout this booklet, we use the acronym LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) to refer to sexuality and gender diverse communities and people. We acknowledge that this acronym may not adequately capture all of the various and unique identities of all people in our communities.

This booklet discusses abuse, and interchangeably refers to abuse, intimate partner violence and domestic violence.

This resource was developed by ACON and supported by Women NSW.

ACON acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work across NSW. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



For more information on both healthy and abusive relationships, sexual assault and consent go to sayitoutloud.org.au

CONTENTS



RECOGNISE

- 4 Is it abuse?
- 5 Should you intervene?

RESPOND

- 6 How can you help?
- 7 What's going on for your friend
- 7 What can you do (immediately)
- 8 What can you do (later on)
- 9 Safety Planning
- 10 Helping a friend a victim of sexual assault
- 11 Things to avoid
- 12 Confronting an abuser that you know
- 13 Starting a conversation
- 15 Likely reactions
- 16 Getting help

RECOVER

- 17 Taking care of yourself
- 18 Setting Boundaries
- 19 Repairing the friendship

RECOGNISE

IS IT ABUSE?

Abusive relationships don't all look the same. Ultimately it is about one person having control and power over another (though it can be more than one person as well).



Frequently abuse can be 'hidden from view' as it occurs out of sight/hearing of others. Abuse can take many forms. One particular situation may undoubtedly be abusive, yet another situation may not be as clear. Someone may disclose to you directly, telling you that they are experiencing abuse. They might also talk more generally about being afraid in their relationship or feeling trapped or like they are always 'walking on eggshells'. They may recount experiences of being hurt or express concern for their safety. Or perhaps you have noticed something that is 'not quite right'? Your gut feeling says that something is wrong but you can't be certain that it is abuse or not.

Again a key indicator of an abusive relationship over an unhealthy relationship is the dynamics of power and control of one person over another and feeling fearful of the partner. If you are not sure then here are some signs that your friend/s may be in an abusive relationship:

THE ABUSED PERSON:

- Seems anxious when their partner is around
- Is isolated and isn't as social as they use to be
- No longer does the things they used to enjoy doing
- Is overly anxious about pleasing their partner
- Has lower self-esteem than they used to
- Mentions that their partner puts a lot of demands on them
- Has bruises or other injuries with no explanation or an explanation that doesn't seem correct

THE ABUSER:

- Regularly puts their partner down
- Tells their partner what they can and can't do
- Gets angry easily with their partner
- Is unreasonably jealous
- Continually texts them or closely monitors their social connections
- Doesn't take responsibility for their own actions or minimises their actions.

Some relationships may be unhealthy but not abusive. An abusive relationship is when one person has power and control over the other person. When one person is fearful of their partner then it is likely an abusive relationship.

SHOULD YOU INTERVENE?

As a bystander, you could make a big difference to someone's life. By intervening you could help the abused person to not feel alone and to feel safe. You could also make an abuser stop and question their actions, or at least know that their actions are unacceptable and ultimately, hopefully get the help they need to stop being abusive to their previous, current or future partner/s.

WHY YOU MIGHT HESITATE...

- Fear of making the situation worse and the violence escalating
- Fear of the friend's reaction and potentially losing the friendship
- Fear for your own safety
- Not knowing what to do/say
- Not wanting or feeling ready to carry the burden of responsibility
- Your own personal triggers, like perhaps if you have experienced abuse in the past
- Feeling like you don't have all the information
- Not feeling supported by the community, your mob or friends around you
- Not recognising it as abuse
- Believing it isn't any of your business
- Thinking someone else will do it help or is better placed to help

HOW CAN YOU GET PAST THESE HESITATIONS?

Read the next section of this toolkit 'Respond' which has a variety of ways to intervene, appropriately, safely and in a way that you feel comfortable with.

Even if you are not the right person to intervene, you may be in a position to find the right person who can.

WHY YOU MIGHT INTERVENE?

- Strong sense of right and wrong
- Wanting to help a friend you care about
- Feeling supported and encouraged by other friends to do so
- Having knowledge of what to do/say
- Believing it was the right thing to do
- Being able to identify that it was abuse
- Believing your actions would not further escalate the situation or isolate your friend
- Believing that your actions would have a positive impact on the situation
- Wanting a stronger, safer LGBTQ community

TRY ASKING YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:


- Do I think that there is abuse happening, even if I don't know for certain?
- Do I think that someone needs help?
- Do I see others and myself as part of the solution?
- Am I currently safe?

IF YOU ANSWERED 'YES' TO THESE QUESTIONS, THEN GO TO OUR NEXT SECTION: RESPOND

RESPOND

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you are concerned that your friend is being abused, here are some ways that you can help.

- 
- ASK**
 - LISTEN**
 - SAY**
 - TELL**
 - STAND BESIDE**
 - GET HELP**
 - DOCUMENT**
 - CALL 000**
 - LOOK AFTER YOURSELF**

What you decide to say or do will depend on the situation and there are lots of actions you can take that don't involve confrontation. Even a simple gesture can be powerful enough to show the person on the receiving end of the behaviour that they're not alone.

Only step in when it is safe to do so!
Avoid putting yourself at risk by always assessing the situation first and acting in a non-confrontational way.

WHAT YOU COULD DO – A QUICK CHECKLIST

- ASK**
Are you ok?
- LISTEN**
Having a voice and being heard can be one of the most crucial steps toward change and healing.
- SAY SOMETHING**
Keep calm. Keep it simple. Try saying "I saw/heard/noticed ... and I am feeling worried about you"
- TELL SOMEONE**
Get support from people you trust.
- STAND BESIDE**
Go and sit or stand next to them and ask them: how can I help, would you like some help?
- GET HELP**
Have a support option ready: 1800RESPECT or ACON.
- DOCUMENT**
Suggest they keep evidence such as photographs of injuries, dated journal entries or screen shots of harassing messages. As a witness you too can record information for later.
- CALL THE POLICE**
If you think that you or somebody else may be in danger.
- LOOK AFTER YOURSELF**
See our next section: **RECOVER** (P17)

HELPING A FRIEND

THINGS YOU CAN DO

If you know or suspect that a friend is being abused in their relationship, it may be difficult to know what to do. It can be very upsetting that someone is hurting a person you care about. There are things you can do to help make them safer.

WHAT'S GOING ON FOR YOUR FRIEND?

An abused person may be overwhelmed with an array of emotions: fear, regret, shame, embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, depression, hope, anger and a broken heart. They may:

- Believe that they are at fault and that by changing their behaviour the abuse will stop.
- Love their partner, but hate the violence.
- Live in hope that the partner's good side will reappear.
- Be dependent on their partner, socially, emotionally or financially.
- Find it hard to make decisions about the future.
- Have disconnected and seem to be feeling nothing or be in denial.
- Feel confusion and shame. For LGBTQ people there may be extra layers of confusion and shame as domestic violence is most often referred to as an issue of 'men's violence against women' which does not translate into same-sex relationships or for trans and gender diverse people.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? (IMMEDIATELY)

If you witness something abusive you may feel safe and able to interrupt immediately. Remember safety is paramount! If you cannot guarantee the safety of yourself or others then now is not the time to intervene.

Here are some steps you can take in the moment you witness abuse when you feel safe to respond:

- DECIDE**
to do something not nothing. Even if it is just to bear witness to the situation and help when it is safer to do so.
- STAND**
with or sit beside the target
- CALL 000** immediately if someone is in danger
- SAY SOMETHING**
to the person who is using abuse if it is safe to do so. Remain calm and unaggressive and keep your message short and simple. Try saying: "Hey what you are doing/saying is not cool". Consider having a support person with you in case the situation escalates.
- INTERRUPT**
the situation by doing something unexpected
e.g. making a loud noise, 'accidentally' drop something, directly engage the abuser e.g. ask them to go for a walk and come back in a minute.

RESPOND

HELPING A FRIEND

WHAT CAN YOU DO? (LATER ON)

If you can't intervene in the moment, if a friend discloses abuse or if you suspect abuse you can make a difference by offering support to them afterwards and checking in with them.

- START A CONVERSATION**
Tell them what you've noticed and ask them if they feel safe and respected. For tips on what to say see our Script (P13)
- LISTEN**
for signs of abuse in what they are telling you. If they do disclose violence make them feel believed, reassure them that their feelings are valid
- IDENTIFY THE SIGNS OF ABUSE AND RED FLAGS**
Help them to recognise it – name it as abuse
- BE SENSITIVE**
understanding and non-judgmental. A victim might be afraid or have feelings of shame
- ASK YOUR FRIEND**
what they need from you right now: a place to stay, a lift to the police station or just an ear to listen
- COMFORT AND SUPPORT THEM**
A big warm hug can make a huge difference
- CHALLENGE MISPERCEPTIONS**
Remind them that they are in no way responsible for the abuse or violence against them. Let them know that abuse does happen in LGBTQ relationships
- EMPOWER THEM TO MAKE CHOICES**
Avoid telling them what to do. Praise them for coping in such a difficult situation
- PROVIDE THEM INFORMATION**
for a DFV support line, emergency service or for a specialist LGBTQ service. Encourage them to seek specialist support or advice. Offer to drive them to an appointment.
- CHECK IN**
after initial conversations and let them know you still care. They may not be ready to take on your support and act straight away, but let them know you're around when they are ready and give them space if they ask for it
- DON'T GIVE UP**
on them as a friend even if they choose to stay in the relationship

THEY ARE NOT AT FAULT!

Remind them that they are in no way responsible for the abuse or violence against them. Let them know that abuse does happen in LGBTQ relationships.

HELPING A FRIEND

HOW CAN YOU HELP KEEP THEM SAFE?

Depending on the level of abuse in the relationship, you may need to talk to your friend about how they can be safer. Keep in mind that violence often increases when someone tries to confront or leave their abuser and it may be hard for them to decide on what to do.

A PROFESSIONAL CAN HELP YOUR FRIEND DEVELOP A SAFETY PLAN. HOWEVER IF YOU THINK YOUR FRIEND NEEDS TO THINK ABOUT THEIR SAFETY STRAIGHT AWAY TALK TO THEM ABOUT THESE THINGS:

- Ask your friend when/where the abuse is most likely to occur. For example is it after their partner has been drinking?
- Ask your friend how they have managed to stay safe so far. They most likely have adopted coping strategies already. Check in to see how effective these are.
- Perhaps suggest a code word that is only known to you both so they can signal when they are in danger, along with an action plan if that code word is used (e.g. then I will call police or come to your house)
- Let them lead their own planning and be guided by what they want to do.
- Offer to keep spare sets of keys, money, important documents, or a bag of their clothes in a safe place in case they need to access them quickly in an emergency.
- Let them know you'll be there no matter what their decision is. If they decide to stay with their partner keep the communication lines open.

A PROFESSIONAL CAN HELP!

Support services can help your friend think about actions they can take when they feel unsafe. Contacting a professional to make a safety plan is advised if you or someone you know is living with domestic or family violence.

Staying safe does not mean the victim must change their behaviour so that their abuser doesn't get angry. The victim is never responsible for the other person's violence.

You can find information about support services on sayitoutloud.org.au

RESPOND

HELPING A FRIEND

WHO IS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Telling someone you have been raped or sexually assaulted is one of the hardest things to do. Hearing about it is also very difficult and it's normal to feel unsure about what to do.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ?

- RESIST ASKING DETAILS**
of the assault because they might not feel ready to talk about it. Probing for details could re-traumatise them. Ask only what is necessary to get them the help they need. If they are struggling to talk, you could suggest that they write it down
- REASSURE**
them that rape and sexual assault is NEVER the fault of the victim regardless of the situation it happened in. Tell them that you are there to support them
- BE PATIENT**
as only they know how they feel, so it's important that you let them recover at their own pace
- RESPECT**
their decisions and allow them to regain a sense of control of their life
- SUGGEST MEDICAL HELP**
if the assault was recent and ask them if you can phone the police. Be guided by them and only call the police with their consent
- BE CONSISTENT**
and keep checking in. Give them space if they ask for it
- STAY WITH THEM**
if you can, go with them to the police or hospital to get help and make a report

THERE IS NO 'NORMAL' RESPONSE TO RAPE OR SEXUAL ASSAULT.

When someone discloses rape or sexual assault they could be telling you directly after the experience or it may have taken them days, weeks, months or even years to feel able to talk to about it.

They may cry or be angry, or they might seem emotionless. They may withdraw socially, or they may party hard. They also might not change their behaviour at all. There is no standard reaction to being assaulted.

HELPING A FRIEND

THINGS TO AVOID DOING FOR A FRIEND WHO IS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Witnessing or hearing about abuse or sexual assault, especially if it is about someone we love, can bring up a lot of emotions. Sometimes bystanders say or do something that can cause further harm to the situation, even if they thought they were helping. Here are some suggestions for ways that you can avoid further fallout or danger or stress for everyone involved.

TRY TO AVOID :

Whether you are supporting a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault OR the perpetrators of either, here are some things you should not do:

❑ MINIMISING THE ABUSE

Chances are that minimising abuse is how the abuser has been getting away with it already. What you are being told is just a fraction of what is actually occurring

❑ TELLING THE ABUSER

that the victim has said or done anything that alerted you. Instead tell them you noticed on your own otherwise you can put their target at greater risk

❑ ASSUMING THAT YOU KNOW WHAT'S BEST

Being abused or assaulted is already a disempowering experience. Telling a victim what to do can make the person feel even more powerless. Re-empowering a victim to make their own choices is different to telling them what you think they 'should' or 'shouldn't' do

❑ GANGING UP ON SOMEONE

Gathering a support network to intervene is different to ganging up on someone. Ganging up is threatening and can make a situation worse

❑ TELLING A VICTIM TO LEAVE

or criticise them for staying. Although you may want them to leave, it is more helpful to support the person to make that decision in their own time and respect that they may decide not to leave. It is important to note that violence usually increases when a victim tries to leave or the abuser thinks that they are planning to do so

❑ POSTING ONLINE

about someone else's experience. There are several reasons for this: it can lead to further victimisation by the abuser or through people's comments; the abused person may feel exposed by the detail of their life being made public, even if you don't use names; and publicising another person's traumatic experience can be triggering for other people to read. Once something is on the internet you have no control over who reads it. You may put the abused person at risk of being found by the abuser through cyber stalking you or the victim

❑ ENGAGEING IN DEBATE

or an argument, as this is how situations can escalate. If the harasser responds in an angry or defensive way, try your best to assist the person who was targeted instead of engaging with the harasser

❑ VICTIM BLAMING

It is unhelpful to ask questions that suggest that the abuse is the victim's fault. Questions like: 'what did you do to provoke them?'; 'how much did you drink?'; 'Why didn't you do...?' 'You should have ...' should never be voiced

RESPOND

HELPING A FRIEND

CONFRONTING AN ABUSER THAT YOU KNOW

With intimate partner violence, family violence & sexual assault being so prevalent in our society, there is a chance that you will know or come across someone who uses abuse. There are times when it is safe and appropriate for you to confront an abuser. This information is to help you if you are aware one of your friends uses abusive behaviours.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Standing up to an abuser can make them think twice about what they're saying or doing. But often people don't stand up because they fear becoming the target of abuse themselves, ruining their relationship with the abuser or 'getting it wrong'.

In small communities like the LGBTQ community there can be extra pressures around anonymity and confidentiality and not wanting to pathologise the community further.

There are several ways that you can confront a person who uses abuse. Remember safety is paramount! If you are worried about the safety of yourself or others then now is not the time to confront someone who uses abuse.

Here are some steps you can take if you witness abuse:

- Interrupting or distracting the abuser
- Tell the abuser that you find the behaviour upsetting
- Calling the behaviour out as abusive
- Recording the incident or other evidence on your phone
- If you don't feel comfortable saying something, use body language to show them that you don't like their behaviour (e.g. a stern look or a shake of your head)
- There is power in numbers, ask someone with you to help respond
- If the abuse is severe or anyone is in danger call 000

Here are some steps you can take if you know that someone is using abuse and if you know the abuser.

- If possible, have a conversation with the abuser in a safe place where you can both talk freely and privately. Try a quiet corner in a café or go to a park. If it is clear they are not receptive, have an exit plan to end and leave the conversation
- Speak to them about their recent disrespectful behaviour (see suggested script P13)
- Call out disrespectful language or behaviour e.g. challenging their negative comments about their partner
- Challenge any rigid attitudes they have to relationships, e.g. that a partner should behave in a certain way

HELPING A FRIEND

STARTING A CONVERSATION

Knowing what to say can be one of the biggest hurdles to get over. This section has some suggestions for starting a conversation, with a printable script to help you get started.

WHAT TO SAY

TO SOMEONE WHO IS BEING/HAS BEEN ABUSED:

Start off by showing them that you are taking the situation very seriously:

“I’d really like to have a chat with you, somewhere in private”.

Tell them why you are concerned and what you have noticed:

“I’ve noticed that you seem [e.g. scared, anxious, not your old self] around your partner”

Name it as abuse:

“I’m worried you’re in an abusive relationship and I am worried about you”.

Give them a chance to tell you what is happening but bear in mind that they may not be ready to talk about it.

Offer help but leave any decisions up to them:

“How can I help?”

TO AN ABUSER WHO IS A FRIEND:

Start a conversation off as caring and non-critical:

“We’re friends, right... well as your friend I’d like to say that I’m concerned by some things I have noticed”

Give reasons why you are concerned, focus on the acts of the abuser and nothing that the target did to alert you:

“I have noticed that you said/did...”

Tell them how you feel about it:

“I am worried for you both, especially for [name the target of abuse]. I don’t want to see anyone hurt”

“I wouldn’t want to see anyone saying/doing that to you”

Raise potential consequences:

“If you don’t get help to change you could cause more harm to yourself, [name the victim and any children involved]”

Check in that they understand:

“What do you think and feel about what I am saying?”

Support them to change:

“Have you thought about getting professional help to change some of your behaviours?”

RESPOND

HELPING A FRIEND

A SIMPLER SCRIPT VERSION:

If the person you are confronting is acting defensively, using 'I' statements this may be able to reduce defensiveness.

HOW TO SAY IT:

- Call on a friend or someone you trust to help you talk openly with the abuser
- Avoid confronting them with aggression; it will only make the situation work
- Try to talk to the abuser about patterns of behaviour. Use several examples to explain these patterns
- Be a good listener and give respectful attention. Do not be antagonistic
- Be honest and direct whenever possible
- Set boundaries — do not make excuses for them or agree with theirs. The abuser is responsible for the abuse
- Be aware that abusers will attempt to enlist you as their supporter through highlighting the faults of their partner and minimizing their own actions

A SIMPLER VERSION:

When I...
I feel...
I would like...

EXAMPLES:

“When I see Sam being spoken down to, I feel worried for them. I would like you to see a professional so that you can get help to stop.”

“When I see Sam getting hurt I feel scared for their safety. I would like Sam to feel safe at home. I think seeing a professional can help you to stop hurting Sam. What do you think about what I’m saying?”



HELPING A FRIEND

LIKELY REACTIONS

If you are unsure if the reaction could get violent, confront the abuser in a public place and bring a friend as a witness and to support you.

The most likely reactions that you will get when confronting a perpetrator of abuse are:

- Denial: “I have no idea what you’re talking about, it simply isn’t true”
- Minimisation: “You’re making it sound much worse than it actually is”
- Blame the victim: “They make me get angry and worked up”
- Attack the victim’s credibility: “You know that they lie all the time”
- They may not see their actions as violent: “It’s not abuse it’s just normal for a relationship”
- Assume the victim role: “They are the one attacking me” or “I’ve had a hard life”
- Claim to be misunderstood: “I only do it because I care about them, and they were way out of line”
- Partial admission of guilt: “Once or twice I may have taken it too far”
- Claim to not remember an incident: “I was drunk I don’t remember anything”
- They may try to get you to doubt your own evaluations of the abuse and lead you to feel confused about what you saw/know: “When I said that I was only joking”
- They may get defensive, angry or emotional.

The best way to work with these negative and unhelpful reactions is to stay calm, keep consistent with your messaging, use as many solid examples as you can and sound as supportive and non-attacking as possible.

For example:

“I hear what you are saying, I don’t know all the details but I did see you get very angry the other day and I am concerned for the safety in your relationship, I think there is no harm in you talking to a professional so that these fights can stop”.



RESPOND

GETTING HELP

Doing it alone is hard! Where possible, everyone involved should get help from others. Here are some useful support options.



CALL ON A FRIEND

Knowing that a friend has your back can make the world of difference. Just make sure that it is a friend you can trust and preferably one who can keep their cool in a tough situation. Having a friend go with you to see police or a support service can make the difference between it being a positive experience or not.

GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

Here are some numbers for services that can help you:

ACON | 1800 063 060

ACON is a NSW based HIV and sexuality and gender diverse health organisation, with offices in Sydney, Newcastle and Lismore. ACON can offer information, referrals, counselling, advocacy and practical support for sexuality and gender diverse people in NSW who have experienced intimate partner violence or sexual assault.

Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia (RDVSA) | 1800 424 017

RDVSA provides 24/7 telephone and online crisis counselling for anyone – of all genders - in Australia who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault, family or domestic violence and their non-offending supporters.

1800RESPECT | 1800 737 732

National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling and information referral service, available 24 hours a day, year round.

QLife | 1800 184 527

QLife national telephone and web counselling service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people, families and friends. Open from 3pm to midnight in your state or territory, every day.

REPORTING THE INCIDENT TO POLICE

For urgent assistance, when abuse is occurring or when you are afraid it is about to happen, call for police and/or an ambulance on 000.

If it is not an emergency situation, and you or someone involved would like to make a report, call or go into your local police station. For a list of police stations go to the police website: police.nsw.gov.au/

Ask to speak to a domestic violence liaison officer (DVLO). DVLO's are in most police stations in NSW, just ask for one when you contact police.

A DVLO will:

Investigate the situation, give you information about the Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) process and support you through the court process.

You could also ask for assistance from an LGBTIQ liaison officer (GLLO). GLLO's are not at every police station, but you can ask for the nearest GLLO at your local station.

You can contact Crime Stoppers with information about domestic violence/sexual assault crimes: 1800 333 000 or via the reporting page: nsw.crimestoppers.com.au/ Information you provide will be kept confidential.

RECOVER

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Abuse is upsetting. After witnessing or hearing about abuse you may be struggling to cope with what has happened and how you're feeling. You may feel sad, angry or helpless. If this is the case, it's important that you seek help for yourself.



SELF-CARE

Taking care of yourself (or self-care) is a good daily habit to get into, but it is especially important during times of stress or heavy emotions.

- ENGAGE IN AN ACTIVITY**
that you enjoy and find relaxing, such as going for a walk, gardening, listening to music or reading.
- DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR YOUR BODY**
like exercising, meditation, a massage, sleeping or eating something healthy (and tasty!)
- CONNECT WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY OR PETS**
Don't be afraid to ask them for some extra support.
- BE KIND TO YOURSELF**
Generally try to be kind to yourself. Don't have too high expectations of yourself and give yourself the positive feedback you'd give a friend during this time.

YOU MAY NEED TO LET GO SO THAT THEY CAN MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS, OR SO THAT YOU CAN MOVE ON FROM ANY STRESS THAT IT IS CAUSING YOU.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Even when we haven't experienced trauma directly it can still affect us. This is especially true when a person close to us tells us about their trauma, it can creep up on us when we're trying to understand and support them. It is important to pay attention to how you are feeling. Look for signs of stress in yourself: increased heart rate or breathing, tension in the body, moodiness, changes in eating and sleeping habits, bad dreams, imagining what they have told you in your own mind, not being able to think clearly or only thinking about the situation.

GETTING TRIGGERED

If you have experienced trauma in your past, knowing about someone else's trauma can trigger memories for you. Reach out for help and support for yourself, with loved ones and with a professional counsellor or psychologist.

LETTING GO

At the end of the day you can do your best to help your friend/loved one but it is their life so there may come a time when you need to let go.

You may need to let go so that they can make their own decisions, or so that you can move on from any stress that it is causing you. 'Letting go' simply means allowing there to be enough space for you both to live your life.

You may say to yourself that you will prioritise your own relationship, family and work but will help your friend as much as possible outside of that time. Communicate your boundaries with others, be clear about what you can and can't offer and don't make promises you can't keep.

RECOVER

SETTING BOUNDARIES

PUTTING IN BOUNDARIES AND TAKING TIME OUT

It may be hard not to get too involved in an abusive situation, especially when it's someone you care about. Giving too much of yourself can lead to stress and anxiety, resentment, depression, and health issues. Set limits for what you reasonably can and can't do to help your friend and stick to them.

WHAT TO DO IF INTERVENING DOES NOT GO TO PLAN

It is hard to see someone suffer and feel helpless about it. It is especially hard if you see a solution to a problem that another person does not see or won't take.

They may need to make decisions at their own pace; they may act in the future or not at all. There are often more reasons for someone to stay in an abusive relationship than not. Some people stay due to financial or emotional security, due to a lack of belief in themselves, because they believe that it is better for their children or pets, because their culture or family won't support a decision to leave, or because they love their partner and still hold onto hope that the abuse will end or that the relationship will get better.

Whatever the reason for their choice remember that it is their choice. However you needn't feel totally helpless. Try taking a break from the situation for a while and check back in later. Try going back through the Respond section of the toolkit and try something a little differently.

TRY TAKING A BREAK FROM THE SITUATION FOR A WHILE AND CHECK BACK IN LATER.

WHAT TO DO NEXT:

TRY TO BE PATIENT

It can take time for someone to recognise they are being abused or that their actions are harmful to others. It can take even longer to be able to make safe and permanent decisions to change their situation.

Even if your friend doesn't act right away, you can congratulate yourself for helping them recognise the problem. Recognition is a powerful first step to changing.

If your friend wants to leave or get help but can't yet, try to help them navigate any obstacles that are stopping them. Maybe you need to help them find a safe place to stay, help them save money and literally escort them to see support.

FOCUS ON BEING SUPPORTIVE

Help build their self-confidence. Show them hope that things can change.

HELP THEM MAINTAIN CONTACTS

People in abusive relationships are often very isolated – help them to develop or to maintain contacts outside of their abusive relationship.

STAY STRONG

So that you are able to help in the future

REPAIRING THE FRIENDSHIP

There are various reasons why your friendship may suffer as a result of you trying to help.

REASONS WHY YOUR FRIENDSHIP MAY SUFFER

Maybe the person involved in the abusive relationship felt embarrassed or ashamed of the abuse and as a result of you noticing and saying something they got defensive.

Maybe they wanted to keep it a secret and they are angry that you found out.

Maybe when you tried to intervene an argument started and things were said that were hurtful. Maybe they felt targeted or attacked.

In almost all situations involving abuse there is sure to be a lot of emotions, and emotions can lead to defensiveness, anger and misunderstandings.

When this happens, resentment grows, and the friendship suffers. There is a chance that people involved aren't saying everything that needs to be said, and aren't able to express what is honestly going on for them.

In order to restore the friendship, each person needs to really try to understand where the other person is coming from, their feelings and motivations. The main issue might be a lack of communication.

1. GIVE THEM SPACE

if either of you need it. Especially if you think that remaining involved might be dangerous to anyone's safety.

2. HAVE A CONVERSATION

Open the lines of communication by telling them that you want to fix the friendship. Tell them that you think you need to talk about what happened.

3. BE OPEN

Don't assume you know their side of the story, what they say or what the outcome will be.

4. APOLOGISE

Own up to any of your actions that may have had an adverse effect on them or the friendship.

5. LISTEN

to their side of the story, don't interrupt them, truly listen and make them feel heard.

6. SHARE YOUR SIDE OF THE STORY

including your motivations for acting.

Know that you can't control them, the friendship or the situation. Do your best, meet them half way and then be patient.



A bystander toolkit for
LGBTQ communities

