



Empowering survivors of

Gender-Based Violence

SUPPORTING SOMEONE EXPERIENCING ABUSE TOOLKIT

Understanding. Listening. Supporting.

A practical guide to helping someone you care about navigate abuse, safety, and recovery.

A Message for Supporters

It can be heartbreaking to learn that someone you care about is experiencing abuse.

You may feel worried, frustrated, helpless, confused, or desperate to protect them. You may find yourself wondering:

- What should I say?
- How can I help?
- Why don't they just leave?
- Am I making things worse?

These questions are normal.

The good news is that you do not need to have all the answers to make a difference.

Often, the most powerful support comes from listening without judgment, believing their experiences, and reminding them they are not alone.

This toolkit will help you understand abuse, respond supportively, and provide practical assistance while respecting the survivor's choices and safety.

Understanding Abuse

Abuse Is About Power and Control

Abuse is not caused by stress, alcohol, anger, mental illness, or relationship problems.

Abuse occurs when one person uses behaviour to gain power and control over another person.

Abuse can include:

Physical Abuse

- Hitting
- Pushing
- Strangling
- Intimidation
- Property damage

Emotional Abuse

- Humiliation
- Insults

- Manipulation
- Gaslighting
- Constant criticism

Financial Abuse

- Controlling money
- Preventing employment
- Creating debt
- Withholding resources

Sexual Abuse

- Coercion
- Unwanted sexual activity
- Reproductive control

Coercive Control

- Monitoring movements
- Isolation
- Threats
- Surveillance
- Limiting independence

Recognising the Warning Signs

Someone experiencing abuse may:

- ☐ Appear fearful of their partner
- ☐ Constantly check their phone
- ☐ Cancel plans frequently
- ☐ Become isolated
- ☐ Lose confidence
- ☐ Appear anxious or withdrawn
- ☐ Make excuses for harmful behaviour
- ☐ Have reduced access to money
- ☐ Seem unusually dependent on their partner
- ☐ Look as though they are "walking on eggshells"

Reflection

Have you noticed any of these signs?

Why Doesn't Someone Just Leave?

This is one of the most common questions people ask.

The better question is:

"What makes leaving so difficult?"

Common reasons include:

Fear

The abuser may threaten:

- Violence
- Children
- Pets
- Self-harm
- Financial consequences

Hope

Many survivors hope the abuse will improve.

Financial Dependence

The survivor may rely on the abuser for:

- Housing
- Income
- Healthcare
- Childcare

Trauma Bonds

Abusive relationships often include periods of kindness, apologies, and affection that create powerful emotional attachments.

Safety Risks

Leaving is often the most dangerous period in an abusive relationship.

Remember:

If leaving were simple, abuse would not exist.

Starting a Conversation

Helpful Approaches

Choose a safe and private setting.
Speak calmly and without judgment.

You could say:

- "I've been worried about you."
- "You don't seem like yourself lately."
- "I care about you."
- "You don't deserve to be treated badly."
- "I'm here if you'd like to talk."

Do:

- ✓ Be patient
- ✓ Respect silence
- ✓ Listen carefully
- ✓ Allow them to set the pace

Don't:

- X Demand answers
- X Pressure them to disclose
- X Force conversations

What To Say

Sometimes simple words have the greatest impact.

Helpful Statements

- ✓ I believe you.
- ✓ This is not your fault.
- ✓ You do not deserve this.
- ✓ Thank you for telling me.
- ✓ I am here for you.
- ✓ You are not alone.
- ✓ How can I support you?

- ✓ I trust your judgment.
- ✓ You deserve to feel safe.

What Not To Say

Certain statements can unintentionally increase shame.

Avoid Saying

- ✗ Why don't you just leave?
- ✗ I would never put up with that.
- ✗ Are you sure it was abuse?
- ✗ You need to leave immediately.
- ✗ How could you let this happen?
- ✗ What did you do to cause it?
- ✗ I told you this would happen.

Listening Skills

How To Listen Supportively

When someone shares their experiences:

Focus On Listening

Try:

- Maintaining attention
- Allowing pauses
- Listening more than speaking
- Avoiding interruptions

Validate Their Experience

You do not need to fully understand to offer support.

Helpful responses:

- "That sounds really difficult."
- "I'm sorry you've been going through that."
- "Thank you for trusting me."

Practical Ways To Help

Sometimes practical support is more valuable than advice.

Transport

You may be able to:

- ☐ Drive them to appointments
- ☐ Collect children
- ☐ Assist in an emergency

Childcare

You may be able to:

- ☐ Provide temporary childcare
- ☐ Help with school runs
- ☐ Support attendance at court or counselling

Documentation

You may be able to:

- ☐ Keep copies of important documents
- ☐ Help organise records
- ☐ Store emergency items safely

Daily Support

You may be able to:

- ☐ Help with meals
- ☐ Assist with shopping
- ☐ Check in regularly
- ☐ Help access services

Supporting Someone Through Legal Proceedings

Court processes can be stressful and exhausting.

Support may include:

- ☐ Accompanying them to court
- ☐ Helping organise paperwork
- ☐ Assisting with childcare
- ☐ Providing emotional support
- ☐ Respecting confidentiality
- ☐ Offering practical assistance

Remember:

You cannot remove the stress, but you can reduce the burden.

Supporting Recovery

Healing often continues long after the abuse ends.

Many survivors experience:

- Anxiety
- Self-doubt
- Trauma responses
- Grief
- Anger
- Fear
- Setbacks

Support recovery by:

- ✓ Checking in regularly
- ✓ Celebrating progress
- ✓ Encouraging professional support
- ✓ Being patient
- ✓ Respecting boundaries
- ✓ Reminding them of their strengths

Supporting Male Survivors

Men can experience abuse too.

If someone discloses abuse:

- ✓ Believe them.
- ✓ Take concerns seriously.
- ✓ Avoid stereotypes.
- ✓ Respect their experiences.
- ✓ Encourage support.

Abuse can affect anyone regardless of gender.

Supporting Children Impacted by Abuse

Children may be affected even if they never directly witness the abuse.

Support children by:

- ✓ Providing routine
- ✓ Creating stability
- ✓ Listening without judgment
- ✓ Reassuring them that the abuse is not their fault
- ✓ Encouraging healthy emotional expression
- ✓ Seeking professional support where necessary

A safe adult can make an enormous difference in a child's recovery.

Looking After Yourself

Supporting someone through abuse can be emotionally challenging.

Remember:

- You cannot rescue someone.
- You cannot make decisions for them.
- You cannot control the abuser's behaviour.

You can:

- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Support
- ✓ Encourage
- ✓ Respect choices
- ✓ Maintain your own wellbeing

Self-Care Check-In

What helps me recharge?

Who supports me?

What boundaries do I need?

Quick Reference Checklist

If Someone Discloses Abuse

- ✓ Stay calm
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Believe them
- ✓ Thank them for sharing
- ✓ Focus on safety
- ✓ Ask how you can help
- ✓ Respect their choices
- ✓ Encourage professional support
- ✓ Continue checking in

Final Message

You do not need to be an expert to make a difference.
You do not need to have perfect words.
You do not need to solve the problem.

Sometimes the most powerful thing you can offer is a safe place, a listening ear, and a reminder that someone is not alone.

Your support may be the reason a survivor finds the strength to seek help, create a safety plan, or begin their healing journey.

Remember:

Listen. Believe. Support.

Your presence matters more than having all the answers.