

6 things you can do if you think a friend might be experiencing domestic abuse



How you react to a friend's disclosure of violence can save their life because it affects their likelihood of seeking out further supports. It is critical to not take her power away; trying to make decisions on her behalf may make her situation even more dangerous.

1

When it is safe to do so, virtually check in on your friends, family, and colleagues

"how are you feeling?"; "do you feel safe in your home right now?"

2

Believe them. Validate and empathize with their feelings.

Even if you haven't seen it. Even if you know/care about the person harming your friend.

Try: "That sounds hard"; "you seem scared"; "I'm sorry you're going through this right now"

3

Use I see & I feel statements.

It's common that people don't recognize or label their own relationship as abusive.

Try saying things like, "I see the way he* talks to you, and it makes me feel scared" or "I see the way he treats you, and it makes me feel sad that you're in that situation."

Ask if they want you to help and how.

4

If they want help, support them with safety planning

Safety plans are practical steps to improve safety

Women's shelter workers are trained to help you with this.

5

Avoid victim-blaming. Many of us use harmful language without knowing it or meaning to be hurtful.

Avoid asking "why" questions or saying things that make the person being harmed feel blamed for the abuse.

6

Educate yourself about the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. Refer your friend to trained professionals – like the ones at women's shelters

You don't have to go into shelter to get help from one.

In Alberta - acws.ca/shelters

Across Canada - [Sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca)

You can call a shelter for resources on behalf of someone else.

Positive change can take time. Though your friend may not use these resources right away, you are empowering her with access to helpful information.

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911**.*

*To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at **1-866-331-3933**.*

*To locate a shelter near you, visit **acws.ca/shelters** or **sheltersafe.ca**.*

*If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)***

***Note: Violence and abuse can be used by people of any gender expression and sexual orientation toward people of any gender expression and sexual orientation. While we all continue to learn about the dynamics of domestic violence, the focus, experiences, and evidence of our provincial membership continue to teach us that the most deadly forms of relationship violence are perpetrated mostly by male-identified people against mostly female-identified people.**

Adapted from sources: Julie Lalonde's Instagram Live presentation 23 March 2020, with consultation from Alberta shelter experts.