

# Domestic Violence: Helping 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.

## Otherwise if you know someone is being abused

If it is NOT an emergency situation, but you know someone is being abused by their partner, ex-partner or family member, the best thing to do is to build trust with that person, and 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.

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

If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, give them encouragement and space to talk, but also be direct about your concerns. Start with general questions like: How are things at home? How's it going with your partner?

If their answers are vague and you continue to suspect that person is experiencing domestic violence, ask questions to clarify what they mean, and make your questions more specific: That's terrible you're 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 continue to suspect they are experiencing domestic violence, ask direct questions about whether they are afraid or being hurt, hit or controlled: 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 or feel like it's not okay to just be yourself?

Many people experiencing domestic violence 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. 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 the truth.

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, 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 it to feel like they're being interrogated. Let them know you're there for them if and when they want to tell you about what's happening to them and continue to build trust.

## If the answer is yes

If that person discloses that they are being controlled, hurt, or abused in some way, take the time to acknowledge their strength in coping with what they're experiencing: "I'm not surprised that you've been stressed lately - that sounds really frightening. I don't know how you're coping with that sort of pressure."

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. Often people can feel disloyal to their partner and they may want to make excuses for their behaviour, or may blame themselves and feel they 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 them to make urgent phone contact with a specialist domestic abuse service – Shine's Helpline can help. But if anyone is in immediate danger, call the Police on 111. "Are you afraid he might kill you, or have you ever felt like that? How safe do you feel right now? Are you okay to go home?"

### **Ask about children's safety and wellbeing**

If that person has children, ask how the children are coping, and ask if they are in any danger. People experiencing abuse who have children often prioritise their children's wellbeing over their own. They may stay in an abusive relationship because they believe that's what is best for their children. And they may decide they need to leave once they see their children being negatively affected by their exposure to abuse and violence.

***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. I’d really like to see you get some more support - this is a very tough situation. There are some really excellent help services set up to help in just this sort of situation – do you want me to give you the number of Shine’s confidential Helpline? It’s free to call and answered every day of the week.”

## **Offer a Safer Homes booklet for learning about domestic violence, options and available help**

To download or order a FREE copy of this comprehensive booklet to share, go to:

<https://www.2shine.org.nz/shop/written-resources-dvds/safer-homes-booklet>

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

Sometimes people experiencing domestic violence choose to deny their situation, but 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’s always open. You might like to talk to me about it another time - that’s OK.”

## **Don’t push; leaving is the most dangerous time for victims**

The most dangerous time for victims of abuse is just before, during, and after leaving a violent partner. It can also be very dangerous for someone experiencing domestic violence to disclose their situation if their abusive partner finds out about the disclosure. Keeping quiet and staying in an abusive relationship may be less dangerous, at least in the short term. Someone in this situation is likely to need a lot of planning and support to leave an abusive partner safely, especially if they are pregnant or have young children.

NZ research shows that people experiencing domestic violence feel best served and supported by specialist domestic abuse organisations like Shine, so make sure you give them Shine’s Helpline number. You may not be able to solve the problem for them but with support, information and time, they may regain safety and control in 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, you should 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. 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**

If you know or suspect that a child is being exposed to violence or abuse in the home, 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. However, situations are often more

complicated and it's always a good idea to get some specialist advice before intervening.

## 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 another person who 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 want to speak to the person abusing them and discuss with that person what would be useful and safe for you to say. Never do or say something that is going to put the victim at greater risk of abuse.

If you have trust or influence with the person using abusive behaviour, it is important to talk to them if it's safe to do so. Your main message to them should be both that abuse and violence to a partner, ex-partner or family member is never OK, but it is OK to ask for help. If the situation is a man abusing a female partner or ex-partner, male family members and friends have a responsibility to speak with him, as they are most likely to be able to influence him to change his 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. 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.

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 use of abuse and violence, so it's important to also suggest a non-violence programme.

## Ring Shine's Helpline for advice

Don't forget that you can ring Shine's Helpline to get advice and support to help someone you know.

**shine\*** [www.2shine.org.nz](http://www.2shine.org.nz)

Free National Helpline **0508 744 633**

 [www.facebook.com/shinenz](http://www.facebook.com/shinenz)

 [enquiries@2shine.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@2shine.org.nz)

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