

Support someone experiencing domestic and family violence



What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence is when one person in a relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the other person. Abuse is not always physical — it can be emotional, verbal, sexual, financial or other controlling behaviours that cause the person being abused to live in fear.

Every year people die from domestic and family violence — even when there has been no history of physical violence. All forms of violence and controlling and obsessive behaviours should be taken seriously.

How to support someone experiencing domestic and family violence

Do you suspect a friend or family member is being abused and you are unsure of what to do? Do you know someone who is being abused and want to help? Has a friend, family member or someone else confided in you about abuse or violence in their relationship?

There are things you can do to help. Your response is very important. If you know someone experiencing domestic and family violence, you can be part of the solution. You may even help save someone's life.

If you know someone experiencing domestic and family violence, you can support them by:

- focusing on their safety and their children's safety
- ensuring they are alone and that it's safe for them to speak with you
- listening to what they have to say
- not blaming them

- letting them know the violence is not their fault
- respecting their right to make their own decisions
- not being critical or making negative comments about the abusive person.

You can make the call to DVConnect Womensline on 1800 811 811 (24 hours, 7 days a week) for confidential advice on the best action to take.

DVConnect provides statewide telephone information and advice not only to victims of domestic and family violence but also to concerned family members and friends. Counsellors are available to help people explore their options, whether the caller is the victim, abuser or another concerned person.

Who can be a victim of domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence affects people of all ages, cultures, religions and sexual preferences. While men can be victims, the majority of people affected are women. Most domestic and family violence happens in relationships where people are, or have been, married, living together or dating. However, people can experience domestic and family violence in their relationships with other family members. Older people or people with a disability may experience abuse from an unpaid carer such as a family member, friend or neighbour.

For many victims, the violence or abuse may continue or get worse even after they have ended the relationship. Often, the victim may be in even greater danger after they have ended or left the relationship.

There are signs that may suggest someone is experiencing domestic and family violence. They may:

- seem afraid of their partner or always very anxious to please them
- stop seeing you, other friends or family and become isolated
- become anxious or depressed, unusually quiet or less confident
- be denied adequate care if they are an older person or a person with a disability and the person caring for them is abusive
- have a partner who is controlling, obsessive or jealous
- have a partner who has threatened to harm them, their children or pets
- have a partner who continually phones or texts to check on them.
- have a partner who is depressed or suicidal
- have physical injuries (bruises, sprains or cuts on the body) and may give unlikely explanations for these injuries
- finish phone calls when their partner comes into the room
- be reluctant to leave their children with their partner
- suspect that they are being stalked or followed
- say their partner or carer gives them no access to money, makes them justify every cent that is spent or makes them hand over their money.

Signs of high risk

Domestic and family violence is always a serious issue. However, there are some situations where the risk of severe injury or even death is increased. The victim may be in greater danger if:

- the couple have separated or are about to separate
- they start a new relationship or their ex-partner thinks they have
- there is conflict within the broader family
- the abusive partner threatens to hurt or kill the other person, their children or pets
- there are issues about child custody or access to children
- the person being abused is pregnant
- there is financial hardship or unemployment
- the abusive person has a history of physical violence
- the abusive person has access to guns or other weapons
- the abusive person is depressed, suicidal, self-harming or has a history of mental illness.

Remember, if you are concerned about someone's safety call the police on triple zero (000).

Your help can make a difference

The way you respond to someone experiencing domestic and family violence is really important and can make a difference. If your response supports and encourages them to talk about the situation, they may feel stronger and more able to explore their options and make decisions.

Abuse does not have to include physical violence to be serious and dangerous.

You don't need to be certain that abuse is happening. Trust your instincts. Don't wait for the situation to get worse or for someone else to help.

Don't be surprised if your friend or family member denies there is a problem, doesn't want your support or becomes defensive. They may be afraid to tell you what is going on, be scared of worrying you, or they may not think what is happening is domestic violence.

When approaching someone experiencing domestic or family violence, it is helpful if:

- they are alone and it is safe for them to speak to you
- you approach them in a sensitive, respectful and caring way, for example, by saying: *"I am worried about you. I've noticed you have been unhappy lately"*
- you respect their decision if they don't want to talk about the domestic violence – they may be afraid or ashamed, or they may not be ready to admit to being abused. It may take some time for them to feel comfortable and safe to talk about their situation.

Here are some examples of what you might say to someone experiencing domestic or family violence:

- *"I don't think it's okay for anyone to treat you like that"*
- *"I believe everyone deserves to be treated with respect, especially by those who say they love us and care for us"*
- *"I'll be here for you if you want to talk".*

How you can help

Respect the person's right to make their own decisions

When the person you know is ready to talk, it is important to listen to them without judgement and to take the issue seriously. It is also important to respect the decisions they make and help find ways for them to become stronger and safer.

Even if you don't agree, you should respect their right to make their own decisions.

Listen to what they have to say

This is one of the most important things you can do. Remember, they are confiding in you and may have kept this issue a secret from others. Encourage them to understand they have a right to a life free from abuse.

Focus on how they are feeling and how they are coping with the domestic and family violence

For example, you could ask:
"How have you been managing?"

Be open and show you believe what they are telling you

People who are abused are more likely to minimise the abuse rather than exaggerate the situation. They are also likely to make excuses for the person abusing them.

Many people who use abusive behaviour can appear caring and charming. However, this does not indicate the kind of person they may be behind closed doors.

Many are only abusive to their partner or family members and not to other people.

Some people who experience domestic and family violence may not see themselves as victims of abuse. They may feel it is somehow their fault or may not be able to see a way out of the situation. If there is no physical violence, they may not consider themselves to be at risk of serious harm.

Let them know the domestic and family violence is not their fault

No one deserves to be abused. You could say: *“The way you are being treated is wrong – it’s abuse”* or *“People feel angry but everyone has a choice in how they respond to the situation. Anger is not an excuse for domestic violence”*.

Focus on their safety and their children’s safety

Let them know you are worried about their safety (and their children’s safety) by saying things like *“I’m really afraid for your safety”*.

Talk to them about how they can keep themselves and their children safe. Always recommend that they call the police on triple zero (000) if they believe their lives, or their children’s lives are in immediate danger.

For people who are deaf or have a speech or hearing impairment they can contact the Text Emergency Call Service on 106 by using a teletypewriter (TTY) (not SMS).

Let them know there is legal help available

The law can help prevent further abuse or violence from occurring. Victims can use the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* to apply to a Magistrates Court for a Domestic Violence Order.

The police can also apply for an order if they are concerned about a person’s safety. Police have the power to issue a police protection notice that gives immediate protection to someone affected by domestic violence until the matter can be heard by the court.

Let them know that domestic and family violence is not just physical violence

Any behaviour in a relationship that causes someone to live in fear is domestic and family violence. Financial control, damaging property, verbal abuse, constant criticism, threats, jealousy and obsessive and controlling behaviours all cause psychological and emotional harm and can have serious consequences. It is not safe to wait until the abuse gets physical before seeking help.

Let them know there are support services available

Legal help and support services are available for all forms of domestic and family violence, not just physical violence. Domestic violence services can help people consider their options and work out ways to keep them safe.

DVConnect provides statewide telephone information and advice for people affected by domestic and family violence. Counsellors are available to help people explore their options, whether they are a victim, abuser or other concerned person.

The confidential 24-hour service for women can be reached toll free on 1800 811 811 and the service for men can be reached on 1800 600 636 from 9am to midnight every day.

There is a list of other helpful services along with their contact details listed at the end of this brochure.

What to avoid when talking to someone about domestic and family violence

When talking to a person who is experiencing domestic and family violence, there are some things to avoid. You don't want them to feel judged or criticised, or too afraid or ashamed to talk about the abusive relationship.

Don't blame your friend or family member for the domestic and family violence

It's likely your friend or family member may blame themselves for the abuse and may even think it's their fault. It is important to reassure them that no one deserves to be abused no matter what. The responsibility for the violence rests with the person who is being violent, abusive or controlling.

It is not supportive to suggest they must have done something to cause the abuse. For example, don't ask: *"What did you do to make them treat you like that?"* The person responsible for the abuse chooses to act this way to maintain power and control in the relationship.

Do not look for excuses — avoid blaming alcohol, other drugs or mental health issues for domestic and family violence

Alcohol, other drugs and mental health issues do not cause domestic and family violence — the need for power and control does. Many people who use alcohol or drugs are not abusive to their partners or family.

Avoid telling your friend or family member what to do

When you care about someone and want them to be safe, it is natural you may want to tell them what to do or what you would do if you were in their situation.

To support them in making a decision, help them to explore options and make their own choices. This will help them regain their self-confidence. Giving information about domestic and family violence rather than telling them what to do, can support them to make their own choices and decisions.

Avoid talking to the abuser about their behaviour

Confronting the abuser about their behaviour may place you and your friend or family member in danger.

If you feel your friend, family member or neighbour is in immediate danger, you should call the police by phoning triple zero (000).

For people who are deaf or have a speech or hearing impairment contact the Text Emergency Call Service on 106 by using a teletypewriter (TTY) (not SMS).

Avoid making negative comments about the abusive person

It is understandable that if your friend or family member is being abused you may feel anger, disgust and hatred towards their abuser. However, if you share any negative comments about the abuser, this may make your friend or family member want to defend and make excuses for them especially if this is their partner. It's more helpful to focus on supporting the person who is being abused.

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone who is experiencing domestic and family violence can be difficult. If you are supporting someone, you should:

- get support for yourself — talk to a counsellor at DVConnect HelpLine (1800 811 811 for women or 1800 600 636 for men) or other domestic violence services, a trusted friend or family member (but be careful not to break confidentiality or place the person being abused at further risk)
- be clear with yourself and your friend or family member about how much and what type of support you can give
- remember that your support, whether you realise it or not, is valuable.

Why people stay in abusive relationships

It's upsetting to know someone you care about is experiencing domestic and family violence. It is only natural to wonder why they don't leave the relationship and how they can say that they still love their abuser.

Ending any relationship is difficult. Ending a relationship where there is domestic and family violence can be extremely frightening. Sometimes it takes many years and several attempts before a person may be able to leave an abusive relationship. Some people may never leave.

There are many reasons why it may be hard for the person to leave:

- they may have been threatened, for example, the abuser may have threatened to harm or kill them, their children, their family, pets and even themselves if they leave
- they may hope the abuser will change or that they can help them to change
- they may think the abuse is their fault and that if they change, the domestic or family violence will stop
- they may be committed to the relationship or believe that marriage is forever
- they may believe that their children need to live with both parents and may downplay the impact of living with domestic and family violence on themselves and their children
- they may be experiencing pressure from family, friends, colleagues or their community to stay with the abusive person
- they may be worried about where they will live and how they will manage financially
- they may not speak English well or understand the law about domestic and family violence
- if the abusive person is their carer, they may be afraid that no one else will be available to care for them
- they may be afraid of coping by themselves, especially if their self esteem has been damaged by the abuse.

Some helpful services

Being familiar with local domestic and family violence services will help you provide greater support to your relative or friend.

Remember: don't let anyone's life be placed in danger. In an emergency, call the police on **triple zero (000)** or ask someone else to contact them for you.

For help and further information, call the statewide DVConnect Domestic Violence Helplines:

› DVConnect Womensline

1800 811 811,
24 hours, seven days a week
(Womensline assists women to obtain safe refuge accommodation, confidential counselling and referral to other services)

› DVConnect Mensline

1800 600 636,
9am–midnight, seven days a week
(Mensline provides confidential counselling, information and referral to men affected by domestic and family violence)

› Legal Aid Queensland

1300 651 188
Violence Prevention and Women's
Advocacy Legal Service
(07) 3238 3425

› Public Trustee

1300 651 591 or
(07) 3213 9288

› Women's Legal Service

Brisbane (07) 3392 0670
Regional 1800 677 278

› Immigrant Women's Support Service

Brisbane (07) 3846 3490

(The service provides culturally appropriate support, information and referral for women and children of non-English speaking backgrounds who are experiencing domestic violence.)

› Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

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Domestic and family violence support services

Domestic violence services provide support, counselling, referral and information to people affected by domestic and family violence.

Brisbane (07) 3217 2544

Cairns (07) 4033 6100

Caboolture (07) 5498 9533

Emerald 1300 523 985

Gold Coast (07) 5532 9000

Mackay (07) 4957 3888

Ipswich (07) 3816 3000 or

Rural freecall 1800 026 262

Roma (07) 4622 5230

Logan City (07) 3808 5566

Toowoomba (07) 4639 3605

Sunshine Coast (07) 5430 9300

Townsville (07) 4721 2888

› Adult Guardian

(assists adults who are unable to make decisions for themselves due to illness, injury or disability)

Brisbane (07) 3234 0870 or
Regional 1300 653 187

› **Kids Helpline**

1800 551 800
(for young people up to age 25)

› **Child Safety after hours** (24 hours)

1800 177 135
(for concerns about children)

› **Disability Information and Awareness Line (DIAL)**

Brisbane (07) 3224 8444
Toll free 1800 177 120

› **Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Helpline**

1300 651 192
(Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm)

› **Lifeline**

13 11 14
(24-hour crisis counselling line)

› **Seniors Enquiry Line**

1300 135 500
TTY users phone 133 677 then ask for
1300 135 500
(Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

› **Residential Tenancy Authority**

1300 366 311

› **Seniors Advocacy Information and Legal Service**

(07) 3214 6333

› **Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline**

1800 010 120
(7.30 am to 11.30 pm, seven days)

› **National Relay Service**

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact the National Relay Service on:
TTY users phone TTY/voice calls 133 677
Speak and Listen users phone
1300 555 727

› **SMS Relay Service**

0423 677 767

Further information

For further information, please visit [www.qld.gov.au/domestic violence](http://www.qld.gov.au/domestic-violence) or call **13 QGOV (13 74 68)**.

To order additional copies of this brochure, email Violence_Prevention_Team@communities.qld.gov.au.

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Disclaimer

The information in this brochure is offered as a guide only.

Notes



www.qld.gov.au/domestic-violence
13 QGOV (13 74 68)

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