

# Supporting a Friend or Relative



There is no single way to 'spot' whether a person (male or female) is experiencing domestic abuse or violence, but a pattern of abuse could include :

- Absence from work, school or social events
- Fear of their partner (or ex partner), or references to their partner's anger
- Personality changes eg an outgoing person becoming withdrawn
- Repeated unexplained injuries

People often feel awkward about 'taking sides' and try to keep it out of it, saying 'it's not really any of my business'.

Friends and family may think they are being neutral or they may not even know what to do to help. But ignoring it doesn't help.

## **There are things you can do**

If you think a friend or loved one is being abused try telling them that you are concerned, say why you're worried and ask if they want to talk to you about it. Let them know you want to help. You don't have to know all the answers; the important thing is to break the isolation.

Always prioritise safety- yours and theirs. The abuser won't appreciate you getting involved so be careful about what you do and where and when you do it. Be careful not to intervene personally and ring the police if your friend or relative is in immediate danger.

Support your friend in whatever decision they are currently making about their relationship, whilst being clear that abuse is wrong. Remember, what you are trying to do is be supportive, not to make them feel judged. It's not always easy for someone to just to leave.

Stay in contact with them over time and help them to explore what choices are on offer. Try to focus on their safety rather than the abuser or the relationship. Let them guide you in how best to support them.

Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault and that you are there for them. Remind them of their strengths, challenge them if they put themselves down or blame themselves, praise them for every step they take and let them know they have your support.

### **Practical tips**

- Agree a code word or action that if they say to you or you see, you know they're in danger and cannot access help themselves.
- Find out information about their rights and the services available - for example contact specialist support agencies such as refuge or women's aid who can provide practical and emotion support.
- Get some support yourself. You have to be strong if you are going to help them. Most domestic violence services are happy to help with any worries you may have or provide suggestions as to other actions you might take.
- Most importantly don't give up on them. You might be their only lifeline.

### **Who Else Can Help?**

Remember, in the case of an emergency you should always call 999, or use the new '101' number to contact the police about any crime, including domestic violence.

- Contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (this is a 24 hour/7 days a week helpline)
- Also check out our web pages on the Luton Borough Council Website for up to date contact information for local organisations that can assist your friend or relative further. See Domestic Abuse under Community and Living at [www.luton.gov.uk/](http://www.luton.gov.uk/)