

# Becoming an Ally for survivors

# SMT

Supporting Safe and Confident Communities  
Cefnogi Cymunedau Diogel a Hyderus



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When someone we know experiences domestic abuse it can be difficult to know what the best thing to do to help is. Often our first impulse is to try and jump in and rescue somebody, call the police or put them in a car and take them as far away from the person hurting them as we can get them. It is completely natural when we hear that they are being harmed that we want to do everything in our power to stop it and help them, but sometimes our best intentions end up doing more harm than help and can sometimes even raise this risk of someone being seriously hurt. Here are some of the useful ways we have learned from listening to survivors of domestic abuse that you can put your compassion and energy to good use.

# ASK

When we speak to survivors they are always glad that people have checked in if they are ok. It's ok to ask and tell people you are concerned about them. Sometimes people are not in place to be completely open about what's happening for them because they are not ready to make changes or leave. So be kind and compassionate in your asking, letting people tell their story and experiences as they are ready. When we listen to people without judgement or trying to pressure them to do what we think is best we give them the gift of reflecting on their experiences in a way that helps them come to their own decisions about what they want to happen and what they need to do next.

Speak to domestic abuse professionals that are local to you. They won't contact the person you're worried about without their consent or try and go to the house and rescue them, because this often isn't what will improve anyone's safety. But they can help you understand what will help in this situation. There is a 24hr helpline for domestic abuse in Wales called the Live Fear Free Helpline and the number is 08 08 80 10 800

Encourage the person you are worried to talk a professional as well. These people are trained to help understand the risk that someone is at in their relationship and what the best options available to them are.

If you are worried someone is being hurt right now then ring the police on 999

# SPEAK

# SUPPORT

Support is all about being an ally to the person being harmed. It is not about trying to rescue anyone. It is about supporting them in the decisions that they have come to about their relationship. It's important when we think about supporting someone that we realize the risk is not new to them. Because the information is new to us we may feel we have to act quickly to rescue because of the risk of something happening quickly. But the victim has been managing the risk by themselves for a long time and we need to respect their decisions even if we don't understand them.

## DOs

Help the survivor document their abuse if asked. This could involve taking photos of any injuries, documenting in a diary accounts of abuse with their consent, or keeping other evidence that the survivor may later need in a secure way that the person causing harm won't have access to.

Offer to help them come up with a safety plan. This can involve thinking about who it is safe to disclose to, where are safe places to go, keeping money, documents or other emergency items safe and easily accessible, discussing patterns and triggers of abuse, making a plan for when they will call the police or you will call the police on their behalf, and discussing how to talk to the children about the plan if there are children in the home. If the person is willing to talk to the helpline or local professionals always encourage them to do this. You can go with them to make it easier if that's something they would want.

Encourage them to participate in activities outside of the relationship with friends and families and offer to do self care activities with them.

Take care of yourself and do not do anything that could put you in the way of harm's way. There are good police responses and professional services that can step in to help people in crisis. Get help from these rather than doing something where you could be hurt and the survivor doesn't get what they need.

Focus on the what the survivor wants in their future and communicate hope that life can be better. Consider learning about our human needs and how life can better meet these needs so that you are able to discuss the kind of meaningful and joyful life that is possible for the survivor.

Blame them for not leaving or being abused. When people don't do what we hope or expect the temptation is to become disappointed, angry or even slip into manipulative and controlling behaviour ourselves. Survivors of domestic abuse are victims, what is happening is not their fault.

## DON'Ts

Challenge the perpetrator. It can be tempting to confront abusive partners, criticizing or belittling them. From our experience this can often increase the risk to the survivor. If the person is no longer in the relationship and are safe then you can encourage the abusive partner to seek change by finding a local programme to help them change their behaviours. A good place to start is the RESPECT helpline and their number is 0808 802 4040

Put information about the survivor on social media. Controlling partners are looking for sources of information, particularly after a separation. Think carefully about what you post on social media about the survivor and how it could impact how they could be treated. When in doubt don't post.

Delivering ultimatums. Often we are so desperate to see people safe that we say things like 'If you don't leave by Sunday then I'm going to call the police, or never speak to you again, or I won't speak to your partner again.' Ultimatums don't help people make independent decisions, compassion and kindness in listening helps people come to safe and free decisions.