

## **I think my friend may be in a violent relationship. What should I do?**

If you have a friend you think may be in an abusive relationship, talk with her about it. Don't look the other way. You might think that something as simple as bringing it up couldn't possibly make a difference, but it really does. You don't have to be an expert to talk about abuse. You just need to be a friend.

- Ask direct questions about her situation, gently. Give her time to talk. Ask again a few days later. Don't rush into providing solutions.
- Listen, without judging. Often a battered woman believes her abuser's negative messages about herself. She may feel responsible, ashamed, inadequate and afraid she will be judged by you.
- Tell her the abuse is not her fault. Explain that physical violence in a relationship is never acceptable. There's no excuse for it -- not alcohol or drugs, financial pressure, depression, jealousy or any behavior of hers.
- Make sure she knows she is not alone. Millions of women of every age, race and religion face abuse, and many women find it extremely difficult to deal with the violence. Emphasize that when she wants help, it is available. Let her know that domestic violence tends to get worse and become more frequent with time and that it rarely goes away on its own.
- Explain that relationship abuse is a crime, and that she can seek protection from the police or courts, and help from a local domestic violence program. Suggest that she call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, at 1-800-799-SAFE, for advice and referrals.
- Work with her to identify resources to help her take care of herself, get her emotional support and build her self-esteem.
- If she decides to leave her relationship, she may need money, assistance finding a place to live, a place to store her belongings or a ride to a battered women's shelter. Think about ways you might feel comfortable helping her.
- If you want to talk with someone yourself to get advice about a particular situation, contact a local domestic violence program.

Once you have brought the subject up, bring it up again. Try not to get frustrated if you reach out to a friend and she stays with her batterer or goes back to him. Ending any relationship is a process that takes time. It's even harder in a violent relationship.