

What to Say if You Suspect Someone is Using Abusive Behavior

Domestic violence is a difficult subject to discuss with friends or family members, but it does need to be talked about--especially if you see that someone is exhibiting abusive behavior.

It's important to note that someone using this behavior may not listen. He* may become defensive and even angry, deny it, ignore you or make excuses. He may want to talk about what she did to "provoke" him. He may even laugh it off or make fun of you. Still, you need to say something. Your silence is the same as saying you approve, and speaking up could help save a life.

Here are some easy ways to start a conversation with someone you think might be being abusive:

Draw attention to it.

A good place to start is by simply pointing out the behavior. In some cases, he might not be aware of his behavior or realize that others are aware of it.

- "Do you see the effect your hurtful or mean-spirited words have on her?"
- "When you do that, it makes her feel bad."
- "Did you mean to be so rough?"
- "Kids learn from their parents. Is this how you want your son to treat women?"
- "How would you feel if another man did this to your daughter?"

Tell him what you think.

An abuser might not realize what he is doing is wrong. Let him know that his actions are harmful and detrimental to his relationship with her – and with others who won't tolerate his actions, including you.

- "I'm really worried about her safety."
- "I'm surprised to see you act that way. You're better than that."
- "I care about you, but I won't tolerate you abusing her."
- "This makes me really uncomfortable. It's not right."
- "I am losing respect for you."

Express ideas about loving behavior.

Provide comparisons between loving behavior and abusive behavior.

- "Loving her doesn't mean abusing her." –OR– "Loving her doesn't include abusing her."
- "Good husbands and partners don't say or do those kinds of things."
- "How would you want your daughter treated?"

- “Men should never hit or threaten the women they love.”

Offer suggestions or solutions.

Let him know that there are ways to help him curb his abusive behavior.

- “Call me if you feel like you’re losing control.”
- “Maybe you should try counseling.”
- “There are programs in our area that can help.”

If his behavior is criminal, tell him.

Make sure he is aware of the consequences of his actions.

- “Domestic violence is a crime. You could be arrested for this.”
- “I’m afraid you’ll really hurt her badly or kill her next time.”
- “You could end up in jail if you don’t find a way to deal with your problems. Then what would happen to you and your family?”