



oneLove

How to help a friend who may be abusive

Talk to your friend about it.

Always think of your own safety first, as it might be dangerous to confront someone who has been physically abusive. If you see, hear, or find out about a friend being emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive toward someone else, and you feel comfortable intervening, say something or do something. Start with gentle questions like, "How have things been going between you and [partner] lately?" The goal is to get your friend to admit that they are feeling stress and that they could use some help dealing with that "stress." An abusive person is extremely unlikely to respond positively to being told that they are an abuser. Going along with your friend and pretending it is stress might get that person to accept help faster than trying to get them to admit they are perpetrating relationship violence. An expert may be able to do so, but you risk endangering the victim if you press too hard on an abusive person to make them admit they are a perpetrator of relationship abuse. Talk to other friends about what you've seen and heard, and work together to come up with solutions.

Know where to refer your friend.

If your friend will admit to being "stressed," offer to go with them to a behavioral health or a mental health counselor. Normalize mental health treatment by telling your friend about a time you needed help, or someone else in your family needed mental health counseling. Plan in advance where you could go together for help. You can find out by asking the campus violence prevention office or the campus behavioral health center, or by calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline. The best thing you can do as a friend or loved one is to encourage them to get help from a professional.

Emphasize how important it is that your friend not use violence.

Tell your friend that no matter how bad things get, including if their partner has cheated on them, insulted them, or done other unfair things — there is never a reason to hit or hurt them. You can let your friend know that excessive drinking does not excuse use of violence and that having a difficult childhood is no reason to hurt someone else.

Many abusive people do not realize that they are being abusive.

An abuser may believe that they are being sweet, caring and loving when trying to "protect" their partner, or think that to "show how much someone means to you," you must act jealous. Alternatively, they could know that their behavior is inappropriate and/or criminal, and feel like they just can't control themselves or don't care about what happens. If you think a friend is being abusive in their relationship, it is vital that someone speaks with them about their behaviors. While it is important for you to try and approach them about this, they may not want to listen. If possible, have them receive counseling for their behaviors. If they are not being receptive, it can be helpful to speak with other people in their life that they admire (a coach, teacher, parent, etc.). Explain to those people what you are seeing, and ask them to speak with your friend about how they need to change their behaviors, and why they should change their behaviors. Some of the signs of an abusive personality include: not accepting responsibility for their actions, difficulty tolerating injury, if someone hurts them they think it's okay to hurt them back, and inability to communicate about emotions.

Abusive behavior can stem from a number of different risk factors.

Past trauma, codependency, a sense of abandonment, familial rejection or neglect, inability to communicate about emotions, lack of validation from outside parties, and objectification of women are all risk factors for abusive behavior.