



How can I help my friend?

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**BATTERED WOMEN'S
SUPPORT SERVICES**

www.bwss.org

What can I do to help my friend?



Remember: You may be the only person your friend can trust. Be attentive, believe what she says, tell her you care, and show her you are willing to help.

- **Reassure your friend** that she does not cause the abuse. An abuser learned to use violence as a way of expressing anger or frustration long before he/she met your friend.
- **Physical safety is the first priority.** Women frequently minimize the violence because abuse usually gets worse over time. Ignoring the abuse is dangerous. Explain this to your friend and help her to make an emergency safety plan by obtaining transition house phone numbers and considering police and legal protection.
- **Tell your friend she is not alone.** Abuse happens to many women, of all income and educational levels, in all social classes, in all religious and ethnic groups.
- **If she is not ready at this point** to make major changes in her life, do not take your friendship away from your friend. Your support may be what will make it possible for her to act at a later date.
- **Give your friend BWSS's brochures** which have information and sources of help for assaulted women.
- **Help your friend with her self-esteem.** Tell her what you admire about her; why you value her as a friend; what are her strengths and special qualities.
- **Support her emotions:** fear, anger, hope, grief in the loss of her relationships, etc.
- **Help with children:** they need support for their feelings, to know the reality of what is going on, to know they are not to blame.



Be supportive and willing to listen.

- Let your friend know that you believe what she has told you — chances are, the situation is worse than she is letting on.
- Encourage, but do not pressure your friend to talk about the violence. Allow her to say as much or as little as she wants in her own words.
- Offer to accompany her to the police, transition house, or any other place she is frightened to approach for help. Your presence will help her to be strong and will show her that she is not alone.

No matter how tempting it is to bad-mouth her partner, stop yourself and try to focus on the abuse as the problem. Most women love their partners and want the violence to stop, but they want the relationship to continue.



One in three women in British Columbia has experienced violence

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Allow your friend to make her own decisions.



Remember: You may be the only person that can see your friend through a life without violence. Don't give up on her — just because the decisions she makes are different from the ones you might make doesn't mean she doesn't want or need your support. If she is not ready to leave at this time, please read page 1 of this brochure.

People who use violence do so as a way of controlling their partners. A woman who has been assaulted may come to believe that she can have no control over her life and that her ability to make decisions is flawed. To help her feel more confident and regain control over her life:

- Let her know that there are no simple solutions but that change is possible. **The first step is to look after her safety.**
- Point out different options available to your friend, and help her to evaluate each one. **Your role as a friend is to support, not rescue.**
- Allow her to decide which option is best for her. If you strongly disagree, **remember that it's her life, not yours.**
- Let her know that you'll stand by her no matter what she decides.

strength & hope



Help make a safety plan.

Remember: Abuse rarely occurs only once. Abuse usually gets worse and more frequent with time. Helping to develop a safety plan may be the best way to help your friend protect herself from further harm. And if she doesn't use the plan this time, she may next time, or the time after that.

A safety plan is a plan of action for when an assault occurs, or is about to occur. To help your friend develop a plan which will work for her, the following information is needed:

- When do the assaults usually occur? Are they predictable?
- What does her partner do or say before he/she assaults her?
- Where can she go before an assault occurs to keep her and her children safe? Is there an understanding friend or relative who can provide her shelter?
- Does the presence of a third person reduce the chance that her partner will assault her? If so, can she invite someone into her home over-night?
- If she can't get out before an assault, how can she get help afterwards? Where can she go, who can she call, and how can she get herself to a safe place?

Since 1979,
over 117,000
women have
accessed
services at
BWSS

You can get more information about safety planning by calling the BWSS intake/crisis line. The important thing is to help her develop a plan which goes in logical order from the time the assault occurs (or is about to occur) until she reaches safety.

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If you are going to help me... help me to help myself.



- 1** Please be patient while I decide if I can trust you.
- 2** Let me tell my story, the whole story in my own way.
- 3** Please accept that whatever I have done, whatever I may do is the best I have to offer and seemed right at the time.
- 4** I am not “a person.” I am this person, unique and special.
- 5** Don’t judge me as right or wrong, bad or good. I am what I am and that’s all I’ve got.
- 6** Don’t assume that your knowledge about me is more accurate than mine. You only know what I have told you. That’s only part of me.
- 7** Don’t ever think that you know what I should do. You don’t. I may be confused, but I am still the expert about me.
- 8** Don’t place me in a position of living up to your expectations. I have enough trouble with mine.
- 9** Please hear my feelings, not just my words. Accept all of them. If you can’t, how can I?
- 10** Don’t save me or try to “fix” my situation. I can do it myself. I knew enough to ask for help, didn’t I?



Increase your knowledge.

Remember: The better informed you are, the better able you will be to help her.

- Find out more about the issue of violence against women by contacting a transition house or BWSS. These agencies can also talk with you in confidence about your friend's situation and provide some helpful information.
- Make a list of phone numbers of agencies and individuals who can offer services to your friend. **Call BWSS for more information about these services.**



Taking care of yourself.

Remember: There are no simple solutions for your friend. If you have a friend who is hurting, don't ignore the violence. You may be the one link she has to a world without violence.

Helping a friend who is in an abusive relationship is often stressful and can be dangerous. You need to look after your own physical and emotional well-being.

- Don't confront your friend's partner about the violence. The partner will likely make it even more difficult for you to see your friend and could become violent towards you.
- Talk with resource persons about your feelings, fears, frustrations, and reactions to the abuse. You can do this without giving away your friend's name or betraying her confidence in any way.

* Some of the material in this publication is borrowed from an Education Wife Assault (Toronto) handout, and a Yukon Public Education Association brochure.

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Transition Houses

Abbotsford/Matsqui	Transition House	604.852.6008
Aldergrove	Libra Transition House	604.857.5797
Burnaby	Marguerite Dixon House	604.298.3454
Chilliwack	Ann Davis Transition House	604.792.3116
	Xolhemet Transition House	604.858.0468
Coquitlam	Transition House	604.464.2020
Langley	Ishtar Transition House	604.530.9442
Maple Ridge	Cythera Transition House	604.467.9966
Mission	Transition House	604.826.7800
New Westminister	Monarch Place	604.521.1888
North Vancouver	Sage Transition House	604.987.8325
Powell River	Grace House	604.485.9773
Richmond	Nova Transition House	604.270.4911
Sechelt	Yew Transition House	604.885.2944
Squamish	Pearl's Place	604.892.5711
Surrey	Evergreen Transition House	604.584.3301
	Virginia Sam Transition House	604.572.5116
Vancouver	Kate Booth House	604.872.7774
	Helping Spirit Lodge	
	Native Women's Transition House	604.872.6649
	Rape Relief Women's Shelter	604.872.8212
White Rock	Atira Transition House	604.531.4430

Battered Women's Support Services

Monday - Friday
10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Wednesday
10:00 am to 8:00 pm

- **COUNSELLING 604.687.1867**
- Support Groups
- Information and Referrals
- Legal Advocacy
- Public Education
- Written Materials
- Confidentiality

P.O. Box 21503
1424 Commercial Dr.
Vancouver BC
V5L 5G2
TTY 604.687.6732
Business
604.687.1868
Fax 604.687.1864

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