

I THINK SOMEONE I KNOW IS BEING ABUSED – HOW CAN I HELP?

Visible Physical Injury including:

- ◆ bruises, lacerations, burns, human bite marks, and fractures – especially of the eye, nose, teeth and jaw;
- ◆ injuries during pregnancy, miscarriage, or premature births;
- ◆ unexplained delay in seeking treatment for injuries; and
- ◆ multiple injuries in different stages of healing.

Illnesses that may be related to being battered include:

- ◆ stress-related illnesses such as headaches, backaches, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, sleep disorders, eating disorders, and fatigue;
- ◆ anxiety-related conditions such as heart palpitations, hyperventilation, and “panic attacks”; and
- ◆ less commonly, depression, suicidal thoughts or attempts, and alcohol or other drug problems.

“Presenting problems” are often related to or a result of domestic violence and include:

- ◆ marital or “family” problems;
- ◆ alcohol or other drug addiction; and
- ◆ “mental health” problems.

In the workplace, the effects of domestic violence can emerge as:

- ◆ lost productivity, chronic absenteeism or lateness, or requests for excessive amounts of time off;
- ◆ on-the-job harassment by abuser, either in person or over the phone; and
- ◆ poor employment history, or loss of employment.

✓ **QUICKLIST**

DO -

- ✓ Ask.
- ✓ Express concern.
- ✓ Listen and validate.
- ✓ Offer help.
- ✓ Support her decisions.

DON'T –

- ✓ Wait for her to come to you.
- ✓ Judge or blame.
- ✓ Pressure her.
- ✓ Give advice.
- ✓ Place conditions on your support.

If you ask, be prepared to respond supportively.

There are many things you can do to prepare yourself to offer supportive and empowering assistance.

- ◆ **Educate yourself about domestic violence** – Read this guide, talk to a domestic violence advocate, understand what services are available.
- ◆ **Initiate a conversation in private** and when you have enough time to talk at length, if she chooses to.
- ◆ **Let go of any expectations you have** that there is a “quick fix” to domestic violence or to the obstacles a victim faces. Understand that “inaction” may very well be her best safety strategy at any given time.
- ◆ **Challenge and change any inaccurate attitudes and beliefs that you may have about battered women.** Battered women aren’t battered because there’s something wrong with them. Rather, they are women who become trapped in relationships by their partners’ use of violence and coercion. The better able you are to recognize and build on the resilience, courage, resourcefulness and decision-making abilities of battered women, the better able you will be to help them.

“Do’s” of providing supportive and empowering help:

- ◆ **Believe her** – and let her know that you do. If you know her partner, remember that batterers most often behave differently in public than they do in private.
- ◆ **Listen to what she tells you.** If you actively listen, ask clarifying questions, and avoid making judgments and giving advice, you will most likely learn directly from her what it is she needs.
- ◆ **Build on her strengths.** Based on the information she gives you and your own observations, identify ways in which she has developed coping strategies, solved problems, and exhibited courage and determination, *even if her efforts have not been completely successful.* Help her to build on these strengths.
- ◆ **Validate her feelings.** It is common for women to have conflicting feelings – love and fear, guilt and anger, hope and sadness. Let her know that her feelings are normal.
- ◆ **Avoid victim-blaming.** Tell her that the abuse is not her fault. Reinforce that the abuse is her partner’s problem and his responsibility, but refrain from “bad-mouthing” him.
- ◆ **Take her fears seriously.** If you are concerned about her safety, express your concern without judgment by simply saying. “Your situation sounds dangerous and I’m concerned about your safety.”
- ◆ **Offer help.** As appropriate, offer specific forms of help and information. If she asks you to do something you’re willing and able to do, do it. If you can’t or don’t want to, say so and help her identify other ways to have that need met. Then look for other ways that you *can* help.

◆ **Be an active, creative partner in a woman's safety planning effort.** The key to safety planning is taking a problem, considering the full range of available options, evaluating the risks and benefits of different options, and identifying ways to reduce the risks. Offer ideas, resources and information.

◆ **Support her decisions.** Remember that there are risks attached to every decision a battered woman makes. If you truly want to be helpful, be patient and respectful of a woman's decisions, *even if you don't agree with them.*