

The Role of the First Responder: Listening with Compassion and Referring to a Professional Helper



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Listening with Compassion



Demonstrate your readiness to listen by saying:

- I care about you
- If someone is hurting her, I am available to talk about it
- I want to help in whatever way you want me to
- I won't share what you tell me with anyone unless you want me to
- If you don't want to talk about it right now, that's ok. I'm here when you are ready.

What to Say



When someone tells you they are in an abusive relationship, say:

- No one deserves to be treated this way
- Abuse is not part of a loving and healthy relationship
- You did not do anything to cause his/her abusive behavior
- You cannot do anything to change his/her abusive behavior
- I'm here to support you and help you in whatever way you want

What **NOT** to Say



- Why don't you just leave?
- Why do you tolerate that behavior?
- What did you do to cause him to get angry?
- How could you let this happen?
- If she is so bad, why are you with her?
- Why don't you go to couples counseling?
- I would never allow that to happen to me.
- I just can't believe he would act like that.

Your Role



- It is often difficult to understand the barriers to leaving an abusive relationship.
- It is not our role to “convince” someone to leave an abusive relationship –we must value the person’s self-determination.
- We must not judge, but strive to understand the complexities involved in an abusive relationship.

Safety Planning



- Safety plans are a tool to help DV victims (and any children involved) protect themselves:
 - Staying safe while living with abuser
 - Guidelines for leaving
 - Safety after leaving
- The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when the victim leaves. **In the United States three women are killed each day by an abusive partner.**

Psychosocial Issues Facing Victims



- Guilt, shame, and blame
- Social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Prolonged/repeated trauma
- Enmeshment with perpetrator
- Risk of re-victimization in other relationships

The more times the cycle is completed the less time it takes to complete.

The "Honeymoon"

Abusers act differently after violent episodes. Some ignore or deny the violence. Some blame their "anger" on something you said or did. Some fear losing you and act genuinely sorry. This phase is often called the "honeymoon". The abuser will try to make up for his violence. He may act sorry, send cards and flowers, buy presents, help around the house, spend time with his kids, go to church, get counseling, or make promises. The abuser may seek pity. It's important to realize that this phase is an attempt to draw you back into the relationship. This phase is never a real "honeymoon".

Tension

This feels like walking on eggshells. Nothing is right. There is no way to predict what the abuser wants. While there may not be physical violence (or at least physical violence is minimal), there is emotional abuse, intimidation and threats. Fear of violence is often as coercive as violence itself.

As the cycle is repeated, the violence usually increases in frequency and severity.

Violence

This is the actual violent episode. It includes physical, emotional or sexual abuse. **A crime is committed.**

The Cycle of Violence



DATING VIOLENCE

SEXUAL ABUSE

INTIMIDATION

Putting you in fear by: subjecting you to reckless driving; destroying your personal property; shouting; using certain looks or gestures to control you; threatening to disclose personal information

VIOLATION OF PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Reading your notes to or from other people; going through your purse or locker; trying to "dig up dirt" on you; forcing unwanted intimacy

THREATS

Threatening to harm you, your friends, your family, or your pets; threatening to commit suicide; threatening to break up with you if you do not do what he wants

VERBAL ABUSE

USING MALE PRIVILEGE

Acting like he is your boss and what "he says" goes; making you feel like you have to consult him or get his permission before making a decision

DATING VIOLENCE

POWER & CONTROL

HARRASSMENT

Always seems to know where you are going to be and shows up; spreads rumors about you; won't leave you alone, even if you've broken up

ISOLATION

Pressures you to choose between him and everyone else; tries to turn you against your friends and family; tries to monopolize all your time; pressures you to spend every waking hour with him

HUMILIATION

Calls you names in front of others or in private; puts down anything about you; shows obvious romantic interest in others in front of you; touching or grabbing parts of your body inappropriately; making fun of you or your family

LIMITING INDEPENDENCE

Telling you what kind of clothes to wear; how to wear your hair; if you can wear makeup; trying to make your decisions for you; pressures you to quit any extra-curricular activities

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Referring to a Professional Helper



- The National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 (TTY) can provide resources, support and referrals in your area.
- Loveisrespect.org has online chat, text and phone support options. This is a particularly good resource for teens in abusive dating relationships.

Finding Appropriate Referrals



- Not all mental health professionals know how to work with people in abusive relationships.
- Make sure the professional has experience in this area. This means they are trauma-informed and **THE MAJORITY** of their clients are survivors of intimate partner violence.
- Reach out to mental health professionals now so you have referrals ready when needed.

A Professional Helper Will



- Reprocess the traumatic events to integrate and facilitate healing.
- Address meaning of the abuse and any cognitive distortions.
- Explore coping behaviors in non-pathologizing way.
- Use psychoeducation to normalize.
- Address grief and loss issues.
- Link to psychosocial supports

NON VIOLENCE

Negotiation & Fairness

Seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict

- *Accepting change*
- *Being willing to compromise.*

Non-Threatening Behavior

Talking and acting so that she feels safe and comfortable expressing herself and doing things.

Economic Partnership

Making money decisions together

- *Making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.*

Respect

Listening to her nonjudgmentally

- *Being emotionally affirming and understanding*
- *Valuing opinions.*

EQUALITY

Shared Responsibility

Mutually agreeing on a fair distribution of work

- *Making family decisions together.*

Trust & Support

Supporting her goals in life

- *Respecting her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and opinions.*

Responsible Parenting

Sharing parental responsibilities

- *Being a positive non-violent role for the children.*

Honesty & Accountability

Accepting responsibility for self

- *Acknowledging past use of violence*
- *Admitting being wrong*
- *Communicating openly and truthfully.*

NON VIOLENCE