

HANDOUT ...

Helping a Friend Who is Being Abused

Many students are emotionally, physically, or sexually abused by their intimate partners each year. If you are concerned about a friend, perhaps you feel the problem will work itself out. This is very unlikely. Violence and abuse in relationships usually continues and often gets worse over time if no action is taken to stop it. You can help your friend by being honest about your concerns. Say something.

Things that might be keeping you from saying something:
Myths and Realities of Dating Violence

- **“The violence can’t really be that serious.”**
Dating violence includes threats, pushing, punching, slapping, choking, sexual assault, and assault with weapons. It is rarely a one-time occurrence and usually escalates in frequency and severity. Even if the violence is “only” verbal, it can seriously affect the victim’s health and well-being, so any act of dating violence is something to take seriously.
- **“My friend must be doing something to provoke the violence.”** A victim of dating violence is never to blame for another person’s choice to use violence against her/him. Problems exist in any relationship, but the use of violence is never acceptable.
- **“If it’s so bad, why doesn’t s/he just leave?”**
For most of us, a decision to end a relationship is not easy. Your friend’s emotional ties to her/his partner may be strong, supporting the hope that the violence will end. Perhaps your friend doesn’t know about available resources, or maybe social and justice systems may have been unhelpful in the past. Perhaps when your friend has tried to end the relationship in the past, her/his partner may have used violence to stop her/him. These are just some of the many compelling reasons that may keep someone in an abusive relationship.
- **“I shouldn’t get involved in a private matter.”**
Dating violence is not a “personal problem”. It is a crime with serious repercussions for your friend, your friend’s partner, your campus, and your entire community.
- **“I know the abusive person— I really don’t think he/she could hurt anyone.”** Many abusers are not violent in other relationships and can be charming in social situations, yet be extremely violent in private.
- **“The abusive person must be sick.”** Using violence and abuse is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. People who use violence and abuse to control their partners choose such behavior; viewing them as “sick” wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for it.