

Responding to people who experience domestic and family violence

As a community or religious leader, you may be approached by someone experiencing domestic and family violence. This conversation guide is an example of how to safely respond to someone seeking help. Domestic and family violence is not always easy to recognize, and people may not directly tell you that they are experiencing domestic and family violence. To learn more about recognising domestic and family violence: www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/about-domestic-and-family-violence/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.html

Responding to domestic and family violence can be difficult. When in doubt, follow these steps:

1. Listen with an open mind
2. Validate their concerns
3. Offer support options and referrals

The conversation guide, on the following pages shows how to use these steps in a conversation with the person seeking help.

If you are ever unsure about something, please call the NSW Domestic Violence Line on 1800 656 463 for confidential advice.

Before you continue, please remember:

If you witness a violent incident or you believe a person is in immediate danger you must contact the police on 000.

Something is considered immediate danger if:

- It's occurring now
- There's an immediate fear of it about to happen
- It's life threatening.

If children are involved:

It is mandatory for religious leaders to report child abuse to the child protection helpline if they suspect, witness or are informed of child abuse. If you would like to learn more about reporting child abuse: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters/about

Conversation guide



1. Listen with an open mind



Them: Do you have a few minutes to speak about something?



You: Yes of course. Are you alright?



Them: I'm not sure if I am alright actually. I have been having some issues with my partner.



You: I am sorry to hear that, do you feel comfortable telling me a bit more?



Them: It's really hard to talk about. They've been shouting at me every time I come home from work or when I'm back from visiting my mother. My mother had a fall recently and I need to visit her house more often than usual. My partner calls me all the time when I'm there. Recently they have been hiding the car keys from me so I can't leave the house, and yesterday they shoved me when I arrived home.

Do



- Make sure you understand the situation thoroughly
- Take their concerns seriously
- Make sure that your conversation cannot be heard by other people.

Avoid



- Making quick judgements
- Asking for proof of the violence
- Asking them to be patient with their abuser.

2. Validate their concerns



You: I'm glad you have shared this with me. Please know that you're not alone, and the way your partner is behaving is unacceptable.



Them: It's so scary to finally share this with someone. Please promise me you won't tell them about any of this. I am afraid of how they might react.



You: Of course, I will not share this with anyone, unless you or your children are in immediate danger. Then I am required to contact help.

Do



- Keep their information private. If someone asks you to keep a secret, it might be because they're scared that the violence might get worse or that other people will judge them. However, if they are in immediate danger you are required to contact the police on 000, and if children are involved you must also report child abuse to the child protection helpline on 13 2111.

Avoid



- Suggesting that they should leave their abusive situation. It's unsafe for victim-survivors to leave without the appropriate support and assistance. They are most at risk of severe violence and death when they try to leave or just after they leave the relationship.

3. Offer support options



Them: Thank you so much. I'm not sure what to do now.



You: To be honest, from what I've heard I'm concerned. I think that we should seek professional advice, but only if you feel comfortable. There is a service called the New South Wales Domestic Violence Line and they can help us figure out what to do. We can call them anytime.



Them: Oh, I am not sure about that yet, can I think about it?



You: Of course. If you decide you want advice from a professional, we can make the call together. Is there anything else you want to talk about?



Them: I think I am okay for now. It is nice to be listened to.



You: Do you feel safe to go home now?



Them: I do, but I'll let you know if I don't anymore.



You: You can speak to me anytime.

Do



- Let them know they can come back if they decline help
- Ask what's the best and safest way of contacting them
- Assure them that help for domestic and family violence is free, as it is common for some people to worry about costs
- Consider that everyone's needs are different, and some approaches may not work for everybody
- Empower them to make decisions for themselves.

Avoid



- Confronting the person using violence or try to intervene in a violent situation, as that may cause harm to you or to the person experiencing domestic and family violence
- Offering or providing counselling to the victim-survivor and the person using violence together. This is not appropriate for domestic and family violence situations and may increase danger to victim-survivors and yourself.

It is normal to experience distress when you hear about domestic and family violence. If you need support with your own wellbeing and want to talk to a professional, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.