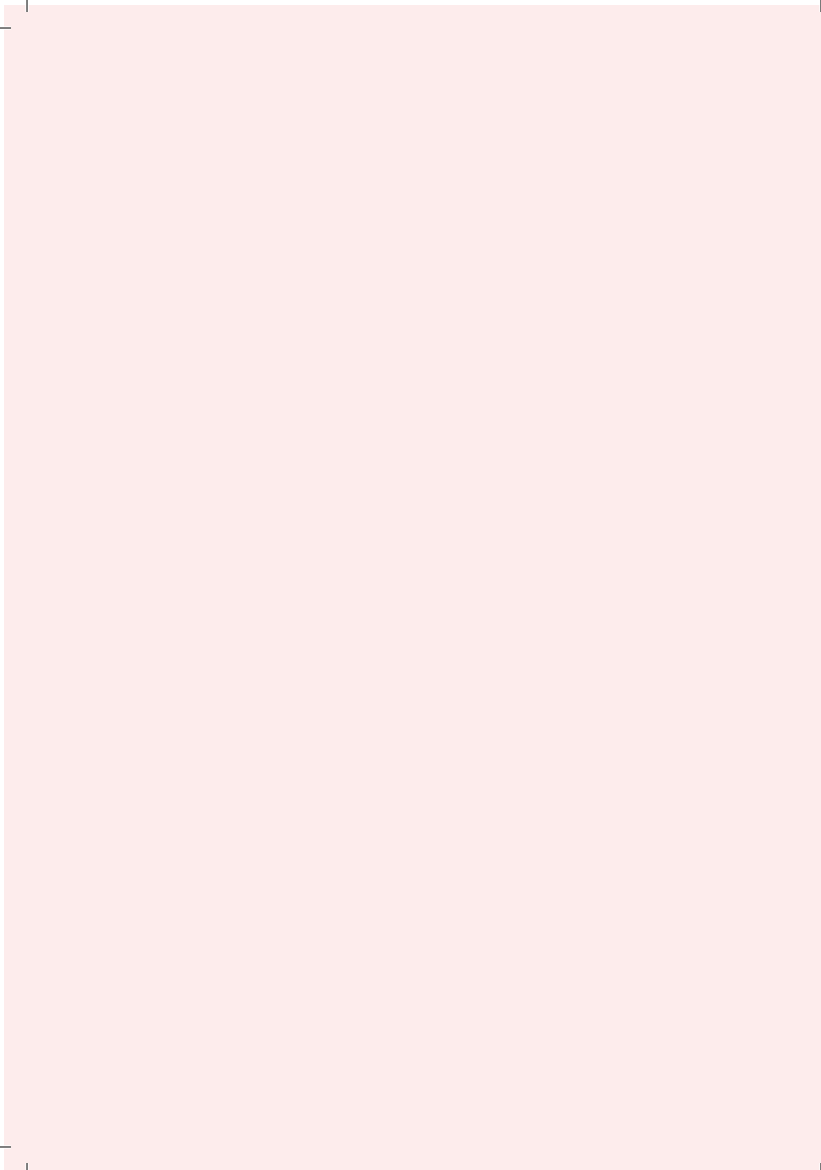


**unsafe
relationships**

**supporting
friends
and family**

MAYOR OF LONDON



Do you know someone who is experiencing violence?

This leaflet is written for friends and family members of someone experiencing domestic violence (including forced marriage and so-called 'honour' based violence) and / or sexual violence.

Here are some suggestions about how you can support them effectively, based on what formerly abused women have found helpful.

If there is a risk of immediate harm, call the police or contact one of the organisations listed at the end of this document.

What is domestic or sexual violence?

Domestic violence – controlling behaviour such as physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse by a current or former partner.

Forced marriage – a marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor.

‘Honour’ based violence – violence committed to protect or defend the ‘honour’ of a family and/or community, usually against young women where they have acted outside perceived acceptable female behaviour patterns.

Sexual violence – sexual contact without the consent of the woman/girl, including rape. Most attackers are known but can also be strangers.

In extreme cases, violence against women can include murder.

Signs of an abusive relationship

He...

- ◆ puts her down
- ◆ does all the talking and dominates the conversation
- ◆ tries to suggest he is the victim and acts bewildered that she isn't grateful to be in a relationship with him
- ◆ tries to keep her away from you
- ◆ acts as if he owns her
- ◆ pretends he has no faults or lies to make himself look good
- ◆ acts as if he is superior and worth more than others in his home

She...

- ◆ may be apologetic and makes excuses for his behaviour
- ◆ is nervous about talking when he's there
- ◆ seems to be sick more often and misses work
- ◆ tries to hide her injuries / wears long sleeves and high necks in the summer
- ◆ makes last minute excuses about why she can't meet you or avoids you in public
- ◆ seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is fearful
- ◆ uses more drugs or alcohol to cope

If you see these warning signs, your friend may need help.

Signs of a forced marriage or 'honour' based violence

- ◆ family history of relatives gone missing, self-harm or suicide
- ◆ relatives making decisions on behalf of the victim
- ◆ victims may truant or have extended absences from school
- ◆ victims may report that they are being kept at home against their will
- ◆ decline in academic / work performance
- ◆ victim may report family has made threats to kill
- ◆ victims may report they are being emotionally blackmailed
- ◆ victims may be isolated due to physical, financial or cultural barriers
- ◆ victims may suffer from depression, self harm or attempt suicide
- ◆ emotional and/or physical abuse

Raise the issue

Don't wait for your abused friend to tell you. Bring the subject up when her abuser isn't around. Let her know you are concerned and want to help.

Try not to criticise her abuser or the relationship. Instead, focus on the abuse and her safety. Listen to what she says and let her see you can be supportive.

Giving support

You need to support your abused friend however she is currently managing her family or relationship, while being clear the abuse is wrong.

Your friend needs to be supported not judged. Maintain contact with her and help her explore all options, such as finding appropriate specialist support.

This is a big challenge. You don't want to see your friend get hurt, but may have to watch her stay with her partner or family when you think she should leave or go to the police.

It's important that she doesn't feel like you're telling her what to do.

What to say

- ◆ sexual or domestic violence is totally unacceptable
- ◆ it's common - one in four UK women will experience domestic violence
- ◆ sexual or domestic violence is about power and control, not sex
- ◆ the abuser is 100 per cent responsible for the abuse
- ◆ it's not your fault, regardless of what you say, do or wear
- ◆ an abuser can choose to stop if they want to
- ◆ you can't change them, but you don't have to put up with it
- ◆ help is available - see the contacts listed at the end

Suggestions of questions to ask

- ◆ what can I do to help?
- ◆ how has his / their behaviour made you feel?
- ◆ how is it affecting you?
- ◆ how have you been coping with the abuse?
- ◆ what can you do to be safer?
- ◆ what are you afraid of if you leave/stay?
- ◆ do you know when it is going to happen?
- ◆ is there a pattern?
- ◆ what do you already do to protect yourself/your children?
- ◆ can I help you find support?

Responding to forced marriage / honour violence

- ◆ do not mediate between the victim and any of their family members - this can put the victim at risk
- ◆ know how serious the danger is and immediacy of the risk - you must act quickly
- ◆ things can rapidly escalate to serious violence ending in murder if nobody intervenes

She may need immediate protection away from the family or care setting. Siblings, boyfriends, girlfriends may also be at risk.

Leaving an abusive partner

Leaving can be difficult. Many women also face making this decision with an abusive partner who promises to change.

Often, leaving a violent partner or abusive family is only the end of the relationship - not the end of the violence. Two women are killed every week by a current or former male partner, around 12 women a year are killed in so-called 'honour' violence and others are killed by abusive family members.

Of these, most were trying to leave a violent relationship, or had recently left one.

Practical help

You could:

- ◆ agree a code word or action your friend can use to signal that she is in danger
- ◆ offer to keep copies of important documents etc for her so if she has to leave in a hurry, she can do so quickly
- ◆ together, or on your own, find out information about local services
- ◆ offer help, eg use of your phone or address for information/messages, keeping spare sets of keys etc
- ◆ get support for yourself - and don't give up on her

You may be her only lifeline.

Men and domestic violence

This leaflet has been developed for women as they are the overwhelming victims of domestic violence. Nevertheless, much of the information will also apply to partners of male victims of sexual violence and to those in same sex relationships.

As with all individuals, the best way to know how to support someone effectively is to ask.

Some men also experience domestic violence and there are services available to help them.

Useful contacts

Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

www.womensaid.org.uk

Rape Crisis

0808 802 9999

www.rapecrisislondon.org

Havens

Camberwell: 020 3299 1599

Paddington: 020 3312 1101

Whitechapel: 020 7247 4787

Forced Marriage Unit

020 7008 0151

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

Survivors UK (sexual violence)

0845 122 1201

<http://www.survivorsuk.org/>

Broken Rainbow (LGBT services)

0300 999 5428

<http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/>

For a full range of services in London, visit:

www.london.gov.uk/knowwheretogo

