



## 12. Offering support and taking action

Experience has shown that when people start to talk about violence they can often feel compelled to disclose their own experience. Alternatively you may recognise the signs of violence in a family member, friend, neighbour or work colleague and wonder what to do.

### For people who have experienced, or are experiencing violence

Many women experiencing domestic violence cope with it alone. While they may develop a range of active strategies to protect themselves and limit the impact of the violence, many do not seek any outside help – they tell nobody at all. When they do disclose the situation to a family member or friend, the first response is often critical in determining how, and whether, they will proceed further.<sup>i</sup>

Violence against women is under-reported, and statistics show that a victim of violence is more likely to discuss and disclose their experience to a friend or family member than to the police or another public authority.<sup>ii</sup>

It is important to know where to refer people and how to deal with people telling you about their experience.

If someone starts talking to you, some simple advice includes:

- Find a safe/quiet space to talk
- Listen – this may be the first time she has spoken about the experience
- Have a non-judgmental attitude
- Believe the woman's story
- Reassure her that it is not her fault
- Hold the perpetrator responsible for the violence and abuse
- Provide emotional and practical support
- Support the woman's choices
- Do not be overly directive.<sup>iii,iv</sup>

For friends and families there is a very useful website that suggests what you can do and how you can help a friend or family member is experiencing domestic violence:

<http://www.dvirc.org.au/publications/friendsfamily.htm>

### For people using violence

If you do talk to someone you suspect is violent to their partner or to the victim of that violence, it is highly likely they will tell you to mind your own business, make excuses or deny it.

None of these responses mean that abuse is not occurring. It is common for a person who is being abusive to deny or minimise the abuse. Probably the only way you will be able to 'verify' that a person is abusive is if their partner tells you that they are, or if you witness the abuse. People who appear to be 'respectable' and 'normal' can be abusive in the privacy of their own home.

If you do observe abuse, and you feel safe or able to, talk about the behaviour you have observed. For example: "You are my friend, but I think the way you criticise and intimidate her is wrong". But if you only know about the abuse because the victim has talked to you about it, check with her first before saying anything to her partner. Her partner could become more abusive to her if he or she thinks she has told someone.

Research shows that men who use violence generally seek relationship counselling rather than domestic violence counselling, often in response to ultimatums delivered by their partners.

There are not as many specific services available for men who use violence compared with services for women suffering violence but there are some. These may be listed in your white or yellow pages.

### Intervening in violent situations

Many people mistakenly believe that they have only two options in instances of actual or potential violence – intervene physically and possibly expose themselves to personal harm, or do nothing. They often choose to do nothing as a result. But this is a false and limited set of choices.<sup>v</sup> Intervening in violent situations can make them less dangerous or more dangerous. Abusive situations are dangerous – stop and think before getting into them. But not stepping in keeps it dangerous and says to the violent person that it's okay to hurt someone. And it tells the person being hurt that no one cares, that she isn't important. When violence isn't challenged, it leaves all of us feeling unsafe.

Things to do;

1. Call the police.
2. Tell the violent person clearly that his actions are not okay.
3. Talk to the victim to help her feel safe.
4. Call on help from other people nearby.
5. Create a distraction to stop the violence.
6. Stand where the violent person can see that his actions are being witnessed.<sup>vi</sup>

(Note: The language here reflects situations involving a male perpetrator and female victim. We recognise of course that males too can be victims of violence and females too can be perpetrators.)

Further responses may be appropriate depending on the situation. Where you come across a situation of violence in public, it can be useful to call out to the guy: "Hey, what are you doing?" "That's not on." Stick around to make sure the situation has cooled down. Ask what's going on, "Is everything alright?", or just be there. This can slow down what's happening. Make the man feel noticed, and offer practical assistance to the woman. Talk to the woman – at some point – and let her know you saw what was going on and you're willing to help her. When he calms down, either on the scene or later if you can, talk to him and tell him that what you witnessed was not okay, and he needs to get some help. If the abuser is someone you know, you could discuss the situation with some of his other friends and, together, decide on a course of action.

### National Services

For emergency situations that require immediate and urgent assistance call .....**000**

Violence Against Women Helpline - confidential 24hr service ..... **1800 200 526**

Life Line .....**131 114**

Mensline ..... **1300 78 99 78**

24 hour Kids Help Line ..... **1800 551 800**

Translating and Interpreting Service .**13 14 50**

### Local and State Services

Become familiar with services available in your area. Find out the contact details for your local services. Some ideas about services to look up in your white or yellow pages or on the internet include:

- o Domestic Violence Services
- o Rape Crisis or Sexual Assault Services
- o Men's help line, referral or counseling services
- o Kids Help lines
- o Family services, children services and child protection
- o Women's information and/or referral services
- o Relationships Australia
- o Women's legal centres
- o Community health services and general practitioners

**At the time of printing a list of relevant National, State and Territory services and their contact numbers can be found at the Australia Says No Website**

[www.australiasaysno.gov.au/gettingHelp/state\\_territory\\_numbers.asp](http://www.australiasaysno.gov.au/gettingHelp/state_territory_numbers.asp) and at the Victorian Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre [www.dvirc.org.au/resources/Contact.htm](http://www.dvirc.org.au/resources/Contact.htm)

<sup>i</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2002) *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Annual Report 2000-01: A substantial beginning to a new commitment*. Union Offset Printers Canberra.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Women's Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996)

<sup>iii</sup> Government of Tasmania (2003) *Pathways: How women leave violent men*. Women Tasmania, Department of Premier and Cabinet, 140 Macquarie Street, Hobart, Tasmania.

<sup>iv</sup> Educational Materials available on [www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com) viewed September 2004.

<sup>v</sup> Katz, J. (2003) *MVP Trainer's Guide for Working With Male College Students*.

<sup>vi</sup> Creighton, A., and P. Kivel. (1995). *Young Men's Work: Building Skills to Stop Violence (A Ten-Session Group Program)*. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden (Oakland Men's Project).