

HOW TO SUPPORT A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER TO GET LEGAL HELP

Can I call and ask for legal help on behalf of my friend/family member?

No. If you have a friend or family member who needs legal help, it is important that we talk to them directly to confirm their details and book an appointment.

Lawyers must follow certain ethical and professional guidelines to keep people's information private. There are rules that say who we can and can't talk to about a person's legal problem.

We cannot talk to friends of family members about a legal problem, unless we have spoken to the person first and they have given us permission.

How can I help my friend/family member?

You can help your friend or family member to call us by giving them our phone number, or by coming with them to our office to make an appointment in person.

See our website for more information.

What if my friend/family member is experiencing family violence?

If you are worried about your friend or family member and think they might be experiencing or at risk of family violence, there are some other important things you can do to help.

If someone is in danger right now, you should call the police on '000' immediately.

You do not have to say your name when you call, so your friend/family member will not know that you called the police.

The important information provided below is from the Safe Steps Family Violence Response Service. You can also visit their website here.

What should you do to help a person at risk of family violence?

Ask them if they are ok

It's best to do this in a sensitive way, one-on-one when their partner is not around. Tell them you are worried about them, explain why you are concerned and make it clear that you want to help. Don't be discouraged if the person is defensive or denies abuse is occurring – don't try to make them talk if they are not ready to, just tell them you are there if they ever need support.

Listen

If the person wants to tell you about what they are experiencing listen to them and believe them without judgement or criticism. Help them understand that the abuse is not their fault and that they always deserve to be treated with respect. Tell them that admitting to being abused is a hard step, and they are brave for having told someone.

Let them know about safe steps and other services

The best thing you can do to support someone experiencing family violence is help them explore options to become safe, and this is exactly what **safe steps** is for. Our specialist family violence response workers are available 24/7 via our phone line to assist women and children experiencing abuse. Let your friend know that they can call out phone line anytime on **1800 015 188** or send her a link to this website so she can read about our services herself.

It's a good idea to let the person know that there are lots of supports and services available and that leaving an abusive relationship is not something anyone has to do alone without assistance. To find out about more family violence support services, check out our list of [other service and information providers](#).

Offer practical assistance and emotional support

Often people experiencing family violence need practical assistance with small everyday tasks. This might mean helping them prepare a safety plan, agreeing to be an emergency contact, offering to

let them stay at your house, driving them to an appointment, or looking after their children so they have time to visit a lawyer or counsellor.

Having the emotional support of a trusted friend is also invaluable, particularly during difficult steps and stressful times. You could offer to accompany the person to the police station to report the abuse, or to court for a hearing, or you could just ensure you are checking in with them regularly to make sure they are ok and have someone to talk to whenever they need it.

What shouldn't you do?

Don't criticise or blame

Admitting to experiencing abuse is a big step for anyone, so it's important that you aren't judgemental or dismissive. Don't blame the person for the abuse, don't say they should be doing things differently; don't make excuses for the abuser's behaviour. Instead be calm, supportive and helpful.

Don't tell them what to do

Don't make comments like 'It's about time you stood up to him' or 'You should just leave'. These comments fail to understand the complexity of the person's situation and can make them less confident in their own decision-making skills. Instead, provide information and help them brainstorm options that could increase their safety.

Don't pressure them to leave

The person may not be ready to leave or they may have valid reasons for staying in the relationship, such as fear for the safety of themselves or their children if they do leave. Remember: family violence tends to escalate when a woman is preparing to leave, or has recently left an abusive relationship. Trust that the person understands their own situation, and knows what the safest thing to do is.

Don't give up on them

On average, a woman experiencing family violence will attempt to leave the relationship seven times before successfully separating. It can be discouraging to see someone you care about return to an abusive relationship, but that doesn't mean you should cut them off or get angry with them. Instead, reiterate that you want to see them happy and appreciated, and you are willing to support them however you can to become safe. Keep in regular contact.

Looking after yourself

It's easy to feel overwhelmed or out of your depth when trying to assist someone experiencing family violence. If you need advice or support, you can call safe steps 24/7 on 1800 015 188 to talk to a specialist family violence support worker.

Some other 24-hour support services that might be able to help:

[Lifeline](#) 13 11 14

[Men's Family Violence Referral Service](#)
1300 766 491

[Men's Help Line](#)
1300 78 99 78

[Kids Help Line](#)
1800 55 1800

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