

When Someone You Care About Has Caused Harm



Neighbours, Friends & Families

Talking to a friend, family member or neighbour who has caused harm or used violence in a relationship is never easy, but it can be a crucial step toward accountability and change. Staying silent can allow the harm to continue but speaking up with care and clarity shows that abuse is never okay and change is possible.

What is intimate partner violence (IPV)?

IPV includes various forms of harm caused by a current or former partner or spouse. It is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that can include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse, as well as stalking and harassment, both online and offline.

Before You Begin: Safety First

- Ensure the survivor is safe and supported-this should never replace safety planning.
- Do not approach the person if it puts anyone at risk (especially the survivor or yourself).

Speak with Care and Purpose

- Approach the conversation with calm and concern, not blame or shame.
- Use respectful language and don't mirror aggression or escalate tension.
- The goal isn't to punish, it's to encourage accountability and change.
- Don't argue or try to win, instead focus on the harm caused and the need for change.

"I care about you, and I'm concerned about your actions."

Talk about What You have Seen or Heard

- Use "I" statements to show care while being clear.
- Stick to specific behaviours you've observed, and don't label the person as abusive.
- Avoid vague or accusatory language that can cause the person to shut down.

"I've noticed how you speak to your partner sometimes, and it worries me."

Be Clear: Harm Has Happened

- Don't minimize what happened or let them shift the blame.
- Let them know that they are responsible for their actions regardless of how they feel about it.
- It's possible to care about someone and hold them accountable.

"I'm worried about what's happening in your relationship."

Support Change, Not Excuses

- Let them know help is available, like counselling or behavioural change programs.
- Change as possible, but it's not quick or easy.
- They have to take the lead. You're there to encourage, not fix it for them.

"There is support out there if you're ready to work on this."

What Not To Do

- Don't make excuses for their behaviour ("it was just a bad day").
- Don't expect immediate change or emotional breakthroughs.
- Don't ask the survivor to mediate or be involved in this conversation.
- Don't center the person's feelings over the harm they have caused.

What You Can Say

- "I've noticed..."
- "I am worried because..."
- "I believe what you did was wrong and it caused harm."
- "I'm here to support change, but that choice is yours to make."
- "This isn't about being a bad person. It's about making things right."

When to Get Help

- Call 911 if there is immediate danger.
- If you are unsure what to do, take [NFF's Working Together to End Abuse Training](#) or talk to a local IPV organization for advice. Find one in your area at [sheltersafe.ca](#)
- Some communities have programs that support people who've used harm and want to change – ask about them.

